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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Monday 28 March 2022

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[Mr SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: Before we start business today, I wish to report to the House that I have received a letter from the Speaker of the Ukraine Parliament. The letter says:

"I express my sincere gratitude to you and the House of Commons for your strong position in support of Ukraine, condemning the unprovoked and unjustified military aggression from the Russian Federation against the Ukrainian state".

In particular, the letter expresses thanks for organising the address by President Zelensky, which it describes as "a milestone event in the history of our bilateral relations".

I know that, like me, colleagues will be grateful for this letter. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Future Soldier Programme

1. **James Sunderland** (Bracknell) (Con): What assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the Army's Future Soldier programme. [906291]

20. **Douglas Ross** (Moray) (Con): What assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the Army's Future Soldier programme. [906312]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (James Heapey): Future Soldier will see the largest transformation of the British Army in more than 20 years. This change, which is only just beginning, will create an Army that is more integrated, agile and lethal; a modern force fit to face up to current and future threats.

James Sunderland: Can the Minister please assure me that the Army Future Soldier programme will keep pace with any emerging doctrinal lessons from Ukraine, and that the British Army will be structured and equipped to meet associated threats?

James Heapey: I certainly can. The integrated review was based on operational analysis of the land campaigns in northern Syria and Nagorno-Karabakh. We are keenly watching the operational analysis as it comes in with regard to what is going on in Ukraine. At the moment, I think we would reflect that the nature of the land battle is exactly as we expected it to be, but clearly if the threat changes, the policy changes.

Douglas Ross: The Army Future Soldier programme was great news for Moray, an area that has benefited significantly from UK Government investment at RAF Lossiemouth. The Future Soldier programme confirmed that Kinloss barracks will not only be retained, but expanded. Will the Minister outline what plans he and the Government have for Kinloss barracks, working with 39 Engineer Regiment, which has been a valuable and integral part of the Moray community since it moved there a decade ago?

James Heapey: My hon. Friend will be delighted at the £25 million of capital investment in the single living accommodation at Kinloss before 2025, which is a reflection of just how important the base is to the Army going forward. 39 Engineer Regiment will remain at Kinloss and continue to play a key role in the Moray community. As part of the Future Soldier order of battle, it will remain in its current role as a force support air engineer regiment.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): The infantry are the core of our Army, so why will most of the cuts in the Department's plans fall on the infantry?

James Heapey: As a former infanteer, I agree vigorously with the premise of the hon. Gentleman's question. The infantry are at the core of the fighting force—they are—but the reality is that we need to change our force design. The premium now is on dispersal and being able to operate effectively in a dispersed way. "Hide to survive" is the tag coming out of many war games and from what we are seeing in real life in Ukraine. The vision is for a more agile, more lethal infantry that is able to disperse and bring effect on to the enemy. [Interruption.] The hon. Gentleman says that, but he will have seen, from the footage of Ukrainians interrupting the activities of vast armoured columns, that small bands of determined people with the right missile technology are far more lethal than any opposing armoured force might prove to be.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I wonder if the Minister could advise the House on how extensively the Department is consulting through the ranks on the programme. Specifically, are serving personnel able to make recommendations or express opinions outwith the rank structure?

James Heapey: I am not sure I agree with the afterthought to the hon. Gentleman's question, but I know that the Chief of the General Staff and his team were vigorous in the way that the Future Army plans were communicated to the Army and that the Army chain of command had an opportunity to contribute to them. I am not sure that there is a mechanism quite as he envisages it, but the Army is, certainly in my experience, the sort of organisation that enjoys being challenged from within. I know there is plenty of challenge going on, so that the Army can make sure it develops the right plans for the future.

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): Mr Speaker, we are proud to receive the letter, which you read out, from the Ukrainian Speaker, and we are proud that President Zelensky said last night:

"Britain is definitely on our side."

The Government have Labour's full support for the UK's military help to Ukraine. Putin's brutal invasion surely reminds us that the Army's primary role must be to reinforce Europe's deterrence and defence against Russian aggression, so why do the Minister's Future Soldier plans risk leaving the British Army too small, too thinly spread and too poorly equipped to deal with the threats that the UK and our NATO allies face?

James Heappey: I fear that the right hon. Gentleman and I have been looking at different sets of plans, because I see an Army that ends up being better equipped, more lethal and more integrated. The choice that was made to introduce the deep recce strike capability into the third armoured division is absolutely game changing, and it is what is required. The de-prioritisation of the close fight that we have seen in Nagorno-Karabakh, in northern Syria and now in Ukraine shows us that the key, defining characteristic of the modern land battle is the ability to strike precisely and in depth, and to attrit our enemy while they are moving towards us. That is what the deep recce strike brigade is going to get after.

John Healey: The heart of our UK commitment to NATO is indeed a fully capable war-fighting division, which the former Chief of the Defence Staff has described as

"the standard whereby a credible army is judged."

Why will this modernised war-fighting third division not be delivered until 2030? Why did Ministers decide it would be built around Ajax when they knew about the deep-seated problems? Why, when it took the German Chancellor just three days to overturn decades of defence policy and boost defence spending by €100 billion, does the National Audit Office say that UK Ministers could take another nine months even to decide whether to stick with or scrap Ajax?

James Heappey: The right hon. Gentleman knows that candour is the name of the game whenever I am speaking. I think there are reasons why both sides of the House could reflect on quite why our Army has the age of kit that it has. Governments of both parties have missed a number of opportunities to decide to renew the Army's equipment inventory over the last 20 or 30 years. The reality is that the Army has to be redesigned to meet the threat as it now is, and I think that two armoured infantry or strike brigades with a deep recce strike brigade is exactly what a modern war-fighting division should look like. Within NATO, there are discussions about how the NATO force needs to transform to meet the modern threat.

Defence Jobs

2. **Virginia Crosbie** (Ynys Môn) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to help support defence jobs across the UK. [906292]

6. **Jacob Young** (Redcar) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to help support defence jobs across the UK. [906297]

12. **David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to help support defence jobs across the UK. [906304]

18. **Miriam Cates** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to help support defence jobs across the UK. [906310]

The Minister for Defence Procurement (Jeremy Quin): Recent estimates show MOD investment supporting over 200,000 jobs across the UK. Continued investment in defence, along with the changes we are making as part of the defence and security industrial strategy, will contribute to further economic growth and prosperity, including jobs, across the Union.

Virginia Crosbie: BAE Systems at RAF Valley in my constituency of Ynys Môn is hoping to hear news about a long-term contract, providing security to hundreds of workers. These are high-value jobs that underpin our sovereign UK defence capability. These technical and engineering roles provide maintenance to the RAF Hawk T2 fleet and support our future fighter pilots. Does my hon. Friend agree that this forthcoming contract is great news for Anglesey and great news for our UK security in these challenging times?

Jeremy Quin: I cannot comment on specific contracts, but I can confirm that those are indeed high-value jobs performing an important role for our armed forces. My hon. Friend has been assiduous in pushing the case for defence jobs in her constituency, and I hope to be making an announcement shortly.

Jacob Young: Does the Minister agree that the current dreadful situation in Ukraine means that we need to be very focused on our defence supply chains, buying and using British where possible and further supporting the economies of areas such as Redcar and Cleveland?

Jeremy Quin: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We were already focused on securing our critical defence supply chains, but DSIS has provided renewed impetus. Specifically on steel, as he mentions his home patch, it is for the prime contractors to place orders but they are all flagged well in advance with UK industry. Unfortunately, there are occasions—we have had this recently—when specific types of steel that we require are not being produced in the UK. I would urge UK manufacturers to really explore these opportunities. We are very keen to see them do so.

David Duguid: The Minister will be familiar with the company Score in my constituency. It is a major supplier of valves across different industries, including for naval vessels. May I invite him to see for himself the fantastic facilities, technology and expertise, including the award-winning apprenticeship schemes, utilised by the single largest employer in my constituency of Banff and Buchan?

Jeremy Quin: Our increase in naval procurement benefits jobs throughout the UK. I am delighted to hear of the Score Group's apprenticeship scheme to build talent for the future and I am keen to visit. The UK Government's shipbuilding programme is proving a great success in supporting Scottish jobs unlike, it appears, that of other Governments with which my hon. Friend, as a Scottish Member, may be familiar.

Miriam Cates: Given the MOD's recently acquired stake in Sheffield Forgemasters, I know that my hon. Friend understands the important role of the UK steel industry in our national security. What consideration

has he given to the opportunities for greater integration and collaboration on defence manufacturing between Sheffield Forgemasters and other steel producers, such as Stocksbridge's Speciality Steel in my constituency, which he is also welcome to visit? That collaboration could benefit jobs and security.

Jeremy Quin: I am aware of the company in my hon. Friend's constituency. We took the unusual decision—it is unusual—to acquire Sheffield Forgemasters to secure its unique capability to supply specialist large-scale, high-integrity steel components, which are vital to defence programmes. Ultimately, it is for companies to manage commercial decisions for their future, but to improve engagement, the Business Secretary reformed the UK Steel Council in 2021, which offers a forum for the Government, industry and trade unions to work in partnership on what is absolutely a shared objective for UK steel to have a competitive and sustainable future.

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): The Aircraft Research Association in Bedford is the only UK-based facility capable of testing our future military aircraft and components, but it is at risk of closure due to the change in electricity costs. Ofgem has stated that only the Government can introduce an exemption scheme to save the company and prevent the UK being reliant on foreign states to test our aircraft. Will the Minister urgently meet me and the ARA to discuss a way forward that protects our national security?

Jeremy Quin: I am willing to meet the hon. Gentleman if that is helpful. I warn him that we are aware of the situation and of the capabilities that we need. I am happy to meet him and speak to him and I will take it from there.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Many hon. Members have been surprised or enlightened by the performance of the Bayraktar TB2 in Ukraine. What sort of message does that send to UK strategy and procurement?

Jeremy Quin: Happily, we were ahead of the game. It is part of the discussion that we had as part of the integrated review. There are active processes in place to test UAVs—unmanned aerial vehicles—and counter-UAV technologies. We are aware of them. This conflict and previous ones have thrown into sharp relief how effective those weapon systems can be.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I have some important manufacturers that supply the defence sector, such as David Brown Santasalo and Reliance Precision, that would like to know what the future of their business is, given that the Government are going to reduce the size of our armed forces to 72,000 and that last week's mini-Budget gave no extra funding to defence. If Vladimir Putin is watching the parliamentary channel, what does the Minister think he will be thinking?

Jeremy Quin: I do not know whether Mr Putin is watching us today; I would like to say some robust things if he is. I give some reassurance to the hon. Gentleman: last time I visited David Brown Santasalo, it was hard at work on components for the Type 26, to

which programme we are committed, as he knows, and on many export orders. It is hard at work producing really valuable bits of kit for the UK and in due course, I hope, our allies.

Mr Speaker: We come to shadow Minister Chris Evans.

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): UK shipbuilding accounts for 42,600 jobs, yet the Government continue to fail to protect that vital industry and those highly skilled jobs by refusing to build British by default. Can the Minister give me one good reason why we cannot guarantee that all future naval ships procured by this Government will be built in Britain using British steel?

Jeremy Quin: Yes, I can give the hon. Gentleman many more than one good reason for why we have the strategy that we do. To name one, let us look at Type 31, which is a fantastic British export success to Poland and Indonesia; I am convinced that there will be others in due course. It was built with the support of an international consortium and we got the best in the world. It is now based firmly in the UK with a lot of it in the UK supply chain, which is giving the best opportunity for UK jobs and for UK shipbuilders to thrive internationally and competitively.

Violence against Women: Armed Forces

3. **Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD):** What steps he is taking to help tackle violence against women in the armed forces. [906293]

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Leo Docherty): Of course, we have a zero-tolerance approach to violence against women across Defence, and our actions across education, training and the service justice system reflect that. Women can and do have brilliant careers right across Defence, and the role models of senior women leaders across all three services reflect that.

Wendy Chamberlain: My constituent had been living in the armed forces base in my constituency with her partner and her children, for whom she was the primary carer. During that time, she experienced continued domestic abuse and when she took the brave step of leaving her partner, she was told by the base that she would be required to leave. As a result, she was made homeless and, concerningly, she has had to leave her two very small children with her partner at the base. Although commitments to end violence in the first place are of course crucial, there will always be circumstances where it takes place. So what support can the Department put in place for those who suffer domestic abuse, and their dependants, while living within the armed forces community?

Leo Docherty: I am very moved to hear about the experiences of the hon. Lady's constituent, and if she would like to approach me with more details, I would certainly be happy to look at that case again. I reassure her that we have had a countering domestic abuse strategy across Defence since 2018, and I look forward to updating the House in due course about our strategy for tackling rape and serious sexual offences across Defence.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does the Minister agree that we train all our military personnel to be able to be extremely violent when the situation requires but we also train them to have the self-discipline to control that aggression and that any breach of that discipline, whether perpetrated against male or female victims, needs to be dealt with expeditiously and seriously through military law?

Leo Docherty: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, and this is all the more the case given that women occupy every role right across Defence, quite rightly.

Russian Aggression: Support for NATO Allies

4. **Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to support NATO allies in response to Russian aggression. [906294]

16. **Tony Lloyd** (Rochdale) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to support NATO allies in response to Russian aggression. [906308]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (James Heappey): We are currently supplying significant air power to NATO's eastern flank, as well as sending ships to the eastern Mediterranean. We have a well-established and enduring contribution to the NATO enhanced forward presence battle group in the Baltics and in Poland—in recent weeks we have almost doubled our military forces in Estonia to demonstrate that capability and our resolve to support that region.

Andrew Gwynne: I thank the Minister, because the UK is right to bolster support to our NATO allies bordering Russia, and NATO is right in condemning Putin's illegal and atrocious actions in Ukraine. Opposition Members stand shoulder to shoulder in upholding democracy, freedom, the rule of law and security. Of course, modern warfare is not just about troops, weapons and equipment, so what more are we doing to work with our allies across NATO in strengthening cyber-resilience in the alliance?

James Heappey: NATO is acutely aware that the threat has evolved beyond the three conventional domains and into space and cyber-space as well, which is why that is a key part of NATO's transformation plans. The UK is to the fore in that, because we have invested ahead of many of our allies in both defensive and offensive cyber-capabilities. So the UK voice is very much to the fore in discussing with NATO how we develop a cyber-capability for the alliance.

Tony Lloyd: Is not one lesson of the brutal aggression of Russia in Ukraine that the decision by the Baltic states to join NATO was the right one? Aggression in Ukraine is not a vindication of NATO's expansion; it is a vindication of the Baltic states' joining our military alliance. Is there not a lesson for all NATO powers, including our own: we have to think again about how much we are prepared to spend on defence?

James Heappey: Make no mistake: the NATO membership of our great friends and allies in the Baltic represents one of the great strengthening moments of the alliance generally. Nobody is prouder to fly the NATO flag than Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, and we stand four-square behind them and behind what it would

mean if President Putin were to try to compromise the territorial integrity of those countries in any way. As for the hon. Gentleman's wider question about resourcing defence across the alliance adequately, I strongly agree; we are one of only a few countries that have been routinely spending the 2% of GDP target. It is fantastic that this moment of challenge within the euro-Atlantic has meant that other countries have now increased their spending to meet that target, too. If there are arguments for more money for defence, no Defence Minister is ever going to object, but we should reflect that the UK has been spending 2% for a while and was given a very significant uplift from the Treasury only 12 months ago.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I commend the United Kingdom for all it is doing to help our NATO allies, but I make this point to the Minister, from one soldier to another. He said earlier that, if circumstances change, the policy changes. I do not excuse myself for again asking the Government to rethink the cut to the Army. He was referring to out of area-type operations, and we are now looking potentially, God forbid, at a conventional war, where mass will be important. We no longer have that mass and it must be retained.

James Heappey: My hon. Friend and I will debate keenly the future of the land battle, but I am not sure that what we have seen on our TV screens over the past few weeks has been a justification for large amounts of massed armour. I think it is entirely a vindication of a change in the way in which the land battle is prosecuted. If forces are massed, they are vulnerable to missile technologies, which are absolutely in the ascendancy. I think that Future Soldier and the integrated review, which gave birth to that, are exactly the right way to develop the Army to meet the requirements of the land battle as it is now and not perhaps how we thought it was 20 years ago.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): Supporting NATO allies is about not just the eastern front and the situation in and around Russia, but the threat from Russian naval activity. Does my hon. Friend agree that the focus must equally be on the activities of Russian submarines in the north Atlantic, around our allied coast, and that the Navy must be given equal consideration in regard to our strategic strength moving forward?

James Heappey: Submarine operations in the north Atlantic are not routinely spoken about in public, but my right hon. Friend will be reassured to know that we are acutely aware that we must maintain awareness of what Russia is doing in the whole Euro-Atlantic and that the focus should not just be on the obvious point of conflict in Ukraine. There is a belligerence to the way in which Russia is doing its business right now, which means that this is the time for maximum vigilance for the UK and the alliance, so that we make sure that all threats to the homeland are properly countered.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow minister, Luke Pollard.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): Labour's commitment to NATO is unshakeable. We support the provision of lethal aid to Ukraine and we back the bolstering of defences for our allies on NATO's eastern front. The Government have already deployed various assets, including Royal Navy ships

from Devonport, which I am proud to represent, but will the Minister set out what further forces are being prepared for deployment to our NATO allies? Can he say whether the cost of that deployment is coming from already strained Ministry of Defence budgets, or whether it will be met from the Treasury reserve, as was the case during the last Labour Government?

James Heappey: There is a constant regeneration of forces. As two battle groups are committed to Estonia, more battle groups need to embark on the training pipeline to make sure that we have contingent land forces at readiness. Similarly, ships have been deployed to the two NATO standing maritime groups and to Exercise Cold Response. We continue to generate further ships to give more choice and options thereafter, if requested by the Supreme Allied Commander Europe. Similarly, with the Typhoons and F-35s, a large amount has been committed as part of the initial response force, but we are generating more to have them at our disposal, if SACEUR asks for more.

The hon. Gentleman asks about the money right now. All of it seems to be being met by the Treasury; long may that continue.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Given that we should help the Ukrainian armed forces by all legitimate means short of war, will Ministers press our NATO allies on the fact that the rather artificial distinction between defensive and offensive weaponry should be swept away when requests for equipment are received, because when a country is fighting on its own territory, having been invaded, all its weaponry is defensive?

James Heappey: My right hon. Friend makes an excellent point. It suits our purpose to refer to the equipment that we are providing in the context of the defensive role it can play, but defence intelligence over the weekend reflected on the fact that the armoured column to the north-west of Kyiv has been pushed back in recent days, because small bands of determined people are manoeuvring with lethal weapons systems. That is forcing the Russians to move back into a place where they feel that they can defend themselves better. These are defensive bits of equipment. That, I think, is the right message to send to the Kremlin. If, in the ingenuity of the Ukrainian armed forces, they do something more, that is good on Ukraine.

Mr Speaker: We now come to the SNP spokesperson.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): On behalf of the Scottish National party, may I, too, welcome the letter from Speaker Stefanchuk to this House?

My last exchange with the Secretary of State, who cannot be with us this afternoon, was in relation to the NATO strategic concept. When I asked about the Government's—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. May I just remind people that they have to stay for two full questions after the question that they have asked? Too many Members have asked a question and left. I remind people: please wait for two full questions and show courtesy to the House when you have had the benefit of a question. I am sorry to interrupt, but I need to get that on record.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Especially when I am on my feet, Mr Speaker.

When I last spoke to the Secretary of State across the Floor of the House, I asked about the upcoming NATO strategic concept, which is second in importance only to the Washington treaty itself. May I ask the Minister specifically about that? Is it still planned to happen in June, or will the timetable for it move because of Russia's war on Ukraine? In terms of what we can expect to see from it, will we have the Government's Arctic strategy before then? In terms of containing Russia, the Secretary of State said at our last exchange that he planned to have a conversation with SACEUR about that very issue. Can the Government tell us what their priorities will be for containment of Russia going forward?

James Heappey: The hon. Gentleman will have to accept my apologies, but so important is the NATO strategic concept that I am afraid it is something that the Secretary of State works on with the team immediately around him. He will need to write to the hon. Gentleman with the detail that he asks for.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: I am always happy to write, but perhaps I could take the Minister on from that to an important issue. NATO is clearly focused on bolstering its own defences and on supporting Ukraine militarily. Several NATO and non-NATO member states are focused on doing the same, plus supporting Ukraine economically. But Ukraine will require Marshall plan levels of rebuilding and international co-operation and support across NATO countries, EU countries and countries further afield. Will the Minister enlighten the House as to what discussions are taking place in NATO specifically with a focus on helping the country to rebuild? The war will come to an end eventually and our friendship must continue the day after.

James Heappey: The discussions in NATO very much focus on the Euro-Atlantic security implications of the conflict and on what the situation may be after it is completed. The wider geopolitical discussion and the economic plan, among other things that the hon. Gentleman rightly asks for, may be discussed within NATO, but I do not think that they are the focus of NATO discussions; I think that they are much more the focus of discussions within the G7, the EU and other ad hoc groupings that are coming together in order to worry about exactly what is next.

NATO Members: Co-operation

7. **Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con):** What steps he is taking to help strengthen co-operation between NATO members. [906298]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (James Heappey): In recent months, the Secretary of State has met his NATO counterparts twice in Brussels and travelled to over a dozen European capitals. The UK is standing by its commitments to our NATO allies, acting to provide reassurance to allies and partners. The UK has doubled its NATO presence in Estonia, and a deployment of Royal Marines is now in Poland on a bilateral basis.

Theresa Villiers: Will the Government co-operate with NATO allies to continue the flow of lethal aid to the Ukrainian armed forces, including weapons such as Starstreak to defend against aircraft attacks?

James Heappey: I did not take the opportunity in my answer to a previous question to make an important distinction, but my right hon. Friend gives me that opportunity now. NATO is not the provider of lethal aid into the conflict in Ukraine. NATO is looking at how it doubles down on its eastern flank in order to contain the violence within Ukraine and show the resolve of NATO countries to stand up for article 5. Those who are donating lethal aid and non-lethal aid to Ukraine are doing so bilaterally, and it is through UK leadership that a lot of it is being co-ordinated and delivered. The next donor conference convened by the Secretary of State will happen later this week. We are ambitious for even more countries to join the donor group at that stage.

Integrated Review 2021: Russian Invasion of Ukraine

8. **Philip Dunne** (Ludlow) (Con): With reference to the integrated review 2021, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies on force structure in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

[906299]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (James Heappey): The integrated review explained that Defence's forces must prepare for the most persistent global engagement and constant campaigning to counter emerging threats. We are continuing to monitor the situation in Ukraine to ensure that we remain threat-led and, in line with the agile planning and delivery mechanisms developed following the IR, we will continue to review our capabilities and readiness levels accordingly.

Philip Dunne: Last week, NATO nations committed force deployments to four member states in eastern Europe to help to demonstrate resolve to Russia at this dangerous time. Does my hon. Friend not agree that now is not the time to reduce the force strength of the British Army by 9,500 regular soldiers, and that this aspect of the conclusions of the integrated review should be at the very least deferred and at best reversed?

James Heappey: My right hon. Friend is an expert in the field. I acknowledge that this issue will be keenly debated and that he has a strong view on it. My own view is that this is the right time to accelerate the acquisition of the lethality that has been missing from the field Army for too long. We are outranged on our artillery, we lack the land precision fires that are now essential and, if I had to choose—and I think that the Ministry of Defence has had to choose—I would choose to have a land force that has been modernised and made relevant to the modern battle again, rather than necessarily standing behind larger numbers.

Veterans Strategy Action Plan: 2022 to 2024

9. **Dame Caroline Dinenage** (Gosport) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the "Veterans' Strategy Action Plan: 2022 to 2024."

[906301]

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Leo Docherty): I am pleased to have regular discussions with colleagues across Government on our veterans' strategy action plan, which contains more than 60 policy commitments amounting to £70 million of additional investment on priorities, including employment, data,

skills and healthcare. We continue to work closely with other Departments, research academics and service charities at all levels to deliver its commitments.

Dame Caroline Dinenage: Just under 10% of the working-age population of Gosport are veterans, so we take a keen interest in this excellent action plan. However, although 96% of our veterans make a successful transition to a civilian career within six months of leaving the forces, it is not until page 32 that the plan talks about promoting a positive image of them. Can we change the headline here to "Service veterans are excellent people to employ"?

Leo Docherty: My hon. Friend has afforded me a useful opportunity to make exactly that point, but I must first thank her for the magnificent work that she does in support of her armed forces community and veterans in Gosport. The reason there is such high demand for veterans in all sectors is that they make brilliant employees: military service does indeed give members of the armed forces skills for life.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): I am sure that pursuing a Commonwealth veteran for 36 grand in NHS costs is not part of the MOD's strategy. Does the Minister agree that it is wrong for someone who has served our country and risked his life in Iraq and Afghanistan to be treated in this way and, if he does, will he work with me and with others to put it right?

Leo Docherty: I do agree that it is wrong and I look forward to updating the hon. Gentleman personally about that case in particular.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister, Stephanie Peacock.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): The veterans strategy commits the Government to ending veteran rough sleeping by the end of 2024. Can the Minister tell the House how many veterans are currently sleeping rough and, if he cannot, how he intends to meet that target with no plan, no resources and no data?

Leo Docherty: We do have a plan and it is reflected in the fact that the armed forces covenant is now deliverable by all local authorities. It has teeth as a result of the statutory guidance that we have delivered, and for which we have legislated for the first time ever. At local authority level, which is where these services are delivered, we have brought real, tangible change of which we can be very proud.

Support to Ukraine's Military

10. **Mark Fletcher** (Bolsover) (Con): What support his Department is providing to Ukraine's military.

[906302]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (James Heappey): Britain was the first European country to supply lethal aid to Ukraine. The UK has so far delivered more than 4,000 next-generation light anti-tank weapons, as well as Javelin anti-tank systems, and is committed to providing Starstreak missiles. We will continue to deliver more. We have also delivered non-lethal aid in the form of body armour, helmets, boots, ration packs, rangefinders and communications equipment.

Mark Fletcher: I welcome the recent announcement that 6,000 additional missiles will go to Ukraine. Indeed, I think we have led the way in terms of providing support for that country. As the conflict evolves, however, many scenarios may play out. What steps is the Department taking to plan for future support that the Ukrainians may need?

James Heapey: The Secretary of State and I both speak to our counterparts in the Ukrainian MOD numerous times each week. It is apparent, as I am sure it would be if we were in these circumstances, that the thing that starts every conversation is resourcing the fight tomorrow. The great advantage of the partnership and trust between the UK and Ukrainian MODs is that we are able to do some of the thinking about what they might need next week, the week after and in three months' time, and we are working hard to ensure that we are cueing up industry to deliver those capabilities as quickly as we can.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): How much of the MOD's spending on that kind of relief in Ukraine will be counted as official development assistance?

James Heapey: I will need to write to the hon. Gentleman about that, but I am not sure that it would be very much at all.

Defence Estate Optimisation Programme

11. **Steve Brine** (Winchester) (Con): What recent progress he has made on the Defence estate optimisation programme. [906303]

The Minister for Defence Procurement (Jeremy Quin): The MOD continues to deliver on its 25-year strategy to modernise its estate. In the last year, the Defence estate optimisation portfolio has completed construction at three Defence sites, with another six in construction, and completed the sale of seven surplus MOD sites, generating £141 million in receipts to reinvest in modern and sustainable facilities for our armed forces.

Steve Brine: The Minister knows that the Sir John Moore barracks in my constituency is marked for disposal under the programme. He also knows that what will be put in its place is causing anxiety. As we reduce the size of the Army in pursuit of the Future Soldier proposals in the integrated review, it is obvious that some consolidation will be needed around the training estate, but does the Minister share my concern about losing what is a good facility in good order at the Army Training Regiment in Winchester, given that the conflict at present—and, I suspect, for some time to come—looks very 20th century, not necessarily in terms of offensive ground operations, but in terms of all the other things, including boots on the ground, that we require of our armed forces?

Jeremy Quin: I know from the meetings we have had that my hon. Friend is very engaged with this MOD site, which is due to close in 2026. The rationale for the closure is to concentrate all phase 1 non-infantry training at Pirbright to provide a bespoke training environment embracing digitalisation. The numbers trained could be flexed, but I will continue to engage with him on what he has impressed on me is an important issue for his constituents.

Ukraine: Protection of Territorial Integrity

14. **Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): What steps his Department is taking to help protect the territorial integrity of Ukraine. [906306]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (James Heapey): Defence continues to play a central role in helping Ukraine to defend its territorial integrity, working with allies and partners to uphold international law. We are also providing lethal and non-lethal military aid to meet the Ukrainian armed forces' requests for assistance and co-ordinating the provision of additional military support from our allies and partners to enable Ukraine to repel Russian aggression.

Drew Hendry: The UK Government's preparation for this war evidently anticipated a quick lightning strike on Kyiv by Putin's forces, followed by attempted regime change, rather than military resource allocation for a protracted ground war crisis. Why was this the case? What lessons, if any, have been learned?

James Heapey: I think there are two points to make to that. First, the UK Government were able to anticipate what has happened because our intelligence services did an extraordinary job in understanding what the threat was, and our alliances with other intelligence services around the world worked brilliantly. That is a useful correction to 20 years of doubting intelligence when making decisions in this place, because our intelligence services remain among the best in the world. To the hon. Gentleman's question about whether the right or wrong kit was given, I think that, absent any decision a decade ago to begin Ukraine's transition to NATO-calibre weapons systems, which would have been an overt step on the way to Ukrainian NATO membership—we can discuss whether or not that is a good thing—the right thing to do in those circumstances was to grab stuff that was on the shelf and available to be brought to bear immediately in the defence of Ukraine. That is exactly what we did.

Ukrainian Resistance to Russian Aggression

15. **Andrew Jones** (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): What assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of Ukrainian resistance to Russian aggression. [906307]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (James Heapey): Ukrainian armed forces have robustly resisted all Russian axes of invasion, conducting effective ambush and artillery strikes on Russian military convoys and maintaining air defences that are limiting Russian air superiority. Ukrainian resistance is significantly restricting Russia's ability to deploy combat power against Kyiv. It is unlikely that Russia has achieved its planned objectives at this stage of the invasion.

Andrew Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. My constituents have told me that they want to see the Government continue to support the Ukrainian resistance in three ways: humanitarian assistance in the region; welcoming refugees here; and military aid. We have seen the news that the Ukrainian army is retaking parts of

its area from the Russians, so as the Ukrainian need evolves, will he ensure that our support evolves to meet that changing need?

James Heapey: I certainly can assure my hon. Friend that that is the case. As I said in response to an earlier question, we are looking a week, two weeks, two months and three months ahead in order to give the Ukrainians strategic depth and in order to bring to bear our technological and industrial advantages and to provide them with the kit we think they will need, not just in the next few days but in three months' time, so that they can continue to ensure that President Putin fails in his endeavours in Ukraine.

Support for Ukraine's Military: British Equipment

17. **Selaine Saxby** (North Devon) (Con): Whether his Department is taking steps to procure British equipment to support Ukraine's military. [906309]

The Minister for Defence Procurement (Jeremy Quin): I emphasise that decisions on equipment are in response to requests from Ukraine, and we consider how best to address Ukraine's needs. The anti-tank weapons provided to the Ukrainian armed forces thus far have been taken from existing UK stocks, to ensure speed of delivery. The MOD continues to pursue options to meet Ukrainian requirements rapidly, including through UK industry and by actively convening our global partners.

Selaine Saxby: I have been contacted by manufacturers of military hardware in North Devon that work with the MOD and can rapidly move to provide items such as helmets and body armour. Are there any plans for a streamlined emergency procurement process to help speed this up?

Jeremy Quin: I emphasise that these are Ukrainian decisions. I urge UK companies to contact the Ukrainian embassy, as well as using other routes. In parallel, the Department for International Trade is meeting defence-ready trade associations such as ADS and Make UK on a weekly basis to rapidly consider industry offers to Ukraine and how they can be assisted. UK manufacturers of military hardware may also wish to forward offers to their trade association.

Topical Questions

T1. [906316] **Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Minister for Defence Procurement (Jeremy Quin): You are aware of this, Mr Speaker, but a number of hon. Members have inquired and the Defence Secretary would not want it to be thought that he means any discourtesy to the House: he has had a brief brush with covid, and I can assure the House on behalf of the Department, the armed forces and the Ministers here present that it has neither stopped him nor slowed him down. He has had a second negative test today, and I am assured that by this evening he will be as present physically as he has been virtually over the last few days.

The Ministry of Defence continues to deliver against the objectives of the integrated review and the defence Command Paper, which recognise that Russia remains

the most acute threat to our security. We remain on course to deliver a more modernised and threat-focused defence alongside our international allies, just as we have worked with them on Ukraine.

Alex Norris: Recent weeks have only reinforced the need to invest in our defence, which is important for our economy and vital for our security. With that in mind, why will Ministers not give a clear commitment to British-built by default in defence procurement?

Jeremy Quin: The events of the last few weeks show the critical importance of having the right kit in the hands of our armed forces. On many occasions the need can be met by British supply, but I would not write off the kit we can procure from our US and NATO allies, nor would I wish them to write off the prospect of buying kit from us. We are part of an alliance, and I am convinced that our approach of supporting British industry, supporting British investment and supporting capability through the defence and security industrial strategy, while keeping a weather eye on what else is available to ensure our armed forces are well armed, is the right one.

T2. [906317] **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): The Secretary of State's decision to send lethal defensive military aid to Ukraine before Russia's invasion was inspired, and it is probably one of the best decisions he has ever taken. What is the initial assessment of the Minister for the Armed Forces of the operational effectiveness in theatre of the next generation light anti-tank weapons we have sent to Ukraine?

The Minister for the Armed Forces (James Heapey): One pauses because these weapon systems, every time they are effective, kill the entire crew of an armoured vehicle. My hon. Friend will take no pleasure from it, but he will be interested to note that these weapon systems have been prolific in their success. The Ukrainian armed forces value them enormously. They are accurate, reliable and deadly.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State, John Healey.

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): The UK's anti-tank and anti-air weapons are proving vital to the Ukrainians in fighting the Russian invasion. The Prime Minister pledged at NATO last week that we will supply a further 6,000 missiles. Both NLAW and Starstreak are made in Britain by British workers, as the Minister for Defence Procurement said in response to the hon. Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) on Question 17, but has production started to replace the British stockpiles of these missiles?

Jeremy Quin: We are working closely with industry. Some lines have continued, but I would rather not get into operational details of as and when stockpiles will be replenished. Suffice it to say that we are in active conversations with industry, as the right hon. Gentleman would expect.

T3. [906318] **Andrew Rosindell** (Romford) (Con): It is 40 years this coming week since the invasion of the Falkland Islands and the violation of British sovereignty by Argentina. It is five weeks since the violation of Ukrainian sovereignty by Russia. As China eyes up Taiwan,

does the Minister agree that it is time that the Government started to plan for an increase in defence spending, maybe to 3% of GDP?

Jeremy Quin: I hear what my hon. Friend says and I note his concern. As the integrated review made clear, we always look at spending on a threat basis: what is required, we fund. I also remind him that we are the biggest defence spender in Europe and the second biggest in NATO, and we were pleased to receive a £24 billion uplift in the current spending period.

T9. [906324] **Wendy Chamberlain** (North East Fife) (LD): As a member of the Scottish Affairs Committee, I had the pleasure of visiting Lossiemouth earlier this year. Leuchars airfield in my constituency is still maintained as a back-up site for operations. Given the current situation, can the Minister advise on sonar and radar upgrades? It is important that back-up facilities are also fit for purpose.

Jeremy Quin: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I think I wrote to her last in November of last year on that issue. I am afraid we have not moved on yet and we are still studying exactly what radar configurations will be required, but it is actively being looked at and I certainly commit to updating her when I can give her an assurance one way or the other.

T4. [906319] **Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Fleeing for their lives when Kabul fell, some Afghans with UK connections entered Pakistan without documentation. Will Ministers urgently devise a practical plan safely to bring to the UK those Afghans who have entry visas to come to this country, but who are still being hunted by the Pakistani police, whose Government apparently want to hand them back to the Taliban?

James Heapey: My right hon. Friend knows that I have been engaged in this matter for him for some time. I am told from my phone that the high commissioner has now reached out to explain the situation. For the benefit of the wider House, the challenge is that for those who arrive in Pakistan with eligibility to come to the UK under whichever Government scheme they are intending to use, but have not entered Pakistan legally, the Pakistan Government are taking a view on limiting our ability to process those people. We are working hard to persuade the Pakistan Government to take a different approach.

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): Joram is a veteran and constituent who came to Britain in 2001 and served in the armed forces, with tours in Afghanistan and Iraq. That left scars: he suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and took to drinking, and as a result served time in prison. He turned his life around and is now a painter and decorator and a father of two, but the Home Office is seeking to deport him to Zimbabwe, where he has no connections and where, when he was last there 15 years ago, he was tortured for having served in our armed forces. That risks happening again. Will the Minister intervene to stop Joram, a veteran, being deported?

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Leo Docherty): I would be very pleased to review the details of the case and correspond directly with the hon. Lady.

T5. [906320] **Mark Eastwood** (Dewsbury) (Con): It is vital that we protect our veterans from vexatious legal claims, something that we have already put in place for those who have served overseas. Will the Minister agree to work with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Government to ensure that legislation is also urgently brought forward to help to protect our Northern Ireland veterans?

Leo Docherty: We are grateful to all veterans of Operation Banner and seek to give them closure with honour and finality. I am pleased that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will in due course bring forward the requisite Bill.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): The most effective deployment of our submarine forces in response to Russian deployment is surely intelligence-dependent. Membership of the joint expeditionary force is not synonymous with that of NATO. I press the Minister: are we making every effort to glean intelligence on Russian naval deployment from those other countries?

James Heapey: Our intelligence on Russian submarine movements is, as the hon. Gentleman can imagine, some of the most sensitive, but he will be reassured to know that we are absolutely working with allies to ensure that our understanding of where Russian submarines are is the best it can possibly be, and that we are postured to ensure that we meet whatever threat there may be as a consequence.

T6. [906321] **Ben Everitt** (Milton Keynes North) (Con): I am sure my hon. Friend will agree that Poland's recent decision to award Babcock the contract for the Arrowhead frigates for the Polish navy is a brilliant example of British shipbuilding capabilities being used to support our NATO allies.

Jeremy Quin: I am delighted to join my hon. Friend in welcoming that downselection. There is still a process to go, but if it has finally got over the line, as I hope, that will be great news for Babcock, great news for Scotland and great news for British shipbuilding. I have on multiple occasions been to see my opposite number in Poland and hosted them here in the UK. I think they are making a great choice.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): In June last year, one of my constituents, a British-Afghan dual national, travelled to Afghanistan to visit his wife and three children aged under 10. During the evacuation, they were advised to proceed to Baron Hotel but were not processed before the suicide attack. Since then they have been trying to get to the UK, but the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office says they need a visa and the Home Office says they are ineligible for the resettlement scheme. What urgent action can the Minister take, with colleagues in the Home Office, to ensure that my constituent can return safely to the UK with his young family?

James Heapey: The hon. Lady's question implies, I think, that her constituent was not eligible to come under the Ministry of Defence-administered Afghan relocations and assistance policy. I know that will be of no consolation to him or his family in Afghanistan. We are working hard with other Government Departments

to make sure that those who were called forward under the leave outside the rules scheme that was in operation during Operation Pitting are still looked after. However, I will need to have this discussion with other Ministers, and I will ask one of them to write to her with an update on the case.

T7. [906322] **Felicity Buchan** (Kensington) (Con): I understand that Starstreak anti-aircraft missiles are being made available to Ukraine. Could this kit be used to protect humanitarian corridors and nuclear power plants?

James Heappey: It certainly could be—it is a highly effective weapons system—but we are not seeking to be in any way prescriptive with the Ukrainians about how it is employed, as they will understand their plan better than we do. We give them these weapons systems confident that they will put them to good use, and thus far that has proved correct.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Does the Minister share my concern that the agility and mobility hoped for in the Future Soldier programme will be thwarted if those soldiers are stuck in traffic on the M6 near Weeton barracks? Would it not be much better to keep Dale barracks in Chester open and have a wider operational footprint for our future soldiers?

Jeremy Quin: That is an ingenious construction. We always think about this, but I am afraid we do not have any plans to change that element of the defence estate optimisation portfolio at this point.

T8. [906323] **Dr Matthew Offord** (Hendon) (Con): Ukraine is becoming one of the most contaminated countries in the world, with explosive weapons, landmines, cluster munitions and unexploded ordnance posing a threat to military and civilians alike. Will the Minister meet me and leaders of EOD UK, a mine action community, to discuss how we can plan for the enormous decontamination task ahead of us?

James Heappey: I certainly will. I have had the opportunity—I am not sure if it is the misfortune or good fortune—to visit a number of countries that have been heavily mined in the past. We see the tragic human cost that comes in countries that have been heavily mined, but also the hope that comes with a meaningful demining programme. I would be delighted to meet the organisation my hon. Friend suggests.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The national security vetting services have never played such an important role, and the skill there is incredibly high. When will the Minister announce that they will remain in York when the MOD moves forward with its plans for the Imphal barracks site?

Jeremy Quin: I cannot give any form of commitment on that right now, but I will write to the hon. Lady.

T10. [906325] **Dr James Davies** (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): Over the weekend I was pleased to see two Royal Navy vessels join five other joint expeditionary force nations in escorting British and Danish supply ships. They successfully delivered military vehicles and equipment to the UK-led NATO battle group in Estonia. Does my

hon. Friend agree that as well as playing a vital role in NATO, it is important for the UK to continue to lead the joint expeditionary force?

James Heappey: I certainly do. NATO has been the absolute cornerstone of Euro-Atlantic security since the end of the second world war, and long may it continue to be so. Neither the JEF, the EU nor anything else should be seen as an alternative. However, there is a market for complementary organisations such as the JEF, which do not require consensus. The JEF is absolutely showing its value in the way that it is being used at the moment.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): The veterans strategy action plan includes a commitment to address the historical hurt or disadvantage that sections of the veteran community have experienced. Will that include compensation for LGBT veterans?

Leo Docherty: I look forward to announcing further progress on the review in due course. I do not want to pre-empt the terms and conditions of the chair, but I think that they will be reassuringly broad.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): While it is perfectly true that any sensible person in the west would rather President Putin were not the President of the Russian republic, does the Minister agree that it is vital that we reiterate at every second we can that NATO is a defensive alliance among 30 members and that we will react if one boot goes over the line on to NATO land, but the presidency of Russia must be a matter for the Russian people, not for us?

Jeremy Quin: My hon. Friend is correct. NATO is a defensive alliance, and we are working closely together. As my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces said, we are undertaking measures to ensure that NATO retains that deterrence and defensive posture that is appropriate in these times. However, we are focused bilaterally on Ukraine and on supporting Ukraine—that is the focus of our policy.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): At the last Defence questions, I got what I hoped was an encouraging answer on behalf of the nuclear test veterans for what will be the 70th anniversary of the first nuclear tests. Will the Minister update us on where we are in recognising those veterans and their families for their sacrifice?

Leo Docherty: This continues to be under review. I look forward to updating the hon. Member in due course.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Ministers have said that we have supplied 4,000 NLAWs and other equipment and deployments, and that we are supplying 6,000 more. Meanwhile, Germany says that it will supply 1,000 and France has not stated what it will supply—as far as I know, nothing has been supplied—so what advice do we give to our colleagues in Europe about how to get their equipment into Ukraine?

James Heappey: It is not just advice; we offer a service whereby we will go to countries around Europe and pick up stuff and ensure that it gets to Ukraine. At the international donor co-ordination centre in Stuttgart,

which I had the pleasure of visiting last week, the UK's 104 Brigade headquarters is the global lead on co-ordinating how all that lethal and non-lethal aid arrives in countries that neighbour Ukraine and how it is moved on thereafter.

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): With the next generation Challenger 3 turrets being built in the north-east, supporting hundreds of jobs, the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory working with Newcastle and other local universities and Cook Defence Systems in my constituency providing armoured

vehicle tracks for not just British tanks but those of NATO and European allies, will my hon. Friend ensure that the north-east's firms and workers remain at the heart of British defence procurement?

Jeremy Quin: They are. Last Thursday, I had a great day opening the AI hub for DSTL in Newcastle and pressing the button to start production of the turrets for our Challenger 3 tanks, to which my hon. Friend referred. There is a great history of defence manufacturing in the north-east, and it will have an even greater future.

P&O Ferries

3.33 pm

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the conduct of P&O Ferries' chief executive and board and the action the Government will take to safeguard jobs.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Robert Courts): I know that the whole House has been left appalled and angered by the behaviour exhibited by P&O Ferries towards its workers over the last week. As a Government, we will not stand by and allow hard-working, dedicated British staff to be treated in such a manner.

This morning, my right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary wrote to the chief executive of P&O asking him to pause and reconsider and to offer his workers their jobs back on their previous terms, conditions and wages, should they want them. That is because we will return to the House to announce a package of measures that will ensure that the outcomes that P&O Ferries is seeking to achieve through this disastrous move to pay less than the minimum wage cannot be seen through. As a result, it will have no reason left not to reconsider its move.

As I said to the Transport Committee and the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee last week, as soon as the package of measures has been finalised, we intend to return to the House so that Members can rightly scrutinise it. In the meantime, we continue to review the contracts that P&O Ferries has with the Government, and the Insolvency Service continues to investigate the actions of Peter Hebblethwaite, who brazenly admitted to breaking the law before two Committees of this House last week.

I am clear that P&O Ferries cannot and will not be allowed to get away with its actions. I hope the whole House will now support our efforts to ensure just that.

Louise Haigh: I thank the Minister for that response. As he said, on Thursday the chief executive of P&O Ferries made a mockery of the rule of law in this country. As a result, seven of P&O's eight ferries are now stuck in port, and on Saturday the European Causeway—the only passenger ship in Europe to be prevented from sailing over safety concerns—was seized.

P&O Ferries must face the most serious consequences for its misconduct. I know that the Minister and the Secretary of State feel the same way, and I appreciate the contact they have made with the Opposition and trade unions, but every available tool at the Government's disposal must now be used to force P&O Ferries to reinstate workers on the previous terms and conditions.

Will the Minister provide some urgent clarity? First, the Prime Minister said very clearly on Wednesday:

"we are taking legal action...against the company concerned".—[*Official Report*, 23 March 2022; Vol. 711, c. 326.]

So has the Secretary of State given his direction to prosecute? If not, why not?

Secondly, given that the chief executive has shown no respect for the law, will the Secretary of State seek his

removal under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986, and the removal of all those who authorised this unlawful action?

Thirdly, the Secretary of State has said he will review contracts, but livelihoods are on the line now, so will he suspend all contracts and licences of P&O and DP World today? Why is DP World still listed as a member of the Government's trade advisory group?

Finally, time is running out. The deadline set by P&O for this Thursday for workers to agree severance amounts to extortion and has no legal basis. What powers do the Government have to extend that unlawful deadline? As the Minister said, workers must be reinstated on the same terms as before. Many are paid above the minimum wage, so will he commit to working with the unions and all ferry companies to agree a binding framework that will prevent a race to the bottom to the lowest international standards?

I know the House agrees that we must send a clear message that rogue employers cannot get away with trampling over the laws of this country. It is time to throw the book at P&O and save this loyal workforce.

Robert Courts: The hon. Lady is quite right that P&O must face consequences for its actions. We are looking at every tool available to the Government and doing so as fast as is humanly possible. We are looking to bring forward a package of measures. I cannot go into any more detail at the moment—I apologise for that; some of these matters are complicated and we need to go through them—but we will speak to Members and to the unions as we put the package together.

The Secretary of State has made his views known very clearly, as did I when I came to the House when the announcement was made and when I appeared before the Transport Committee. The letter the Secretary of State has written is absolutely clear about the view we take of P&O's actions, and we will act on that.

The hon. Lady mentioned several other matters. We continue to review any contracts that may exist and continue to take any action we can on things like trade advisory groups. I hope the hon. Lady will pardon me for not going into detail at the moment. We will come forward with a package of measures that we will take, as I said we would when I was before the Select Committee. We are putting that package together as I speak and will of course work with the unions and all others as we do so.

Mrs Natalie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for working so closely with me and others since P&O took this disgraceful decision. Does my hon. Friend agree that the minimum wage proposal is a floor and not a ceiling? It would put ferry workers in the same position as other workers in this country and defeat P&O's agency foreign workers model, such that P&O should just reinstate the Dover workforce now, on their current terms. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government measures that are coming forward this week will support ferry operators and ferry workers and safeguard the Dover-Calais route for the future?

Robert Courts: First, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for her fearless championing of her constituents. There is no one who speaks out with more persuasion, force

and passion than she does for the people of Dover and her constituents, and I pay tribute to her for that. She asks whether the national minimum wage is a floor, not a ceiling, and I am very keen to say that there is a package we are considering. We will come to the House and explain what that package is in due course, and I hope the House will look forward to and welcome that when it comes.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Can I, through the Minister, thank the Secretary of State for what he has said and the content of the letter that he and the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy sent to P&O today? These actions have been utterly reprehensible, but I do have to ask where the progressive zealot intent on protecting jobs was when British Airways threatened to fire and rehire 30,000 staff. If some action had been taken at that point, we might not have been in this position today with P&O. However, it is better that a sinner repenteth, and the Government are indeed on the right side of the road now, which I very much welcome, because the actions of P&O are abhorred by everyone not just in this House, but right across the country.

The Minister said in his response to the shadow Secretary of State that he cannot give any details now, but can I please reiterate that the deadline is on Thursday and this place breaks for recess on Thursday? This is of the most urgent nature, and we need details on that as soon as possible.

The Chairs of the Transport Committee and the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee—this is my final question, Mr Speaker—have written to the Secretary of State today with a number of points, including stating:

“The Government should prosecute P&O Ferries and remove its licence to operate in the UK.”

What consideration is the Minister giving to this action, and to showing P&O that it cannot operate where it does not abide by the law?

Robert Courts: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. He is quite right that, in reality, this is something that unites the House. Whatever party, wherever we come from and whatever our politics, we are all disgusted by the way that P&O has behaved. He is quite right, and I am very aware that the deadline is pressing, which is why the Government are working so hard on this. As soon as we are able to do so, we aim to come back to the House and update it on the package of measures we are looking to take—[*Interruption.*]

Sorry; the hon. Gentleman reminds me, as I am on my feet, that there are a couple of questions I have not answered. I will consider the point he has raised about licences in particular, and we can consider that as we are going along. I know that some letters have been written. I have not yet seen those, but I will be very keen to see the suggestions that are made in those as well. As I said when I was in front of the Transport Committee last week, I am very keen to work with the Select Committee and the unions on any constructive suggestions they have made. If you will pardon me for taking just a second longer to say this, Mr Speaker, there have been some very constructive suggestions from all sides of the House.

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): Stena is one of the largest employers in my constituency of Ynys Môn, and Holyhead is the second busiest roll-on roll-off port in the UK. The news about P&O last week was felt with palpable anger and shock. I have spoken to Stena seafarers such as David Gwatkin and Mark Harrison on the Stena Adventurer, and they are quite rightly concerned about their jobs. Will the Minister confirm to my constituents that he and the Secretary of State are doing everything they can to ensure that this despicable, callous behaviour never occurs again?

Robert Courts: My hon. Friend speaks with enormous power and passion for her constituents in Ynys Môn, and I pay tribute to her for that. The distress felt by seafarers of all companies has been absolutely palpable over the last week. Clearly, those at P&O are in our hearts and minds, but equally there are those with other operators who are worried about their livelihoods. It is precisely the case that we are taking the time we are because we want to be able to provide the reassurance to others, no matter where they work or who they are employed by, that their livelihoods will be secure.

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): I appreciate the Minister's comment about DP World or P&O Ferries being on the advisory group, and that he will look at this as part of a package, but can he just tell us today whether part of that package is going to be to take DP World off the Government's advisory body? That would send a fantastic message right now to the company that its behaviour is unacceptable. Will the Minister send out that message now, not ask us to wait for the package?

Robert Courts: I do apologise to the hon. Gentleman, because I know that he would like me to say a number of things and to send such a message now. The message will be sent. I hope he will forgive me, but I want there to be a package that we announce to the House so that the House can scrutinise it, rather than announcing things piecemeal. We will come to the House, and we will explain what all those are.

Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for the strength of the Government's response to the moral bankruptcy that P&O Ferries demonstrated at the Select Committee last week, and I welcome the Government's commitments to protect seafarers in the future. Does my hon. Friend agree that every step needs to be taken to ensure that seafarers are properly protected in the future?

Robert Courts: Moral bankruptcy is precisely the point; my hon. Friend puts his finger on it. We are taking every step. We will come forward with a package. We want to make sure that we get this right and are keen to make sure that people are protected.

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): We know that the unions met P&O Ferries on Friday—unsurprisingly, perhaps, the company was treating those unions with utter and complete contempt. I think the reason is this: the penny has not yet dropped for P&O Ferries that, very soon, legislation will come into force that will remove the incentive to exploit foreign agency workers at the expense of British seafarers. Will the Minister pick up the phone to P&O Ferries today and directly ask the chief exec to extend the clock for accepting what are essentially illegal offers? They are not redundancy offers—they are illegal.

Robert Courts: I thank the hon. Gentleman, who has been extremely constructive, for his input into this issue. I am grateful for it; I am taking it extremely seriously, and I am considering it all. I hope he does not mind if I say that at the outset.

The Secretary of State has already done more than make that phone call: he has written in no uncertain terms, in public, asking the company to do precisely what the hon. Gentleman has mentioned. I am not surprised that P&O has treated the unions with contempt, as the hon. Gentleman says; that is how we have seen it behave across the whole of this matter. It is deeply regrettable, and I urge the company to treat the unions and its workers with respect.

Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con): I come from a family of seafarers. The behaviour of P&O has been arrogant, disgusting and unacceptable. I am grateful to the Minister for the strong action that he and the Secretary of State for Transport have taken. Will they send a strong message to the chief executive of P&O and say from the Dispatch Box that he should resign for his behaviour?

Robert Courts: Yes, absolutely. The Secretary of State has been absolutely clear: he has said in terms that the chief executive's position is untenable, and I agree.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): May I raise again the fact that the shipping companies have received over £2 billion of tonnage tax concessions, and P&O has been a major gainer from that? May we have an assurance from the Government today that no tonnage tax relief is now being paid to P&O and that, if necessary, we should seek to receive back some of the tonnage tax concessions that it gained? Why did it gain them? As a result of a commitment to protect and increase the number of British seafaring jobs.

Robert Courts: I confirm to the right hon. Gentleman that we will be considering any actions that we can take. We will announce those as part of the package.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I am grateful for what the Secretary of State and the Minister have done. I just do not understand how a minimum wage, which by definition is a minimum, cannot be paid to people. Perhaps the Minister can explain that to me.

I take what the Opposition have said; we really need to hear in this House what the measures are. I understand why the Minister wants to make a package of announcements, but will he ensure that there is an oral statement before Thursday, when we go into recess?

Robert Courts: My hon. Friend is quite right, and I agree with him. The House does need to know what the measures are, and we intend to return to the House as soon as possible to make that statement.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I also welcome the messages on safety, consultation and wages that the Government are sending out. I have spoken to workers affected in Larne, in my constituency. What they clearly want to see is the kind of sanctions that will be placed on the company to make sure that it obeys. As we have seen from the evidence it gave last week, the company still seems to think that breaking the law is okay.

Robert Courts: The right hon. Gentleman puts his finger on the centre of the issue—thinking that breaking laws is okay. We saw an extraordinary display last week, when the CEO came here, brazenly admitted breaking the law and said he would do it again. We will make it absolutely clear that that is not acceptable. We will announce later in the week how that will be done. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will pardon me if we delay until then.

Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con): I have been speaking to people in South Ribble, and it is safe to say that P&O's reputation is absolutely in tatters at the moment. Many people say that they will never use the company again. Through the Minister, I thank the Secretary of State for his strong letter this morning. Does the Minister agree that the chief executive officer of P&O Ferries should strongly consider his position?

Robert Courts: I do.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Following the question from the hon. Member for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher), will one of the package of measures that the Minister said he will be announcing later this week be the removal of the chief executive as a director, under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986? Is that under active consideration?

Robert Courts: I know a number of Members wish me to start talking about individual measures, and I hope the right hon. Lady will forgive me if I do not. We will come to the House and explain that package of measures, and we are clear about the position of the individual in question: his position is untenable and he ought to go.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): Experienced crews are familiar with safety requirements. Will the Minister assure the House that a full safety inspection will take place before any vessel or ferry leaves port?

Robert Courts: Yes, and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency has detained one vessel to ensure that has taken place. I have total confidence in the MCA, and it will ensure that any vessel is safe before it sails.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Further to that question, surely the results of those inspections will be published in full, so the public can have confidence in what is being done. It appears that, as well as being in breach of its duty to inform the Secretary of State about its intentions, P&O is in breach of its duty to inform flag states. Do the Government intend to pursue that matter?

Robert Courts: We are considering any options that may be relevant after the actions of P&O last week. We will consider all of them.

Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con): One of the most damaging concessions made to the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee last week was that it was cheaper for P&O to dispense with its section 188 consultation obligations, and that it was more cost-effective for it to pay 800 protective awards and then move to agency worker rates of £5.50 an hour—below the national minimum wage. It is doing that by paying the British

national minimum wage up to the limit of British territorial waters, and then moving to rates of below £2 an hour. I know how hard my hon. Friend is working on this issue, but we do not have such measures in the airline industry when people move between jurisdictions. Will he look carefully at the territorial limit of national minimum wage obligations?

Robert Courts: I will indeed, and that is one of the issues we are discussing. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to it, and I thank her for her expertise.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): I was at the port of Liverpool on Saturday, and I met sacked P&O seafarers from Liverpool and from Larne. They had come across using a different carrier to show their solidarity with their Liverpool comrades. They told me about the MCA inspection in Larne, which kept the vessel in port. I will pass on their message to the Minister: they want their jobs back on their existing terms and conditions. They do not want just a review of the licences; they want proper action. They want the Government to show that they really are on their side, and not to leave any doubts about whether they are on the side of billionaires from Dubai.

Robert Courts: I can be absolutely clear: we are on the side of the workers, and we will explain what we are going to do in the House later this week.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): I congratulate the Minister on the robust approach that the Government have taken to this matter. Many small business owners and managers work long and hard to get personnel matters right, to do the right thing, and to comply with employment law. What signal will it send to them if P&O Ferries gets away with wilfully ignoring the law?

Robert Courts: That is a signal we cannot have. We cannot have any company wilfully ignoring the law, and we want to ensure that every company knows that it must do the right thing.

Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab): The Government's response to the mass sackings of 800 P&O workers has been shameful. Ministers failed to step in and save jobs, and in October they refused to support Labour efforts to outlaw fire and rehire. They are not seeking to disqualify P&O's chief executive from holding a company directorship, for brazenly and knowingly breaking employment law. Many of my constituents employed in the maritime industry are afraid that their jobs could also be under threat. Will the Minister urgently commit to introducing legislation that will guarantee that the strongest employment protections are available to everybody working in the UK maritime industry, so that no one is ever treated in as contemptible a way as the 800 P&O workers were?

Robert Courts: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's way of describing the Government's approach—I do not think we could have been any more robust—but the overall thrust of his point, that workers should be protected, I agree with. We will come to the House and explain how we are going to do that as soon as we possibly can.

Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con): I welcome the Minister's statement, but two of my neighbours and constituents, with a combined service period of 51 years, were laid off

by email last week. They are understandably upset that they do not know whether money is coming into their households going forward. Can the Minister assure me that at the heart of the package of measures he will be introducing—I understand he cannot go into detail—are workers' rights, so that in future no company like P&O will be able to take such actions?

Robert Courts: Yes, that is precisely what we aim to achieve.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I was heartened when the Minister, in opening, said he will not stand by and allow workers to be treated in such a manner, but P&O's arbitrary and illegal deadline of 31 March for all sacked ratings to sign the severance package, which effectively buys their jobs but also seeks to use a legal device to muzzle them, is this Thursday. When the Minister says he is going to bring a package to this House as soon as possible, as soon as possible must be before Thursday.

Robert Courts: The hon. Gentleman makes the point that the way these people have been treated is not on. It is absolutely unacceptable. This is complicated, so there are a number of things we just have to go through to get this right. As soon as we can come back to the House we will, but in the meantime the letter the Secretary of State has written makes precisely the demand that the hon. Gentleman asks for.

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State and the Department for the robust way they have taken on P&O over its disgraceful actions over the last few weeks. Can the Minister confirm a couple of things? First, will all contracts and relationships that P&O has with the Government be under review? Secondly, will he block the outcome that P&O is after, specifically trying to pay workers less than the minimum wage? Thirdly, does he agree with me that the CEO should either resign or be sacked immediately?

Robert Courts: My hon. Friend makes a number of excellent points. We will consider them as part of the package, but I can assure him that the thrust of what he is seeking to achieve is the same as the Government's.

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): The problem we have here is that we have had fire and rehire with British Gas and British Airways, and I remember warm words from Ministers just a few months ago but no changes to the outcome. The words of my fellow Liverpoolian, Frank Cottrell-Boyce, that Tory MPs protesting about the behaviour of P&O bosses is

"Like your neighbourhood arsonist offering you a flask of tea over the smoking ruins of your house"

come to mind. Will Ministers now look at whether they can commit to securing a collectively bargained fair pay agreement for the entire sector?

Robert Courts: We will consider all suggestions made by hon. Members across the House and I thank them for them. We will announce to the House in due course the measures we propose to take.

Allan Dorans (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP): What discussions has the Minister had with the Scottish Government and other devolved Governments about

[Allan Dorans]

the impact of P&O's actions? What efforts has he made with Cabinet colleagues to end the utterly despicable practice of fire and rehire?

Robert Courts: At a time like this, conversations take place across Government and across the devolved Administrations to consider what action we can take together.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): I thank the Minister for his statement. I hope he introduces legislation very quickly. In that legislation, will he also take on board the scandal of the way seafarers are treated in international waters generally—they suffer from low wages, poor conditions and terrible working arrangements—which has been exposed by the P&O scandal? We need to address the issue of fairness and justice for all seafarers. As a major seafaring nation, we can take the lead on that.

Robert Courts: This country absolutely is a major seafaring nation and has taken the lead already; for example during the pandemic when we were the first country to declare seafarers as key workers and took the issue of their rights to the International Maritime Organization. I am very keen that we continue to take the lead. The right hon. Gentleman puts his finger on a number of really pertinent issues.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): Before I entered Parliament, I was an employment rights lawyer for more than a decade, and in all that time I do not think I ever saw such blatant disregard for the law or contempt for workers' rights. This Government say that that is wrong, but the reality is that it has been allowed to happen on their watch. They have failed to ban fire and rehire; they have failed to extend the national minimum wage to seafarers; and if it was not for the legal challenge from Unison, we would still have fees for the employment tribunal. It is no wonder that employers think they can get away with it. When are this Government finally going to stand up for workers' rights?

Robert Courts: Unfortunately, the hon. Lady is just wrong on a number of points. For example, in regulations from 2020 the national minimum wage was extended to the vast majority of seafarers working on the UK continental shelf, so she is just wrong about that. There is an issue here that we are seeking to address, and we are addressing it.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): After Peter Hebblethwaite admitted to the Select Committee that he had broken the law and would do so again, the nation has concluded that he is not a fit and proper person to be a director of P&O, or indeed of any company. When will the Government also reach that conclusion and disqualify him? When will they seek to ensure that workers onshore are not treated with the same contempt as those seafaring workers have been, and make sure that people cannot be fired in such a way, whether they are working for Weetabix, Tesco, Sainsbury's, British Airways, British Gas or any of the other companies that have done the same thing over the past two years?

Robert Courts: The Government have reached the same conclusion as the hon. Gentleman about Mr Hebblethwaite, and that is why the Secretary of State has written to him in the terms that he has done today. It is a matter for a court, not the Government, to disqualify a person. That would be an unusual position for any Government to take, as I know the hon. Gentleman will understand. We are looking to see what else we can do to protect workers in this sphere, as I have explained, and I look forward to updating the House before the end of the week.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for taking such a robust stance on this issue. May I invite him to make it absolutely clear that the despicable action of P&O Ferries is not connected in any way with P&O Cruises, because there is some concern about that? P&O Cruises is a completely separate company, owned by a separate organisation, and it is concerned that it may lose bookings as a consequence.

Robert Courts: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right that there is no connection whatsoever between P&O Ferries and P&O Cruises. They are wholly separate organisations, separately managed. No blame whatsoever for the actions of P&O Ferries attaches, or should be seen to attach, to P&O Cruises.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): The chief executive of P&O came into this place where the laws of the land are made and told us that he broke those laws in a premeditated way. He went on to compound the situation by showing scant regard for safety measures on his ships, resulting in their being impounded. Knowing all that, does the Minister not think that the chief executive deserves to be summarily dismissed, and should the Minister not make sure that that is done immediately, regardless of any package that he will bring forward?

Robert Courts: I entirely share the hon. Gentleman's state of shock at the statement that Mr Hebblethwaite made in front of the Select Committee last week. The Secretary of State and I also share the view that Mr Hebblethwaite's position is untenable. We have told him that he ought to go, and I urge him to take that on board very seriously.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull East (Karl Turner) is absolutely right. These are not redundancies, because the positions are not redundant; crew are still needed to man those ships. The fact remains that it is cheaper, quicker and easier to sack British workers than it is to sack workers anywhere else in Europe. When the Minister brings forward this package, will he have a discussion with the rest of Government and say that the time has come for proper employment rights in the UK?

Robert Courts: I take on board entirely the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. The most important thing we have to do now is to make sure that the rights of those workers, and others in a similar position, are protected. Government will be taking note of any lessons that we might have to draw in the wider sphere, but it would be precipitative of me to make any commitment about that.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): The Minister has been given example after example of fire and rehire this afternoon; every hon. Member, unless they have been living on another planet, is acutely aware of all those examples from the last two or three years. At what point will the Government say, "This is wrong. It should be illegal"?

Robert Courts: As the hon. Gentleman knows, this is not really a fire and rehire situation, but we are absolutely clear that the way that those workers have been treated is wrong. That is why I have said in no uncertain terms that we are bringing forward a package of measures and I will be able to update the House before the end of the week.

Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab): Will the Minister confirm whether the Government have received advice from the Insolvency Service? If so, can he confirm that P&O, simply by not notifying the flag states of the intended redundancies within the prescribed time limits, has committed an offence that could and should lead to an unlimited fine being imposed? If not, will he bring forward legislation to correct that position retrospectively and make that unlimited fine happen?

Robert Courts: It would not be normal for any Minister to comment on the legal advice that has been given, but I share the hon. Lady's concerns, which is why we have asked the Insolvency Service to investigate in these circumstances. I take on board her suggestion, as I do those of all hon. Members, and we will update the House on that package shortly.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): Dockers in Rotterdam refused to load freight on to a ferry in support of 800 unlawfully and illegally sacked P&O workers. Does the Minister endorse that action in support of saving those 800 jobs? If so, why is it good enough for workers and trade unions in Rotterdam but still illegal in this country to take solidarity action?

Robert Courts: This is a Government who are standing up for workers. We have been absolutely clear about our condemnation of the way that P&O workers have been treated in this case and we will be taking action, which I will explain in due course.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): The P&O pension pot has a shortfall of £147 million. P&O's parent company, DP World, has previously sponsored a golf tournament to the tune of £150 million. Does the Minister agree that P&O's parent company should step in and pay up

so that workers' pensions are secure for the future? Will he add that to his package that needs sorting out?

Robert Courts: I entirely understand the hon. Gentleman's concern. I think that DP World and P&O should get together, talk to their workers and look after them, which they have not done so far.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): The Minister's response there was interesting. DP World is the parent company and has corporate responsibility for the actions of P&O Ferries. Has anybody picked up the phone to the Government of the UAE, who have responsibility for DP World, to say that this situation is simply not good enough and not good for their reputation?

Robert Courts: We have been absolutely clear, when we have written to P&O, that the decisions that it has taken are absolutely catastrophic for its reputation and we have said the same thing to DP World.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): The Minister is absolutely right that this is not fire and rehire, because the P&O workers have not even had the indignity of being offered back their contracts on lesser terms and conditions. The flippant disregard for the UK workforce, the contempt for the rule of law and the disgusting abuse of foreign workers in what can only be described as slave labour are not just wrong; it is not on. I hope that when the Minister comes back to the House with his detailed package, we will be not just tough in words but tough in actions and tough on P&O.

Robert Courts: I agree with the hon. Member that the way that the workers have been treated is absolutely not on. We have been absolutely clear about that and we are keen not on words but on action.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): What is worse is that DP World and P&O Ferries were prepared to put untrained crew and passengers on to those ships and for them to sail, which is completely against health and safety measures. There is therefore something at the core of the company's culture that needs to be addressed and that must result in the licence being removed, because it is clearly prepared to be unsafe and break the law.

Robert Courts: I understand the hon. Lady's concern. The thing that I hope will give her confidence is that we have the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, in which I have full confidence; it is an outstanding safety regulator. It inspects all those ships and if they are not safe to sail, they will not sail.

Schools White Paper

4.9 pm

The Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi):

With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on the publication of the schools White Paper.

Since 2010, we have been on a mission to give every child a great education. We have made huge strides, but we know there is still further to go on that journey, which my predecessors began and I am proud to lead today. Too many children still do not get the start in life that will enable them to go on and make the best use of their talents and abilities. Sadly, disadvantaged pupils or those who have special educational needs are less likely to achieve the standards we expect for them. Since 2010, we have been rolling out many changes to our education system—changes that have driven up standards, lifted us up the league tables internationally and given us measurable evidence of what works. We will now put that evidence to use and scale up what we know will create a high-quality system for children, parents and teachers.

We have an ambition that by 2030 we will expect 90% of primary school children to achieve the agreed standard in reading, writing and maths. In secondary schools, I want to see the national GCSE average grade in both English language and maths increase from 4.5 in 2019 to 5. By boosting the average grade, we show a real determination to see all children, whatever their level of attainment, do better. A child who goes from a grade 2 to a grade 3, or one who goes from a grade 8 to a grade 9, contributes to that ambition as much as a child on the borderline who may go up from a grade 4 to a grade 5. So every parent can rest assured that their child is going to get the attention they deserve, however well they are doing.

It goes without saying that every child needs an excellent teacher. This White Paper continues our reforms to training and professional development, to give every child a world-class teacher. The quality of teaching is the single most important factor within a school for improving outcomes for children, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Our vision is for an excellent teacher for every child in our country, but if we are to do that, we need to make teaching even more of an attractive profession. To make sure that it is, we will deliver 500,000 teacher training and development opportunities by 2024, giving all teachers and school leaders access to world-class evidence-based training and professional development, at every stage of their career. We will also make a £180 million investment in the early years workforce. Teachers' starting salaries are set to rise to £30,000, as we promised in our manifesto, and there will be extra incentives to work in schools with the most need.

A world-class education also needs environments in which great teaching can have maximum impact. Therefore, we will improve standards across the curriculum, behaviour and attendance. Making sure that all children are in school and ready to learn in calm, safe, supportive classes is my priority. All children will be taught a broad, ambitious, knowledge-rich curriculum and have access to high-quality experiences. We will set up a new national curriculum body to support teachers, founded on the success of Oak National Academy. This body

will work with groups across the sector to identify best practice, deepen expertise in curriculum design and develop a set of optional resources for teachers that can be used either online or in the classroom. These resources will be available across the United Kingdom, levelling up education across our great country. We will continue to support leaders and teachers to create a classroom where all children can learn in a way that recognises individual needs and abilities. In addition, we are going to boost our ability to gather and share data on behaviour and attendance. We will move forward with a national behaviour survey to form an accurate picture of what really goes on in schools and classrooms and, of course, to modernise our systems to monitor attendance. We will introduce a minimum expectation for the length of the school week to the national average of 32.5 hours for all mainstream state-funded schools from September 2023, at the latest. Thousands of schools already deliver that but a number do not and that needs to change.

Too many children, especially those who are most vulnerable, routinely fall behind and never catch up with their peers. The awful covid pandemic has made that worse. Even though I am relieved to tell the House that the latest research on learning loss and recovery shows that pupils continue to make progress, there is still much more to do. That is why today's White Paper sets out a really ambitious plan for scaling up that recovery, building on the nearly £5 billion of recovery funding that has already been announced.

My children are the most important thing in the world to me and I know that I am not alone in saying that. All parents want their children to be happy and to grow up to a future that is full of promise, so I am today making a pledge to parents; it is a pledge from me and this Government via schools to all families. The parent pledge is that any child who falls behind in English or maths will receive timely support to enable them to reach their potential. A child's school will let parents know how their child is doing and how the school is supporting them to catch up.

Tutoring has been a great success and that is making a difference. It is here to stay and we want it to become mainstream and a fundamental pillar of every school's approach to delivering the parent pledge. There will be up to 6 million tutoring packages by 2024.

We know that the approaches that I have outlined make a huge difference to pupils, so I have asked myself this. We have 22,000 schools in England; how do we ensure that these happen systematically in every school for every child? How do we get that consistency across the system? It has become clear from my six months in the Department studying the evidence that well-managed, tightly managed families of schools are those that can consistently deliver a high-quality and inclusive education. It is a system where expertise is shared for the benefit of all and where resources and support can help more teachers and leaders to deliver better outcomes for children.

With that in mind, by 2030, we intend every child to benefit from being taught in a family of schools, with their school in a strong—I underline the word “strong”—multi-academy trust or with plans to join or form one. That move towards a fully trust-led system, with a single regulatory approach, will drive up standards. We also want to encourage local authorities, if they think that they do well in running their schools, to establish

their own strong trusts, and we will back them. There will be a clear role for every part of the school system, with local authorities given the power that they need to support children. We will set up a new collaborative standard requiring trusts to work constructively with other partners.

I know from my experience in business and in rolling out the covid vaccine that the hardest thing for any complex system, whether it is health or education, is scaling up, but I have faith both in the brilliant leaderships that we already have in our school systems and in our educationalists to be able to deliver on this White Paper. We want to spread brilliance throughout our country, levelling up opportunity and creating a school system where there is a clear role for every part of the system, all working together and all focused on one thing: delivering outstanding outcomes for our children.

Soon, everyone will see what we all know—that this Conservative Government are busy making our schools the very best in the world. We should be so proud of how far we have come and rightly hopeful about where we are going next. For that reason, I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

4.19 pm

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for advance sight of his statement today. It has been a little over two years since schools were closed to most pupils and almost 12 years since his party came to power, yet among the many reannouncements that we heard over the weekend, the big ideas were that three quarters of our schools should carry on as normal, teaching the hours that they already teach; that when children are falling behind, schools will be there to help; and that the national tutoring programme—described by providers as being at risk of catastrophic failure—is the answer to all our problems.

Is that really it? Is that the limit of the Secretary of State's ambition for our children and for our country? He rightly stresses the need to be evidence-led. Is that all he thinks the evidence supports? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I expected good order to be kept during the Secretary of State's statement, which in fairness it was, and I certainly want the same for the shadow Secretary of State. If somebody does not want to keep good order, will they please leave now?

Bridget Phillipson: The Secretary of State rightly stresses the need to be evidence-led. Is that all he thinks the evidence supports, or is it all he could persuade the Chancellor to support?

The attainment gap is widening. Performance at GCSE for our most disadvantaged kids was going into reverse even before the pandemic. After two years of ongoing disruption, it is clear enough where the focus should be. The Secretary of State says that he has ambitions, but they are hollow—hollow because they are wholly disconnected from any means of achieving them, hollow because there is no plan to deliver them, but also hollow because there is no vision for what education is for, what growing up in our country should involve and what priority we should give our children.

We are two years into the pandemic. Two years is a long time, and an important time—half a lifetime for the children starting school in September. We can all see the impact that the years of disruption, botched exams, isolation and time spent at home have had on our children, yet time and again the Government fail to grasp the truth that time out of education for children and young people means more than time out in the rest of their lives. Instead, our children have been an afterthought for this Government—a Government who showed their priorities when they reopened pubs before they reopened schools, a Prime Minister whose own adviser on education recovery resigned in despair, a Department that closed schools to most children with little thought for how it would repair the damage or reopen them safely.

Labour listened to parents and young people and set out the children's recovery plan that our children need and our country deserves—breakfast clubs and new activities, quality mental health support in every school, small group tutoring for all who need it. Our children have waited long enough. When will they see a recovery plan that rises to the generational challenge staring us all in the face? Only today, the Department published research setting out that in reading in particular, pupils are falling further behind and the disadvantage gap is widening.

It goes deeper than just the past two years. We see the value and worth of every child. We see them as ambitious and optimistic, with dreams for their future. We see the role of a Government as one of matching, not tempering, that ambition. Education is about opportunity; we want opportunity for every child, in every corner of our country, at every stage.

We want childcare that is high-quality, affordable and available, not a cost that prices people out of parenting. We want every parent to be able to send their child to a great local state school, which is why we would launch the most ambitious school improvement plan for a generation, focusing on what happens inside the school, not the name above the door. We want teachers to be supported to succeed, not leaving the profession as they are doing, which is why we have set out plans for career development and for thousands of new teachers: the success and professionalism of our teachers enables the success of our children.

We want to see our children not just achieving, but thriving at school, with a rich and broad curriculum that enables them to flourish. We want to give children and young people real choices and see them succeed through strong colleges and apprenticeships. That is why we would deliver work experience, careers advice and digital skills for all our young people so that everyone leaves education ready for work and ready for life. That is why today's White Paper represents such a missed opportunity.

However, for all the disappointment that we feel on these Opposition Benches, echoed by school staff and school leaders across our country today—and the Secretary of State, in his heart, probably feels that disappointment himself—it is our children, whose voices are rarely heard in this place, who are the real losers today.

Nadhim Zahawi: I was hoping for a plan, but none was forthcoming. The hon. Lady spoke about schools being closed. Labour, dancing to the tune of its union

[*Nadhim Zahawi*]

paymasters, wanted to keep them closed. If the hon. Lady thinks that that is a plan, perhaps she should go and visit one of those schools, as I did earlier today with the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms). If she had been with me at Monega school in Newham and observed the brilliant leadership of Liz Harris and her team, she would know that our reforms are working. There is a family of schools in a high-performing trust which is delivering for those children, 24% of whom are on pupil premium. Great leadership and great teachers are being supported by a fantastic teaching hub within the group that is part of that trust, delivering great outcomes for children rather than playing politics with our education system.

I seem to recall that it was the leader of the hon. Lady's party who wanted schools to remain closed—and, of course, wanted to pause the whole vaccination campaign so that we would lose three months before we could vaccinate teachers. Because we did not do that, and because so many of the Leader of the Opposition's Back Benchers went against him, we continued to vaccinate, we protected teachers, and we got schools open again.

The hon. Lady spoke about our standing in the world rankings. I can share with her the information that England achieved its highest ever scores in both reading and maths in two international comparison studies, the 2016 progress in international reading literacy study and the 2019 trends in international mathematics and science study. In 2019, following the introduction of the phonics screening check in 2012, the proportion of year 1 pupils meeting the expected standard rose from 58% to 82%, and the figure rose to 91% among those in year 2. That is a record of real delivery for young people of which the Government are proud. Of course we have had a pandemic since then, but the £5 billion invested in our recovery is making a real difference.

The hon. Lady questioned that recovery, and questioned what the national tutoring programme was achieving. We have just announced that the NTP has delivered 1 million 15-hour blocks of tutoring. It will meet its targets. School leaders told us that they wanted a school-led pillar—as well as the other two pillars which are also delivering—and we have provided that for them. Evidence that we published today, to which the hon. Lady referred, suggests that since the spring of 2021, primary school pupils have recovered about two thirds of the progress that was lost owing to the pandemic in reading, and about half in maths. That is real delivery.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Select Committee, Robert Halfon.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I welcome the White Paper. I think that we are seeing the beginnings of a long-term plan for education, especially given tomorrow's publication of the special needs review and the publication of the care review. The Government have begun to provide a washing line for all the clothes pegs of different educational initiatives. The parent pledge and the catch-up plan are also important.

The White Paper refers to a knowledge-rich curriculum. I am thoroughly in favour of that, but what about a skills-rich curriculum to sit alongside it? I see that the skills Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart), is paying close attention.

Such a curriculum would prioritise skills including oracy and financial, technical and vocational education, reverse the huge decline in design and technology skills, and prepare students better for the world of work.

What does the White Paper do for children from care backgrounds, exclusion backgrounds and special needs backgrounds who underperform in GCSEs to such an extent in comparison with their peers? We know the grim statistics. How will this White Paper help them? How will the curriculum better prepare pupils for the world of work? Perhaps one of the most important priorities is the 124,000 Oliver Twist ghost children, who are possibly on our streets. What is he doing about those children who have not returned since schools reopened last year?

Nadhim Zahawi: I am grateful to the Chair of the Education Committee. He raises a number of really important questions. He is absolutely right to identify that the schools White Paper, with the SEND Green Paper—which we will consult on and publish tomorrow and share with the House—and the children's social care review by Josh MacAlister, will for the first time give us the ability to knit together a system that delivers for all pupils, especially those with SEND and those that are most vulnerable in the care system. On financial education, the Schools Minister is looking at how we can take that further and embed it in the education system. My right hon. Friend will also know that I walk around the country wearing on my lapel a TL badge, which stands for technical level. T-levels are a fusion of A-levels and the great work we have done on apprenticeships, and that is what we will do to ensure that children have the runways that their career path can take off on. He is right to remind us of the 124,000 children who are out of education. That is why, for the first time in our country, we will have a register to ensure that we know exactly where those children are. There are many parents who deliver great home education, some of whom are in my own constituency, but many children are lost in the system and we have to make sure we know where they are.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. This has to finish by 5.15 pm, so please help each other by being short and sweet with questions as well as answers.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): It is good that the Secretary of State has clearly been listening to the concerns of the profession, of parents and of young people since he came into post, but I am afraid that his announcements today are underpowered because of the funding pressures that will continue in the system. Schools continue to face covid costs and they continue to face rising salary costs, which are not being fully funded by the Department. These include the increased starting salary for new teachers, which is still on the horizon and not yet delivered. Schools also face rising energy costs and all the other pressures that organisations are facing. In particular, the Secretary of State will know that there is particular funding pressure in relation to pupils with SEND. What is he doing to ensure that schools have the funds they need to rise to the ambitions he has set out today?

Nadhim Zahawi: The hon. Lady is right to say that there are many pressures on schools at the moment. The funding we secured at the spending review was £7 billion,

with much of it—£4 billion—frontloaded to this year and next year. Energy costs are rising—they are 1.4% of the schools budget. A big part of the budget is obviously wages. We are keeping an eye on what is happening to energy costs in schools. On SEND, we have put in an additional £1 billion, so the total budget now stands at £9.1 billion, plus an additional £2.6 billion to ensure that we deliver the specialist provision that we need in the system, because there has been a lack of confidence among parents as to whether their child will get the right provision. Today's White Paper supports mainstream schools to all be great SEND schools as well.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): How will the poorly performing schools get the brilliant teachers and better professional development that the Secretary of State rightly wants, because that is what they need?

Nadhim Zahawi: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. We endowed the Education Endowment Foundation when the coalition Government came into office, and I have just announced a further endowment for the next 10 years. It has evidenced the qualifications and quality of teacher training that are required, whether in the early careers framework, initial teacher training or later in life in professional development, and we are following that evidence and scaling up half a million teacher training opportunities. That has never been attempted, certainly in my time in Parliament; it is a huge scale-up of teacher training and that is what we will deliver.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): When he was confronted on yesterday's "Sophy Ridge on Sunday," the Secretary of State could not answer a question on the shocking fall in per pupil funding, particularly compared with private schools. My child, like thousands of children, started school just before this Government came into power and they are just about to finish. The Secretary of State talks about a parent pledge. Will he apologise to the thousands of parents and young people for what this Government have done to per pupil funding over the last 12 years?

Nadhim Zahawi: I am slightly puzzled by the hon. Lady's question. As I described, standards have consistently gone up because we have introduced things such as the phonics screening check. We are investing £7 billion in education, with £4 billion frontloaded for this year and next year, to make sure that schools have the funding they need. Andreas Schleicher of the OECD was in my office telling me that, actually, the United Kingdom is in the top quartile for investment in our school system. That is what this Government are doing, and this White Paper takes the evidence for what works and scales it for every child in this country. I want to see every child have the opportunity I had to achieve to the best of their talent.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Teacher training has often been part of the problem. By what mechanism will my right hon. Friend prevent any return to the half-baked theories that proved to be a disaster in the classroom?

Nadhim Zahawi: We will be evidence-led. We are also launching an institute of teaching to deliver the high standards on which my right hon. Friend rightly focuses.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): In Cumbria, we have some of the best schools in the country, but we also have some of the smallest because the communities they serve are often half empty—homes are not lived in because they are owned by second homeowners. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree it is right to tax second homeowners at least twice the rate of council tax and to use that funding to make sure rural community schools have the support they need to do the job at which they are so good?

Nadhim Zahawi: We are supporting small rural schools through the national funding formula to make sure they have the funds they need.

Laura Trott (Sevenoaks) (Con): I welcome the White Paper, particularly its ambitions on literacy and numeracy. Will Ofsted reinforce those ambitions through data-led interventions where they are not being met?

Nadhim Zahawi: Ofsted's 2019 framework has, in many ways, helped schools both to focus on literacy and numeracy and to have a knowledge-rich curriculum, from which this White Paper does not deviate. We are working in lockstep with our colleagues in Ofsted to make sure we deliver the highest-quality outcomes for children. If we focus on outcomes, we will not get it wrong.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): I am not convinced that the Government are listening. They do not have the support of the National Association of Head Teachers, the Association of School and College Leaders or the National Education Union for this White Paper. If the Secretary of State is really listening, headteachers are telling me that they need the classroom support teachers who have been so drastically cut over the years by this Tory Government.

Nadhim Zahawi: I remind the hon. Lady that there are now 217,000 teaching assistants in classrooms, a 6,000 increase since 2010.¹ I speak to ASCL and the other unions to share evidence and to share our work on the White Paper, and they have been engaging with us. The Education Endowment Foundation, which provides evidence in other areas, has an excellent review of how best to use teaching assistants. Every school should look at that review.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): I had my latest session with Hampshire County Council on Friday to go through every school in my constituency. The Secretary of State will be pleased to know that every single one is good or outstanding—the last one will be there very soon.

I am concerned about access to child and adolescent mental health services, as children cannot learn if they are not in the right place mentally. I am also concerned about small rural primaries. The heads of such schools in my constituency will take some convincing that being part of a large multi-academy trust is the answer to their problems. Given what the White Paper says about all children being in an academy, can the Secretary of State convince me of why the evidence says that is the answer?

Nadhim Zahawi: My hon. Friend asks a number of questions, which I will try to unpack. We will say more on our work with the Department of Health and Social Care in the SEND Green Paper tomorrow. Suffice it to

1. [Official Report, 30 March 2022, Vol. 711, c. 5MC.]

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say that local evidence, the dashboard and that transparency will lead to much better outcomes for families and children. He is right about rural primaries; I have similar high-performing rural primaries in my constituency. My message to them is that they do an excellent job and, if they feel that they want to get together with other rural primaries, we will support them in setting up a multi-academy trust. Alternatively, where local authorities think they do a great job supporting their schools, they can set up trusts. With the White Paper, I am trying to ensure that we take everyone with us on this journey because, ultimately, if we all remember what we are in this for—to deliver better outcomes for every child at the right place and the right time for that child—we will do the right thing.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I just need to reiterate that we need one question each, so that the Secretary of State does not have to answer a number of questions, and the questions need to be brief, not with long statements beforehand. Barry Sheerman will lead the way in how to do that.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you for those kind words, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Secretary of State knows I have admired him in the past as a manager and a man with passion, but this is not much of a plan. Any plan needs people to lead and deliver it, but we now have weak local authorities, a weak central Government Department for Education and a weak Ofsted. If he really believes the leadership will come just from academy trusts, I do not think we will achieve very much.

Nadhim Zahawi: This White Paper will define the role of each of those stakeholders that the hon. Gentleman just described in the system. With that clarity, and the support for good leaders in local government, good leaders of multi-academy trusts and—to push back slightly, with respect—the great leadership in Ofsted, we will deliver for those children who we all want, and I know he wants, to see delivered for.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I welcome the White Paper and my right hon. Friend's real focus on excellence in our schools, but we can only deliver world-class numeracy and literacy if schools are safe places to learn. The Government's own inquiry last year pointed out that every school should assume that its students experience sexual harassment and online abuse at school, so will he include as central to his plans the culture in our schools and the roll-out of relationships and sex education?

Nadhim Zahawi: My right hon. Friend is right to highlight that issue. I was in the Department when we rolled out relationships education and relationships and sex education in the curriculum, teaching young people what healthy relationships are like and how to identify unhealthy and abusive behaviour. That is a priority for me and it is in the White Paper under paragraph 80.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Secretary of State speaks about levelling up opportunity. In some of the most disadvantaged areas, including my own constituency, we have organisations

such as the excellent Hull and East Yorkshire Children's University, which provides a rich source of experiences and support for pupils and schools. Will he say something about his plans to harness the expertise of organisations such as children's universities and give them sustainable funding so they can get to work on that levelling-up agenda that the Government talk so much about?

Nadhim Zahawi: That is exactly what this White Paper will do and it is why the issue of teaching is so important to our plan. I will certainly have a look at the children's university the right hon. Lady mentions. Anyone who wants to join us on this journey is most welcome, and we want everyone to come along because, if we deliver for every child, we will have done something great for the future of our country.

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend on his White Paper and thank him for the fact that Stoke-on-Trent is now an education investment area priority, which comes with additional investment for our local area. I also thank him for the fact that the levelling-up premium to recruit and retain some of the best teachers across the country has been adopted from the Onward and New Schools Network report that I did on levelling up education. Most importantly, we want some of the best multi-academy trusts, which for too long have been clustered in the south, to come up to Stoke-on-Trent. How does this White Paper enable that to happen?

Nadhim Zahawi: My hon. Friend has always been a great champion for his schools and speaks with real experience as an accomplished teacher in his own right. He is right that we need our best, highest-performing multi-academy trusts to lift their ambitions. This White Paper will deliver that, including additional funding of £80 million to get that momentum going again. We are about to announce our 10,000th academy and we have 22,000 schools in England. I am ambitious for every part of the country, and we will deliver that ambition in Stoke-on-Trent as well as in other parts of the country.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I congratulate the Secretary of State on his choice of Monega Primary School for his speech this morning.

Some multi-academy trusts are a bureaucratic mess at the moment. I welcome the proposal to allow local authorities to set up and lead trusts. Does he also have plans, as has been reported, to allow schools to exit MATs that do not suit them and to increase the accountability of trusts to local authorities?

Nadhim Zahawi: Yes, we do. The White Paper speaks to this. We will consult on the regulatory framework around trusts so that the best-performing trusts have the confidence to join us in making sure that we get that framework right.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): Some 15% of children have special educational needs and disabilities. How does my right hon. Friend intend to ensure that any conclusions on reforms from the SEND review are aligned with and implemented alongside the White Paper?

Nadhim Zahawi: That is exactly what we have done. I hope that we can demonstrate in today's work, but also in tomorrow's Green Paper, the knitting together of how we deliver support to parents of children with special educational needs in our mainstream education system, because every mainstream school should be a great SEND school. There is also the work we are doing on alternative provision. We will set out more details tomorrow.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): With the first schools White Paper in six years coming on the back of a pandemic that was so brutal for our children and young people, this really feels like a missed opportunity for children, parents and school staff up and down the country. Where is the ambition in this? This is a unique opportunity to broaden the offer in terms of the academic achievement and broader life skills that parents and employers want, as well as wellbeing. Has the Secretary of State had his hands tied by a Chancellor who is more focused on his own ambition than the ambitions of our children and young people?

Nadhim Zahawi: I am slightly surprised by the hon. Lady's question, because I briefed her personally on the details of the White Paper. Nevertheless, if she reads the White Paper, she will see that we are ambitious for a knowledge-rich curriculum but have also made it very clear that we will have a strategy for everything from sport to music to culture, because the evidence is that everything from extra-curricular activities to pastoral care and behaviour makes the real difference in providing the high-performing school standards that I want to see in every part of the country.

Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con): This is great news for the young people of our country. Specifically, it is good news for the people of Doncaster, as Doncaster is now a priority education investment area. That will give my young constituents the boost they need to level up their opportunities. My only concern is that while I welcome the half a million teacher training opportunities, will this not result in more teacher training days and therefore more days out of school for our young learners?

Nadhim Zahawi: No.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): As a member of the Education Committee of just short of 12 years, I have to say that an evidence-led policy would be a welcome departure for this Government. On teacher recruitment and retention, there is a bit in the White Paper on aims to improve the workforce, but not on the "how" and the "what with". There is no involvement by teaching universities in the Institute of Teaching. With recruitment and retention continuing to pose enormous challenges for many schools, particularly in disadvantaged areas, the White Paper pays scant attention to how schools in those areas will be able to recruit and then retain specialist teachers in, say, maths or physics.

Nadhim Zahawi: We are making sure that, especially in education investment areas, teachers in subjects like maths and physics have an incentive, with £3,000 tax-free. Many of them will want to go to those areas if they feel they have the support in place. That is why we want a strong family of schools working together in high-performing multi-academy trusts to offer the support that we saw so visibly during the pandemic.

Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for the focus on outcomes, which is so important for the children of South Ribble. Three of my constituency's primary schools have joined with two primary schools in South Ribble borough to form the Axia Learning Alliance, a co-operative trust, which I confess to knowing little about. Will the Secretary of State and his Ministers consider such trusts as part of his future proposals?

Nadhim Zahawi: It is through the multi-academy trust—that family of schools that is tightly managed and high performing—that we think we can deliver the greatest outcomes for children. I will happily look at what my hon. Friend's schools are doing, but outcomes are delivered through schools being strongly held together and really well managed, as well as through the sharing of evidence.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): The White Paper says that it

"marks the start of a journey".

Quite why it has taken 12 years to start a journey to raise standards will be beyond the understanding of most parents, staff and children. If the Secretary of State wants to learn from the evidence of successful and sustained improvement in schools, will he apply the lessons of collaboration and support from the London challenge, which transformed education standards in the capital and did not involve a name change on the badge above the door?

Nadhim Zahawi: I will look at any evidence and learn from it. The hon. Member speaks about what we have done. I remind him that in 2019, 65% of key stage 2 pupils reached the expected standard in all of reading, writing and maths, and we want to go much further—to 90%—but the 2019 figure was a seven percentage points increase in reading and a nine percentage points increase in maths since 2016. That is what we have done.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and, in particular, the focus on multi-academy trusts; we have some successful ones in northern Lincolnshire. However, education, like the rest of the public sector, finds it difficult to attract the best quality professionals to that part of the country. Will he reassure me that there will be focus on that and that he will work with schools and councils to achieve that?

Nadhim Zahawi: Yes, very much so. You will know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the most valuable resource on earth is human capital, and that is why we are flexing the system towards education investment areas and priority education investment areas. We will deliver high-quality, highly qualified teachers so that schools in those areas get the same benefit as others around the country. I do not believe that people are less talented in Knowsley than in Kensington; the difference is that they do not have the same opportunities. I am absolutely passionate about ensuring that we deliver on that.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Education is a big passion of mine, and I thank the Secretary of State for his recent announcement that Tameside will be an education improvement area. With that, the focus on skills, outcomes and opportunities is key, but that is not

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possible in substandard education buildings. It would be remiss of me not to mention Russell Scott Primary School in Denton, which has been dubbed Britain's worst rebuilt school and for which a bid is in to the Department for Education. Can we have the new school that those kids so desperately deserve?

Nadhim Zahawi: I know that the hon. Member is passionate and appreciate that he wants to work constructively. I know that the bid is in—the Minister for School Standards is looking at all bids—but he makes a powerful point, and I will happily work with him, because I know that he will care about the evidence; unlike, sadly, his Labour Front-Bench colleagues.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Having married into a family of teachers, I know how talented and passionate many of our teachers are. However, many teacher training courses include very little content on learning difficulties or speech and language conditions. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that all teachers receive the special educational needs and disability training that they need through initial teacher training and continuing development to give every child the best possible start in life?

Nadhim Zahawi: My hon. Friend raises a powerful point. We are considering a national professional qualification for special educational needs as well as early intervention. He will hear more about that from me tomorrow in the Green Paper announcement.

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): Schools in Bedford and Kempston, like those everywhere else, have been through the most difficult period of disruption, and have had to do so on reduced budgets. Not once in any of the conversations I have had with heads, teachers or parents, who are desperate for support, has anyone asked for more targets. If targets were not being met before the pandemic, why does the Secretary of State think that increasing them is going to do anything but create more stress for children and drive more teachers from the profession?

Nadhim Zahawi: I hope the hon. Gentleman was listening when I spoke about England rising up the international league tables around the world. That is because we are so focused on making sure that we back our teachers, train them well and then, of course, target our efforts, including on such successful programmes as the phonics screening check. I respectfully disagree with the hon. Gentleman: we need targets. That is why the primary target of 90% for achievement in maths and English and the GCSE average grade target going up from 4.5 to 5 are so important.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): The Secretary of State and I both have excellent Warwickshire grammar schools in our constituencies; will he say a little about the role of grammars in the raising of standards?

Nadhim Zahawi: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour for that question. I have in my constituency three grammar schools, all of which are high performing. We want to spread the DNA of grammar

schools across the system. There are 165 grammar schools in an education system with 22,000 schools. Many grammar schools have already joined and are leading high-performing, strong multi-academy trusts. I want more of them to do the same, and they will join us on this journey.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I am concerned that the Secretary of State may be underestimating the damage that has been done to some children by the isolation during the pandemic—that is certainly what I hear from schools in Cambridge. That damage can be addressed through more interventions and more resources; is there anything in the White Paper to address that in a county such as Cambridgeshire, which remains one of the most poorly funded in the country?

Nadhim Zahawi: Mental health is one of the areas we have been looking at with the Children's Commissioner, including through her very good "The Big Ask" survey of half a million children. In May last year, we announced £17 million of investment to build mental health support in education settings. We have invested further to make sure that the mental health leads in more than 8,000 schools and colleges have the necessary support and knowledge to support young people.

Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): I welcome the White Paper and thank my right hon. Friend for his passion and drive to deliver the best possible education to all children throughout the country, no matter whether they live or what their background is.

This morning, I caught up with some of my local school leaders, as I do regularly, and although they were interested to hear about what was coming up in this announcement there was naturally a bit of trepidation about further change on the back of the covid pandemic. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need to make sure the changes are streamlined so that they cause as minimal an amount of disruption for school teachers as possible?

Nadhim Zahawi: My hon. Friend raises a really important point. The frontline—the 461,000 teachers and 217,000 teaching assistants—and the support staff and leaders in our education system have gone above and beyond to make sure that schools reopened, stayed open and dealt with omicron.¹ We have looked carefully at the evidence, which is why one of the things we have not done is change the curriculum. A knowledge-rich curriculum is important to make sure we deliver the outcomes we so passionately want to deliver for young people.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): If the Secretary of State is to deliver on this package, which has been announced 12 years into a Conservative Government, he is going to have to fund it. If we want decent teachers at the front of classrooms, we are going to have to pay them, so where is the funding for decent teachers in this package? If we are to improve schools, they need the resources; is anything in this package going to increase per-pupil funding?

Nadhim Zahawi: We are investing £7 billion, with £4 billion front-loaded this year and next year, and there is £5 billion for recovery. That is the investment. That is the commitment that we make when we speak,

1.[Official Report, 30 March 2022, Vol. 711, c. 6MC.]

as I did this morning, to great school leaders like the great head at Monega. She will tell the hon. Gentleman that this is doable. The team at Monega has turned the school around in five years and it is now an outstanding school. We want to spread that good practice and quality leadership across the system.

Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his ambition and for making Bedfordshire an education investment area, but I draw his attention to a particular point in his White Paper, which refers to work

“to scrutinise and challenge off-rolling”

from schools. He will know that, unchecked, off-rolling can undermine trust, even in the best systems, so will he pay particular attention to that?

Nadhim Zahawi: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and in knitting together a system between our White Paper and the SEND and AP Green Paper, I have the opportunity to make sure that such behaviour no longer happens and that alternative provision is not seen as a sort of warehousing for forgotten children, because high-quality alternative provision has a place and a role to play in our education system.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): Education is the joint top sector affected by long covid—joint with social care, and above healthcare—but I have not yet seen anything from the Department on how MATs will help teachers with long covid. For example, I am aware of a headteacher who has chosen to take early retirement because they kept getting written warnings from the MAT, rather than being supported. That is not going to help workforce retention. Would the Secretary of State meet me to discuss how we can support teachers and heads who have long covid?

Nadhim Zahawi: I will happily meet the hon. Lady.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): The ambition for all children that shone through my right hon. Friend's statement is to be warmly welcomed, but at the start of his statement he rightly acknowledged that children with special educational needs are less likely to achieve the ambition we all want for them. In my constituency, time and again I hear too many heartbreaking cases from families, where one of the causes is the length of time it takes for an EHCP to be signed off. Can he give me an assurance that the action coming from this White Paper and tomorrow's SEND review will tackle that barrier?

Nadhim Zahawi: Yes, I can.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. The parent pledge that the Secretary of State delivered today is ambitious and entirely necessary. A report in Northern Ireland has shown that children are eight months behind where they would normally be. The White Paper today is for England and Wales, but the problem is UK-wide, so the solution must also be UK-wide. What discussions has the Secretary of State had with devolved counterparts to ensure that this is the approach in every area of the United Kingdom?

Nadhim Zahawi: The hon. Member will know that education is devolved, but we happily share all the evidence. We share our strategy with our colleagues in the devolved Administrations, and in the spirit of collaboration I am happy to continue to share the evidence. England has in many ways been evidencing what works, and we are happy to share that.

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): I very much welcome Stoke-on-Trent being announced as a prioritised education investment area, which will help to continue the significant work being done to improve standards in education that teachers have been working on in Stoke-on-Trent. Does my right hon. Friend agree that improving standards of education is absolutely vital both to levelling up standards and to unleashing the real potential of places such as Stoke-on-Trent?

Nadhim Zahawi: I thank my hon. Friend, and I absolutely agree. I am the beneficiary of great education, of which the greatest determinant is having a great teacher or an inspirational teacher in the classroom. That is why much of the focus of this White Paper is about backing teachers, and making sure that they get the qualifications and the professional development that they need to do their job properly.

Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con): I very much welcome the positive and progressive statement from my right hon. Friend. I pay tribute to the pupils and teachers in my constituency of Penrith and The Border for all their resilience and tremendous hard work throughout the pandemic. However, can my right hon. Friend reassure my constituents that pupils will receive all the targeted and tailored support and tutoring they need and, more broadly, the mental health and pastoral support they need?

Nadhim Zahawi: My hon. Friend raises two excellent points. The work we have done on the national tutoring programme has allowed us to make the parent pledge, because I saw the evidence of how, when an individual child has gaps in their knowledge, the focus on engagement with parents makes a real difference. Of course, his point on mental health I addressed earlier.

Miriam Cates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con): As a parent and a former teacher, I wholeheartedly welcome this White Paper. It is ambitious, but it is also a common-sense approach. I particularly commend the use of common-sense, plain English in the White Paper, which is very accessible to parents. Perhaps my right hon. Friend could pass on some tips to other Departments. I want to pick up on a phrase that is mentioned a couple of times in the White Paper, which is that

“the quality of teaching is the single most important in-school factor in improving outcomes for children”.

I completely agree with that and I welcome the reforms to teacher training, but does my right hon. Friend acknowledge that children spend most of their time at home, rather than in school, so can he set out how this will work alongside the Government's programmes on strengthening and supporting families, because that will have just as important an effect on improving outcomes?

Nadhim Zahawi: My hon. Friend raises a really important question. I have focused the Department on skills; the skills Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood

[*Nadhim Zahawi*]

and Ongar (Alex Burghart), and the Minister for Higher and Further Education are both on the Front Bench. Later today, we will vote through what will then become, I hope, the revolution in the skills landscape that this country so badly needs and deserves.

From skills to schools: the schools White Paper delivers on what we want to achieve—making sure that every child has the opportunity of a great education in the right place and at the right time for them. Then there is family: families are important, whether in mainstream education or when it comes to children and the social care system. My hon. Friend will hear more from us about the family hubs that we will deliver in half of England's local authorities.

Antony Higginbotham (Burnley) (Con): Since 2010, the number of good and outstanding schools in Burnley and Padiham has increased. We can see in pupil attainment the impact that has had. That is not just numbers on a page, but life chances improving in our local communities. That is why we need to drive even harder, because education is the heart of levelling up. Will the Secretary of State set out what the White Paper will do for pupils who need targeted intervention in individual subjects, to help drive them forward?

Nadhim Zahawi: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's question. He will, I hope, see in the annex to the White Paper the evidence that strong, high performing multi-academy trusts really do deliver the best outcomes. That is my vision for the whole country.

The parent pledge, yes, is about children who fall behind in English language and maths, but teachers who I have seen in those high-performing multi-academy trusts also look at other subjects as well as pastoral care and curriculum work. That makes the difference.

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for his excellent statement today. I also endorse the words of my right hon. Friend the Chair of the Education Committee on the importance of oracy skills in schools; I went to see an excellent initiative in Serlby Park Academy in Bircotes, in my constituency.

The Government have a commitment to getting 90% of primary school children up to reading, writing and maths standards by 2030. Does my right hon. Friend agree that driving up those standards in primary schools improves outcomes not only at that stage, but throughout a child's and young person's entire educational journey and beyond?

Nadhim Zahawi: The wise words of a great teacher and a great headteacher.

Ukraine

5.7 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to update the House, on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, about the NATO and G7 leaders' meetings in Brussels last week. Together with our allies, we agreed to keep the pressure up on Putin to end his appalling war in Ukraine through tougher sanctions to debilitate the Russian economy; through supplying weapons to Ukraine and boosting NATO's eastern flank; through providing humanitarian aid in dealing with the wider consequences of the crisis; and through supporting Ukraine in any negotiations it undertakes.

Strength is the only thing Putin understands. Our sanctions are pushing back the Russian economy by years and we owe it to the brave Ukrainians to keep up our tough approach to get peace. We owe it to ourselves to stand with them for the cause of freedom and democracy in Europe and across the world. It is vital that we step up this pressure. We cannot wait for more appalling atrocities to be committed in Ukraine. We know that the impact of sanctions degrades over time, and that is why we need to act now.

Next week, NATO Foreign Ministers will meet to follow up on the statements of leaders. I will be pressing our allies over the next weeks for all of us to do more. On oil and gas, the UK has already committed to ending imports of Russian oil by the end of this year. We must agree a clear timetable with our partners across the G7 to end dependence on Russian oil and gas permanently. On banks, we have already sanctioned 16 major Russian banks. We have hit Gazprombank and placed a clear prohibition on Sberbank, Russia's largest bank. We want to see others adopt these sanctions and go further.

On individuals, we have cracked down on oligarchs such as Roman Abramovich. Last week, we sanctioned the despicable Wagner Group of mercenaries. On ports, Britain has banned entry to Russian vessels at all our ports. I will be lobbying our partners across the G7 to join us in stopping Russian ships.

We must maximise the flow of weapons that are being supplied to Ukraine under the United Nations charter of self-defence. The UK was the first European country to start sending lethal aid to Ukraine, and we are doubling our support with a further 6,000 missiles, including next-generation light anti-tank weapons, and Javelin anti-tank weapons. We are equipping our Ukrainian friends with anti-aircraft Starstreak missiles. We are also strengthening NATO's eastern flank, deploying troops to Bulgaria, and doubling the numbers of troops in Poland and Estonia.

We are co-ordinating deliveries with our allies, and we want others to join us in getting Ukraine what it needs. The UK is providing £220 million in humanitarian support to help the people of Ukraine, from shelters to heaters and medicine. Today we announced our partnership with Australia to fly out more relief, including blankets, cooking equipment and power generators. We are getting supplies directly into Ukraine's encircled cities, with £2 million in canned food, water, and dried food. As refugees come into countries such as Poland, we are working with the UNHCR so that it is informed about

the UK's Homes for Ukraine scheme. That scheme has already had more than 150,000 applications, thanks to the generosity of the British public.

We know that Putin is not serious about talks. He is still wantonly bombing innocent citizens across Ukraine. That is why we must do more to ensure that he loses and we force him to think again. We must not just stop Putin in Ukraine; we must also look to the long term. We must ensure that any future talks do not end up selling out Ukraine, or repeating the mistakes of the past. We remember the uneasy settlement of 2014, which failed to give Ukraine lasting security. Putin just came back for more. That is why we cannot allow him to win from this appalling aggression, and why this Government are determined that Putin's regime should be held to account at the International Criminal Court.

We will work to restore Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. We have set up a negotiations unit to ensure that the strongest possible support is available to the Ukrainians, alongside our international partners. We have played a leading role alongside our G7 allies in driving the response to Putin's war, and I want to ensure that that unity continues. Sanctions were put on by the G7 in unison, and they should not be removed as long as Putin continues with his war and still has troops in Ukraine. That is not all. We must ensure that Putin can never act in this aggressive way again. Any long-term settlement needs to include a clear sanctions snapback that would be triggered automatically by any Russian aggression.

In the aftermath of Putin's war, Ukraine will need our help to build back. In these exceptional circumstances, we have a duty to step up with a new reconstruction plan for rebuilding Ukraine. We will work with the international community to do that. At this defining moment, the free world has shown a united response. Putin is not making the progress he craves, and he is still not serious about talks. President Zelensky and the Ukrainian people know that everybody in the United Kingdom stands firm with them. We were the first European country to recognise Ukraine's independence from the Soviet Union. Thirty years on, we are the first to strengthen its defences against Putin's invasion, and lead the way in our support.¹ Over the next week, I will be working to drive forward progress in unison with our allies. Together, we can secure a lasting peace that restores Ukraine's sovereignty. Together, we can ensure that Putin fails and Ukraine prevails. I commend this statement to the House.

5.13 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): I thank the Foreign Secretary for advance sight of her statement, and the continued briefings on Privy Council terms.

It is now more than a month since Vladimir Putin launched his barbaric and illegal invasion, with horrifying results: buildings razed to the ground, maternity hospitals bombed, and the city of Mariupol turned into a living hell. Ukraine is the victim of a bandit regime that is willing to use violence in an attempt to subjugate its neighbour. But 24 February marked not only an attack on the people of Ukraine; it was also an attempt to crush the values of democracy, rule of law and freedom that we all enjoy. There can be no excuses for Putin's actions, and one day soon I hope he will be held to account for what I consider to be war crimes.

Day by day, it has become clearer that despite Putin's brutal tactics he is not winning. A month ago, many people gave Ukraine's resistance little chance. Many expected Russia's armed forces to sweep into Kyiv in days, frankly, yet still Ukraine's forces hold firm. Their skill, bravery and resolve has inspired the world. Putin's invasion may have stalled, but the threat he poses remains. Reports suggest he may be seeking a way out. We want to see an end to the bloodshed, and the restoration of Ukraine's independence and sovereignty.

I am sure the Foreign Secretary will agree with me that any ceasefire agreement must enjoy the full support of the democratically elected Government of Ukraine and that, if an agreement is reached, there will be no return to the previous status quo in our economic relationship with Russia. Putin's regime must still pay a long-term cost for its war of aggression. We must decisively end our dependence on fossil fuels and move rapidly towards cheap, home-grown renewables to support our energy sector. We must complete the unfinished task of ending Britain's role as the hub of dirty money from Russia and elsewhere. As this war remains in the balance, we must do what we can to ensure that we tip it towards Ukraine.

I am pleased that the NATO, EU and G7 summits last week reinforced western unity. It is right that NATO has agreed to bolster the eastern flank, with the approval of four additional battle groups. I welcome the commitment to increase and strengthen capabilities, as well as cyber-security assistance, financial aid and humanitarian aid, but can I ask the Foreign Secretary what is the scale of the UK's contribution? Last week's commitment shows NATO's long-term strategy is quickly evolving. Other European allies who are reviewing defence spending are boosting their armed services. I was in Berlin last week, where our colleagues in Germany have committed to a historic investment in defence. Finland, Sweden and Denmark all announced reviews or extra resources for defence. Does the Foreign Secretary really believe it is right at this time for the UK to cut the Army by 10,000 in the next few years? If not, will she act on Labour's call to halt those cuts?

It is time, too, for Britain to return to the table when it comes to European security. Will the Foreign Secretary tell the Prime Minister to stop picking petty squabbles with our neighbours on the continent and instead deepen security co-operation that will keep us all safe?

Last week, G7 and EU leaders focused on closing loopholes on existing sanctions rather than imposing new measures. There remain many gaps in the UK's regime: trusts are not fully covered; many Russian banks are not designated, and ownership thresholds are too high. We need to ensure effective enforcement, which should include the overseas territories and Crown dependencies. Can the Foreign Secretary tell us what her Government are doing to close those loopholes and whether she plans to put further sanctions in place?

A month on from this illegal invasion, the world has changed. The unity across this House, this country and the international community must endure. The next few days and weeks will be crucial, and we send all our support to the people of Ukraine. As this war enters a new phase, we must all adapt and hold our nerve. Through the darkness of terror and destruction, Zelensky's democratic Government remain in control against all the odds. Bravery is shining through.

1. [Official Report, 29 March 2022, Vol. 711, c. 4MC.]

Elizabeth Truss: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: this is about the future of freedom and democracy, and the future of European security. The Ukrainians and President Zelensky are fighting bravely. They are fighting not just for their own future, but all our futures, and they deserve all the help we can give them: humanitarian support, lethal aid, and the moral and diplomatic support that we are providing.

The right hon. Gentleman is also right to say that Putin must not gain from this appalling aggression. There will be no letting up on sanctions. We want to see sanctions tightening. Putin will pay the cost. He will be held to account in the International Criminal Court. We are working with our allies to collect evidence. Of course, we need to make sure that Ukraine is rebuilt following this appalling war and the appalling devastation that the people of Ukraine have experienced.

The right hon. Gentleman is also right that we want to see sanctions increase. In the case of banks, the UK has imposed more bank sanctions than any of our allies. We want our allies to follow suit, and we want to do more in terms of completely de-SWIFTing the Russian economy and tackling banks of strategic importance, such as Sberbank. We also sanction more oligarchs and other entities than either the EU or the US does. We want to do more, we will do more and we want our partners to do more.

The most crucial thing of all is cutting off the supply of finance from oil and gas. That is what will completely debilitate the Putin regime, and that is why we want the G7 to agree a very clear timetable to end dependence on Russian oil and gas completely. It is vital that we never go back to being dependent on an authoritarian regime for core parts of our economic survival. With next week's NATO summit, we have an opportunity to move forward with those plans. I encourage all our allies to work with us on this, because the only thing that Putin will understand is tougher sanctions and more defensive aid.

We have boosted our defence spending, and we continue in talks with our NATO allies about boosting the eastern flank. The UK is also leading with the joint expeditionary force, working with our allies around Europe. I talk to my European counterparts all the time. We are committed to boosting European security and working with our friends right across the EU.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Perhaps for too long, the west has harvested the peace dividend, but there is no doubt that we have entered a new era in the battle for democracy globally. May I urge my right hon. Friend to do what she can within Government not only to make the case for a sustained and substantial increase in defence spending, but to ensure that our soft power capabilities are adequately resourced, for the very simple reason that jaw-jaw should always be preferable to war-war?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend makes a good point about the peace dividend. The reality is that, right across the west, not enough has been spent on defence. Meanwhile, the Russians have been building up their armed forces, their military capability and their disinformation efforts. One thing I have done is to re-establish an information unit in the Foreign Office to tackle Russian disinformation. We are working to get

that information into Russia so that the people of Russia have a clear view about what is going on, in contrast to the propaganda from their Government. We are also working on expanding our soft power, whether it is through the BBC or other outlets, to get the truth across to the people of Russia. As to my hon. Friend's other point, I am sure that he will be raising it with the Chancellor at Treasury questions very soon.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the SNP spokesperson, Alyn Smith.

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): I, too, am grateful for advance sight of the statement, and I commend the Foreign Secretary on the very open approach that she has taken to briefing parties across the House on this crucial issue.

The SNP stands part of the international coalition to defend Ukraine and international law, so I welcome the co-ordination across the EU, G7 and NATO. We support the provision of arms, and the further provision of arms, to Ukraine, and we particularly support the establishment of the negotiations unit to help the Ukrainians to negotiate properly. I share the Foreign Secretary's scepticism about President Putin's good faith, but let us remember that every single cold war dispute ended with a negotiated outcome of some sort, so we need to keep up that support. I also strongly welcome the support for accountability for war crimes, because we need to think towards the peace at the end of the war.

I am glad to see that sanctions are ramping up. Can the Foreign Secretary confirm to the House that the intention is that, if a person or bank is sanctioned in one G7 or EU territory, that will be mirrored across the other territories? When will that be achieved? I appreciate that we all come from different legal backgrounds, but I think it is important that we set a timescale for matching each other's sanctions.

On refugees, there is considerable difference between the SNP and the Government. We would far rather have seen the UK mirror the EU's approach by waiving visas for three years. We think that that would have been generous and proportionate, but it is not what happened. I welcome the fact that the Homes for Ukraine scheme has had 150,000 applications, but I think the far more meaningful statistic is how many of them have been fulfilled. Can she tell us that? If she cannot tell us that, we need to do a bit less self-congratulating about the Homes for Ukraine scheme—I say that constructively. Does she share my concern that the Home Office needs a lot more resource to process those applications properly, and can she confirm that that discussion is under way?

More generally, does the Foreign Secretary agree that the integrated review is now rather badly out of date? Will she give us any indication of the thinking within the Government about updating and refreshing it, because it strikes me that that needs to be done urgently?

Elizabeth Truss: On sanctions, it is worth saying that we are already aligned with our allies on key areas of sanctions, including banning Russian state and private companies from capital markets and stopping the Russian Government from raising sovereign debt. On oligarchs, we have now sanctioned more oligarchs than the EU or the US. We have also sanctioned more banks than the EU.

What we want to achieve next week is a levelling up across all the sanction areas. Some of that will mean other countries following what the UK has already done—for example, we have banned Russian vessels from UK ports, which I remember discussing a few weeks ago with the hon. Gentleman—and then we all need to go further. I am clear that we should all go further in terms of SWIFT; we want to see a complete ban on the Russians' use of the SWIFT system.

We need to keep going with our allies, however, and that is the work that we are doing—putting pressure on and working with our allies. In the case of oil and gas, many European countries are heavily dependent on Russian gas and they need to find alternatives. We are helping and working on that, as is the United States, so this is very much a team effort.

On the Homes for Ukraine scheme, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities will be issuing new information about that later this week. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be keen to attend that session to hear more details.

Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con): My right hon. Friend mentions the BBC. At the top of the BBC News this morning was the news that an actor had walloped a comedian at an American awards ceremony. Does she agree that we must do all we can to ensure that the horrific stories that are coming out of Ukraine remain high on the news agenda? That is really important. Will she reassure my constituents that the Ukrainian situation remains at the top of her agenda and that she will continue the good work that she has been doing for however long it takes?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend makes a good point about the priorities that people put on various events. What we have seen—the appalling aggression that we have seen in Ukraine—is an epoch-defining moment. We will absolutely not forget that, and we will not make the mistakes of the past, of ignoring and normalising Russian behaviour. This time, we must ensure that Putin loses and we must tackle Russian aggression for the long term. I will continue to work on that together with our allies across the world, and we will not let the issue drop.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): I point out to the Foreign Secretary that most of Ukraine's neighbours are protected by EU and NATO membership. One that is not is Moldova, which has already taken in huge numbers of refugees. Does she agree that, particularly because of the situation of Transnistria, it is vital that we are able to offer some support to the democratic Moldovan Government, who share our values and aspirations but are in a parlous state?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Gentleman is completely right about Moldova. We are working closely with our allies to provide direct support to it and to help it with the refugee situation. That is something that we discussed at the G7 meeting and that we will be working on further over the next week.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): My right hon. Friend rightly refers to the necessity for a clear timetable with respect to Russian oil and gas. In particular, I would like to ask about the German issue, because Germany has a vast dependence on Russia, and it will take a considerable

amount of time to get that right—if it can ever be got right. How will the problem be resolved in the short term, because the problem for Ukraine is short term and the quicker we resolve it the better? The problem is that Germany is, effectively, bankrolling Russia at the moment.

Elizabeth Truss: I have been talking to my German counterparts, as has the Energy Secretary, about what can be done to work with Germany to help it move away from Russian gas, oil and coal. The United States has also been working with Germany and the EU on supplying liquified natural gas. Germany has undertaken a complete change in its energy policy and defence policy; it is now investing in new LNG terminals and looking at where else it can get that energy from. We are very keen to work with Germany, and indeed other European countries, because we cannot be in a position where Europe is dependent on Russian gas. That does not help the security of the German people and it does not help the security of the British people, so it is in our interests to work together to end dependence.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): All of us cannot help but be moved by the scenes that are still going on, not least with the 300 killed in the theatre just last week. Some 3.8 million people have now crossed borders into nearby countries and many of them will have ties to our country. We should all be proud of every person who has said that they want to take someone in. The Foreign Secretary will also know that many of these people are struggling for means—they left with nothing—and would even struggle to get on a flight to get to this country. Are the Government considering chartering airlift flights from the border so that those who can get through the mire of paperwork we have put in front of them—the Liberal Democrats have put on record that that should not be there—can get to this country and take up the safe homes that have been so generously offered?

Elizabeth Truss: We are working to support people who want to come to the UK, through the family scheme and the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Considerable transport is being offered; Wizz Air is offering free flights to the UK and there are free Eurostar journeys as well. We are working with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to make sure that that information is available. At present, the issue of getting to the UK is being resolved; as the hon. Lady says, we are making sure those visa processes are happening, and that is the responsibility of the Home Office.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Will the Foreign Secretary make sure that a reasonable proportion of the extra £4.1 million that the Government have rightly given to the BBC in respect of the World Service is earmarked for the BBC Monitoring service and, in particular, the Russian and Ukrainian parts of it?

Elizabeth Truss: Yes, I will make sure that that is the case.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): I am afraid that the system that the Foreign Secretary has outlined is not humane. My constituent's mother-in-law is in Dublin, less than an hour's flight from Cardiff, but she cannot come to stay with her family member in Cardiff because they are on a global talent visa for the next two years

[Kevin Brennan]

and therefore do not qualify for the family scheme. They are being told to make the application under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. That is ludicrous, as they are in rented temporary accommodation while they are here. Will the Foreign Secretary have a word with her ministerial colleagues in the Home Office to stop this nonsense and allow people in? If they were the constituency MP involved, every Member of the House would say the same as me: this situation is absolutely ludicrous. Can the Government do something about it?

Elizabeth Truss: I will certainly happily take forward the hon. Gentleman's case with the Home Secretary.

David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): Will the Foreign Secretary say a little more about the humanitarian aid? As she is aware, many volunteers, such as those at the Ukrainian chapel in my constituency, have, in effect, stood back from the enormous efforts they were making in trying to get necessities to the Ukraine and the countries surrounding it. I am sure they will want to be reassured that the humanitarian effort being undertaken by the Government, and indeed by the Disasters Emergency Committee, is delivering what they would want it to deliver.

Elizabeth Truss: The DEC appeal has raised more than £200 million and we are deploying our aid into Ukraine. I talked about the work that we are doing with the Australians, and we are supplying food to the encircled cities. The biggest challenge—this a security challenge—is getting the aid into some of those cities. We certainly are well funded for the work that we are doing. The Ukrainian Government are providing a lot of the logistical support to make sure that the supplies get into Ukraine, but the issue is security. We have pushed very hard for genuine humanitarian corridors to be set up. I am afraid that the Russians have not properly done that and, in some cases, getting supplies in is dangerous. Constituents can be reassured that we have the funding and the supplies. The key thing that we are working on with the international agencies is making sure that the aid safely reaches its destination; that is the issue we face.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): In an FCDO press release last week, the Foreign Secretary said that Russian intelligence services have targeted UK national infrastructure in what she called a “calculated and dangerous” hacking campaign and that Putin is sowing

“division and confusion among allies.”

She rightly said, in that press release, that she “will not tolerate it”, so will she reassure the House that she is urging the Prime Minister and the Cabinet to open an investigation into the Intelligence and Security Committee's Russia report on Kremlin-linked influence in the UK? Will she admit that it is simply not helpful that that report has still not been investigated?

Elizabeth Truss: We have had that question before, and we have followed through on the report's recommendations and on making sure that United Kingdom infrastructure is protected.

Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend and the Prime Minister on the actions that they have taken to support Ukraine—which have been recognised by President Zelensky—including through humanitarian and lethal aid and by providing the most supportive scheme for families who are fleeing the horrors in Ukraine. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there will be a consequence for the western world—President Putin will have calculated that—through higher food prices and higher energy prices and an impact on the western world's economies? Will she continue to play a co-ordinating role to ensure that the western world responds in the most robust way and that all Members of the House come together in recognising the impact?

Elizabeth Truss: It is certainly true that the crisis is having an impact on energy costs and food costs in the United Kingdom. The Chancellor announced measures in his spring statement last week to help to address some of those costs, but we have to be clear that the cost of doing nothing is huge. This is about European security and the future of freedom and democracy, and we know that the people of Ukraine are paying an incredibly high cost at the moment.

The other point that I want to make is that this is not just about the western world; there are real issues about global food security. One of the things that we are working on as part of our new international development strategy is making sure that we support people across the world. There will be increased demand for food. There are concerns about food supply. We are working very closely with our allies on how we ameliorate those effects, which if we do not get this right could have not just food security and humanitarian consequences, but global security consequences.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): The Ukrainian army, with its skill and bravery, is showing that the Russian war machine can be stopped in its tracks. The Secretary of State said that we will learn lessons, one of which surely has to be about the British Army. Over 12 years we have seen a systematic reduction in the size of the British Army and there is a sense that the Government do not really have an idea of what they want the British Army to do. Can we expect a statement from the Government on stopping current plans for further reducing the size of the British Army and instead having a strategic approach which recognises that, alongside the cyber and terrorist threats, we need to be ready to face major state threats? That cannot be done overnight, because a huge amount of skill and experience has already been lost from the British Army. We need that investment and a strategic plan from the Government. Will there be a statement to say that we will get that?

Elizabeth Truss: I point out to the hon. Gentleman that Operation Orbital, which was led by the United Kingdom and has trained up 20,000 Ukrainian troops, has been a very important part of the success of the Ukrainian forces in being able to resist. I pay huge tribute to the bravery of the Ukrainian forces. The UK has led on supplying that sort of support and training.

Of course we need a comprehensive offer. That is what we are doing: we are modernising our armed forces under the leadership of the Defence Secretary,

but we are also supplying more direct support into the eastern flank of NATO to make sure that we are protecting European security at this vital time.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Evil human trafficking gangs are now operating in the countries bordering Ukraine. They prey on young women and older girls and promise them safe passage and a new home, but then move them hundreds of miles away and force them into prostitution. Let us imagine fleeing a war zone in Ukraine, reaching a safe country and then being locked in a room hundreds of miles away and repeatedly raped, day in, day out. May I ask the Foreign Secretary what the Government and NATO are doing about it?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend has a strong record of standing up against the appalling actions of human traffickers. He is absolutely right that there is a real risk at the border and that people are being threatened—women and girls are being threatened—with these appalling activities. A core part of what our humanitarian aid is supporting is the international agencies protecting against those activities, which of course are also subject to war crimes investigations. We are seeing appalling rape accusations in Ukrainian cities as well. The UK is leading on prevention of violence against women and girls and on tackling sexual violence as a red line in war, and we will continue to do so.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, has just issued a very strong appeal for an urgent and immediate ceasefire. What are the British Government doing to support his call before there is more bombing, more deaths and more people driven into refugee status? Could the UN be the medium for a longer-term peace conference that will bring about some degree—hopefully a real degree—of peace and security for people in the area? Will the Foreign Secretary say something about the very brave peace activists in Russia who have risked a great deal to speak out against this war?

Elizabeth Truss: Of course we completely support the UN call for a ceasefire. We have worked at the UN General Assembly to secure the votes of 140 countries against Russia's appalling aggressive action. It is down to Putin and the Russian Government, who have pursued this aggression against an innocent nation that had done absolutely nothing to provoke it. I applaud those in Russia who are prepared to stand up against the Government and protest against this appalling war. Ultimately, it is for the Russian Government to stop their appalling aggression in Ukraine and withdraw their troops. That has to be the precursor to any peaceful resolution of this crisis.

Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con): We have seen the incredible determination and bravery of Ukrainian forces defending their territory with many weapons sourced from the UK. I am delighted by the announcement that we are to send 6,000 more missiles. Defending Ukraine's airspace is crucial—we hear pleas from Ukraine every day—so I am delighted about the Starstreak missiles that we are providing. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that in her upcoming meetings with our allies, she will encourage them to provide similar defences to enable airspace defence?

Elizabeth Truss: The weapons that we are providing, including the NLAWs and now the Starstreaks, are having a real impact in Ukraine. Those weapons are produced across the United Kingdom—the NLAWs, for instance, are produced in Belfast—so this is contributing to jobs and growth across the UK, and represents a very important export for us.

As for what more we can do, the Defence Secretary has already held a donor conference to encourage other countries to supply weapons, and we have seen many countries, including Germany, now come forward, supplying weapons into Ukraine. We are also working to supply logistics. We are co-ordinating the delivery of those weapons to Ukraine. As I said earlier in respect of humanitarian aid, the difficulty often lies in the final mile, getting the equipment in, and the UK has been leading the way in that regard.

Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I am glad that the Foreign Secretary mentioned food security. It is apparently only 10 days until the planting season starts in Ukraine. That poses obvious problems, on which we need not expand here.

The Foreign Secretary talked about the need to go further and do more, but when it comes to refugees, unfortunately, the UK Government have gone almost nowhere and have done the least. Leading charities called today for the scrapping of the visa requirements, and it was reported at the weekend that a Conservative councillor had resigned from the party owing to the “hostile” and “xenophobic” policy on refugees. Surely now is the time to change that. It emerged this morning that Ireland has taken in 13,500 refugees. How many has the UK taken in, and will the Government go further and do more for refugees? Will they behave like normal humanitarian countries on this issue?

Elizabeth Truss: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that so far more than 20,000 individuals have been approved for the Ukraine family scheme. As I have said, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities will be giving an update on the Homes for Ukraine scheme later this week, but we already have 150,000 people registered. Progress is being made, and we are seeing more Ukrainians come to the United Kingdom.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): We have recently seen an incursion into the NATO zone by a drone, albeit an ancient drone, 30 years old, and with no markings on it. Given the conferences that will take place in the next few weeks, would it not be pertinent to start asking for a safe-to-fly zone so that we can protect our air zone on the borders of Ukraine and Moldova, and all the way up into the Baltics?

Elizabeth Truss: What we are doing is maximising the support that we are giving under the UN charter, which allows us to supply Ukraine in its own self-defence. That is effective: we are seeing the effectiveness of the NLAWs, and we are now putting in the Starstreak anti-aircraft missiles. That is the way in which we will support the Ukrainians in defeating Vladimir Putin and ensuring that he loses in Ukraine. A no-fly zone would mean direct NATO involvement in Ukraine, which is a very different matter from the defence that we are supplying under the UN charter.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): At the United Nations General Assembly, we have seen some key votes in which the vast majority of the world has come together to stand with Ukraine, but we have also seen first 37 and then 38 countries remain neutral, either actively or passively, by abstaining. What work is the Department doing to help those countries to move into a safer place, whether in the context of energy, food dependency or, indeed, their security?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Lady is correct. Many countries have been dependent on Russia, sometimes for defence support, sometimes for food, and sometimes for trade. What we need to do—and what we are doing, with our allies—is work to increase our trade links, our economic links and our defence links, as well as engaging with those countries to encourage them to see Russia's actions for what they are.

If we live in a world where a sovereign state can simply be invaded with impunity, what does that mean for the future of those countries? That is the point that we are putting to all of them. At the same time, however, we recognise that there are genuine dependencies, so we have to help them to find alternative sources of trade, food and indeed defence support in order to encourage them not to side with Russia.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Further to the question asked by the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd), can my right hon. Friend update the House on what conversations she had with our G7 and NATO allies when she and the Prime Minister visited Brussels regarding what we can do to bolster other vulnerable countries in the region such as Moldova?

Elizabeth Truss: We had thorough discussions with our NATO and G7 allies on how we can help Moldova in terms of direct humanitarian support, support with refugees and also defensive support. We have seen that Putin's ambitions are not just about Ukraine; they are about creating a greater Russia. That threat is of course very severe in Ukraine but it is not limited to Ukraine. As well as bolstering Ukraine and its defences, we want to help countries such as Moldova as well.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): The Foreign Secretary made an excellent point earlier about food security. There is a prospect of this evil invasion of Ukraine impacting on the global humanitarian situation and also affecting us domestically when it comes to food supply. Would she consider two urgent actions in that case? Is now not the right time to restore the amount of aid we give to 0.7% of GDP? Is it not also right to halt the foolish progressive reduction in the basic payment scheme for our farmers, so that we can maintain our ability to feed ourselves?

Elizabeth Truss: There are many things we can do to improve food supply. I am certainly seeing what we can do through our aid budget, and we are looking at our aid strategy at the moment. I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman that this is a real issue. It is recognised by our friends globally as a real issue and we are working on it together, but we also need to look at what we can do to support countries in areas such as trade. Increasing trade with like-minded countries is another way of making sure that food supplies are able to flow, and that is something we are also looking at.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I want to place on record my thanks to the people of Warwick and Leamington for their phenomenal response to this crisis, and in particular to members of the Polish community and to Dawid Kozlowski, who has set up a warehouse one and a half times the size of this Chamber for all the contributions that have been received. Can I ask the Secretary of State to elaborate on the point raised by the right hon. Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell) about humanitarian aid going from the UK not just into Ukraine but into neighbouring countries, and on how that is being channelled?

Elizabeth Truss: Humanitarian aid is going directly into Ukraine—some of it is being delivered by the UN agency and by international Red Cross, and some by the Ukrainian Government themselves. In terms of the aid that is supporting in neighbouring countries, we are working through the UN but we are also working directly with the Government of Poland and other neighbouring Governments who have an effective system to be able to deliver that aid. So a lot of the aid we are putting in is going to those Governments so that they can distribute it. We are also acting as a deliverer of logistics for third-party Governments. For example, the Australians have contributed donations and we are doing the logistics to get that Australian aid into the neighbouring nations and also directly into Ukraine.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): My constituent Gareth Roberts is currently in Prague with his Ukrainian wife Nataliia and her daughter and granddaughter, awaiting news of their family visa application. Like many others caught up in this Kafkaesque dystopia of excessive bureaucracy and insufficient capacity, they are beginning to run out of funds. Granddaughter Albina has scoliosis, which means she has to wear a brace for 23 hours every day. Comfortable accommodation is not a luxury for them; it is a necessity—so much so that the family are contemplating applying for refugee status in the Czech Republic. I trust that the Minister speaks regularly to her Home Office colleagues, so can she confirm that people who are forced to apply for refugee status in other countries due to slow UK bureaucracy will not then be made ineligible for family visas here in the UK?

Elizabeth Truss: I will take up the right hon. Lady's case urgently with the Home Office to get it resolved as soon as possible.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Like the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), I am concerned about the mass movement of women and children from Ukraine opening up opportunities for human trafficking and particularly sex trafficking. At the weekend, it was reported that, according to a number of charities, the Homes for Ukraine scheme risks operating as Tinder for sex traffickers. What does the Foreign Secretary have to say about that?

Elizabeth Truss: Criminal justice checks are done on all those participating in the Homes for Ukraine scheme, to ensure that there is proper safeguarding. I agree with the right hon. Lady about the very concerning issue of human trafficking at the border. We have more than

300 staff in the region working with the international agencies to prevent that from happening, but she is right to say that it is a real risk, and we take it extremely seriously.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): Communities across the UK, such as Newport in my constituency, which is twinned with Zolotarevo in Ukraine, have offered accommodation to Ukrainian refugees. In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran), the Foreign Secretary said that there were some transport options for Ukrainian refugees coming to the UK, but can she advise whether additional financial support will be available, and whether Disasters Emergency Committee resources might be used for that?

Elizabeth Truss: I can tell the hon. Lady that this support is being put through the UNHCR and the Governments in countries such as Poland with whom we are working closely. There is direct financial support being provided, but also Wizz Air has opened free flights from Warsaw to the UK and, as I have said, Eurostar is offering similar support. There are a number of routes people can use. The key point is that when those refugees cross the border into Poland they are provided with that information by the Polish Government so that they can access those resources.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I pay tribute to the Ukrainian armed forces, to the resistance fighters and to ordinary citizens for the fortitude they have shown in the face of Russian aggression. It is a human reaction: I cannot help feeling that there is more that we can and should be doing to help them at this time. The Foreign Secretary will have seen media reports that Russia's plan B is to carve the country into two distinct territorial units politically. In her statement, she said:

"We will work to restore Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty."

I agree with her, but what does she mean by this?

Elizabeth Truss: First, any media reports about what the Russians are planning to do should not be taken at face value. What we know is that Putin is not succeeding in his plan, that he is desperate and that he could go to any measures. I think we need to be clear about that. I agree with what President Zelensky has said, which is that he wants to see the entirety of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty restored, and that is what we are supporting him to do.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): The UN's World Food Programme is warning that the war is creating a shock wave through the international food markets, further inflating prices and disrupting supply, which will lead to dire consequences for global hunger. Will the Foreign Secretary reassure the House that supporting international efforts to alleviate suffering in famine-ravaged countries is a priority for the British Government?

Elizabeth Truss: It is very much a priority. We are working closely with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and with our international counterparts to address that crucial issue.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): The Foreign Secretary gave us the figure for the number of Ukrainian refugees who have been approved to come to the UK, but she did not give us the figure for the number of refugees who have arrived here. Is that because she does not know that figure? Perhaps she can tell us why she is giving us one figure but not the other. Is not the logic of what she said about the need for changes to the Homes for Ukraine scheme that the Government should introduce a humanitarian visa so that people can come here without all the bureaucracy and the difficulties we have heard about from hon. Members this afternoon?

Elizabeth Truss: The number I quoted is a Home Office number, and I am happy to ask the Home Office to give the hon. Gentleman further details.

Jill Mortimer (Hartlepool) (Con): My right hon. Friend says she thinks President Putin is increasingly desperate and could try anything. In that case, how much credibility does she attach to the possibility that he could stage an attack against his own people to garner further domestic support for his invasion of Ukraine?

Elizabeth Truss: I am afraid to say that what we have seen from President Putin is an attempt to create all kinds of false flag operations. The UK has been working with the United States to highlight the intelligence we have that demonstrates his playbook. We did that for his claims of a chemical weapon attack, and we have done it for his attempt to establish a puppet regime. We will continue to call out his appalling activities.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I think the Foreign Secretary's comments on the economic and jobs advantages of our lethal aid to Ukraine were, I am sure unintentionally, a little crass and insensitive. She may want to reflect and clarify those remarks after looking at *Hansard*.

People in my constituency and across the country with connections to Ukrainians who are applying for refuge in this country are being met with absurd bureaucratic delays. What changes are now being made? Further to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil), why did the Chancellor not award the Home Office any further funding to do more and to do it quicker?

Elizabeth Truss: What I said about the weapons we are supplying is that we have a good defence industry in the United Kingdom and that the people of Northern Ireland are proud that their products are being used to help defend freedom and democracy.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Can the Foreign Secretary shed light on reports that civil servants working on Afghan resettlement are now being redeployed to Ukraine issues? Can she reassure us that, while we still have ongoing moral obligations and casework in Afghanistan, there is bandwidth for both?

My constituent Jibran Masud got out of Ukraine, and he was due to sit finals at Dnipro Medical Institute in May. Will the Foreign Secretary find something equivalent for him and the apparently dozens like him so that they can do their finals here and benefit our NHS as doctors? They are all British nationals.

Elizabeth Truss: I will see what I can do about the medical students. It was a major focus of our initial evacuation to make sure we successfully helped them to leave Ukraine in these very difficult circumstances.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I welcome the statement and commend the Foreign Secretary for her strong leadership. This morning my constituent, a humanitarian doctor on the border of Ukraine, told me she is struggling after seeing children horrifically scarred with third-degree burns. Those children face an uncertain and very painful future, as they need plastic surgery and other interventions. I assured this young doctor and her family that I will be praying for her, but what more will we do to provide specific medical support for those children and, importantly, to provide the vital support that is needed to stop the bombings that are causing this devastation?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Gentleman is right that these devastating injuries are being caused by President Putin's appalling aggressive actions in Ukraine. We are helping people with medical emergencies, and we are flying people into the United Kingdom for treatment for some of these horrific injuries.

Points of Order

6.3 pm

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. By convention, when a Member campaigns in another Member's seat it is considered courteous to notify that Member in advance. I am aware that the deputy leader of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), whom I notified in advance of this point of order, was campaigning in my seat on Saturday, but of course no such courtesy was extended. Although this is far from the most egregious discourtesy she has paid me in this place, may I ask for your guidance on what can be done to make sure that senior Members, in particular, observe basic courtesy when dealing with other Members?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving notice of his point of order and for notifying the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) of his intention to raise it. I can only reiterate that, as "Rules of behaviour and courtesies in the House of Commons" makes clear, Members

"should notify colleagues whenever...you intend to visit a colleague's constituency (except on purely private visits). All reasonable efforts should be taken to notify the other Member, and failing to do so is regarded...as very discourteous."

I hope that clarifies the matter.

Angus Brendan MacNeil: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In response to my question on how many people have come into the UK from Ukraine compared with the 13,500 going into the Republic of Ireland, a nation one twelfth the size of the UK, the Foreign Secretary mentioned the figure of 20,000. However, it was reported this morning that only 1,000 of the 25,000 completed applications have so far been approved. It has also been reported that 21,600 visas have been granted. My question was on how many people have come in, and the hon. Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) asked the same. The Government seem unable to answer, so will they make a statement or answer an urgent question tomorrow to clarify the matter so that we know exactly what is happening?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows that is not a point of order for the Chair. He has made his point clear, and I am sure those sitting on the Treasury Bench will have heard what he has said. If any clarification is necessary, I expect it will be forthcoming.

SKILLS AND POST-16 EDUCATION BILL [LORDS]: PROGRAMME (NO. 2)

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill [Lords] for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 15 November 2021 (Skills and Post-16 Education Bill [Lords]: Programme):

Consideration of Lords Message

(1) Proceedings on the Lords Message shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion 2 hours after their commencement.

Subsequent stages

(2) Any further Message from the Lords may be considered forthwith without any Question being put.

(3) The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—(*Amanda Solloway*.)

Question agreed to.

Skills and Post-16 Education Bill [*Lords*]

Consideration of Lords message

Clause 7

ADDITIONAL POWERS TO APPROVE TECHNICAL EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS

6.6 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Alex Burghart): I beg to move,

That this House disagrees with the Lords in their amendment 15B proposed instead of the words left out of the Bill by its amendment 15.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): With this it will be convenient to discuss the Government motion that this House agrees with the Lords in their amendments 17B and 17C.

Alex Burghart: I am delighted to be back in the House to discuss our landmark Skills and Post-16 Education Bill. I am pleased the Bill has progressed to this point, as it is a real opportunity for us to create a chance for more people to develop the skills they need to move into a job and support our economy. We have made the case that this Bill and the work surrounding it will provide qualifications that have been designed with employers to give students the skills that the economy needs. That will help us to boost productivity and level up our country.

Lords amendment 17B is a Government amendment on provider encounters. I am delighted that we were able to make this amendment, thanks to the tireless work of my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), the Chair of the Select Committee on Education. His successful campaigning on this issue, and on further education and skills more broadly, is testament to his expertise, his persuasive powers and his dedication to his constituents, who will be well served by this Bill.

This amendment represents a compromise that will require schools to put on six provider encounters for pupils in years 8 to 13—two in each key stage. This should help to ensure that young people meet a greater breadth of providers and, crucially, it should prevent schools from simply arranging one provider meeting and turning down all other providers.

The underpinning statutory guidance will include details of the full range of providers that we expect all pupils to have the opportunity to meet during their time at secondary school. The Government intend to consult on this statutory guidance to ensure that the legislation works for schools, providers and, most importantly, young people.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say. Does he agree that defunding BTECs poses tangible risks to disadvantaged students and that Lords amendment 17, which ensures that the earliest qualifications can be defunded will now be 2025, gives the necessary time for a good evaluation of T-levels and how they work in this new landscape of qualifications? We should support our colleges to allow every child to achieve their potential.

Alex Burghart: I am always anxious to hear what the hon. Gentleman has to say. I believe his comment is a reference to amendment Lords 15B, which I am coming to in a moment, but I hope he will forgive me if I finish talking about Lords 17B first.

I hope this House will agree that we have reached a sensible compromise position, with the help of my right hon. Friend the Chair of the Education Committee. This middle ground of six provider encounters will help to give every pupil information about what further education colleges, independent training providers, university technical colleges and other alternative providers can offer.

Turning to Lords amendment 15B on the roll-out of our technical education qualification reforms, I begin by reiterating the announcement made in this House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on Second Reading. We are allowing an extra year before public funding approval is withdrawn from qualifications that overlap with T-levels and before reformed qualifications are introduced that will sit alongside T-levels and A-levels.

Our reform programme is rightly ambitious, but we understand that it would be wrong to push too hard and risk compromising quality. The additional year strikes the right balance, giving providers, awarding organisations, students and other stakeholders enough time to prepare while moving forward with these important reforms. That is why we cannot accept the three-year delay that the amendment proposes.

These changes are part of reforms to our technical education system that have been over a decade in the making; they have their origins in the Wolf review of 2011 and were taken further by the Sainsbury review in 2016. Both those crucial pieces of work showed that we must close the gap between what people study and the skills employers need. As Lord Sainsbury said:

“Whatever their background, individuals need access to a national system of technical qualifications which is easy-to-understand, has credibility with employers and remains stable over time.”

T-levels will deliver on that pledge. They are a critical step change in the quality of the technical offer. They have been co-designed with more than 250 leading employers and are based on the best international examples of technical education. We have already put in place significant investment and support to help providers and employers to prepare for T-levels. By September 2023, all T-levels will be available to many thousands of young people across the country. The change to our reform timetable means that all schools and colleges will now be able to teach T-levels for at least a year before overlapping qualifications have their funding removed.

Last November, the Secretary of State also announced the removal of the English and maths exit requirement for T-levels. That is about making the landscape fairer so that talented students with more diverse strengths are not prevented from accessing this important offer. The change brings T-levels into line with other level 3 study—notably A-levels, which do not have such an English and maths exit requirement.

In addition, this Lords amendment would require consultation and consent from employer representative bodies before the withdrawal of funding approval from qualifications. As hon. Members will be aware, we have twice consulted on our intention to withdraw funding from qualifications that overlap with T-levels. T-levels

were designed with employers to give young people the skills that they need to progress into skilled employment, the skills that employers need and the skills that our economy needs.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): The Minister refers to the consultation that the Government did on the defunding of BTECs and the twin-track approach. Am I right in saying that 86% of respondents to the Government’s own consultation said that the Government should keep the twin-track approach? If so, why is the Minister highlighting that consultation, which has come back to him telling him that the approach he is taking is wrong, as a reason not to vote for the amendment the Lords have proposed here?

Alex Burghart: Our consultation showed that there was widespread support for having a system of technical qualifications that offered both co-design with employers and entrenched, embedded work experience. The choice before Parliament in debating this Bill is whether we wish to push ahead, following the best international examples, on technical qualifications that are designed with employers and give students the best work experience opportunities as part of that qualification. That is the choice. We on the Government side know where we stand. We wish to have gold-standard qualifications that rank among the best in the world. I am afraid the Opposition do not seem to wish to follow us on that journey.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education will continue to involve employers actively when making decisions about qualification approval, including through its route panels. Those panels hold national sector expertise and expert knowledge of occupational standards that have portability across employers. Institute approval will be a mark of quality and currency with business and industry, and will ensure that both employers and employees have the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need. The requirement for a public consultation and consent from employer representative bodies would duplicate existing good practice and introduce an unnecessary burden.

6.15 pm

We have listened to the views expressed in the House and acted upon them. The Secretary of State’s policy announcements of significant changes acknowledge and satisfy the aims of the amendments. To push the amendments would risk the whole reform programme and risk letting down a generation of learners. I therefore urge the House to reject the amendment from the other place.

I am very pleased that we are starting to make real progress with this legislation. Through our change to provider access legislation, I believe we have made this Bill better, but now is the time to crack on with delivering our important skills reforms.

Mr Perkins: Last week’s spring statement showed that this Government have a Chancellor ill equipped to tackle the size of the cost of living challenge in front of him. This week, the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill shows that, when it comes to addressing the key skills challenges our growth-starved nation faces, we have a Government ill equipped for that challenge too.

We should remember that in the Chancellor's statement last week he referred to reviewing the apprenticeship levy and other taxes, and by Friday he was forced to deny that there would be any formal review of the levy or the system at all. What a mess. This is a Government who spend the back-end of the week denying what they said in the first part of it. No wonder the sector is utterly disillusioned with their approach.

Let us stop for a minute and think how it could have been. A skills Bill worthy of the name would have seized the challenge posed by the huge reduction in apprenticeships since the introduction of the levy and demanded a review that ensured that small businesses were better served and that more level 2 and level 3 apprenticeship opportunities were created, and sought to return at least to the numbers we had before the levy was introduced.

A transformative skills Bill would also have ensured that all the relevant bodies were around the table directing local skills funding. It would also have recognised that, if universal credit is really going to be a bridge from the dole to a rewarding career, people on universal credit must be able to afford to invest in themselves in the way that the excellent Lords amendment suggested.

One can only imagine what their noble lordships made of the Commons consideration of their amendments. A range of peers from across the political spectrum had brought their considerable knowledge and experience to bear to strengthen this "act of educational vandalism", as Lord Baker described it, and voted through a series of amendments that a wide variety of knowledgeable judges, including groups such as the Association of Colleges, had described as strengthening the Bill.

Yet, one by one, the Government rejected those amendments, meaning that they have failed to grasp the huge opportunity, presented by the first skills Bill in their 12-year period in office, to put England's approach to skills on a comparable footing with the best systems around the world. Their noble lordships reluctantly agreed to place just two further amendments in front of us today.

On Lords amendment 15B, when this Bill was first debated nine months ago we had the then Secretary of State and the skills Minister in dismissive mood, decrying BTECs for all they were worth. Since then, we have had the more ameliorative approach, which we welcome, of the current Secretary of State first offering an extension to funding for BTECs into the next Parliament, then saying that the Government would conduct a qualifications review and tell us which level 3 qualifications they consider not of sufficient quality or duplicating T-levels.

All the while, however, the suspicion remains—reinforced by the Minister's speech a moment ago—that the Government believe that only by discrediting or defunding BTECs will T-levels flourish. I am confused about why they so lack confidence in this new qualification. As my great friend Lord Blunkett said when moving Lords amendment 15B last week, the Opposition have no hostility towards T-levels; indeed, we believe they are of real value. Just two weeks ago, I was at Barnsley College—a fine institution where I met several good T-level students studying construction, digital production, and health and care. They were hugely impressive, as were the lecturers and the leadership team, and had a real vision for where they might go following this qualification. I have no problem with saying that I have seen good quality T-level provision.

Nor should the Government refuse to recognise that BTECs, CACHE diplomas and other level 3 qualifications have also been transformational for so many students, and they should proceed cautiously before abolishing them. If the qualification, in its current form or in any future form, is a strong one, it will prosper, without the need to try and kill other level 3 qualifications and leave tens of thousands of students without a qualification to study. BTECs are widely respected by employers, learners, universities, colleges, training providers and other key stakeholders. When I asked the Minister about this earlier, he refused to answer, but the DFE's own figures showed that 86% of respondents to its consultation urged it to continue the twin track of T-levels and BTECs. The Minister referred to Labour opposing T-levels. We are not opposing T-levels at all. In fact, it was the Conservative-dominated House of Lords, with the support of Conservative peers, that voted to place this amendment back before us last week.

The Government have optimistically suggested that 100,000 students might be doing T-levels by 2024. Given that 230,000 students currently study for level-3 qualifications, the Government need to come clean, when their review is published, about their plan for those who do not move on to do T-levels. It really is not good enough to continue dodging this question. Institutions need to know, learners need to know, and employers need to know. Do the Government expect that more students will complete level 2 and then go into the world of work at the age of 17? Do they expect that anything like the missing 130,000 would stay on alternative level 3 courses? If not, what is the plan? The Government need to come clean.

On Lords amendments 17B and 17C, while Labour Members would have preferred that the Baker clause was adopted in its entirety, we are prepared to accept this compromise as a way to move the issue forward. It was interesting to hear the Minister talk about that compromise. I still fail to see what it was about having more than one intervention in a single school year that the Government thought so radical an idea. Why is two in every two years considered the very most that we can expect of our schools? Notwithstanding that, given that at least 50% of pupils do not progress on to an academic route, children and young people should have as much support as possible to learn about the wide range of opportunities open to them. It is welcome that the two interactions must be separate and different from each other. I would like to impress upon the Minister that these interactions must be of high quality and must be impartial.

The Government need to acknowledge that the perspective on the current operation of the Baker clause differs considerably depending on whether you are a student or a provider. All too often, apprentices I have met have told me that they were not made aware of apprenticeships while at school. Just a few weeks ago, I was at the Remit Training automotive apprenticeship academy, where just five of the 25 students I met said that apprenticeships had been discussed at school and that they had received proper careers guidance. I suspect that if we spoke to their school, we would have heard a different tale. Ensuring that these interactions are done in a meaningful way that really opens schoolchildren's horizons is so important.

While it remains a regret that more of the Lords' excellent amendments were rejected by this House, it is our intention to support their lordships' two remaining

[Mr Perkins]

amendments before us tonight. Beyond that, we give notice that as this Government have clearly run out of the ideas required to address the skills shortage they have created, a future Labour Government will tackle the systemic failure that has seen this country fail too many students and leaves England's employers consistently complaining that under this Government too few young people leave our schools ready to work. It will take a Labour Government to drive the partnership and collaboration required to bring Government, employers, metro Mayors, local authorities and others together to reform what is not working and develop a skills ecosystem fit for purpose that delivers the work-ready students our employers demand, and our economy, and our country, so desperately need.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): I am pleased to be called to speak today, and glad that this Bill is reaching almost the end of its yellow brick road. Sometimes the Government are like the Tin Man and need a bit of oil in them. I pay tribute to the Secretary of State, the skills Minister and the Minister for Higher and Further Education, as well as the previous skills Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan), who first set the wheels in motion for this legislation.

I have always passionately believed in the need to build an apprenticeships and skills nation. I disagree with the Opposition in that I think that the Bill is fundamentally important. The lifetime skills guarantee and the lifelong learning entitlement will transform lives for the better. It is backed by real funding of an extra £3 billion announced in the autumn Budget. That will do a lot to reverse the decades of neglect and snobbery that have often surrounded the FE sector. Culture change must start at the top. I am genuinely proud of the way that the Government have met the challenge of skills. We will always need more to be done, but this is a fundamental Bill and it should be recognised as such. While I absolutely want to make sure that the core BTECs are kept until the T-levels are rolled out, I would certainly not want a delay in T-levels. If anything, I would be happy for the Minister to introduce them even faster than their planned roll-out.

Culture change must also come from the bottom up. One of the biggest obstacles to students undertaking more skills-based courses is the fact that schools do not encourage students to do apprenticeships or vocational learning in the same way that they encourage progression to university. As I mentioned in relation to amendments that came to the House a few weeks ago, my maiden speech in 2010 was on this very subject, so the Minister will understand why I care about it. Sadly, not a lot has changed since 2010 in terms of encouraging students to do apprenticeships. Many teachers have themselves qualified by going to university, so their familiarity with this pathway has helped to foster the age-old mantra of "university, university, university". I would like the Government to allow us to have not just postgraduate teachers but teachers who have qualified through a degree apprenticeship. We have policing and nursing apprenticeships, so why not teaching apprenticeships and undergraduates at higher apprentice level?

The way the inspection framework has been framed and the nature of A-levels being seen as more academic has also contributed to the focus on university as the

gold-plated standard. I hope that the roll-out of T-levels will help to ensure that the same procedures apply to technical education and then divide between academic and vocational learning. Personally speaking, I would be delighted if students could mix their alphabet of learning and take A-levels and T-levels together, which would essentially establish an international baccalaureate-style system of the kind that has benefited so many pupils from countries around the world.

However, the most critical thing we can do is improve careers guidance in schools. I am sure that my colleagues on the Front Bench will have tinnitus from the amount of times that I have gone on about this, but it is fundamental. The more encounters that pupils have with further education providers, technical colleges and university technical colleges, the more likely we can demonstrate that there is another, and arguably better, path forward. On one occasion, when I was lucky enough to have the role of skills Minister that my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart) performs with such distinction, I went to visit an exhibition in Birmingham—a skills show—and met a father and daughter who were in the process of deciding whether she should go to university. I showed them what was on offer—the high-quality skills courses and the jobs as well. By the time we had finished, the father and the daughter had absolutely decided that she would go and do a higher apprenticeship. I thought to myself, "I've converted one person to do this and I hope we convert many millions more of our young people." That is why these encounters are so important—without that skills show, that father and daughter would probably have just taken the traditional academic route of her going to university.

Last time I spoke on this Bill, I was addressing my new clause 3, which would have provided for three careers guidance encounters per pupil in each key year group. The Secretary of State said that while he was unable to make an announcement at that time, he would consider it further and move in due course and, as is so often the case with him and his Ministers, they have kept their commitment and their word, which is hugely appreciated. I am delighted to speak in support of Government amendments 17B and 17C, which allow for two careers guidance meetings per pupil per key year group, making a total of six such meetings, which is double what is on offer today. That goes to show that if the Secretary of State says he will do something, it will happen.

6.30 pm

Colleagues across the House will remember that I tabled three amendments to the Bill: one was to create apprenticeship routes for prisoners, one was to increase the number of careers guidance meetings for students, and one was to consider providing funding to support level 2 qualifications for adults who demonstrated an intent to progress to level 3 under the lifelong learning entitlement. Mr Deputy Speaker, I hope you will not mind if I take a leaf out of *Meat Loaf's* book, as he said:

"Now don't be sad, don't be sad, 'cause two out of three ain't bad".

That applies to two of the three encounters as well. The Government accepted two of my amendments—the one on prison apprenticeships in particular—and I greatly respect Ministers for listening and working with me and colleagues to reach these agreements.

A few months ago, I was honoured to be invited back to Exeter University—my old university—to make a speech and present its first cohort of degree apprenticeship students with their degrees. I remember sitting in that same hall as a university graduate in 1991, and I looked out at so many apprentices from all walks of life who were proud of the work that they had achieved. If a traditional academic university such as Exeter—one of the best in the world—can do so much to change its culture and promote degree apprenticeships, things must really be changing in our country. I hope that the passing of this excellent Bill will see many more schools and universities embrace vocational education pathways, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will continue to do more to banish once and for all the snobbery and misunderstanding that have surrounded apprenticeships, skills and technical education and to create a broader curriculum that supports vocational learning to better prepare pupils and students for the world of work.

Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con): I reiterate the general remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) about how the Bill is welcome overall. I will support the Government in their motions to disagree with the Lords amendments, and I agree that it is important that the Bill sees its final passage so that we can get on with the important journey towards an integrated education system. I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests as chair of the Lifelong Education Commission, which I set up with ResPublica to look at the long-term structural issues underpinning why the United Kingdom, and England in particular, has had such a difficult, long tail of underachievement and the need, as we look at the Government's mission to level up for the future, to place skills provision front and centre of the agenda.

About 6 million people—the figure hovers around that number—still have only qualifications at level 2, and there is a desperate need to give more people an opportunity to enhance their qualifications so that they can apply for the many jobs and vacancies out there. People are not refusing to do those jobs. It is partly that they do not have the skills and capabilities to engage with the process, but they are desperate to do so, and that it is why it is so vital to match their skills with their ambitions.

The Bill begins the long process of moving from a top-heavy system that focused unduly on universities and did not give the further education sector the opportunity and investment that it needed to progress. Hopefully, we will now focus on tertiary education overall instead of pitching HE against FE. However, the Bill must be just chapter one of that educational revolution. As the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr Perkins) mentioned, the Bill goes only so far, and a number of caveats have yet to be addressed, particularly on financing. I am particularly interested in financing for lifelong education, as such learners are not 18-year-olds who can access loan finance—and, even if they could, they have families, and they have mortgages and other debts to pay, so simply saying, “You can apply for an additional loan” will not work. We need to look at grant financing and understand the pressures placed on individuals and the barriers that they will need to overcome to access lifelong learning.

I tabled nine amendments the other month, none of which was accepted by the Government; nor, sadly, were they taken up by the Lords. I will continue to press

the Government on skills provision, the lifelong loan entitlement and the lifetime skills guarantee, which applies only to a small proportion of the overall population. I wish it could be expanded, and I hope that the Government recognise that that ambition should be realised, particularly for individuals who have received qualifications at levels 3 to 5—or even levels 6 or 7—and need to retrain. They may have taken a degree 20 years ago, but they cannot access the opportunities to do that retraining.

The opportunities for lifelong learning and skills provision need to be more inclusive in the future. At the moment, the Bill addresses only a small segment of society—it is a segment that must be addressed and tackled—but let us look at chapters two, three and four and begin the journey of levelling up for everyone in this country, not just the immediate priority on which we are focused today.

Alex Burghart: It is a pleasure to follow my right hon. Friends the Members for Harlow (Robert Halfon) and for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore), who both have great expertise in the field. On what my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood said, we are interested in building up the offer for people already in the workplace. We see a great many people taking apprenticeships to reboot their careers. The Prime Minister's lifetime skills guarantee is offering people who did not get level 3 technical qualifications at school or college the chance to do so later in life. Of course, we also have the LLE, which is championed by the Minister for Higher and Further Education, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan).

We are about giving everyone, whatever stage they are at in life, the chance to step forward and build their careers with new opportunities. The Bill is central to that. I have heard the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr Perkins) criticise the Bill at various stages for not mentioning apprenticeships. They are obviously extraordinarily important to what we are doing, and I am delighted to report that, in the first quarter of the academic year, 164,000 people started apprenticeships, which is up 34% from last year and—crucially—up 6% from the pre-pandemic period. He often likes to quote figures of yesteryear, and I must remind him—not for the first time—that the change in the number of starts was not down to the creation of the apprenticeship levy but because, in 2017, when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was in a more junior job in the Department for Education, he started to reform apprenticeships to ensure that our 640 standards reflected the needs of employers. That golden thread has run through all our reforms over the past 10 years, building from the report written by Baroness Wolf in 2011 through to the Sainsbury review in 2016.

To hear those on the Opposition Benches say, “Slow down, you're going too fast” is somewhat reminiscent of the Locomotive Act 1865, which recommended that the speed limit in town should be 2 mph and that somebody with a red flag should walk ahead of the vehicle as it made its progress. We have waited long enough and students have waited long enough for high-quality technical qualifications that are designed with employers to give the economy the skills that it needs and to give students the skills they need to prosper in that economy.

[Alex Burghart]

The hon. Member for Chesterfield also referred to the number of people on BTEC courses and the number of people expected to do T-levels. I remind him again that we are not in the process of defunding all BTECs: BTECs will survive where they do not overlap with T-levels. Just as now, there will be some people who do not study level 3 at age 16 to 19, and those people will have an enhanced offer at level 2, off the back of our level 2 reforms that are currently out to consultation.

I was delighted that at the beginning of last week 69 T-level providers from throughout the country—from north to south and east to west—came to the Department for Education and talked to us about their experiences in the first two years. A great many students came with them, and the level of enthusiasm for the qualifications and the level of excitement about the opportunities that the reforms are going to provide for the next generation was tangible. It therefore gives me great pleasure to commend the Bill to the House and sit down.

*Question put.**The House divided: Ayes 280, Noes 152.***Division No. 231]****[6.40 pm]****AYES**

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Lee
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Jake
Blackman, Bob
Bone, Mr Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
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
Chope, Sir Christopher
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, rh Michelle
Dowden, rh Oliver
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Eustice, rh George

Evans, Dr Luke
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Gray, James
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Griffiths, Kate
Grundy, James
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, rh Jeremy
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
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, Julian
Kruger, Danny
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi

Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Logan, Mark
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, Stephen
Merriman, Huw
Metcalf, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Mills, Nigel
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mortimer, Jill
Morton, Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Nici, Lia
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, Chris
Pincher, rh Christopher
Pow, Rebecca
Pursglove, Tom
Raab, rh Dominic
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Richardson, Angela
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Skidmore, rh Chris

Smith, Chloe
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, rh Mark
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tracey, Craig
Trott, Laura
Tugendhat, Tom

Vara, Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Sir Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallis, Dr Jamie
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Webb, Suzanne
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wright, rh Jeremy
Young, Jacob

Tellers for the Ayes:
Gareth Johnson and
Michael Tomlinson

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blake, Olivia
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
Clark, Feryal
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, rh Yvette
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Davey, rh Ed
Davies, Geraint
Davies-Jones, Alex
De Cordova, Marsha
Dodds, Anneliese
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Duffield, Rosie

Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, Maria
Efford, Clive
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Farry, Stephen
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Furniss, Gill
Gardiner, Barry
Gill, Preet Kaur
Green, Kate
Green, Sarah
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
Hanna, Claire
Hardy, Emma
Harris, Carolyn
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Dan
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah

Kendall, Liz (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr Pat McFadden*)
Khan, Afzal
Kyle, Peter
Lavery, Ian
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewis, Clive
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Norris, Alex
Olney, Sarah
Osamor, Kate
Osborne, Kate
Owatemi, Taiwo
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillipson, Bridget
Pollard, Luke

Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, rh Angela
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rodda, Matt
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Wakeford, Christian
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitley, Mick
Whittome, Nadia
Wilson, Munira
Winter, Beth
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Colleen Fletcher and
Mary Glindon

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 15B disagreed to.

Lords amendments 17B and 17C agreed to.

Ordered, That a Committee be appointed to draw up a Reason to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendment 15B;

That Alex Burghart, Michael Tomlinson, Sara Britcliffe, David Johnston, Mary Glindon, Mr Toby Perkins and Matt Western be members of the Committee;

That Alex Burghart be the Chair of the Committee;

That three be the quorum of the Committee.

That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—
(Amanda Solloway.)

Committee to withdraw immediately; reason to be reported and communicated to the Lords.

Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill

Consideration of Lords message

[Relevant documents: Second Report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, Legislative Scrutiny: Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, Part 3 (Public Order), HC 331; Fifth Special Report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, Legislative Scrutiny: Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, Part 3 (Public Order): Government Response to the Committee's Second Report, HC 724.]

After Clause 49

APPLICATION OF POLICE AND CRIMINAL EVIDENCE ACT 1984 TO NATIONAL FOOD CRIME UNIT OF FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY

6.56 pm

The Minister for Crime and Policing (Kit Malthouse): I beg to move,

That this House insists on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendment 58 but proposes amendments (a) to (c) in lieu.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): With this it will be convenient to consider the following:

Government motion that this House disagrees with the Lords in their amendment 72B but proposes amendments (a) and (b) in lieu.

Amendment (c) in lieu of Lords amendment 72B.

Government motion that this House insists on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendment 73, insists on its amendment 74A to Lords amendment 74, disagrees with the Lords in their amendment 74B to that amendment in lieu, disagrees with the Lords in their consequential amendments 74C, 74D, 74E, 74F and 74G, insists on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendment 87, insists on its amendments 87A, 87B, 87C, 87D, 87E and 87F to the words restored to the Bill by its disagreement to that amendment but proposes additional amendment (a) to the words restored to the Bill by its disagreement with the Lords in their amendment 73 and additional amendment (b) to the words restored to the Bill by its disagreement with the Lords in their amendment 87.

Government motion that this House insists on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendment 80, insists on its amendments 80A, 80B, 80C, 80D, 80E and 80F to the words restored to the Bill by its disagreement with that amendment, disagrees with the Lords in their amendment 80G instead of the words left out by that amendment but proposes additional amendment (a) to the words restored to the Bill by its disagreement with the Lords in their amendment 80.

Kit Malthouse: Our position on Lords amendment 58 has always been that we accept the case in principle that the Food Standards Agency should have direct access to relevant police powers to enable it to tackle food crime, but that such powers should be accompanied by appropriate accountability mechanisms, including in relation to the investigation of complaints. Lords amendment 58 was inadequate to the task, but as the disagreement between the two Houses was not one of principle, we have now brought forward amendments 58C to 58E in lieu, which seek to put a comprehensive legislative framework in place.

The amendments do four things. First, they allow the regulations to be made, conferring relevant Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 powers on the Food Standards Agency; we are principally concerned here with search and seizure powers. Secondly, they will enable regulations to apply provisions of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 relating to drawing inferences from a suspect's failure to account for their presence at a particular place. Thirdly, the amendments create an offence of obstructing a food crime officer in the execution of the functions conferred on them under new section 114C of PACE. Fourthly, they amend the Police Reform Act 2002 to bring the National Food Crime Unit within the remit of the Independent Office for Police Conduct. I trust that the amendments will be welcomed by both sides of the House, notwithstanding the unfortunate way they were made in the other place.

I move on to Lords amendment 72B. I am pleased that the other place has seen reason in abandoning plans to make misogyny a hate crime, given that the Law Commission identified risks that the plans could generally prove counterproductive for women and girls. The Lords have, nevertheless, tabled an alternative. It would still mandate the police recording of crimes that effectively amount to hostility on grounds of sex or gender, although, perhaps recognising the Law Commission's warnings, it does so without any attendant powers to recognise such crimes in court. The amendment would also introduce a new stand-alone offence related to harassment or intimidation that is aggravated by hostility towards sex or gender.

On matters of police recording, I assure Members that the issue requires no legislation. During the Domestic Abuse Bill, the Government committed to asking the police to collect such data and they are still in discussions with forces to take that forward. I acknowledge that the other place thinks that the commitment is moving too slowly. My noble Friend Baroness Williams of Trafford was completely frank that we ought to accelerate our efforts; I share that sentiment.

However, judging from the debate in the other place, the purpose of the amendment appears to be based on the premise that any delay is explained by police foot dragging; as such, legislation would serve to turn up the heat on reticent forces. That is not a fair characterisation. We need to move more quickly, but the remaining teething issues are of an entirely technical nature, as we decide on the best approach and reconcile a number of different approaches by those forces already recording that kind of data. Wielding a bigger stick through legislation may confer a frisson of virtue, but unfortunately it misdiagnoses the problem. It is also particularly important that we take extra care over the design of our approach in light of the Law Commission's finding on existing local police recording efforts. Quoting an independent review, it noted that the experience in Nottinghamshire has

"not been associated with increased reporting".

We want to understand why and then improve on that outcome. What we simply need to do now is resolve a number of points of implementation with forces. We are committed to moving more rapidly in doing so.

Sir Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): I am listening with great care to my right hon. Friend's remarks about reporting—a concern that, as he knows, I share, having been in office when we made that

undertaking, which I regard as very solemn. In order to help, I hope later to develop an argument about sentencing guidelines, but does my right hon. Friend agree that existing guidelines on intimidatory offences already refer to offences based on hostility in relation to sex, as opposed to a sexual motive? Would he with his officials look at the applicability of those guidelines to see whether that is already a hook on which the police can hang their monitoring and data collection task?

Kit Malthouse: As usual, my right hon. and learned Friend has made a helpful suggestion. We will certainly review as he suggests. It is worth bearing in mind what we are trying to achieve, which is twofold. First, we obviously want to encourage women and girls to come forward and report in a way that they believe will have an impact. Secondly, we have to make sure that that impact happens—that there is a police response. As many hon. Members will know, modern policing is driven by data. It is important that the police see crime through the data that appears daily in their management dashboard and that they can therefore assign resources accordingly. I have often said to groups of citizens that reporting crime is a little like that interesting philosophical problem: if a tree falls in a forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound? If a crime occurs and no one reports it, how on earth are the police to know?

The reporting of crime is often a complex area, so marrying up the confidence that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland) is looking for in reporting, with making sure that that then translates into police action on the frontline, is the critical piece of work that we want to do as swiftly as possible.

I move on to the question of a stand-alone offence. The Law Commission's review of hate crime laws did touch on this issue, while noting that it was not within its terms of reference. In doing so, it suggested that the Government should tread carefully, recommending that we explore the possible need for such an offence and ensure that, if one is required, it is proportionate and well defined. It also briefly echoed some of the Government's own considerations about the need for further analysis, speaking to some of the complexities.

With that in mind, I am pleased that in the other place my noble Friend Baroness Williams committed to consulting publicly on the issue before the summer recess. That is entirely the right approach—ensuring that we are moving forward to elicit answers while taking account of the competing considerations at play. Again, short of rushing into legislation before we have the right answers, this part of the Lords amendment is also in my view rather redundant.

As I have said before, our desire to advance the cause of women's and girls' safety is extremely strong, but we have to ensure that our efforts are directed at the right solutions. The Government are already doing and have committed to doing a huge span of work in this space, and our mission is ongoing and urgent. To that end, the Government have tabled amendments (a) and (b) in lieu. These require us properly to consider the Law Commission's carefully considered and expert-informed recommendation relating to making misogyny a hate crime and to establish a clear position on it. Through that, we are targeting attention at the right evidence-based solutions, the importance of which I have outlined.

Furthermore, we have gone further in committing to consulting publicly on a new public sexual harassment offence, which means that we will soon have a much clearer sense of how we should proceed. With those measures in mind, I invite the House to reject Lords amendment 72B and agree with the amendments in lieu.

Let me turn to the two public order issues that were returned to this House by their lordships. There has been much ill-informed comment about the powers to attach conditions to a protest related to the generation of noise. I will repeat what I said at the last session of ping-pong: these provisions do not ban noisy protests. There is no dispute about the fact that local authorities should have powers to deal with egregious noise—I speak as a local councillor and, when I was a resident of central London, as a frequent user of their services. Indeed, at the Opposition's behest, we added provisions to the Bill that can be used to limit noisy and disruptive protests outside schools and vaccination centres. Those continuing to support the Lords amendments—including, I assume, Labour Members—are saying that protesters may make any amount of noise, at any location, at any time of the day or night, and for any length of time, perhaps over a period of days or weeks.

When faced with a prolonged protest in, for example, a residential or commercial area, where the level of noise is such as to amount to intimidation or harassment, or is causing alarm or distress, it is entirely reasonable that the police should be able to impose conditions, perhaps prohibiting the use of amplification equipment or drums between the hours of 10 pm and 7 am. If not, we find ourselves in the ridiculous situation where although the police cannot enforce something, the local authority can.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Obviously, Northern Ireland has a history and tradition of protesting, and it is about getting the right balance. I say honestly to the Minister that I, and probably other Opposition Members, would like Lords amendment 73 to be approved. If someone is preaching the Gospel, or if a single person or group of people are singing hymns on the streets of the United Kingdom, can the Minister reassure me that they will be able to continue and there will be no restrictions? We all know those services last no longer than about an hour—that is a fact. We are keen to ensure that the Government are not suppressing the right to religious freedom in the way it has been suppressed in the past.

Kit Malthouse: There is no desire or intention to suppress religious or other freedoms. This is about giving the police powers not to ban protest or assembly, but to place conditions on it. As I said during previous stages of the Bill, the job of this House in a democratic society is to balance competing rights. There is no doubt that, as is accepted at the European Court of Human Rights and across the liberal world, the right to protest is not unqualified. Someone cannot protest in such a way that it unreasonably impinges on my right to go about my business as a non-protester. Where noise is concerned, we are seeking to give the police powers to strike that balance where appropriate.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Can I take this point just a little further? This is about an interpretation not only of how loudly something is being said, but of what is being said. Is the Minister saying that the Bill

[*Ian Paisley*]

would allow a police officer to make a judgment that he does not like the particular verse of scripture or quote that is being used, and could therefore stop it being said? That breaches the European convention on human rights in a number of areas.

Kit Malthouse: The amendments have no bearing on the content of the noise, merely on the impact the noise is having on people nearby from a decibel or distress point of view. Other legislation governs content, particularly if it promotes hatred or incites violence, although as I hope the hon. Gentleman will understand, that will not necessarily be true in this case. The amendments are agnostic as to content.

Ian Paisley: I must press the Minister further. We surely live in a society that allows difficult things to be said. Unfortunately, the Bill is going down a road—it is considerably un-Tory-like, I have to say—where difficult things will no longer be allowed to be said, or at least to be said loudly, proudly and boldly. That appears to be where the Bill is taking us.

Kit Malthouse: Not at all. Difficult things will and should still be said loudly, proudly and boldly, but it may be different in certain circumstances—for example, we have already conceded in the Bill that certain things should not necessarily be said consistently loudly, proudly and boldly outside a school. We have already conceded the power to control noisy protests outside a school, or indeed a vaccination centre. Why should those areas necessarily be privileged over others? This is about the distress and alarm caused by that noise, and its imposition on the rights of others. It is not necessarily about the content.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): Only the other week, alongside RMT and Nautilus members I engaged in a very noisy protest outside the P&O and DP World headquarters in London. That protest was noisy, and I hope it was a nuisance to those working in P&O head office. People are very concerned that the Government have such a stubborn attitude to trying to retain provisions that could make the noise of that important protest against injustice unlawful.

Kit Malthouse: Let me give the hon. Gentleman an example. At that protest, legitimate and right as it is, individuals are exercising their right to free speech. Imagine, for example, that next door to the P&O headquarters there was an old people's home. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) laughs, but such circumstances do occur, and that is why we have local authority noise teams. There could have been a hospital next door to the P&O headquarters. If the hon. Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) had continued his noisy protest, and the shouting, screaming and flying of banners through the night for days on end, to the extent that occupation of that hospital became difficult, it would seem perfectly reasonable for the police to say, "Would you mind awfully not shouting and screaming between 10 o'clock at night and 7 in the morning?" In certain circumstances the police would have to form a judgment about that. An area might face prolonged and noisy protests that impinge

on the rights of others who are not necessarily even involved in the dispute or protest. In the face of changes and developments in amplification technology, we have a duty to seek to strike a balance between those competing rights.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The question of distress and alarm is an interesting one jurisprudentially. By what means does the Minister anticipate that it will be established in court? Does he see it as an objective or subjective test?

Kit Malthouse: If I could make some progress, I was going to come to that matter. There has been some concern about the definitions of particular phrases in the Bill, and we recognise that some of the terminology has caused concern. Many of the terms used, such as "alarm" and "distress", are precedented and well understood by the police and courts, but we accept that the term "serious unease" is novel in legislation. To address those concerns, the Government amendments in lieu remove that as a trigger for the power to attach noise-related conditions to protests.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I am grateful to the Minister for taking so many interventions. By taking out the word "serious" as well as "unease", there is a danger that we also take out "serious alarm" or "serious distress" and replace it with just "alarm" or "distress". On one hand the Home Secretary is making a welcome concession on "serious unease" but she also appears to be watering down the trigger so that "alarm" and "distress" is enough.

Kit Malthouse: As I said, those terms are well understood by the police and courts. They are interpreted, and have been over many years in other circumstances, and we do not believe there is room for misinterpretation. This is about placing conditions and balancing rights. We hope and believe that in the small number of circumstances where it is appropriate for the police to apply conditions, just as for the tiny number of protests that currently attract conditions in this country, this is a proportionate, modest power for the Lords to put in place.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): The Minister is trying his best on this point, but he has to return to the fact that it is wholly subjective whether distress or alarm has been caused. We are conferring this power, but we are not providing strictures around it, or indicating what we believe to be appropriate or inappropriate. None of this will be settled until it is tested, tested and tested again, but we should bear in mind that it will never be tested in the court until a protest has already been curtailed and the police have acted in using these powers without any parameters from us as legislators. That is not the road to go down, unless we very clearly and simply define what we mean and how we intend to curtail protest. Until the Government do that, they cannot have our support.

7.15 pm

Kit Malthouse: I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but he is looking towards, if I may say so, a Napoleonic approach to the law which we do not have in this country. We set the parameters of powers for the police, which they interpret and which are then tested

through the courts. That has been done for public order legislation down the ages. As I say, it has been interpreted, quite rightly, over time by independent judges who oversee and seek to strike that balance. He is right that each circumstance where the police face a decision will be different and that we rely on the test through the court over time to find the right balance.

I urge Members who are expressing concern about this measure to consider, as many do, what it is like living in central London. Those who are residents of Westminster, where for many years I was a councillor, will know that Westminster City Council has a very good and very effective noise team. If their next-door neighbour is having a disco or a party well into the night, night after night, they can seek a defence against that from their local authority.

In a small number of cases where legitimate protest impinges, because of its noise, decibel level, longevity or other matters, why should not local residents or businesses who are unable to continue, or whatever it might be, seek some kind of protection from the police? That seems perfectly reasonable to me and I cannot see why anyone objects, unless they believe that protesters should be allowed to make any amount of noise at any time anywhere outside any sort of premises. If they do not, we are just talking about matters of degree. The way we settle those matters of degree, as in other areas of police powers where we look at proportionality and reasonableness which are then interpreted by the courts, seems to me a fairly modest way of doing things.

On Lords amendment 80, I should say once again that both the national policing lead for public order and the policing inspectorate have said clearly that the distinction drawn by the Public Order Act 1986 between public processions and public assemblies is anachronistic and no longer reflects the realities of policing protests. Provided the thresholds in the 1986 Act are met, the police should be able to attach any condition to an assembly in the same way they can already attach a condition to a procession.

As is its right, the revising Chamber, the unelected partially hereditary House, has asked this elected democratically accountable House to consider the amendments again. We have listened to the concerns raised and responded with further changes. It is now time for the views of those of us who took the trouble to get elected to prevail, so we can get on with implementing the many measures in the Bill that tackle violence against women and girls, ensure violent and sexual offenders get the punishment they deserve, and protect all our neighbourhoods.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his radical reformist speech. I had not realised he was in favour of such reform of the House of Lords.

There are three topics for debate today: the Food Standards Agency and tackling food crime; misogyny as a hate crime; and noisy protests. I can deal with the first relatively quickly. We welcome the Government's amendments in lieu of Lords amendment 58 on increased investigatory powers for the National Food Crime Unit of the Food Standards Agency. I congratulate Lord Rooker and his colleagues on their doughty campaigning on this topic, and I congratulate the Government on listening to the argument and introducing additional amendments

to bring the National Food Crime Unit within the remit of the Independent Office for Police Conduct. I understand that further legislation will bring the crime unit under the remit of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and fire and rescue services. We will therefore support the Government in their amendments in lieu tonight.

Moving on to misogyny, I am sorry that yet again we are in a position where the Government are blocking legislation that would provide better protection to women. Given the Government's woeful record on violence against women and girls, with prosecutions at an all-time low for crimes such as rape and sexual assault, it seems to us that they should be doing far more, from making street harassment a crime or introducing rape and serious sexual offences in every force, to longer minimum sentences for rape and more support for victims. As Baroness Newlove said in the other place, making misogyny a hate crime is simply about ensuring

"that the law is on the side of women".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 17 January 2022; Vol. 817, c. 1379.]

The Lords listened to the Government's arguments that the Law Commission had concerns that making misogyny a hate crime might complicate the prosecution of rape and sexual assaults. They then came back with Lords amendment 72B, which narrows the scope of the proposals significantly. It makes it an offence to harass or intimidate a person based on hostility to their sex or gender. That negates all the concerns of the Law Commission. The amendment also requires the Secretary of State to pass regulations within six months requiring police forces to record data on offences which fall under this section or which the victim reports as being motivated by misogyny. These are relatively straightforward steps that will increase public awareness, improve victims' confidence in reporting, and enhance the way the police respond to violence against women.

The Government have rejected those simple and progressive reforms. In their place, they have tabled an amendment giving the Government 12 months to respond to the Law Commission's report. Surely that is a statement of the obvious, in that one would expect the Government to formally respond to the Law Commission. The Opposition do not understand why the Government would reject a law making it an offence to harass or intimidate a person based on hostility to their sex or gender. And we certainly do not understand why the Government still have not asked police forces to gather the data.

On that point, perhaps the Minister could help to clarify something for us. During the passage of the Domestic Abuse Bill in March 2021, the Government committed to asking police forces "on an experimental basis" to record the data and said that they would shortly begin the consultation process with the National Police Chiefs' Council. In the other place, Baroness Williams said:

"discussions with the police through the NPCC have been under way on this for some time".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 22 March 2022; Vol. 820, c. 790.]

However, in a freedom of information response this month to my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), the NPCC says:

"a formal request to record has never been received to date."

Can the Minister clarify whether the Government have—if so, when they did—or have not formally requested, through the NPCC, that that data should be recorded? My concern is that, while I understand some of the arguments

[Sarah Jones]

the Minister was making about the complexity of the data, some of the conversations have yet to actually begin.

We must be absolutely intolerant of misogyny in all its forms. The Government could choose to make that clear now by backing Lords amendment 72B. It is not a frisson of virtue, which is what the Minister described it as; it is a very clear and simple way to make sure the law works for women.

Turning to the third of the three issues we are debating this afternoon, the right to noisy protest, we stand at a significant moment in history following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. We were all humbled and deeply moved by the presence of President Zelensky on our screens in this place, showing us his country's bravery in the face of tyranny. Last week, President Zelensky called on people across the world to take to the streets in the name of peace:

"Come from your offices, your homes, your schools and universities, come in the name of peace, come with Ukrainian symbols to support Ukraine, to support freedom, to support life."

We saw brave Ukrainians protesting where there were horrific reports of Russian troops opening fire on the crowd, and brave Russians protesting in their country in their thousands on the streets, and being arrested and detained for standing their ground. We saw tens of thousands of people on the streets in London this weekend supporting Ukraine. But here we are again debating amendments that could criminalise singing the Ukrainian national anthem. Under the provisions in this Bill, protesters could be criminalised—[*Interruption.*] The Minister is heckling from a seated position—

Kit Malthouse: You all heckled me from a seated position, so why can I not do the same?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order.

Sarah Jones: Indeed the Minister can heckle me from a seated position, but it does not make him right. Under the provisions in this Bill, protesters could be criminalised if the police determine that they are too noisy. We have suggested amendments, and the Lords have done the same. Conservative Members have expressed significant disquiet at the timing of such a draconian intervention. Why on earth is the Home Secretary pushing ahead with plans to stop protests that make noise? The police have never asked for these provisions, and I doubt they would ever use them. The public did not ask for them, and Members from the Home Secretary's own party did not call for them.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that the measures give legitimacy to the secret police—or the open police—who are basically bundling up those in Moscow who protest against Putin's brutal war? This is playing into the hands of Putin. Does she also agree that the proposals will effectively stop picketing as a legal and legitimate means of protest in trade disputes? It is despicable.

Sarah Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. At this significant historical moment when millions of people across the world are protesting against what is happening in Ukraine, we need, as the mother of all Parliaments, to protect our right to protest.

The Minister said that we need to get the balance right, and of course that is true. There are laws already in place to manage protests to make sure they legitimately allow people to go about their business. We are talking tonight about protests being too noisy. [*Interruption.*] The Minister is heckling about the Labour amendments on harassment and intimidation outside schools and vaccination centres. That was about harassment and intimidation; it is not about noise.

Kit Malthouse: Yes, it is.

Sarah Jones: No, it is not.

Kit Malthouse: It is about noise. Read your own amendment.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. The Minister is being very noisy at the moment.

Sarah Jones: Perhaps the Minister wants to stand up and make another speech, but I will carry on. The Home Secretary is pushing amendments that the police do not want and did not ask for, and that the public do not want and did not ask for. Why are the Government so constantly out of step with public opinion?

Part 3 of the Bill targets protests for being too noisy. It provides a trigger for imposing conditions on public assemblies, public processions and one-person protests if a protest is too noisy. It includes vague terms such as "serious annoyance" or the subjective notion of being too noisy, which create a very low threshold for police-imposed conditions and essentially rule out entirely peaceful protests. Lord Coaker in the other place has read the Government's definitions of "too noisy". Double glazing is a threshold. If someone is organising a demonstration and they are going to be noisy, they need to find areas where buildings have double glazing. You could not make it up, Mr Deputy Speaker.

One person's "too noisy" is another person's "not loud enough". Keeping these provisions on noise will invite all sorts of problems of interpretation for the police in trying to agree on what "too noisy" might mean. The Opposition want these provisions removed from the Bill. Lords amendment 73 removes the trigger on noise related to public processions; Lords amendment 87 removes the trigger on noise related to one-person protests; and we support the leave-out amendment 80 to remove the clause from the Bill altogether, as well as Lords amendment 80G, which accepts a definition of "serious disruption" being added to the Bill, but removes from it any mention of noise.

The Home Secretary and the Justice Secretary have made one small concession on noise by removing the term "serious unease" from a range of conditions under which police can restrict protest. I am glad that the Government have partially admitted that the term should never have made it on to the statute book. However, as the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) has said, and as Liberty and others have pointed out, the drafting has unintended consequences. Now the police will be able to impose conditions on protests that they believe may cause persons to suffer "alarm or distress". There is no need for it even to be "serious" alarm or distress. We have a better solution, and a way for the Government to fix this legislative mess. All they have to do is support our amendments.

In the MPs' offices in 1 Parliament Street that look over Whitehall and Parliament Square, MPs—including me and my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), the shadow Home Secretary—and their staff work with near-constant background noise coming from protests, be it loud music, singing or speeches. Of course it is annoying, and it can be very distracting, but that is the point of protests—to capture our attention, because they have something to say. I urge Members across this House to ask themselves tonight why they would vote for legislation that could criminalise singing in the street.

At this late stage of the Bill's journey, we are debating specific amendments. Members all know that voting against the Government's public order amendment tonight does not mean voting against other measures in the Bill or stopping it passing. The time for that has come and gone. It would simply mean that Members do not want to vote through measures that restrict peaceful protest based on noise. When Members walk through the Lobby this evening, I hope they have the voices of those protesting for Ukraine ringing in their ears.

7.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I ask those wishing to catch my eye to stand. There are about five. I am going to impose a five-minute limit—not everybody is going to get in—and I want to leave five minutes for the Minister to respond at the end. As Members know, Divisions will take place at 7.55 pm.

Sir Robert Buckland: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will do my best within a five-minute limit. Normally, I have only just cleared my throat after minute four, but I will strive within the constraints you have placed on me.

I rise to speak to the Government's proposed amendment in lieu of Lords amendment 72B, regarding a response to the Law Commission. I welcome it, and I think it is sensible to set out a timetable on which the Government will respond to those recommendations. To cut to the quick, I make no bones about the fact that I think we need to improve the law on street harassment. The current deficiency in the law on harassment and stalking is that it requires a course of conduct. That will not cover a whole range of crimes that are committed against women, in particular, on the streets of our country every day. I had hoped that we would be able to deal with the matter in the Bill, but I am realistic and I understand the constraints under which the Government work.

Of course, I respect the Law Commission, which is an excellent body. When I was Lord Chancellor, I helped to make sure that its funding was put on a more even keel. Its work is of a very high standard and we should be proud of it. I, for one, will not therefore seek to overturn the proposal, even if I do not quite agree with the answer. Having said that, and with respect to the Law Commission, I do not think its recommendation about a sexually motivated offence is the right answer; I think that would be to narrow it too much. I would be looking for an offence that was wider in definition and covered a variety of behaviours. It might include specific statutory reference to misogyny as a motivation or demonstration based on sex or gender, but that could equally be dealt with in sentencing guidelines.

I say that because when I looked again at the sentencing guidelines for intimidatory offences, I saw the word "sex" included as one of the factors determining culpability. That is a departure from previous guidelines that I have worked with. This guideline came in back in 2018, and I was not immediately familiar with it because I moved on from the role of Law Officer shortly thereafter. I was struck by the fact that we already have that important word in guidelines that the court has to take into account in sentencing. I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister to consider that matter in the round. It seems to me that because of those guidelines, police and prosecutors should already be working to gather evidence where there is a crime of intimidation, and where that aggravating factor may well be present.

I said in my intervention on my right hon. Friend the Minister that I regarded the undertaking that we made during proceedings on the Domestic Abuse Bill as a solemn one. I am, frankly, disappointed and impatient that we have not made the progress we should have done on reporting and collating this information. We need to get on with that, because we need that body and wealth of information well before the commencement or bringing into force of any new offence that particularly affects women and girls. I see no reason for excuses or shilly-shallying around this issue. I note in particular the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) about that. She has tailored it particularly carefully around that reporting right. I am prepared to give my right hon. Friend one last chance on this, but I will not be going any further, because I think that now is the time for us to get on with this, frankly.

I note that in the other place, my name was taken and referred to as if I was the architect of the amendments. It is no false modesty on my part to say I really was not, but I am grateful to the hon. Member for Walthamstow for the discussions we have had. She has always sought to be constructive. We are trying to find our way through this thicket to offer more protection for women and girls. Let us not beat around the bush: that is why we are all here and it is what we should be pressing the case upon. That is why our lordships rightly have asked us to think again.

I do not share my right hon. Friend the Minister's cynicism about the Lords. They have an important role to play on issues such as this, where we have detail. Where I do have an issue is with the increasing practice in the other place of challenging the underlying philosophy of Bills, which I do not think is their role. On issues such as this, they have an important part to play. We have men and women there who speak with authority—certainly on this issue—and I am grateful to them for their careful consideration.

We are nearly there. We are now in the right area on harassment. I will be happy to give my right hon. Friend the leeway that he needs, but on reporting, the watchword has to be, "We need to get on with this, and soon."

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I call the Front-Bench spokesperson for the Scottish National party, Stuart C. McDonald.

Stuart C. McDonald: The SNP remains totally opposed to the dreadfully drafted and totally excessive restrictions on protest contained in part 3 of the Bill, and we do so

[Stuart C. McDonald]

for all the many reasons that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin) has set out in previous stages, so I can be relatively brief.

The truth is that the Government know they have comprehensively lost the arguments on this, so they are left reassuring us that the powers will not actually be used and that noisy protest will not be banned altogether, and providing a hotchpotch of examples, many of which would already be caught by existing public order provisions. The Minister even made reference to discos. While I would love there to be a fundamental right to disco, or whatever the modern terminology is, that is not remotely comparable to a protest and the fundamental right to protest.

We just cannot legislate in this way. We cannot hand over draconian powers on the basis that Home Office Ministers reassure us that they or the police will use these powers exceptionally, rather than ubiquitously. Any restriction on fundamental rights must be carefully justified, carefully set out and carefully circumscribed, but the protest provisions in the Bill are as far from careful as could be imagined. They remain vague, confusing, opaque and incredibly subjective, and they trigger police powers to intervene in protest at an unbelievably inappropriate and low level. They make it hard for people to understand what they might or might not be able to do.

For the reasons that the shadow Minister set out, the powers are verging on the absurd. We have seen Ministers being drawn into debates about whether the presence of double-glazing might impact on whether a protest could be subject to restrictions. Even this evening, we have been drawn into debate about next-door neighbours and whether a protest at the Russian embassy would be okay if the next-door neighbour was a bunch of officers, but might not be okay if it was an old folks' home. That is the level of absurdity.

All of these powers are dreadful from the point of view of the rule of law, of human rights and of democracy itself. On the other hand, the powers might also prove to be a poisoned chalice for police forces, which will struggle to justify any of their decision making on objective grounds or to defend themselves against charges that they are being political in their decision making, and that will be true whether or not they actually use the powers.

As the shadow Minister said, it is welcome that the concept of serious unease is being removed, but the point I made to the Minister was not properly addressed. The expression in the Bill as it stands is

“serious unease, alarm or distress”.

The Government are not just taking out the word “unease”; they are taking out the word “serious” alongside it. That means that the threshold is not “serious” alarm or “serious” distress, but just “alarm or distress”. As I said in my intervention, the Home Secretary has made a concession on the one hand, but she is taking much more away with the other, and that point has not been answered in any way, shape or form.

Frankly, these provisions are beyond saving. They are a botched, rushed job, just so that the Home Secretary could say that she was doing something about certain

protests that she did not like—no matter to her, it seems, that her legislation significantly impacts on the fundamental right to protest more generally. There is nothing left for it but to continue to insist that the whole lot comes out. The Government's arguments have fallen to pieces, and I regard it as dreadful that they continue to try to bulldoze these provisions through Parliament. We will vote against the relevant Government motion to disagree, and I hope that the other place will continue to resist these utterly unjustifiable restrictions on the right to protest.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the journey that the Minister is on, because a week ago he told us that he was not convinced and needed to see more evidence. A week later, he has obviously been doing some reading, because now he wants to have more conversations and go further, faster. This evening, we want to help him keep up with the rest of us who have been looking at how we can tackle violence against women and to see what can be done. I welcome the words of the right hon. and learned Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland) on that.

When toxic masculinity is on show at the Oscars, in our streets and in our homes, all of us want to tackle it and none of us wants to condone it. The challenge with the Minister's argument is that it is still inconsistent. As he admitted last week, misogyny drives crimes against women, but he is also saying that he does not know what he can do to help it. He just cannot make up his mind. It is almost like he is gaslighting himself. He needs to clarify whether he thinks things can change, as the sentencing guidelines already say. In this country, we can already recognise where hostility towards someone's sex drives crimes. Does he think that is a good or a bad thing, as the right hon. and learned Member for South Swindon said? The amendments before him from the Lords, and the amendment in lieu that I have tabled to try to help him find that compromise across both Houses, would tackle it.

Does the Minister think that the 17 police forces that are already doing this practice and that recognise—including the chief constables who have this said publicly—that it helps improve victim confidence and the data they have to tackle crimes, are doing the right thing? If he does not, surely he wants to stop them doing it, because it is wasting police time. Which is it? There are inconsistencies in his arguments.

The Minister talks about the Law Commission, and I am sure it is delighted to hear what he said, because this Government's track record on the Law Commission is not very good. Since 2010, 17 Law Commission reviews have been accepted, but not implemented, and a further 16 have had no response at all. Of the 62 that have been done, only half of them have been implemented.

There is no argument here about making misogyny a hate crime, like it is some lump of plastic. This is about recognising, as the Minister did last week, where crimes are driven and what we can do about it, just as we have recognised where hatred of someone's religion or racial background is driving crimes, and we have sent that message. His argument is about why that does not need to be statutory, but he is making an argument that it does need to be statutory, because a year ago this place was promised that that would happen. Pledges were made at the Dispatch Box.

Indeed, Ministers in the other place wrote to me to confirm those pledges. On 17 March 2021, the first commitment was made. On 8 July, we were told that the Home Office had met stakeholders to make it happen, and on 15 November, we were told there was a consultation. In the Minister's letter to me, he said:

"You noted my commitment that the Home Office will ask the police to collect crimes of violence against the person"

in this way, and he confirmed that the police data requirements group would be taking that forward and that the details would be rolled out in May to meet the timetable of autumn last year, yet it has not happened. That is clearly an argument for making sure that where this good policing practice is already happening, it is extended across the country so that women are not facing a policing lottery as to whether their police forces are doing it.

The argument the Minister is making is precisely why we need to put this matter on the statute book and back those chief constables and 17 police forces that are already doing it. It is why we need to say to the 673,000 women who, according to House of Commons Library figures, reported being a victim of a personal crime in the past year, but did not come forward to the police, that we will learn what we can do to make them feel safe. It is why we should learn from the other place and Baroness Newlove, Baroness Bertin and Lord Russell, and Baroness Kennedy and the Scottish report, that deeds, not words matter.

The Minister says he recognises that the other place is frustrated by the slow pace of change. He says he is looking for the evidence. I encourage him to look at the independent evaluation that shows very clearly that including misogyny in hate crime helps policing and helps women come forward. We have to stop blaming women for not coming forward to report crimes or saying that somehow we understand why they are cautious, and we have to start looking at what works.

We also have to stop hiding behind the Law Commission, because yet another review is not the commitment to deeds that women in this country want. Finding that only certain crimes can be motivated by misogyny does not recognise disabled women being targeted for fraud or Muslim women being targeted for both Islamophobic and misogynistic attacks. The Minister knows that the other place will not wear this any longer, and neither will women in this country. I urge him to do the right thing and accept the amendment in lieu. Let us get on with making sure that every woman is protected from misogyny in this country.

7.45 pm

Mr Carmichael: I will touch briefly on all three areas under debate this evening. On food crime, I am delighted that we have got to what seems a sensible, workable compromise. It says something about the attitude of the Home Office and this Government in general to Parliament and the other place that for something as prosaic as this it has taken two rounds of ping-pong before the Government have been prepared to accept what was surely to the rest of the world blindingly obvious. I welcome the fact that we have got there nevertheless.

On the issue of misogyny, there is little I could add to the excellent contribution from the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy). I might have had some more sympathy 20 to 25 years ago for some of the

arguments that the Minister advanced, but I have seen the way in which interaction with the criminal justice system has been transformed for so many different groups in our communities, in relation to racial aggravation, religious aggravation and the rest of it, and this measure is surely long overdue. A consultation, such as is being offered by the Minister, just does not cut it. If the Government were to have the courage of our convictions and to go ahead with an amendment such as the one tabled by the hon. Member for Walthamstow, they would be doing something transformative in the way in which the police interact with women and girls, and are seen by them.

On noise protest, it will not be lost on the House that when I asked the Minister about the test to be applied he said that he would come to it later, but then did not do so, as he did not have any meaningful answer. As things stand, it is incredibly widely drawn and it takes us back to what used to be the situation in Scotland, where we described a breach of the peace as, "anything that two cops did not quite like the look of". Things have advanced somewhat since then, but the broad definitions we are being asked to accept tonight are a retrograde step. Tellingly, the only answer the Minister had was, "Well, we've got courts who will look at these things and define them." It is the job of this place, Parliament, when we are passing legislation, to give proper definition; we should not be subcontracting that to the courts, especially not on something as important as the right to protest. If that degree of uncertainty is left hanging, it is not difficult to see that there will quickly come to be a chilling effect. When we are dealing with legislation governing the right to protest, definition—the right of the individual to know exactly where they stand in relation to the police and the courts—is crucial. That is why it would be irresponsible of this House to allow the Government to have their way. If I were a frontline police officer or prosecutor, I would see this as an absolute poisoned chalice and I would not want to have anything to do with it.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Geraint, you will have to sit down at 7.50.

Geraint Davies: I have just come back from Lithuania. Hundreds of women have escaped to there, having lost their democracy as a result of Putin's bombing and his oppressing his people at home. At the same time, we have a situation in Hong Kong where democracy is being taken away. Yet here we are taking away the right to peaceful protest, which has given us the suffragettes, climate change activists, peace campaigners and trade unions. This horrific bit of legislation will completely undermine the right of trade unionists to picket, at a difficult time in our economic evolution; it is purely terrible and it should not be brought forward. It is completely unnecessary, it will be very damaging to trade union relationships and it will drive protests underground, which, taken alongside the right for covert intelligence agents to act above the law, may lead to unintended consequences and will put the public at risk. Democracy and our public are at risk from this dreadful Bill, and it should be reversed as quickly as possible.

Kit Malthouse: It is traditional to express gratitude to Members for contributing to a debate, but after that nonsense, I am afraid that I cannot unequivocally offer that.

[Kit Malthouse]

I welcome the support across the House for the amendments in lieu on food crime. I am afraid that amendment (c)—which was tabled by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy)—in lieu of Lords amendment 72B is unnecessary and misdirected, despite her attempts to patronise me. It is unnecessary because, as I said, the Government have already committed to collecting the data that is described and they have additionally committed to consulting on a new public sexual harassment offence before the summer recess. It is misdirected because the Government's original amendment responds directly to a specific recommendation of the Law Commission. Furthermore, our commitment to consult on a public sexual harassment offence speaks to another Law Commission recommendation that we explore the merits of such an offence, as well as the significant attention to that issue in our previous debates. I take into account the entreaties from my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland) to go faster and harder on this matter.

By contrast, the idea of contemplating that any additional new offence addresses

“intimidatory offences aggravated by sex or gender”

is untethered to any particular rationale or proper discussion to date. In fact, I would go further in saying that we need to move away from the preoccupation with hate crime laws. I was struck by the words of Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws in the other place:

“Most men do not hate women, but somehow from boyhood they breathe in this sense of entitlement”.—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 22 March 2022; Vol. 820, c. 797.]

However, Lords amendment 58B focuses not on addressing that entitlement, but on hostility—the legal test for hate crimes. The broader point made by the Law Commission is that the concept is naturally unsuited to confronting the widespread and abhorrent behaviour most often directed against women and girls. Hate crime laws instead turn on those visceral occasions that befit the word “hatred”, such as a racial slur uttered during a crime.

The fact that hate crime legal models are poorly attuned to the sorts of behaviour that we want to tackle was put very well by Rape Crisis in the Law Commission's report, which said of crimes against women and girls that

“these crimes are rooted in power and control, not hatred, making the gender/sex an ill-fitting protected characteristic in the hate crime framework.”

My hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Laura Farris) made the same point in the last debate on this matter.

The point is that we need to think carefully about the right model for the particular problem that we want to address. An entirely bespoke solution, which addresses the root drivers of this behaviour, is more likely to succeed. The alternative, as proposed in Lords amendment 58B, is an offence that is poorly targeted and consequently never used, so let us now do the proper groundwork—I give an undertaking that we will do that—in identifying the right legal solution to the particular nature of these crimes. I hope that all Opposition Members will contribute to the consultation that we have committed to introducing before the recess. We are already exploring whether a public sexual harassment offence is that solution, and that is what the Law Commission also spoke about.

On the Lords amendments relating to public order, we have heard yet again the ridiculously misconceived claims that are peddled about these amendments. The Public Order Act has always sought to balance the right to peaceful protest with the rights of others to go about their daily lives. All we are doing is a modest updating of a legal framework that is more than 35 years old—I thought that would have been supported by the party who banned any protest within a kilometre and a half of Parliament—and does not reflect the realities of policing protests in the third decade of the 21st century.

To suggest that any amount of noise and disruption is acceptable is saying to the British public, adversely affected by a protest, that their rights do not matter and that they should just put up with it. Their rights do matter. Of course, we must accept that protests can be disruptive and cause inconvenience, but a line must be drawn somewhere, and the provisions in the Bill simply enable the police to draw that line where it becomes necessary and proportionate to place restrictions on a protest to protect the rights of others.

It is more than a year since the Bill was introduced. It has been thoroughly debated and scrutinised by both Houses. The unelected and, as I said, partially hereditary House has exercised its right to ask us to consider certain matters again. We have done so once already. We should again send these amendments back to the Lords, and that House should now accept the will of this democratically elected House and let the Bill pass.

Question put, That this House insists on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendment 58 and proposes amendments (a) to (c) in lieu.

A Division was called.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): There do not appear to be any Tellers, so I am calling the Division off.

Question agreed to.

7.56 pm

One hour having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the Lords message, the proceedings were interrupted (Order, 28 February).

The Deputy Speaker then put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83F).

After Clause 54

INTIMIDATORY OFFENCES AGGRAVATED BY SEX OR GENDER

Motion made, and Question put,

That this House disagrees with the Lords in their amendment 72B and proposes amendments (a) and (b) in lieu.—(*Kit Malthouse.*)

The House divided: Ayes 283, Noes 148.

Division No. 232]

[7.56 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Lee
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward

Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve

Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Jake
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 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
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dineneage, Dame Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donelan, rh Michelle
 Dorans, Allan
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Gray, James
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 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
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 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, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert

Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Nici, Lia
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Pow, Rebecca
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richardson, Angela
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tracey, Craig
 Trott, Laura
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim
Tellers for the Ayes:
Gareth Johnson and
Michael Tomlinson

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blake, Olivia
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan

Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
Clark, Feryal
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Davey, rh Ed
Davies, Geraint
Davies-Jones, Alex
De Cordova, Marsha
Dodds, Anneliese
Dorans, Allan
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Farry, Stephen
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Furniss, Gill
Gardiner, Barry
Gill, Preet Kaur
Green, Sarah
Gwynne, Andrew
Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
Hanna, Claire
Hardy, Emma
Harris, Carolyn
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Dan
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr Pat McFadden*)
Khan, Afzal
Kyle, Peter
Lake, Ben
Lavery, Ian
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewis, Clive
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid

Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McKinnell, Catherine
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Norris, Alex
Olney, Sarah
Osamor, Kate
Owatemi, Taiwo
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillipson, Bridget
Pollard, Luke
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, rh Angela
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reynolds, Jonathan
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Wakeford, Christian
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitley, Mick
Whittome, Nadia
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Winter, Beth
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Mary Glindon and
Colleen Fletcher

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 55

IMPOSING CONDITIONS ON PUBLIC ASSEMBLIES

Motion made, and Question put,

That this House insists on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendment 73, insists on its amendment 74A to Lords amendment 74, disagrees with the Lords in their amendment 74B to that amendment in lieu, disagrees with the Lords in their consequential amendments 74C, 74D, 74E, 74F and 74G, insists on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendment 87, insists on its amendments 87A, 87B, 87C, 87D, 87E and 87F to the words restored to the Bill by its disagreement to that amendment but proposes additional amendment (a) to the words restored to the Bill by its disagreement with the Lords in their amendment 73 and additional amendment (b) to the words restored to the Bill by its disagreement with the Lords in their amendment 87.—(*Kit Malthouse.*)

The House divided: Ayes 276, Noes 202.

Division No. 233]

[8.12 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel	Clarke, Theo
Afolami, Bim	Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Afriyie, Adam	Clarkson, Chris
Aiken, Nickie	Cleverly, rh James
Anderson, Lee	Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Andrew, rh Stuart	Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Ansell, Caroline	Colburn, Elliot
Argar, Edward	Collins, Damian
Atkins, Victoria	Courts, Robert
Aldous, Peter	Coutinho, Claire
Bacon, Gareth	Crosbie, Virginia
Bacon, Mr Richard	Crouch, Tracey
Badenoch, Kemi	Daly, James
Bailey, Shaun	Davies, David T. C.
Baker, Duncan	Davies, Gareth
Baldwin, Harriett	Davies, Dr James
Barclay, rh Steve	Davies, Mims
Baron, Mr John	Davison, Dehenna
Baynes, Simon	Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Bell, Aaron	Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Benton, Scott	Docherty, Leo
Berry, rh Jake	Donelan, rh Michelle
Blackman, Bob	Dowden, rh Oliver
Blunt, Crispin	Drax, Richard
Bone, Mr Peter	Drummond, Mrs Flick
Bowie, Andrew	Duddridge, James
Bradley, Ben	Duguid, David
Brereton, Jack	Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Bridgen, Andrew	Dunne, rh Philip
Brine, Steve	Eastwood, Mark
Bristow, Paul	Edwards, Ruth
Britcliffe, Sara	Ellis, rh Michael
Browne, Anthony	Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Bruce, Fiona	Eustice, rh George
Buchan, Felicity	Evans, Dr Luke
Buckland, rh Sir Robert	Everitt, Ben
Burghart, Alex	Fabricant, Michael
Burns, rh Conor	Farris, Laura
Butler, Rob	Fell, Simon
Cairns, rh Alun	Firth, Anna
Carter, Andy	Fletcher, Katherine
Cartlidge, James	Fletcher, Mark
Cash, Sir William	Fletcher, Nick
Cates, Miriam	Ford, Vicky
Caulfield, Maria	Foster, Kevin
Chalk, Alex	Fox, rh Dr Liam
Chishti, Rehman	Frazer, rh Lucy
Chope, Sir Christopher	Freeman, George
Clark, rh Greg	French, Mr Louie
Clarke, rh Mr Simon	Fuller, Richard

Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Gray, James
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 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
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 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, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim

Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Nici, Lia
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Parish, Neil
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Pow, Rebecca
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richardson, Angela
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek

Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tracey, Craig
 Trott, Laura
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Dorans, Allan
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Dame Angela

Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Gareth Johnson and
Michael Tomlinson

NOES

Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 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
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
 Hanna, Claire
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz (*Proxy vote cast
 by Mr Pat McFadden*)
 Khan, Afzal
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lavery, Ian
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewis, Clive
 Linden, David

Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Newlands, Gavin
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
Olney, Sarah
Osamor, Kate
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owatemi, Taiwo
Paisley, Ian
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillipson, Bridget
Pollard, Luke
Qaisar, Ms Anum
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, rh Angela
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie

Reynolds, Jonathan
Robinson, Gavin
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheppard, Tommy
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Alyn
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Turner, Karl
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Wakeford, Christian
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Whitley, Mick
Whittome, Nadia
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Wilson, rh Sammy
Winter, Beth
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Colleen Fletcher and
Mary Glindon

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 56

IMPOSING CONDITIONS ON PUBLIC ASSEMBLIES

Motion made, and Question put,

That this House insists on its disagreement with the Lords in their amendment 80, insists on its amendments 80A, 80B, 80C, 80D, 80E and 80F to the words restored to the Bill by its disagreement with that amendment, disagrees with the Lords in their amendment 80G instead of the words left out by that amendment but proposes additional amendment (a) to the words restored to the Bill by its disagreement with the Lords in their amendment 80.—(*Kit Malthouse.*)

The House divided: Ayes 278, Noes 202.

Division No. 234]

[8.23 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim

Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie

Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Lee
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baker, Duncan
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Jake
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Browne, Anthony
Buchan, Felicity
Buckland, rh Sir Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, rh Conor
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, rh Michelle
Dowden, rh Oliver
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James

Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Gray, James
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Griffiths, Kate
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
Henderson, Gordon
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
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
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, Julian
Kruger, Danny
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Logan, Mark
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Macleane, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, Stephen
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Mills, Nigel
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mortimer, Jill
Morton, Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Nici, Lia
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Parish, Neil
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, Chris
Pincher, rh Christopher
Pow, Rebecca
Purslove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Raab, rh Dominic

Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Richardson, Angela
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Skidmore, rh Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, rh Mark
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tracey, Craig
Trott, Laura
Tugendhat, Tom
Vara, Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallis, Dr Jamie
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Webb, Suzanne
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wood, Mike
Wright, rh Jeremy
Young, Jacob
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Gareth Johnson and
Michael Tomlinson

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Ali, Tahir
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena

Amesbury, Mike
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, rh Jonathan

Baker, Mr Steve
Bardell, Hannah
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blake, Olivia
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Clark, Feryal
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Davey, rh Ed
Davies, Geraint
Davies-Jones, Alex
Day, Martyn
De Cordova, Marsha
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Dorans, Allan
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Farry, Stephen
Fellows, Marion
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
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise

Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
Hanna, Claire
Harvey, Neale
Hardy, Emma
Harris, Carolyn
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Dan
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr Pat McFadden*)
Khan, Afzal
Kyle, Peter
Lake, Ben
Lavery, Ian
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewis, Clive
Linden, David
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Newlands, Gavin
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
Olney, Sarah
Osamor, Kate
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owatemi, Taiwo
Paisley, Ian
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillipson, Bridget
Pollard, Luke

Qaisar, Ms Anum
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, rh Angela
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reynolds, Jonathan
Robinson, Gavin
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheppard, Tommy
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Alyn
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Zarah

Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Turner, Karl
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Wakeford, Christian
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Whitley, Mick
Whittome, Nadia
Wilson, Munira
Wilson, rh Sammy
Winter, Beth
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Colleen Fletcher and
Mary Glindon

Question accordingly agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 15 and No. 41(A)),

That, at this day's sitting, the Motion in the name of Mark Spencer, relating to Business of the House (Today) may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Mr Marcus Jones.*)

Question agreed to.

Backbench Business

War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Payments

8.35 pm

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House believes that the current process for claiming War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation payments is not fit for purpose and urges the Government to launch an independent inquiry into the system's failings.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for selecting this subject for debate and the Leader of the House for arranging time tonight in a timeslot that is not normally allocated for Back-Bench business. That is very much appreciated after the debate was moved from last Thursday.

In recent years, many of us have become disconnected from the idea of war. It is becoming something that happens far away to people we do not know. We might try to keep on top of the news, but the human stories are often lost. However, the war in Ukraine has reminded us that armed conflict is not just something remote and abstract; the sad truth is that it can happen anywhere when political processes break down or when leaders put their egos above human life. Ukraine has reminded us of another truth: wars are not fought by armies; they are fought by individuals each with a life as complex as our own. When we hear the stories from Ukrainian civilians leaving behind their careers and families to take up arms to defend their country, we see the human face behind every member of those armed forces. When we hear the stories of teenage Russian conscripts surrendering in tears, we see that under each helmet is a complex and unique individual.

Whether or not we agree with the motives of a conflict, or disagree with the concept of war in principle, that all takes second place to our ability to recognise the humanity in every individual, and veterans are central to this. Many veterans have seen the very worst of humanity, so it seems only right that when they return home they should be greeted by its very best: compassion, recognition and respect. They have given all for their state and it is only right that the state, in turn, should give its all for them. That is the key principle in why it is so important to compensate veterans fairly. It is about recognising our duty of care to help them to live a full and dignified life post service, and doing so with respect to their individuality. Schemes such as war pensions and the armed forces compensation scheme are absolutely critical in delivering our duty of care to solidify our commitment to veterans by pledging that whatever injuries, mental or physical, someone receives during their time in the forces, or whatever existing condition was worsened, the burden of that harm should be carried by the state, not by the veteran. It is absolutely correct in its simple recognition that whatever harm was incurred in the name of the state is the state's responsibility.

That is not asking for much; in fact, it is the bare minimum that we can do to show that we respect these veterans for what they have done to support all of us. Yet the reason we are here today is that at the moment, at least, that bare minimum is not being met. The Government are not yet recognising the duty of care towards veterans. They are not offering to freely and unconditionally carry the financial burden of their injuries.

They are not respecting veterans. Yes, war pensions and the compensation scheme exist, but the way in which they are being administered is a national scandal that should have us all hanging our heads in shame. The process, as it stands, operates in a way that discourages veterans from pursuing their claims. It is loaded with presumptions that veterans are not entitled to compensation, making them prove eligibility beyond any reasonable standards. It is a process that is inherently distrustful, presuming that veterans are trying to swindle the system. It is mired with complicated terminology and legalese, with little signposting for those who need it most.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I speak as someone with a one-third war disability pension. When I left the armed forces, I had a medical, and that signposted me to get the disability pension. People do not necessarily have to wait until they get a condition such as post-traumatic stress disorder.

Owen Thompson: I hear what the right hon. Gentleman says, and I will come to that point, but we see a lack of transparency and serious questions about conflicts of interest. As a result, the process pushes veterans into poverty, ill health and, sadly, even suicide.

I was first made aware of the seriousness of the issue by my constituent Garry McDermott, a former lance corporal with the Royal Scots who left the armed forces in 2003. As a result of his time in service, he had been diagnosed with complex PTSD, and he suffers from a variety of physical health issues including with his hips and his knees. Those injuries were caused or worsened by his time in the service of his country, but, when he returned home and sought compensation, he found that the country was not willing to serve him.

Garry has been fighting for more than a decade for the Government simply to recognise their duty of care towards him and pay him what he is due under his war pension. Time and again, they shirked responsibility by denying a link between his injuries and his time in service. His physical health has severely deteriorated over the past decade—he now needs a new knee and two new hips—due to trauma induced by carrying 80 kg bags during his time in service. That was confirmed by his Army medical files, yet he has been refused an increased payment. Medical advisers at Veterans UK have denied the link between Garry's time in service and his injuries time and again. Damage to his teeth from his time in service was noted as "poor dental hygiene" by Veterans UK. Damage to his toes was said to be due to fungus. One time, his ability to go for a run to support his own mental health was held against him. Whenever he put in a claim, he was made to feel like he was trying to cheat the system and not worthy of the Government's support. He was not claiming for millions of pounds or thousands of pounds—these are claims for an extra £22 a week.

Mistreatment of one veteran is bad enough, but Garry is one of thousands. The true scale of the scandal became clearer when I raised his case at business questions only a matter of months ago and was told:

"It is not always right to draw conclusions about a whole system from one case."—[*Official Report*, 20 January 2022; Vol. 707, c. 517.]

The reaction to that statement proved otherwise, as social media exploded with veterans who had experienced the same issues as Garry and were dismayed by the

former Leader of the House's flippant dismissal. Dozens contacted me directly to set the record straight: the problem was systematic and they were the very proof of that. The veterans whom I have spoken to have been in all ranks of our forces, including majors and colonels, and it is extremely widespread.

Let us look at Veterans UK's recent customer satisfaction survey. Of the 324 veterans surveyed about their satisfaction levels in using the war pension scheme, only 36% noted any level of satisfaction, and 32% gave it a 1—the lowest possible rating. For the armed forces compensation scheme, it was even more dire, with only 13% giving any sort of positive rating above 5; meanwhile, half of veterans rated their satisfaction at 1, which again was the lowest possible option. If war pensions are not bad enough, it seems that the scheme that replaced them is even worse. More generally, the dissatisfaction rate with the Veterans UK claims process is a shocking 80%.

Because of the sheer scale of the issue, it is easy to get lost in the details of individual cases. However, important as those are, they give Veterans UK and the Ministry of Defence the chance to portray them as outliers, which they are not. They are symptoms of a system that is simply unfit for purpose. We need to take a step back and identify the recurring issues among the cases: the common threads that show us that the problem is systematic. I am extremely grateful to everyone who has helped to identify the problems, including campaigning groups such as the Independent Defence Authority and Justice4Troops and, most of all, the veterans who have reached out to share their own stories.

The first issue is that the system of war pensions and armed forces compensation scheme payments operates with a presumption against awarding veterans with their claims. Let us start with the cold, hard statistics. Since April 2009, of the 107,000 disablement claims cleared at initial review under the war pension scheme, 32% have been declined. Only 59% of those whose claims passed forward received a financial award.

Of the 94,000 armed forces compensation scheme claims, 31% have failed at the initial stage, and 74% of appeals have been rejected. Only 57% of claims have resulted in a financial award. The fact that a third of claims fall at the first hurdle and only a minority make it through the appeals process paints a bleak picture of claimants' chances. That is especially worrying given the fact that the stats date mostly from before Veterans UK took over the assessment processes. According to many veterans, that has worsened the situation.

Interestingly, the MOD does not hold in a collated format stats on how many claimants decided to withdraw or not to take steps to progress their claim—the details are tucked away in the paper files of each case. I have been told that the reason for making the information so difficult to locate is that it is

"not information the Ministry of Defence needs to capture in order to process claims or monitor performance."

I cannot imagine any reason why holding data on how many veterans give up on the process would not be conducive to monitoring its success, but that is where we are.

Whatever the case, far too many veterans do give up. They are faced with a system that presumes they are trying to swindle it. Many veterans, like my constituent

[Owen Thompson]

Garry, find themselves struggling to prove that their health conditions were caused by their time in our forces. The slightest ability still to do any physical exercise is held against them and injuries sustained in service are noted down as otherwise. It is the same cruel and distrustful approach to benefits that is embodied by universal credit, with people being made to undergo undignified tests to prove their disabilities.

Even when it clashes with professional opinion, Veterans UK keeps denying claims. Army medical files that prove causation between time in service and injuries are regularly ignored. Similar tests that are carried out for other benefits—such as personal independence payments—and prove unfitness to work are ignored. Veterans are made to feel as though they are guilty until proven innocent. In some cases, evidence of a veteran's disability has seemingly—this claim has been made to me—been doctored to underplay its severity. In one case, a veteran's medical files stated that they could walk 140 metres with discomfort, but when their claim was rejected, part of the reason given was that they could walk 140 metres—there was no mention of the discomfort.

One veteran, a former major, told me:

“Veterans UK have followed an unofficial policy of ‘Deny, Delay, hope you Die’ in which at the first stage they claim you don't have that injury, then when it's proven they insist on a level of evidence that the claimant must provide, despite the fact that they have full access to my medical record, then they attempt to claim that the cause wasn't service, such as in my case they attributed my deafness to my age, which is currently 49.”

As with universal credit, it boils down to saving money. An ideological dogma of small government has led to starved public resources and a scramble to save money here and there. The ones who pay the price are those who need help the most—in this case, veterans. It is evident that the system is rigged to deny veterans their claims for the feeblest of excuses, at all costs. It should go without saying that no amount of money saved is worth the lives and livelihoods of those who gave their all for all of us. The overarching goal of a body like Veterans UK should be not to save money but to do all it can to repay the debt that we owe our veterans.

Of course, the MOD says that assessments are arrived at through evidence-based professional judgment and that medical advisers seek to advise on the pre-existing evidence rather than to diagnose issues. However, as we have heard, it is not uncommon for existing evidence to be ignored or, allegedly, altered. Medical advisers seem consistently to exceed their remit to pursue a policy of cost-cutting and cover-up.

The role of medical advisers ties into another issue that runs through veterans' testimonies. Many veterans have raised questions about the lack of transparency around obtaining details of who makes decisions on their claims. Personal privacy is of course paramount—I do not think anyone would question that—but it should be balanced with veterans' right to know that their assessors are the right people to make the decisions, even if for nothing other than their peace of mind. There is no transparency on that front, and veterans feel completely in the dark about the people who make these life-altering decisions. Medical advisers stay deep in the shadows, even going as far as to refuse to appear on video link at tribunals. The Minister might consider

how dehumanising that can be for a veteran—to feel that their fate is in the hands of a faceless bureaucrat. What is so hard about treating veterans like human beings and creating a healthy, open relationship between them and their medical advisers?

In one case, a veteran requested a statement from a medical adviser on why they thought he had PTSD, but they declined to do so, saying that they were not qualified to make such a judgment. However, the same assessor then rejected their claim relating to PTSD deterioration. How can an adviser make a judgment on one, but not on the other? I just cannot understand that. It might be explained by seeing exactly what the assessors do, opening that up and shining a light on it.

Perhaps even more concerning is the reuse of the same medical adviser at different stages in the appeals process. In testimony after testimony veterans have complained to me about the same individual assessor giving their judgment on a claim at the initial stage, the appeal and then feeding into the tribunal. Separate advisers should be used to ensure impartiality and a range of opinions. Surely the whole point of appealing is to get a second opinion to reassess the claim from a new point of view. If the adviser used at the initial stage is then brought in for the appeal, how can a veteran be assured that their claim will not just be subject to the same opinions that rejected it in the first place? Where is the fairness and where is the impartiality? At best, it is serious neglect in the system design, leading to a conflict of interest. At worst, it is a deliberate choice to cut costs by rigging the system against veterans. It is little wonder that so few appeals get anywhere. All of this contributes to a feeling that there is a huge power imbalance between the veterans and those assessing them.

The picture painted of Veterans UK is that it puts cost-cutting above its duty to protect veterans' lives and livelihoods; it perpetuates a culture of distrust towards veterans, and sees many as dishonest and unworthy of compensation; it operates under an assumption that veterans will not get their compensation—a case of “guilty until proven innocent”; it overrides medical and professional opinion to claim that injuries were not caused by time in service; and it hides behind a lack of transparency around its medical advisers. Most of all, however, it completely disregards the debt that society owes to our veterans.

Of course, there is a serious human cost to this. According to Lisa Scullion and Katherine Curchin, writing in the *Journal of Social Policy*,

“it is evident that there is a lack of understanding of the impact of trauma on people's psychosocial functioning and, as a result, veterans are treated in ways which are variously perceived as disrespectful, unfair or disempowering and in some cases exacerbate existing mental health problems.”

Returning from the unimaginable conditions of war, physical and mental trauma leaves many feeling vulnerable, isolated and financially unstable. PTSD is rife, and the risk of self-harm and suicide can be high. Subjecting this community to complex, lengthy and demeaning processes to claim the money they need to support themselves does nothing but exacerbate mental health problems. They are forced to relive trauma and put their mental health on the line.

For some veterans, their lengthy fights to claim their money are simply too much to bear. Many simply give up and some, tragically, take their own lives. They

simply cannot bear the mental strain of fighting for years—sometimes decades—only to be told that they cannot be recognised as worthy of help. One veteran told me:

“In September last year, I had a full physical and mental breakdown because of all these accusations that I’m not as injured as make out, and again tried to hang myself. I was diagnosed with Complex PTSD directly because of the MoD.”

Yet Veterans UK is ill equipped to deal with this. It even admitted in a written statement that it has no policy in place to deal with veterans suffering from mental health issues. I welcome the Minister’s pledge to start publishing veterans’ suicide rates in England and Wales, starting next year. It is important that the MOD does understand the scale of the problem across the UK as a whole.

I have been delighted by the level of support from across the Chamber in bringing forward this debate, and I am certainly not here seeking any kind of political scalp. This is not about point scoring; this is an entirely cross-party issue. We are united by wanting to do the very best by our veterans. We simply want the Government to hear the pain veterans are in and address it. That is why we need an independent inquiry into the failures of Veterans UK. It is evident that a few tweaks around the edges will not be enough to fix the system.

Root-and-branch reform is needed to build the foundations of a system informed by different philosophies and following different priorities. An independent inquiry should investigate how Veterans UK arrived at the culture of cost-cutting. It should give veterans an opportunity to air their concerns and feel listened to. Most importantly, it should lay the groundwork for a new approach. For instance, there would be huge benefits in creating a system using the principles of trauma-informed care. Again, in the *Journal of Social Policy*, Lisa Scullion and Katherine Curchin write that

“the application of trauma-informed care principles to the UK social security system could improve interactions within this system and avoid re-traumatising those experiencing on-going or unresolved trauma.”

In the meantime, we could take actions right now that could save lives. Untimely payments cost lives; target times should be reduced as far as possible. War pension payments that exceed their target by a fortnight must be brought into line with it. On top of that, the Confederation of Service Charities, or Cobseo, has raised concerns about the backlog of appeals awaiting resolution. Immediate steps could be taken to progress that. Veterans UK’s policies around the consideration given to previous health assessments undertaken during a veteran’s time in service must be taken into account fully and properly.

This is the right time to make changes. The armed forces compensation scheme will be reviewed this year, and major work is being done to digitise the schemes. Now is the time: the opportunities are there to lay the groundwork for a better system, including by addressing the recommendations of the previous five-yearly reviews in 2010 and 2017.

All these actions are necessary, but without an independent inquiry to lay the foundations of a new approach, the MOD risks tinkering around the edges. I appreciate that not all these issues can be fixed with the wave of a magic wand; I do not think anyone would expect that. Reforming the treatment of veterans will be

a long process. But that could start now with an inquiry, simply to recognise what has gone wrong, learn from the mistakes and understand how we can do better.

I urge the Minister to take this call seriously and bring forward plans for an inquiry. Our veterans deserve our respect. They deserve better than what they are currently receiving. They deserve an independent inquiry, and a new system that recognises their humanity. I urge hon. Members to support this call.

8.57 pm

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): I commend the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) for securing this debate. When he asked me to speak, it was hard to refuse. There are reasons for that. First, I am a veteran myself, along with my good and right hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart). I am a co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on veterans and also have the privilege of chairing the Armed Forces Bill Select Committee. I have a vested interest in this important issue.

The first thing I want to say is that there are 2.2 million veterans or thereabouts in the UK. The fact is that they are not all mad, bad or sad: the vast majority live life perfectly successfully and happily, and are doing very well indeed. I do not know many officers or soldiers who are sleeping under Waterloo bridge, but we cannot deny the problem because we know that there is one.

My point is that although the vast majority of veterans are being looked after and doing really well, a percentage of them have an issue. Whether that is 5% or 8% depends on what we read, but some among us are identified as being in bad health and there is no question at all but that we have a moral responsibility to help those who have served in our armed forces. That is a no-brainer, and it must happen. But maybe there is a disconnect in respect of what they expect of us in society and what they are not getting.

The armed forces compensation scheme is a good scheme that has much to be commended. It is a great scheme, and I commend those volunteers who work within it—the assessors, medical staff, and all those who make it happen and do the best they can to improve the lot of our veterans. Yes, there are some examples of where the scheme has not provided sufficient care for those in need. We heard a bit about that earlier, and inboxes for all MPs are a barometer of what might be lurking out there. I feel fortunate in Bracknell, but I know other colleagues are not so fortunate with what they get in their inboxes. That encourages us to action, as we have to make the appropriate interventions.

There are situations where veterans can be penalised if they are getting better, and a lot of the assessments come down to the day on which someone is assessed. Are they having a good day or a bad day? Are they showing an improvement this week? There is an inconsistency with the assessments, and we know that some veterans have been wrongfully assessed. Mental health problems can go under the radar. Some veterans do not want to present with mental health problems, and they keep things to themselves. I commend Op COURAGE, the fantastic new initiative being led by the MOD and the Office for Veterans’ Affairs. It is brilliant. We had a read-out last week at the all-party group on veterans, and the stuff that is happening is really good. We are moving in the right direction.

[James Sunderland]

There is no question in my mind that in the main, MOD pensions, war pensions and armed forces compensation scheme payments are generous and fair. It is a good scheme that befits those who have undertaken armed service. Anecdotally, as we have heard, there may be an issue, and that is what I want briefly to scratch now. I find myself in the strange predicament of suggesting that we may have a problem and that there may be a solution, but that we do not know what that solution might be because we have not defined the problem. That is our first task: what is that problem, and how deep does it go? It is easy to admire the problem, but as politicians we should be focused on the solution.

Veterans UK fulfils a vital function for the MOD, but it assesses and it awards, and it may be that marking one's own homework brings its own problems. Is the problem systematic? It may be—we do not know. About 2,500 veterans are believed to be in this trap—let us call it the assessment and award trap. Are they presenting better? Are they presenting worse? Once again, it depends what day we look. Can we separate out those functions? When the next armed forces Bill is discussed in 2026, perhaps it could include a clause on that. Perhaps, as the hon. Member for Midlothian said earlier, we need to appoint an independent assessor versus Veterans UK. Perhaps there is an enhanced role for our service charities, such as the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association, the British Legion, and Combat Stress. Perhaps we could do a lot more with our armed forces champions. Perhaps local councils could intervene.

Perhaps, however, we need another solution altogether, such as veterans advisory and pensions committees. Hon. Members might recall that during the passage of the Armed Forces Bill in 2021, Lord Lancaster tabled an amendment in the other place to get the Bill to incorporate the functions of veterans advisory and pensions committees, to include all functions covered by the covenant, and to get a change to the current statutory instrument. He withdrew that amendment because the Government offered a concession to draft a Government-sponsored handout Bill—perhaps a private Member's Bill—in the next Session of Parliament. We may face that in due course, which I would welcome.

What does that actually mean? In brief, VAPCs are regional statutory committees—nine in England, two in Scotland, one in Wales and one in Northern Ireland—that have been established by a statutory instrument under section 25 of the Social Security Act 1989. It seems perfect—social security Act, statutory body, one can see the connection straightaway. The VAPC handbook, published by the MOD, states that each VAPC is an advisory non-departmental body that acts independently of its sponsor department, the MOD—you can see where we are going with this. Currently, VAPCs cannot be given functions relating to all veterans, because that is outside the extent of the enabling power which limits the functions of VAPCs to war pensions, armed forces compensation scheme benefits, those claiming and receiving them, and their families. Well, guess what? That is what we are talking about, so it may be that the VAPCs are perfectly placed to do that bit of work within their existing statute, or it might be that an amendment, such as the one proposed in 2021, would give VAPCs a power

to be given functions relating to all veterans. It is a neat trick and an easy one to amend, so again I commend it to the House.

Importantly, VAPCs could be given a statutory role, subject to resources and perhaps supported by the charities and the NHS, to provide a voice of reason for Veterans UK, perhaps as some kind of independent assessor, critical friend or voice of conscience. I regret that at this point in time I do not have a ready solution in terms of the mechanism by which that might take place, but it stands to reason from what we said earlier this evening that it is worthy of consideration. I believe that VAPCs could be really important in this particular area to provide that link and that voice of conscience with Veterans UK.

Ultimately, before I finish, anything that resolves the loose ends and allows us to get granularity on what veterans are currently facing, and anything that allows us to dig deeper and understand that there is an institutional systemic problem, is to be welcomed. Anything that we do in this country in support of veterans is to be applauded.

9.6 pm

Ms Anum Qaisar (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) on securing this important debate, and I start my contribution by paying tribute to the veterans from my constituency of Airdrie and Shotts, which has a long military history. We must do all we can to support those who have made immense sacrifices.

As my hon. Friend stated, the current process for claiming war pensions and armed forces compensation scheme payments is simply not fit for purpose. It drives many veterans to give up on their claims. The process is complex, there is a lack of transparency, and they are very often faced with extended delays. Those issues have led to a severe deterioration in the mental health of many veterans. They have driven many into poverty and increased the risk of suicide. It is currently believed that there are thousands of individuals suffering such issues while awaiting a final decision. This issue is not an isolated factor impacting the mental health of our veterans. In fact, it raises wider issues around the military's treatment of the mental health of veterans, along with occupational wellbeing such as pensions.

There is an issue very specific to one of my constituents. Over a significant period of time, she has been writing to her elected MP—me and my predecessors—for Airdrie and Shotts. She spoke to me recently about her son. She told me that her son joined the trade and supply branch of the forces in May 1988 and remained in service for a number of years. He was in consultation with doctors over his back pains. However, doctors repeatedly dismissed his pains and appeared unsympathetic. Despite protesting that he was unwell, he was placed back on to normal duties. He was deployed again and took part in a number of exercises with full kit, despite those back pains. When he arrived back in the UK and spoke to doctors, they again dismissed his claims that the training had exacerbated his pain and said that a previous car accident was to blame. At that time, my constituent's son was unable to sleep without prescribed medical treatment. This specific case goes further and I am short of time, but the story of my constituent and her son really does get to the heart of how we treat our veterans in terms of their wellbeing, be it their mental health or their occupational wellbeing, such as receiving pensions.

My constituent's son sadly died in 2011, despite his specific case being raised a number of times on these very Benches by four different MPs for Airdrie and Shotts. What is still abundantly clear is that despite veterans sacrificing so much for this country, the UK Government are simply not ensuring that mental health and occupational wellbeing, such as pensions for veterans, are a priority.

In the Scottish Parliament, the SNP has established a £1.7 million Scottish veterans fund to support projects that provide a wide range of advice and practical support to veterans across Scotland. In Scotland, we have also appointed a Scottish Veterans Commissioner, who is the first person to hold such a position across all four nations.

We in the SNP believe that veterans are an asset to our society and deserve the best possible care. I applaud my Airdrie and Shotts veterans for their immense sacrifices, and I believe that all veterans deserve to be fairly compensated for injury, illness and death caused by their time in the armed forces.

9.10 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) on his tenacity in campaigning on this issue for some time. I also congratulate him on securing this debate and on his introduction to it, which exposed the injustices and the flaws in the current system. I have had experiences of the system through one constituent in particular, but it is clear that he has uncovered a whole range of systematic flaws. Those who have served our country and made sacrifices deserve a system that is fair and supportive to them. He was right to say that we should consider it a matter of shame that we do not have that, and I pay tribute to his work in this area.

I want to talk about my experiences with the system—particularly in relation to a constituent of mine, David Cottrell, whom we discussed in an Adjournment debate more than three years ago—and why there are still issues today. I recognise that covid-19 has caused delays in dealing with claims, but that does not excuse the delays and the errors that have been made by Veterans UK in losing documents on two occasions and taking more than six months simply to copy paperwork. My constituent does not feel as though his claim and subsequent appeal are being treated fairly when he sees that happening regularly.

I know that the Royal British Legion is calling for the direct lodgement process, which is available in Scotland, to be extended to England and Wales. That would allow appeals to be sent directly to Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service, rather than having to go through Veterans UK. In the legion's experience, direct lodgement is more efficient. That is of little surprise given that the customer journey, as it is called, via the current route represents a 13-stage process with the involvement of Veterans UK. Direct lodgement would also provide reassurance about the independence of the tribunals service, which is currently lacking, particularly for my constituent.

When we consider that over the last 10 years, more than 60% of war pension appeals have been unsuccessful—in comparison, 37% of personal independence payment appeals are unsuccessful—we can begin to see why veterans feel as though the process is not working for them.

Essentially, we ask people to apply to Veterans UK and then, if that decision is wrong, to go back to Veterans UK to appeal and wait for it to decide whether a review is possible. At that stage, if there is no change, the case worker at Veterans UK must have prepared appeal papers, which are then passed on to the reprographics department. Only at that point are they sent to the tribunals service. I think anyone can see how the appeal process is overly convoluted.

The involvement of Veterans UK, which is the subject of the appeal, risks, at the very least, the perception of a conflict of interest. Of course, it is reasonable for a mechanism to allow review without the need for a tribunal hearing, and of course it is necessary for Veterans UK to provide its response to the appeal. However, both those matters could be dealt with under a different system. It seems plain to me that introducing direct lodgement would be at least a step forward for veterans in England and Wales, and I hope the Government will take that request on board. I struggle to think of any truly independent appeal process in which an appeal must first go through the body that is being appealed against. I really do not know what that adds to the process and, as we have heard, it creates more concern and problems.

There is a focus at the moment on ensuring that those waiting get their cases to tribunal can do so with as little delay as possible, following the closure of the service for a significant period during the pandemic. I am pleased that the Government have committed to reducing waiting times, but the Royal British Legion has said that it is essential that, as the default provider of representation, it has the capacity to deliver its services to those who need support. I understand that following some discussions, there has been a little slowing down to enable hearings to match the legion's capacity. However, there is a question mark about how long that arrangement will last, so I ask for some assurances that any attempts to clear the backlog are done with the welfare of veterans at heart to ensure that they are properly represented.

Clearly we all want veterans' appeals heard as soon as possible, but it is vital that they come out of that process feeling that they have been properly represented and their cases have been properly heard. In the context of the repeated concerns about independence, it would be a cause of concern if the acceleration of the clearing of the backlog hindered the legion or any other provider from providing the representation that veterans need.

On a slightly tangential point, I am sure that many Members will, when contacting organisations, have had challenges about whether they have their constituents' consent. As we all know—indeed, we commonly quote it—statutory instrument No. 2905 of 2002 covers the authority of MPs to act on behalf of their constituents. It has therefore been a source of frustration that Veterans UK seems to be unaware of that provision. We have managed to get that resolved, but it does not show an organisation that is particularly customer-focused.

It is accepted that the pandemic has caused delays to the normal functions of the application, assessment, and appeals process, but I was concerned to see that the number of claims made to the war pensions and armed forces compensation scheme dropped by almost 40% from 2019-20. While we must acknowledge the impact that the pandemic had on that, it is notable that the decrease in personal independence payment applications for the same period was much less at around 27%.

[Justin Madders]

Perhaps the decision to prioritise PIP assessments by alternative means, while the war pensions process ground to a halt, offers some explanation, but it feels to many that the system for war pensions was simply closed for a period of time.

From April to August 2020, there were 200,000 PIP assessments, yet not one war pension medical assessment took place. In Mr Cottrell's case, that meant a decision was made on his claim without a medical assessment report, and the decision maker specifically referred in the decision notice to having to decide on the claim in lieu of such evidence—the implication being that the decision may have been different if an assessment had taken place. Mr Cottrell certainly believes that to be the case.

The feedback I have received from those navigating the war pensions process is that veterans feel they are an afterthought, and the comparison with how PIP is dealt with certainly makes them feel that way. The DWP does not apply a target time for the clearance of war pensions claims. My understanding from the last question on the subject is that the average time is 127 working days, or six months. For Mr Cottrell, who was also claiming PIP, the difference in approach was stark. His PIP renewal claim in 2020 was dealt with within 18 days. It is reasonable to ask why the same standards cannot apply to war pensions.

I am told that the vastly different timeframes are based on the long-term performance of the war pensions scheme, and that will remain the case

“until the digitisation and transformation of the WPS is complete in 2023”.

That essentially means there will be little improvement for veterans for at least another year while that digitisation process takes place. It is perhaps unsurprising that veterans do not feel they are being given much priority and that they feel like an afterthought. The schemes designed to ensure they can access the financial support they need through their pensions are lagging behind numerous social security benefits, and that is together with the fact that we are now in the third year of waiting for the digital answer to the veterans ID card. That is another example of how veterans feel they are not being treated as a priority.

I would like to conclude with Mr Cottrell's own words. He asks that the Government

“meet some Veterans and ask them what they think of the service Veterans UK provide to people who have served this Country and have been damaged either physically or mentally by their service”.

As we have shown and heard today, it is not possible to discuss the war pensions and armed forces compensation scheme without looking at the role and performance of Veterans UK, so I would like the Minister to commit to listening to constituents such as mine, veterans such as Mr Cottrell, and to addressing their concerns, in order to drive some improvements in the service, because we all believe that veterans deserve the very best service in these areas, as in every other service they use, as a thank you for their service and duty over many years.

9.20 pm

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): It is good to follow the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders). Perhaps there will be a

certain type of reply to his final question, because I asked the Minister this morning about the Army's future soldier programme and how it engages with those in what we weirdly call the “ordinary ranks”. I think the answer to him will be the same as the one to me about veterans engaging in this process—I got a less than effusive response this morning.

I wish to speak in this debate and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) because I know the case of his constituent Garry and because, having been on the Defence Committee for a number of years—it is always good to see its former Chair, the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis,) with us—I wish to follow up on a couple of issues. Not only that, but my nephew is a member of the Royal Engineers and is now extending his time in the armed forces, and I am delighted for him. As the Minister will know, he was my brother's commanding officer for at least one of his tours of Afghanistan, my brother being a reservist; so much of the backbone of the armed forces is in the reserves, but we will come on to that in a wee minute. I may also take up the points made by the hon. Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland) about chairing the Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill last year. Was it last year?

James Sunderland: It was 2021.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: It was 2021, yes. The hon. Gentleman had to do that online, and I congratulate him on that. A range of issues similar to those faced by Garry, the constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian, consistently came up; here we are in the 21st century and members of the armed forces of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland require us to stand and have these debates. They require us to stand and say how wonderful it is for charities to support them—charity! I find that extraordinary. I am more a fan of the Danish model, where a member of the armed forces, no matter their rank and how long they have been in the armed forces, receives the same treatment as every other citizen, because the treatment is that good that they do not need anything different and they do not need to rely on charity.

I know that many of the charitable organisations that support members of the armed forces—there are a lot of them—do a power of work and have done for a number of years. Many of them have done this for a very long time, such as the Royal British Legion, Poppyscotland and others. When it comes to issues such as war pensions and armed forces compensation pay schemes, I wonder to myself, “Is it really up to charities or even the body itself, the war pensions armed forces scheme, to be part of this process, to the exclusion not only of veterans, but of members of the armed forces themselves?” That comes back to the crux of the matter.

I know that Conservative Members will disagree with what I am about to say, but I am glad that the Labour party decided at the last election to agree with the SNP on the requirement for an armed forces representative body. That is the missing cog in this wheel. We see that time and again. For example, if we go back to the extraordinary report led by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Sarah Atherton), through the Defence Committee, on women in the armed forces, we see that a clear clarion

call about the treatment of women was that women in the “ordinary ranks” were not being listened to. We see the exact same thing when it comes to terms and conditions or the future armed services programme: no one is listening to the ordinary ranks. I am in disbelief that we are still going through the old conundrum.

If we look at so many of the armed forces across the NATO alliance, we see that because they have independent armed forces representative bodies like a police federation, without the right to strike—apart from in the Netherlands, where people have that right—they are able to move forward in agreement, in negotiation with their Governments. In the Scandinavian model and, notably, in Denmark, we see that this also comes with the vast majority of Parliament agreeing a set-out programme over a period, for example, a parliamentary term. So there is engagement, discussion, debate and agreement about treatment and terms and conditions, including pensions.

It beggars belief that nearly 80 years after the second world war, we are still talking about veterans as though they were charity cases. It is extraordinary that 21st-century parliamentarians are still having this type of debate, no matter how good or well intentioned the charities are that provide so much support. However, as someone who worked in charities before coming to Parliament, I was always trying to do myself out of a job. I know, frankly, that that will go down like a lead balloon with some, but the reality is that the failure to move forward with engagement, discussion, deliberation and agreement continues to fail veterans. It will continue to fail veterans now, as well as people such as my nephew who will be veterans at some point. I hope that, by that time, we will have moved forward and will have an independent armed forces representative body.

9.25 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) on securing this debate. It is a pleasure to speak in it, just as it is to follow the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes), who is certainly the soldier's champion on union issues. It is very important to have the ordinary soldier represented in this place. It is nice to see in the Chamber the chair of the all-party party group on veterans, the hon. Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland), and I thank him for all he does for veterans. I also look forward to the Minister's response. I know that, deep in his heart, he has a love for and an interest in veterans, and he is in post because he does it well. However, we have to highlight the issues that need reiterating and we look to him for a helpful response tonight, as we always do.

I declare an interest as a former part-time soldier in the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Artillery for some 14 and a half years. I also pay special tribute to my Strangford constituents, who have always been strong supporters of all the services—especially the Army, as well as the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy.

Members will be under no illusion about my view on our armed forces. I am supremely proud of them and supremely embarrassed about their treatment by this so-called grateful nation. It is critical that we remember the importance of the armed forces compensation scheme, which was born out of the need to support large numbers

of service personnel and their families as a result of the fatalities and injuries sustained in operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Thankfully, the military are not as exposed operationally now as they were then, although if Putin continues as he has started, we may find that we have a need for their training, services and sacrifices once more. Regardless of the machinations of that despot, however, the scheme is still critical.

The lasting impact on soldiers is incredibly clear, and I have many constituents who have post-traumatic stress disorder. I know them all well but I know one particularly well, and he is absolutely on edge with the talk of war and in regard to whether he would ever be called back into service. How many more are retraumatised with the scenes on our screens at present, reminding them of the last war on terror that we entered into and the dreadful price that they still pay for their service?

I do not know whether hon. Members had a chance to see the programme on Channel 4 last night on the Falklands war. If they did, I gently remind them that even though the war began 40 years ago on 2 April, many, many of those who served in the Falklands war are traumatised and have PTSD. We saw examples on TV last night that brought it all back. That was 40 years ago, but people are still living all those experiences in a very difficult way.

Bob Stewart: I thank my good friend for giving way. Although he has not mentioned this, I remind the House that one heck of a lot of people were damaged in Northern Ireland. It was more than all the other wars put together, actually, and we must not forget the Northern Ireland veterans who are still suffering. They need to be looked after just as much as someone from Iraq or Afghanistan.

Jim Shannon: The right hon. and gallant Gentleman reminds us all of the conflict and the 30-year war against the IRA in Northern Ireland, where he and others in this Chamber served gallantly and expertly for us. He is right that there are many in Northern Ireland who still live those battles every day and fight the demons that attack them. I served alongside many people on whom the trauma of what they saw, what they endured and the friends they lost left a lasting impression; unfortunately, some took their own lives. That is a salient reminder of what the right hon. Gentleman is saying, and I know that from his own experiences he can confirm it better than most in this Chamber. I thank him from the bottom of my heart for all that he did for us in Northern Ireland.

One of my concerns is that when the scheme was envisaged, the number of beneficiaries was not accounted for in the mechanisms designed to deliver it, which has resulted in unacceptable delays in sorting out payments. The additional pressure of trying to jump through the hoops is putting more strain on those who are already physically and mentally suffering. That needs to be addressed completely.

I thank charities such as SSAFA, the Royal British Legion, Help for Heroes and particularly Beyond the Battlefield, a charity in my constituency that will have the first centre in Northern Ireland dedicated especially for veterans to go and stay. I have invited the Minister to come along and open it, probably in May, and I very much look forward to that.

[Jim Shannon]

The scheme appears to focus on one-off payments, but the reality is that many who have suffered life-changing injuries have conditions that are evolving and deteriorating and that necessitate coming back to the scheme for additional payments. That has not been well handled; reassessments appear to be taking too long and are often hamstrung by an over-complex process in which veterans and their families have been placed at the periphery, not the heart. Instead of being about the outcome, it is all about the process, which is the wrong way round.

That leads me on to another concern, which is that the process is not independent enough. In effect, medical professionals funded by the MOD through Veterans UK are marking their own homework, with insufficient scrutiny applied to the process, the outcomes and the appeals. To be clear, my main concern is that Veterans UK is insufficiently resourced to manage the scheme effectively and that veterans and their families are suffering directly.

It is clear that Veterans UK is being asked to do too many things at once, with insufficient staffing, an outdated IT system and an over-reliance on paper-based records. It is not networked up with other agencies such as the NHS, the Department for Work and Pensions or the judiciary overseeing appeals, so paperwork, medical reports, appeals and so on are all taking far too long. The much-heralded digitisation of Veterans UK is underfunded, unambitious and already running well behind. The likelihood is that by the time the process is complete, long backlogs will have built up with veterans waiting needlessly for outcomes: the technology will have moved on, but yet again veterans will be lagging behind.

I further point out to the Minister that Veterans UK is operating without defined priorities, so veterans awaiting the outcome of the armed forces compensation scheme are competing with veterans awaiting that of the war pensions scheme. Both groups are up against myriad veterans who are appealing previous outcomes or making complaints about poor processes or medical diagnoses from Veterans UK that are at odds with their own NHS consultants' reports. They, in turn, are in the same queue as veterans waiting for the long-promised veterans' ID card, which is being issued only to service leavers, not to veterans.

I am conscious that the three Front Benchers need to wind up, so I will conclude. The very existence of Veterans UK at its HQ at Norcross, where all these schemes and complaints are supposed to be managed, has been subject to a review. I support the scheme, as I think we all do, but we want to see it doing better. Like other hon. Members, I have only briefly been able to highlight the practical operational issues that show that change is needed, and needed soon.

It is time to get it right. Improvement is needed, and our veterans deserve better. These men and women have offered their all. There is no excuse for such treatment under a scheme that is designed only to help. I look forward to hearing how the Minister and his Department will address my and all our concerns and, more importantly, how they will provide the resources that are critical to doing better, enabling the scheme to work and operate well, as it is supposed to.

9.34 pm

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) on securing this important debate. I think that most of us who have spoken this evening understand that the system needs some reformation.

It is of course at times like these, when we see the desperate scenes of the war in Ukraine, that we realise that conflict is never very far away. I wish to pay tribute to the efforts of our armed forces, in the knowledge that military service does not come without cost. It can mean life-changing injuries, it can mean complex mental health issues, and it can, sadly, lead to death. It is for that very reason that the war pensions and armed forces compensation schemes exist. The state has an undeniable responsibility to care for those who have protected it, as my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian made clear when he said that the burden of the harm should be carried by the state and not by the veteran. Providing compensation is the very least we can do for those who have given so much.

My hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Ms Qaisar) highlighted the issues experienced by her constituent, whose son sadly took his life. She also talked about the Scottish Veterans Fund, which the Scottish Government have set up. This is an important commitment to the health and wellbeing of our veteran community. My hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) said that he found it extraordinary that charities were still filling in the gaps where the UK Government were missing. He never misses an opportunity to talk about the armed forces representative body. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) described it as a union, but with the specific difference that members of this body would not have the ability to strike that we see in many other countries. In that respect, it would be much more like the Police Federation. It would, however, allow members of the serving and veteran communities to raise issues, although not through their superiors or those in their immediate line of duty.

The hon. Member for Strangford talked about his pride in the armed forces community, but he also talked about post-traumatic stress disorder and how it could be escalated by the scenes that we are seeing in Ukraine. We have to be aware of the fact that re-traumatisation can happen, and it can be caused by the processes of application for war pensions and subsequent appeals.

The UK Government continue to fall short, and stand guilty of putting cost cutting ahead of compensation. The stories that we have heard this evening are not isolated. Thousands of veterans have been affected by a protracted claims and appeals process. The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) talked about the time that these claims were taking, and said that we owed it to our veterans to speed the process up. Some veterans have sadly taken their own lives during the long wait for a decision from the War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Tribunal.

It is concerning to hear reports that Veterans UK and Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service have been prioritising reducing waiting times over the experience of those undergoing an appeal. Of course we agree that waiting times must be reduced, but that must be done in a considered manner that does not further disadvantage those who are going through the process. The Royal

British Legion, which is the default provider of representation for veterans at tribunal hearings, has said:

“early this year, in order for the Courts and Tribunals Service to meet their existing Key Performance Indicator of 75% of cases disposed of within 20 weeks, cases were being listed at an ever-increasing rate, outstripping the Royal British Legion’s capacity to provide representation and leaving us unable to represent vulnerable injured veterans and bereaved spouses requesting support.”

This is a pertinent issue, given that there is no legal requirement for an appellant to have representation. Questions must be answered with regard to the impartiality surrounding Veterans UK’s medical assessments.

I want to highlight three issues this evening. The first is the practice of the same medical assessor assessing a veteran’s claim at three separate stages of the process, instead of separate or different assessors being used to ensure the impartiality of opinions and a range of opinions. The second is the ability of medical assessors to overturn medical specialist diagnosis in order to deny claims. If an individual has medical specialist information and reports, they should take priority over the opinion of a medical assessor who does not have a knowledge of that individual. The third involves the concerning reports of medical evidence and paperwork being removed from veterans’ evidence bundles during the tribunal process.

Specific groups of veterans have been neglected, and I want to speak briefly about the British nuclear test veterans. My hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian spoke extensively about the trauma-informed approach. The nuclear test veterans, in their struggle for recognition and compensation, have experienced a system that is re-traumatising, rather than trauma informed. The ongoing issues that veterans have experienced on a broader scale are reflected in the Veterans UK customer satisfaction survey, with the majority saying that they could not rely on the Veterans Welfare Service or the Defence Transition Service to do what they said they would do. The hon. Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland) talked about Veterans UK marking its own homework, and I think that is a phrase many of us would recognise.

What would we like to see? An independent inquiry is needed into the failings of the current system, which is pushing veterans into poverty and into mental health crisis. This must be a starting point towards implementing a trauma-informed approach to compensation. The review should include introducing a requirement that each veteran has access to a professional advocate to assist them through the application and the appeals process, and implementing a process of direct lodgement in England and Wales, as is already the case in Scotland.

Finally, there are other unresolved issues surrounding pensions and compensation that require urgent attention, from the LGBT veterans who were impacted by the historical ban on LGBT people in the armed forces to the veterans living abroad who are affected by the injustice of frozen pensions. I appeal to the Minister to make the necessary reforms to ensure that no veteran is disadvantaged as a result of their service and that all veterans have access to the financial support to which they are entitled.

9.43 pm

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) on his campaigning on this issue and on securing this

important debate. As a country, we are all incredibly proud of our ex-servicemen and women. They have performed the ultimate public service, and if this has caused serious injury, illness or death, veterans and their families deserve to be fairly compensated. At the moment, however, far too many veterans are being denied the payments they are entitled to, leaving them at risk of poor mental health, poverty and the feeling of being let down by the country they have served with distinction.

At the heart of this issue is Veterans UK, which is in charge both of war pensions and of the armed forces compensation scheme. It is allowed to mark its own homework, as the hon. Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland) said, because it is responsible for both assessing claims and awarding any payments. Indeed, according to its own customer satisfaction survey, 80 % were not happy with the service, as was highlighted by the hon. Member for Midlothian. So building on the contributions of hon. Members today, I am going to address the delays in the process, the burden of proof that the system places on our veterans, and the reasons that current Government plans do not go far enough in solving these problems. Since 2009, successful applications to the armed forces compensation scheme have fallen from 62% to 46%, while rejections have risen from 30% to 40%. At the same time, average clearance times for claims have risen to more than 100 days for both the AFCS and war pensions, with war pension wait times missing the Government target since 2011. This means that, over the last decade, our veterans have been forced to wait longer by months, not weeks, only to be more likely to be rejected by their compensation schemes.

The first stage of the application is just the beginning, however. For veterans who feel they have been unfairly rejected, a lengthy and difficult appeal system awaits. Here, rather than Veterans UK having to prove an injury or illness is not related to service, veterans are tasked with the burden of proving it is. Too often, veterans have to rely on forces charities. As brilliant as they are, this should not be necessary, as the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) said so passionately.

In a document that was also submitted to the Select Committee on Defence in 2021, the forces organisation Justice4Troops shared with us the following examples. Bruce Menzies was medically discharged in March 2020 with complex PTSD. He had a formal diagnosis, but his compensation claim was rejected, with the statement that his diagnosis was due to his “personality” and “genetics.” Bruce became homeless in May 2020 and faced a sharp deterioration in his health, becoming hospitalised.

Justine Montgomery joined the RAF with no pre-existing conditions. She sustained an injury to her right knee while in service. She was medically discharged, left unable to walk and in need of strong pain and nerve medications for the rest of her life. Her application for compensation was also rejected. She described the process as

“tedious, draining and near enough impossible to complete let alone progress with.”

Roy Shirlaw was an RAF engineer. He was injured on operations in 2011, resulting in surgery on his back. He was discouraged from making a claim, and when he did it was rejected as he was deemed to be “not on duty.”

[Stephanie Peacock]

This was later overturned on appeal, but his claim was still only partially accepted and the injuries were deemed to be not severe enough to qualify for compensation. Ten years after his initial injury, he is still stuck in the appeals process.

Each of these three people was medically discharged by the forces, but somehow they ended up unable to prove their worthiness for a scheme designed for injured and unwell ex-forces personnel. Veterans are not medical experts, yet they are forced, over and over again, to try to prove the extent of their injuries, with many ending up stuck in the system for years and many forced to give up entirely, as the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Ms Qaisar) highlighted.

As has been mentioned, nuclear veterans have an even harder time than most in claiming compensation. The BNTVA and Labrats campaign groups and the *Daily Mirror* report that they are forced to prove that each and every medical condition is caused specifically by radiation, rather than being a result of service generally. Given that they had flown through mushroom clouds, cleared up debris and crawled through the fallout of nuclear bombs as Britain tested our atomic weapons for the first time, the latest National Radiological Protection Board study on the health of these veterans found that they were more likely to have and die from chronic myeloid leukaemia and several cancers, as well as being at a greater risk of self-harm. However, with limited medical records available from the time of the tests, proving their exposure to radiation and claiming compensation is a near-impossible task for these veterans, many of whom died before being able to claim a single penny. It is time the Government properly recognised our nuclear test veterans. We are the only country in the world not to do so. The Prime Minister should meet them, as he promised, and give them the recognition they deserve.

Money to address inefficiencies and digitalise Veterans UK is important but, for the veterans who have had their health, wellbeing and happiness taken from them, an online form rather than a paper one will be little consolation. In the last few days, Veterans UK has updated its site with flowcharts and the promise of bitesize videos to come. This is not a replacement for ensuring the compensation system is transparent, fair, impartial and consistent all the way through. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) spoke powerfully about how we need to make sure Veterans UK is properly resourced.

I conclude with these questions for the Minister. What is he doing to ensure that veterans who are already dealing with illnesses, disabilities and injuries do not have to fight for the compensation that is rightfully theirs? Does he support an independent review into how Veterans UK operates and what improvements can be made, and is he considering direct lodgement, as advocated by the Royal British Legion and outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders)?

It is a question of ensuring that every veteran gets a fair and impartial chance to claim the compensation they are entitled to, having dedicated their lives to serving our country. The Government have a duty of

care to our ex-forces personnel. If Ministers continue to ignore those issues, they will be failing in that duty and failing our veterans.

9.49 pm

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Leo Docherty): I am very grateful to the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) for securing this important debate. I thank him for the words he spoke about his constituent, and we thank his constituent for his service; I look forward to continuing that correspondence, which I know to be of long standing.

The hon. Gentleman rightly pointed out that this is a relevant debate, given events in Ukraine, and pointed out that wars are fought not by armies, but by individuals. That is a very good point, and I agree that we must show compassion, recognition and respect. I must say that I do not concur with his overwhelmingly damning indictment of the system as it stands, but it is important that we are always seeking improvement. We are seeking improvement first in the speed of a claim, but also in customer service. However, I reiterate that this is not about saving money.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC) *rose*—

Leo Docherty: I will give way very briefly, but we are pushed for time.

Liz Saville Roberts: The Minister is talking about constant improvements. I rise on behalf of my constituent, who in 2018 received a pension benefit forecast with an annual Army pension and a terminal benefit. In July last year he was told, in a letter from the Ministry of Defence, that he was no longer eligible for an Army pension. I wrote to the Minister in July last year on his behalf, but I have had neither acknowledgment nor reply. I have tried on many occasions to raise this matter, and I am now doing so in the Chamber. Will the Minister commit to meeting me to discuss my constituent's case?

Leo Docherty: We will pursue that immediately. I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for the opportunity.

We will seek to improve speed and quality. We will not be just tinkering in the way we improve things; we are serious, because we know that we will be judged on our failures in this regard. I will briefly mention contributions by other hon. Members before I get on to putting some of the broader issues in context.

I was grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland), who has a long-standing interest in this field. He talked about our moral responsibility to veterans—I agree with him—and his interesting ideas about the role of the VAPCs offer food for thought. The hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Ms Qaisar) raised the very concerning case of her constituent, and mentioned the good work of the Scottish Veterans Commissioner. I join her in commending that role.

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) also raised a constituent's case, and spoke about the convoluted nature of the process. I accept that that is the case, and that is exactly what we want to change by moving away from the paper process. The hon. Member—my honourable friend—for West

Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) mentioned the important role of service charities, but I would argue that they augment the role of the state rather than replacing it, and we should be very proud of that.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) rightly highlighted his concerns about his constituents in Northern Ireland. I look forward to visiting him there soon. The hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) called for the reform of the war pensions system, and that is exactly what we are getting after. I was grateful for the variety of comments made by the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock), who made a range of points, some of which I will address now.

First, I must set the context. We must bear it in mind that Veterans UK makes 106,000 monthly payments to recipients of the war pensions scheme and the armed forces compensation scheme. Those payments are tax free and linked to inflation through the consumer prices index. There are around 6,500 applications and 1,000 appeals and reconsiderations currently being processed. I am just trying to give a sense of the scale.

All that costs Her Majesty's Government £736.3 million a year, £652 million under the war pensions scheme and £84.3 million under the armed forces compensation scheme. It is an operation of huge scale, and justifiably so, because it recognises the scale of the service of our magnificent veterans' community, which comprises more than 2 million people, but in an organisation of that size there will of course be some cases that do not get the appropriate level of service.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Will the Minister find time to update the House on the progress of a small-scale matter but an important one—the cohort of about 250 war widows who lost their pensions on co-habitation or remarriage and did not get them back when the law changed?

Leo Docherty: My right hon. Friend has been a long-standing campaigner on this. I hope we are making progress and I look forward to meeting him soon to update him.

Of the 106,000 awards, 154 complaints were received, so that is a 0.1% failure rate. Of course any failure is unsatisfactory and we want to reduce that number to absolutely zero, but I am just trying to give a sense of the scale of the system. The staff at Norcross are working their hardest in difficult conditions, and they do receive significant numbers of thank-yous, so I should put that on the record. It is a real problem that they are working with an antiquated system of paper records from many different sources of information that they have to bring together. The armed forces compensation scheme now has an average target time to resolve cases of 90 days, which is being met, and the war pensions scheme has an average target time of 127 days, which is falling short, but that is because they are trying to get rid of the backlog, which we all seek to clear, as the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston asked. We should do that with empathy and thoroughness. The future will be better. We recognise that we can do more. That is why we are injecting £40 million into digitising both schemes, which will result in a quicker process. The pilot that has just taken place resulted in something that previously took six weeks with the paper system

now taking six hours. We hope that the new digital system will launch at the end of 2023.

In tandem with those mechanical and procedural improvements, we are cognisant that we must inject more empathy into the process. Veterans UK is therefore conducting lived-experience roundtables bringing together veterans directly with its staff to hear about their service and adjusting their customer service style accordingly. On that note, I ask the hon. Member for Midlothian, on the back of this debate, if he would like to engage with the staff at Vets UK to try to be a part of the solution. We would be very grateful and I would look forward to affording that opportunity.

We are determined to improve the service to all those in receipt of payments from both schemes because they deserve nothing less than a first-rate service, as they deserve the gratitude and respect of the whole nation.

9.57 pm

Owen Thompson: I thank all hon. Members for their contributions to this debate. I think there is a very great degree of agreement. I do not think that anyone is necessarily saying anything vastly different from anyone else. We all want to see the best outcomes for the veterans who have given service to our nations, but sometimes the system is not working, and we need to do everything that we possibly can to make sure that it works right, whatever that takes. I am encouraged by what the Minister says. I will certainly be keeping a very close eye on what comes next, because we have to get this right. We cannot go on like this. There are veterans who have been put in these situations for decades in trying to get the compensation that they should be receiving, and we should all be endeavouring to ensure that they do. Again, I thank Members for their contributions, and I look forward to seeing what comes next.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House believes that the current process for claiming War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation payments is not fit for purpose and urges the Government to launch an independent inquiry into the system's failings.

Business without Debate

SITTINGS IN WESTMINSTER HALL (19 APRIL)

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 10(2)(b), the sitting in Westminster Hall on Tuesday 19 April shall begin at 11.30 am, shall be suspended from 1.30 pm to 4.30 pm, and may then continue for up to a further three hours.—*(Rebecca Harris.)*

DELEGATED LEGISLATION (SOCIAL SECURITY)

Ordered,

That the Universal Credit and Jobseeker's Allowance (Work Search and Work Availability Requirements - limitations) (Amendment) Regulations 2022 (SI, 2022, No. 108), laid before this House on 7 February 2022 be referred to a Delegated Legislation Committee.—*(Rebecca Harris.)*

PETITION

Abuse of short-term letting

9.58 pm

Nickie Aiken (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): The petition states:

The petition of residents of the constituency of Cities of London and Westminster,

Declares that local authorities should be granted stronger powers to deal with rogue landlords who abuse the short-term lets 90 Day Rule in London.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to introduce an amendment to the 2015 Deregulation Act to allow for a licensing regime in order to practically enforce the 90 Day Rule.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002725]

Lateral Flow Tests in Healthcare Settings

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

10 pm

Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): I am delighted to have secured tonight's Adjournment debate on an important topic for my constituents and people across the country. I feel driven to raise this point again because I do not believe that the Government are adequately considering the most vulnerable. Two weeks ago, I wrote to the Secretary of State on behalf of more than 50 hon. Members of this place and others. We were of all parties—this is not a party political issue but one of fairness and justice—and we were of one mind: that the charge for lateral flow tests would exclude many from a proper part of life in this country.

It is clear to everyone that the fight against covid-19 is not over. The rise of new variants and strains will continue. Researchers and healthcare professionals will develop and deploy new and more effective vaccinations and therapies. I think the Minister will agree that we have to learn to live with covid and that we will not eliminate it tomorrow, but living with it is a death sentence for many. Millions across the UK are clinically extremely vulnerable or have CEV relatives and friends in care homes and medical settings.

Protecting the most vulnerable has been a key aim of public health policy for two years, and that is right.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing forward the debate. I agree with him entirely. Does he agree that it is essential for testing to remain widely accessible for those who are face to face with the most vulnerable in society: the carers, who have been at the forefront of protecting all of us across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland over the last two years? Lateral flow tests are still worth the cost, and they must continue to be available free for all vulnerable people and their carers.

Mr Sharma: I thank the hon. Member for that important intervention. I am sure that the Minister took note of his concerns.

We all know that we are experiencing and facing an increasing cost of living crisis, and earlier this month the Foreign Secretary agreed that the escalating crisis in Ukraine will only drive inflation higher, so in the midst of the most serious cost of living crisis for a generation, with a national insurance tax rise and with covid remaining a global threat, it would be wrong to add a further burden on to families wanting to stay safe from covid and visit friends and families in care settings. The introduction of charges for lateral flow tests risks introducing a serious cost on many for visiting their closest family when those visits mean so much to visitor and host.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing forward the debate. In York, the case rate is now 977.7 per 100,000, 261 patients are in hospital poorly, five more deaths have just been announced and four people are in intensive care, so the virus is far from leaving us. In Labour-run

Wales, an extension to the lateral flow test programme has been announced so that we can know where the virus is, manage it and protect our NHS. Should we not be doing that in England?

Mr Sharma: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. Again, the Minister has taken note. I am certain she will make that comparison and try to assist and to follow the best practices in other parts of the country.

Low-income and frontline workers will be hit the hardest by the introduction of charges, but regular testing is vital to minimise the spread of covid-19. The money saving expert Martin Lewis said last week that he was out of ideas. There is nothing left for families to do. Inflation is just too high. In my constituency, I have spoken to staff and volunteers at Ealing food bank who do amazing work to help those most in need. They are deeply concerned about the move to charge for lateral flow tests. Their service users will have to make the choice between paying to test and heating and eating.

In January, I raised this issue with the then Minister for the Cabinet Office, the right hon. Member for North East Cambridgeshire (Steve Barclay), who agreed that testing

“has played a key role in our response”.—[*Official Report*, 13 January 2022; Vol. 706, c. 629.]

But now we are cutting off that limb of the response. The Government are choosing to weaken their arsenal in the fight and to lessen the effect of two years of hard work and sacrifice.

Even before the newest wave of inflation struck, families in my constituency were struggling to feed themselves. Now it will get only worse, with a cost of £12 for just one pack of tests. At the end of February I asked the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care how much the packs cost his Department, but he could not give me the figures for commercial reasons.

But please, Madam Deputy Speaker, do not think it is just the cost that is the problem: no, it is the fairness too. Throughout the country, nearly 1.5 million people are eligible for treatments such as antivirals if they get covid-19, because the UK Government have identified them as being at the highest risk of severe illness. We know that those people are more at risk, less safe, and less protected by natural or acquired immunity. Around 500,000 of these people are immunocompromised, meaning it is less likely that they receive the same level of protection from covid-19 vaccines. The vaccines have been incredible and have reopened the world for many, but not for everyone. Infection is still a terrifying and uncertain prospect for many of the 500,000 immunocompromised.

There is more. The national health service has worked tirelessly to keep us safe and to save lives. I again pay tribute to the incredible staff of Hillingdon Hospital who did so much for me when I had my own covid infection. They saved my life, and I am eternally grateful to them. What payment to them for two years of danger and worry is it that they will have no certainty that their patients are covid free?

I recall the fuss from Members on the Government Benches when they were asked to wear masks to help to prevent the spread of covid-19. There were ludicrous comments from some. One compared wearing a mask to abuse, agreeing with the statement that masks were “germ or bacteria ridden cloths”.

Well, those in the NHS still have to wear masks for their own safety. Perhaps more testing, and allowing people to take responsibility without having to pay for tests, would allow a few more people in hospitals and GP surgeries to take their masks off.

Rachael Maskell: My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech, I must say, but could I mention care homes as well? People have made huge sacrifices over the last two years in not seeing their loved ones in care homes, and not being able to afford a test will put another barrier in their way. Does my hon. Friend agree that in the care home setting it is vital that relatives have access to tests?

Mr Sharma: I thank my hon. Friend very much, and I was going to talk next about care homes, but her intervention has certainly confirmed my argument and point of view that this is the most important area the Government need to look at very seriously if we want to control the effects of covid-19 on our society.

We could also speak about dentists, whose industry is struggling with the pandemic, while they are driven by targets in NHS contracts that they cannot meet. There is no help from the Government to meet the massive costs of making their practices safer, but now patients are being robbed of the opportunity to test before going to the dentist's. We cannot erase risk, but we can try to minimise it for everyone working in healthcare and in healthcare settings.

We have all gone through so much to combat covid-19, suffered so much and sacrificed so much. I do not argue for lockdowns and closing the economy or closing the country off from the world, but now is the wrong time to cut this specific key lifeline for millions. It is the wrong time to take away peace of mind, and the ability to do the right thing in checking whether we have covid-19 and acting responsibly. I urge the Minister to work with the Chancellor of the Exchequer to find a way to pay for lateral flow tests, and to protect this tool in the fight to ensure that the worst off in society are not cut off from their loved ones and that the most vulnerable feel more secure leaving their homes.

10.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maggie Throup): First, I thank the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr Sharma) for bringing forward this debate about lateral flow tests in healthcare settings. He speaks so passionately about health issues more broadly, and I am grateful for his speech on this important topic today. He has spoken previously about access to covid-19 testing, particularly in specific settings, and I want to put on record my thanks for his contributions on these matters.

As the hon. Member highlighted, the pandemic has provided this country with a monumental challenge. When coronavirus first emerged, we knew very little about it, other than reports that people were becoming seriously ill and, very sadly, passing away. The Government moved quickly with unprecedented measures that affected every single person on these isles, building and scaling up our testing capability to levels not seen before, sponsoring the development of groundbreaking vaccine technology and being the first country in the world to approve a vaccine.

[Maggie Throup]

Our huge thanks go to all those who supported the vaccine roll-out and mass testing. From our NHS staff on the frontline, primary care workers and individuals in the community to the military providing expertise in logistics and planning, colleagues from the private sector and civil servants deployed from their normal roles, we recognise the immense effort and long, exhausting hours they have put in working to keep the nation safe.

I am proud of how the Government responded at pace to the challenges that health and social care staff faced. Since April 2021, we have dispatched over 5.8 million rapid lateral flow tests to NHS workers in England—directly to NHS trusts, care settings and the homes of individual staff members—with over 60,000 of those going directly to the hon. Member's local NHS trust in Ealing.

Testing has been a crucial countermeasure throughout the pandemic. The world-beating scaling up of our PCR testing capability proved invaluable, enabling us to diagnose symptomatic individuals when facing a growing but relatively unknown threat from a new virus.

We introduced lateral flow devices in November 2020 as a tool in addition to the highly sensitive PCR tests. LFTs were a significant step change in our battle against covid-19, enabling us to open up greater levels of asymptomatic testing and tackling asymptomatic transmission when the vaccine roll-out was in its infancy yet still ahead of the rest of the world.

Since April 2021, 13,500 positive but asymptomatic NHS-linked individuals have been identified by LFTs. Through their tireless dedication to regular testing, staff in the NHS and in care drove that most pressing fight to protect those most at risk—their colleagues at work, their friends, their families and, most importantly, their patients. All were protected because we were able to break the chains of infection using LFTs. I want to put on the record my immense thanks to each and every NHS and care worker for their valiant and unwavering efforts.

Since the early months, we have learned a lot more about covid-19, including what makes someone more at risk of contracting the virus and how best to mitigate the risk of transmission. That applies in all settings, although especially in healthcare and social care ones, where the close nature of the care provided creates greater opportunity for transmission. In these places, LFT testing has helped to ensure that staff can continue to safely carry out essential care for those most at risk.

By relying on the expert advice of our medical and scientific advisers, many of whom have become household names because of their immense contributions, we have been able to take steps to mitigate the rate of transmission of covid-19. We are now in a much better position, where the link between infection and severity of disease is substantially weaker than in earlier phases of the pandemic. We have severely weakened the link between infection and severe disease. As the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) said, cases are rising again. However, we are on the front foot thanks to vaccines and community covid-19 treatments.

The UK's investment in groundbreaking vaccine technology and our world-beating vaccination programme has put us one step ahead of the virus. Vaccination is now the UK's first line of defence. Thanks to the

actions taken by the people of the United Kingdom, as of 24 March 2022 more than 85% of those over 12 have had two doses. Now we are also inviting those aged 75 and over, residents in care homes for older adults, and individuals of 12 years and over who have a weakened immune system to take up the offer of a spring booster jab.

Importantly, we now have widespread availability of targeted community covid-19 treatments. For people who are eligible, those can significantly minimise the chance of developing severe disease. I hope that the spring booster and the community covid-19 treatment programme reassure the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall that we take very seriously the situation of the immunosuppressed.

Rachael Maskell: My concern is that in York, where about 90% of people are vaccinated, the rate of people getting very poorly with covid is going up. The antiviral treatments are not effective, because there is an increase in mortality as well. Putting the additional line of defence—testing to prevent transmission—in the system is one way to save lives. I cannot understand why the Government will not move the issue on for three months; we could then review the situation again.

Maggie Throup: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention; I know she is passionate about this issue, which she has spoken about many times. It is important that we should recognise that we have moved on. We have broken the chain of transmission with the vaccination programme, which is our first line of defence along with antivirals and therapeutics within NHS settings.

Core to continuing to stay ahead of the virus and learning to live with covid is a move to everyone embodying safer behaviours in their day-to-day lives. The Government recommend continued vaccination, which ensures that everyone is as protected as possible and reduces the chance of their becoming infected and transmitting it to others and of developing severe disease. We have the spring booster programme, and there is an evergreen offer to those who have not yet come forward for their first dose—there are a few of them every day—or who have delayed their second dose or booster. They are welcome to book their vaccines at any time.

We recommend ventilation to ensure that harmful particles are blown away, and the wearing of face coverings in crowded and enclosed spaces to minimise transmission, particularly where prevalence is higher. People should stay at home if they are unwell, to ensure that they do not spread the virus to their friends and family, as well as washing hands regularly and following NHS advice to “catch it, bin it, kill it.” In addition to that advice, NHS England for NHS staff, and the Department of Health and Social Care and the UK Health Security Agency for social care staff, provide expert infection prevention and control guidelines to ensure that healthcare staff, their families and their patients are kept as safe as possible.

Over the past two years we have worked relentlessly to ensure that the people of the United Kingdom have been protected from the virus, reacting to learnings and putting them into practice, as well as using them to implement pragmatic long-term plans. The approach to managing covid-19 in NHS and social care services has evolved over time, giving us the opportunity to learn what works best to keep people safe. We have the

opportunity to put that learning into practice, while continuing to focus on providing care for those who need it and supporting those at risk from covid-19.

As we know, the pandemic is by no means over. The UK Health Security Agency continues to monitor the virus and has recommended a package of contingency capabilities that form a reasonable insurance scenario to enable us to respond to resurgences or new variants of concern. I reassure the House that in line with recommendations, the Government have secured a supply

of lateral flow devices to use if necessary. Limited ongoing free testing will be available for a small number of high-risk groups within the settings we have discussed, plans of which will soon be set out in further detail by the Government. Once again I thank the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall for securing this debate on such an important issue and expressing his remarks so well.

Question put and agreed to.

10.22 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 28 March 2022

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

Greyhound Racing

4.30 pm

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Before we start, if anybody is in any doubt, the person with four legs in the Gallery is a registered PAT dog—Pets As Therapy—and she is there with the Chairman's consent.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 554073, relating to greyhound racing.

It is always a pleasure to serve under you as Chair, Sir Roger. The Petitions Committee has asked me to open this debate. The petition closed on 30 April 2021 with 104,885 signatures. It asks that the UK Government introduce legislation to abolish greyhound racing, via a managed shutdown of activities, and ensure the welfare of redundant dogs through a levy on the industry.

The petitioner wishes to remain anonymous; the words I speak this evening are his/her words. The petitioner asserts that the welfare of greyhounds is not adequately protected by the Animal Welfare Act 2006, GBGB—the Greyhound Board of Great Britain—or any independent body, and that greyhounds endure unavoidable suffering on dangerously configured tracks, are raced in extreme weather and are housed in kennels that have not been independently inspected.

An early-day motion was tabled on 16 December 2021 acknowledging and supporting the petition. The UK Government responded to the petition on 26 November 2020. The petitioner told me that greyhound racing uses thousands of greyhounds as a global, online betting shop commodity, and that spectators at racing tracks are not needed, because racing is livestreamed.

Pressure from animal welfare charities and campaigners resulted in GBGB being required to publish annual data of greyhounds injured, rehomed and euthanised for humane or economic reasons. However, the Dogs Trust and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals have questioned the accuracy of the data, because different datasets have been used for different years, making direct annual comparisons difficult. The data is not broken down to track level, preventing remedial action if required at a particular track.

The total recorded number of GBGB greyhounds injured annually since 2017 is 4,837 in 2017, 4,963 in 2018, 4,970 in 2019, and 3,507 in 2020. The number of those put to sleep on humane or economic grounds is 605 in 2017, 566 in 2018, 472 in 2019, and 224 in 2020. The petitioner found that greyhounds that were recorded as being in rescue centres or as rehomed as a pet were actually still racing. The dual system of having GBGB-registered tracks and independent tracks does not work, because greyhounds are raced at both tracks.

GBGB data records some greyhounds as retired, but the petitioner says that some of those are sold or given away to race on the three independent tracks. The

petitioner spoke to me about insufficient enforcement of the Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations 2010 by local authority trading standards departments due to lack of welfare inspections at tracks, because many councils are under-resourced and because schooling tracks and breeding facilities fall outside these regulations.

The petitioner believes that the GBGB reform programme, greyhound commitment, does not go far enough. GBGB statistics reveal a minor fluctuation, rather than a sustained improvement, in the percentage of racing dogs being injured. The figures were 1.19% in 2017, 1.16% in 2018, 1.21% in 2019, and 1.12% in 2020.

The petitioner referred me to section 3.1 of Dr Andrew Knight's "Injuries in racing greyhounds" report from 2018, with which I am sure Members are familiar. The salient point is that races are run anticlockwise, so most injuries occur on the left foreleg and the right hind leg, because when negotiating a bend in the track, the left foreleg is used as a pivot, with claws digging into the ground, whereas the right hind leg moves in an arc, providing the primary propulsive force. The greyhound skeleton adapts by reabsorbing calcium from other bodily areas, resulting in spongy or honeycombed bone composition, which contributes to track injuries.

On the suggestion of the petitioner, I visited Hope Rescue, a centre run by Vanessa Waddon, so that I could listen to the practical realities of rehoming injured and surplus greyhounds. Hope Rescue is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmire (Chris Elmore), who wanted to be here but has parliamentary duties elsewhere. Vanessa is in the Public Gallery this evening. We also have with us Suzy the greyhound, who has already been mentioned by you, Sir Roger, and who is representing Greyhounds as Pets and Pets as Therapy—I hope I have got that right.

Hope Rescue is named after Last Hope, a greyhound found abandoned on a Caerphilly mountain in 2004, having been shot with a captive bolt gun. Both his ears had been hacked off to hide identifying ear tattoos. Last Hope was still alive, and his finder reported that he was still wagging his tail, but he had to be put to sleep. This cruel story inspired Vanessa to become involved in greyhound rescue, and she set up Hope Rescue, which is an all-breed rescue centre.

Move forward 17 years and Hope Rescue is supporting the UK campaign, and the campaign in Wales, to ban greyhound racing because of welfare concerns and the prospect of increased greyhound racing when Wales's only independent track, Valley track, becomes a GBGB track. Hope Rescue started its Amazing Greys project at Valley track in April 2018 in order to provide emergency rescue spaces and vet care for injured and surplus greyhounds before they were transferred to one of Hope Rescue's partners—the Dogs Trust, Greyhound Rescue Wales and the Forever Hounds Trust—although some dogs were rehomed directly from Hope Rescue. Between April 2018 and August 2021, the project took in over 200 greyhounds that had been surrendered because their owners or trainers had links with Valley track. They included over 40 greyhounds that had sustained serious injuries—mostly fractures—through racing at Valley track. Sadly, five greyhounds did not survive their injuries. Many greyhounds had old, undiagnosed injuries, lameness, other health problems such as dental, skin, fleas and worms, and behavioural problems such as anxiety and fear.

[Christina Rees]

After publicly sharing the petition, Vanessa was told that Hope Rescue was no longer welcome at the Valley track, so the fate of current surplus and injured greyhounds from Valley track is sadly unknown. Although Valley track is an independent track, Vanessa told me that her project revealed the strong links between the regulated GBGB sector and independent tracks. Some 67% of injured greyhounds at Valley track were GBGB greyhounds. Vanessa and the project's volunteers were heartbroken to witness those greyhounds in so much shock and pain when receiving emergency treatment from Hope Rescue's vets. There were no vets at Valley track.

The majority of the injuries were broken legs, including snapped bones going straight through the skin. One dog had the skin degloved from her leg, down to the bone, when she collided with the hare, and more fractures to her skull, face and ribs due to the collision. Sadly, she did not survive.

Valley track advertises its "eye-watering sharp first bend" on its website, and Vanessa witnessed most injuries occurring on that first bend. However, the greyhounds try to continue to the end of the race, because that is what they are trained to do. Vanessa believes it is unacceptable that the risk of these beautiful dogs suffering an injury—or even dying—is disregarded by the industry as collateral damage. As she can testify, behind every injury and death statistic is a beautiful, sentient dog, which will have endured immense suffering.

Vanessa told me that animal welfare charities are currently experiencing unprecedented demand and pressures due to the huge surge in pet ownership during the pandemic. On the day I visited, Hope Rescue had 216 dogs in its care, including some seized from illegal breeders, stray dogs, and dogs surrendered by their owners. Rehoming surplus greyhounds is an additional pressure on rescue centres, in both cost and capacity, created by the welfare deficiencies in the greyhound racing industry.

The dilemma facing rescue centres is that they do not want to stop taking in racing greyhounds, even though it would free up thousands of additional rescue spaces and improve welfare for the wider dog population and their owners, because who would otherwise look after the greyhounds?

Vanessa recognises that GBGB has introduced some recent financial schemes, including the injury recovery scheme, which provides a 50% grant, up to a maximum of £2,000, for certain injuries, and a £400 retirement bond. However, those financial incentives cover only a portion of the true costs and resources necessary for rehoming surplus and injured greyhounds as companion pets. Vanessa believes that the need for an injury recovery scheme speaks volumes about the welfare issues caused by greyhound racing. Resources should not be needed to fix broken legs, because legs should not be broken in the first place.

Hope Rescue launched a petition to ban greyhound racing in Wales in September 2021, and within a week it had secured the 10,000-signature threshold to be considered for a debate. The petition had cross-party support in the Senedd from Jane Dodds, leader of the Welsh Lib Dems, Luke Fletcher of Plaid Cymru, and Carolyn Thomas of Labour, along with support from rescue centres across the UK. The petition closed on 1 March 2022

with 35,101 signatures, and was discussed by the Senedd's Petitions Committee on 7 March. The Committee agreed to proceed with a call for evidence, to be followed by a debate in the Senedd.

The petitioner stresses that public attitudes to greyhound racing are changing. In the UK, there were once 77 GBGB-licensed tracks and 200 independent tracks; today, 20 licensed and three unlicensed tracks remain. Greyhound racing to satisfy the needs of, and create profits for, the betting industry is being recognised as an animal welfare and gambling addiction problem. Some 99% of British greyhound bets are placed online or at betting offices, so it is unlikely that that money remains in the local economy.

Increased regulation may offer a temporary solution and may marginally increase the welfare of greyhounds while they are racing, but the significant number of injuries, deaths, and surplus greyhounds needing rescue spaces requires a long-term strategy. A sustainable solution to the welfare problems is needed. The petitioner and Vanessa strongly feel that a ban is the only solution. A ban can be achieved immediately in Scotland and Wales due to the low number of tracks, but in England a ban should be phased in to ensure that displaced greyhounds can be accommodated and the infrastructure will be dismantled over time.

Hope Rescue recently commissioned a YouGov poll, which showed that 45% of the public support a ban, 17% oppose a ban, and 38% are unsure or do not support either option. The foundation of any welfare strategy is that prevention is better than cure. The petitioner and Vanessa humbly request a meeting with the Minister to discuss how the UK Government can progress the proposal to abolish greyhound racing.

4.46 pm

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): I commend the hon. Member for Neath (Christina Rees) for rising to the challenge and leading this important and sensitive debate about the future of greyhound racing in this country. I listened to everything she said and sympathise with many of her points. All of us present are animal lovers and care for the welfare of greyhounds and all animals that we have a duty of care towards. There is much common ground in what we are discussing today. However, there are differences of opinion about how we approach the issue and ensure the best for greyhounds and those associated with the greyhound industry in this country.

I am pleased to contribute to the debate, and I do so as co-chairman of the all-party parliamentary greyhound group. I am proud to do so alongside the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery). I am also a vice-president of the Greyhound Trust, which works tirelessly for the welfare of greyhounds and their rehoming once their racing days are over. Of course, I am the MP for Romford, home of Essex and London's premier greyhound stadium, which has been there for many years.

I fully support all those calling for the highest possible welfare standards in the sport of greyhound racing. No one wants to see animals being injured or harmed. We all want to see the best possible care and attention for those dogs, and it is right that we fight for that. I also support the continuation of greyhound racing as a traditional sport in this country, provided that we strive to keep improving welfare standards for greyhounds.

I want to restate my unequivocal support for animal health and welfare in greyhound racing. I have always been passionate about this issue, as I am for all issues relating to animal welfare—as the Minister knows only too well. Indeed, this is not a matter that I take lightly at all. I have always fought for animal welfare throughout the United Kingdom since my election as a Member of Parliament, and I will continue to do so. I am open-minded; where things are wrong, they need to be called out, but we need to do that in an evolving way.

There is no denying that welfare standards in greyhound racing have not always been at the level we would want to see, but I believe the answer must be building on the great progress that has been made, certainly in the last 20 years since I have been involved as an MP, rather than banning the sport altogether. Some 15 years ago, I was appointed by the then Leader of the Opposition as the shadow Home Affairs Minister responsible for animal welfare, so I worked on this particular issue at that time. I worked with numerous animal welfare organisations at a national and international level to secure the health and welfare of all animals, especially dogs and greyhounds.

Since then, I have continued my work as an animal welfare champion in Parliament through my role as chairman of both the APPG on zoos and aquariums and the all-party parliamentary greyhound group, and through my private Member's Bill, the Animal (Penalty Notices) Bill, which will introduce penalties for individuals who have cruelly mistreated pets, zoo animals and livestock—which, of course, includes greyhounds. As hon. Members know, I approach this issue with a genuine desire to improve the lives of the greyhounds and to ensure that their welfare is properly secured.

Our society is rightly judged by how it treats the animals in its care, and that care must go for racing dogs, too. I have therefore worked to support the Greyhound Trust, the Greyhound Board of Great Britain, Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, the Dogs Trust and all the other organisations that work tirelessly for the welfare of animals.

Despite the concerns that many members of the public have expressed, which are shared by many Members of this House, I nevertheless feel confident to state my support for the continuation of greyhound racing. I believe that, when appropriately regulated and properly managed, the practice can ensure the health and welfare of the greyhounds.

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): My hon. Friend is indeed an animal welfare champion in this House and has been for a long time, and I share his passion for animals. Is it not correct that many of the statistics on the welfare of greyhounds—such as the number of injuries or the number of greyhounds successfully housed after retirement—show the movement is all in the right direction? There is still work to be done, but are we not moving in the right direction?

Andrew Rosindell: My hon. Friend is completely right. I would not be here today if I did not think that we were going in the right direction. There is absolutely a huge amount of work to do, and we should champion that work and make sure it continues to go in the right direction. If it does not, we will all be deeply upset; we probably will not defend the sport as we are

doing today. However, things are going in the right direction because, I believe, GBGB is now taking the issue seriously.

There is still an enormous amount of work to do. We need an evolution, rather than just bringing in arbitrary bans that often do not work. Such bans can have the opposite effect, as has happened in other parts of the world. I share the sentiments of my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson). Let me be clear: my absolute priority is the welfare of the dogs, which I will continue to argue for in this House.

Greyhound racing is one of the most popular spectator sports in the United Kingdom. Coming from Romford, I am aware of that. The huge number of local people from all over east London and Essex who come to Romford greyhound stadium love the greyhounds. They do not just come to watch them race; they adore the greyhounds and raise a lot of money for their welfare at Romford stadium. There are 20 licensed stadiums in the UK, which generate multimillion-pound revenues and employ 7,000 local people.

In the year of the Queen's platinum jubilee, I want to also highlight that greyhound racing is an historic British tradition. The greyhound is the first breed of dog mentioned in literature. Greyhound racing reached the height of its popularity after world war one, when it provided an affordable day out for British working people. Let us be honest: it was a pastime for working people and, certainly in my constituency, it still is.

I am proud that the people of Romford continue this age-old tradition, which they balance with their love for the dogs and concern for animal welfare. I see it all the time. They do not have disregard for the animals—they would hate the idea of an animal being ill-treated. They would not go to watch greyhound racing if they thought there was arbitrary cruelty going on. As I have said, we need an evolution to a better place.

I am proud that my constituents regularly go to see the greyhounds racing at the London Road stadium in Romford. It is important that we do not take this institution away from my constituents and those across the country who participate in the sport by regularly watching the greyhounds and raising money to support the welfare of greyhounds in this country. Those people take great pride in breeding, racing and caring for their dogs. Greyhounds are active dogs that are bred for high-impact exercise. They enjoy having a purpose on the racecourses and receiving attention in the stadium. I see that they really love the attention and they enjoy what they do.

Vets have stated that greyhounds need regular high-impact exercise to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle. They derive that from the tracks, during training and in the kennels. On the issue of kennels, I accept the point made by the hon. Member for Neath; we need more inspections and more veterinary attention in kennels. Let us go there too. Let us not ignore what goes on in the kennels. It is not just about the tracks. The kennels need the same level of scrutiny.

As chair of the all-party parliamentary greyhound group, I believe it is important that we understand that greyhound welfare must be at the heart of the sport. We must do everything we can to safeguard the wellbeing of the dogs. Greyhound racing in the UK is regulated by the Greyhound Board of Great Britain, which states

[Andrew Rosindell]

that greyhound safety and welfare is at the heart of everything it does. That means that races must be strictly regulated to protect animal welfare.

Greyhounds must be rehomed after retirement and funding from racing used directly to contribute to greyhound welfare. A lot more needs to be done to contribute to the rehoming of the greyhounds after their racing days are over, particularly by the bookmakers. I believe that we need to pressure bookmakers more strongly to get a greater contribution to the welfare of the greyhounds in retirement.

GBGB has made a series of commitments to greyhound welfare. It has a zero-tolerance policy against any individual found to have mistreated a greyhound in any way. Its measures include issuing licence suspensions, fines and lifetime bans from the sport; ensuring a vet is present at every race and that every greyhound is inspected before and after racing to ensure that no greyhound will race if the vet has concerns; maximising track safety to ensure that the UK's track injury rate is the lowest in the world; requiring the highest standards of welfare at trainers' kennels; and, finally, ensuring that racing greyhounds enjoy long and healthy retirements.

Since September 2020, GBGB has paid more than £2 million to help home over 5,000 greyhounds, and that comes on top of the work of other organisations and small local groups. I know about the work done by the Romford Greyhound Owners' Association Trust for Retired Racing Greyhounds. I know that many different groups across the country are working tirelessly to ensure that dogs are rehomed, loved and cared for in their later years.

I have also heard great stories about how GBGB has been working with Battersea Dogs & Cats Home to ensure that greyhounds are rehomed. I hope that continues, along with its work with other dog welfare organisations. Through the measures I mentioned, the Greyhound Board of Great Britain has lowered the fatality and injury rate for greyhounds more than ever and successfully rehomed more greyhounds than we have ever seen before. We are going in the right direction, and we must keep that going ever stronger. There will be cross-party support for increasing that welfare across the country, because we all love animals and want the best for them.

Animal welfare is and always will be my primary concern in this debate. The Greyhound Board of Great Britain has been able to deliver an excellent programme of animal welfare and will continue to strive for even stronger measures to secure the welfare of the dogs in future. It has done that through its regulation of races and commitment to provide funding for veterinary treatment for greyhounds and by offering a home to the retired dogs.

Greyhound racing is an important British tradition that, when conducted properly, is fully compatible with animal welfare considerations. However, we must go further. A ban would result in thousands of jobs being sacrificed, millions of pounds lost to Her Majesty's Treasury, areas of deprivation losing yet another community asset, and thousands of fit, healthy and much-loved greyhound racing dogs being left with no direct means of support. That is not the answer at this stage. We have to work together to ensure that further improvements are made and the welfare of the animals is given the

utmost priority without going for a sudden ban, which would lead to unintended consequences for the welfare of the dogs.

For these reasons—with the proviso that welfare standards must continue to be improved—I believe we must allow the continuation of the sport in the United Kingdom. I look forward to the Minister's response to all the important points that Members have made, because I know that the Government are dedicated to animal welfare and to the highest possible standards in greyhound racing.

5 pm

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I fully support most of the comments by the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) about the continuation of greyhound racing.

The debate is very welcome, and should in no way be confrontational. The priority of everyone, regardless of their view, should be the health and welfare of greyhounds—the most lovable, intelligent animals we will ever come across. Some of the tales that my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Christina Rees) mentioned are harrowing. We hear tales of greyhounds having received some of the most terrible treatment. It happens—I am not saying that it does not—but there are bad apples everywhere. We need to ensure that welfare standards and the investment in the welfare of these wonderful animals is increased.

I must say a massive thanks to the GBGB and the British Greyhound Racing Fund, and to the people who sent me information knowing that the debate would take place this afternoon, including the RSPCA, Dogs Trust, and individuals who might have a different view from mine. I am happy to listen to everything that everybody says about the welfare of these wonderful animals, because it is important.

I have been involved in greyhound racing for 40 years. I have always had greyhounds. I have never met one person anywhere—not one—who wants to see any harm to these wonderful dogs. We talk about rules and regulations, and about banning people. Listen, if anybody in my area got caught doing anything against this wonderful breed of animal, they would be banished from the community—and it has happened. The common denominator among us all, in debating the petition today, is that we support increased investment in welfare, and that should be our priority.

My interest in greyhound racing—people call it an industry or a sport—reaches back to my days in the mining industry. We had whippets and greyhounds. Quite often, they were looked after better than some of the family. That is the reality of it: communities looked after these wonderful animals. I have been involved with greyhounds at different tracks up and down the country, and in Ireland, Wales and Scotland. It is a most enjoyable sport that I was involved in for quite some time. I went to different tracks with greyhounds, and they were all looked after better than my own kids. The notion that such dogs are abused, killed and battered to bits on a regular basis is very much outdated.

As the hon. Member for Romford pointed out, the statistics are heading in the right direction. That is not to say that we should rest on our laurels, because we have to continue with the investment in greyhound

welfare, as I have mentioned a number of times. I have been to many trainers' kennels—not 10, but 20, 30 or 40—and I have not yet been to a bad one, which might be my good luck. The kennels that I have been to are clean enough to eat food off the floor. The food that the greyhounds get is good enough for a human. I have spent hours, if not days or weeks, at the wonderful kennels of the legendary Harry Williams, a British breeder and greyhound trainer. Harry has just retired, probably for the third or fourth time. When he retired, he had more retired greyhounds than racing dogs in his kennels, because he loved the dogs so much.

There is a massive issue with how dogs are transported from kennels to the track. We need to look at those sorts of things and continue to keep the pressure on to make sure that things are as good, if not better, than they are anywhere else in the world. A lot of tracks used to be in a state of disrepair, and the majority have closed. We have only 20 licensed GBGB tracks in operation now, and I think there are three independents, which are non-licensed and not governed by GBGB. The tracks have improved dramatically through investment in welfare for the dogs.

I take issue with individuals or groups talking about injuries, because greyhounds want to run. They are bred to run, and not in straight lines. Greyhounds will get injuries, as will hounds or any type of dog that loves to run, particularly at high speed. However, I agree with everything that has been said about trying our damndest to eradicate injuries at greyhound tracks. If that means investment in the tracks, so be it. We have to try to do everything we can for these wonderful animals.

I do not want the debate to be about facts and figures, because it should be about how we can continue to improve the welfare of racing greyhounds, and the hon. Member for Romford has already mentioned a number of facts and figures. However, it is worth mentioning the injury data since GBGB's commitment. The total number of injuries sustained at GBGB tracks in 2018 was 4,963; it is now 3,575. In 2018, the injury rate against total dogs run was 1.16 and is now 1.12. The total number of fatalities at GBGB tracks in 2018 was 242 and is now 200. The numbers are heading in the right direction. Although we are getting better and better at what we do, we cannot rest on our laurels. We need to continue to get better.

There are great statistics in the retirement data since the launch of the GBGB commitment. In 2018, the total number of greyhounds that were successfully homed or retained in the sport after retirement was 6,773, or 83%. In 2020, that figure stands at 7,089, which represents 95% of all greyhounds leaving the sport. That is an amazing result. I have been involved for an awfully long time, and 95% of the dogs being rehomed is fantastic progress—what a brilliant achievement. A lot of that is thanks to the hard work of Vanessa and others in facilities for retired greyhounds up and down this country, where volunteers do fantastic work looking after and rehoming the animals. Some of them are tricky to rehome because people cannot just go and pick up a greyhound—they need to understand that greyhounds have different characters.

It is worth noting that the trainers are not millionaires; they are not in it to make fortunes, and if they are, they will not succeed. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of kennel hands—young men and women—looking after the greyhounds as if they were their own kids,

working all hours to ensure their health, safety and welfare, often at personal cost. Let us be honest: a lot of those young people do not really have great career paths, but they dedicate themselves to the greyhounds they look after. Greyhound racing is not something where people can get involved and become millionaires; it is quite the opposite—their finances normally take a dive.

It is important that we recognise and listen to everybody's views. The statistics vary quite a lot depending on who writes them, so we need to dig into them to get a good idea of what is happening. The GBGB is developing a new long-term strategy for greyhound welfare in five important areas: welfare, nutrition, behaviour, health and mental state, which we have already discussed—that is a fantastic initiative. Let us hope that, at its conclusion, the strategy, which has the classic name “A Good Life for Every Greyhound”, proves to have been beneficial to everyone in the great sport of greyhound racing.

I do not want a fight with anybody about this issue. I fully support the people in my community and across this country who want greyhound racing to continue. I agree with every single person who has ideas for increasing the welfare of greyhounds. The GBGB and the other organisations cannot rest on their laurels. Some individuals say that greyhounds should be afforded the same sort of protections as other breeds, but when we look at the support for extra protections for the breed—whether we agree with the continuation of greyhound racing or not—it is absolutely amazing.

I genuinely think it is important that we continue fighting for better welfare for every single one of these wonderful dogs. I have had some fast dogs and some very slow ones, but they are beautiful. I have cherished and loved every single one of them for what they are, not for how fast they run.

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): I call the Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee.

5.16 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Not only is it a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger, but it is very apt that you are chairing this debate, because you have a huge record on animal welfare. I know you take it extremely seriously, so it is good to serve under your chairmanship. I thank the hon. Member for Neath (Christina Rees) for presenting the petition and the facts. This is turning out to be a very good and thoughtful debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) has also put a great deal of effort into all aspects of animal welfare, but particularly greyhound racing. It was great to hear what he had to say, and to hear the great passion that the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) has for greyhound racing. He has had greyhounds himself, and they are beautiful dogs.

We have to remember that 104,000 people have signed the petition, so we have to take it seriously. I want to talk a little about the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee's 2016 inquiry and what we found. There is no doubt that the welfare of racing greyhounds is covered by the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and the Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations 2010. The 2006 Act allows action to be taken where there is cruelty to an animal or failure to provide for animal welfare

[Neil Parish]

needs. Those provisions apply where greyhounds are at tracks or kept at trainers' kennels. Animal welfare standards at all English greyhound tracks are set by the 2010 regulations.

The regulations require that all greyhound tracks have a vet present while dogs are running and that vets inspect all greyhounds to ensure that they are fit to run, including in extreme weather. Temperature-controlled kennelling must also be provided at the track, and greyhounds must be microchipped and tattooed. A Government review found that the regulations had proved effective in improving the welfare of greyhounds at the track, and the traceability. However, it also found that much more needed to be done, and when I get to the findings of our inquiry I will ask the Minister about various things that I think need to be improved. There is a need to improve conditions not only at the track, in terms of kennelling, but with trainers. There is also the professional trainer and the professional who keeps greyhounds, and they may have a number of them. Those people need to be looked at very carefully to make sure that the welfare of the greyhounds is good. Some greyhounds are kept by people as pets, but they race. They are looked after extremely well but, again, we need to check because, as the hon. Member for Wansbeck said, we have to make sure what, whatever rules and regulations are in place, we come down heavily on those who do not comply.

There has been improved transparency: GBGB agreed to publish annual statistics on injuries, retirements and dog euthanasia. That is a big issue. At these tracks, is it that the dog cannot be kept alive and cannot have its injuries put right, or is that dog uneconomical? I believe the gambling industry must pay much more towards the rehoming of these dogs and ensuring that the injuries that dogs sustain can be put right.

There is no doubt that the statistics are going in the right direction. If we look at the total deaths, not just at the tracks, there were 932 in 2018, 710 in 2019 and 411 in 2020. But 411 dogs are still too many—there is no doubt about that. We have to look at how to improve that situation. The publication of the stats was accompanied by the introduction of the GBGB's greyhound commitment, which set targets to reduce track injuries. Some tracks are very difficult to alter. I agree with the hon. Member for Wansbeck that kept greyhounds like to race and run, but we need to ensure that if there are problems with the track, the bends or whatever, they can be ironed out. Nothing should be off limits.

The GBGB also introduced an injury recovery scheme, which enables the treatment and rehoming of 500 dogs with career-ending injuries who otherwise would have been put to sleep. In September 2020, the GBGB introduced a greyhound retirement scheme, with a £400 bond paid jointly by the owner and the GBGB, which goes towards rehoming costs at the end of a dog's racing life. The GBGB has already paid out over £70,000 in bond payments to improve rehoming centres.

To support the GBGB's efforts to improve welfare, in January 2019 the Government announced an increased funding commitment from bookmakers. In 2019-20, the British greyhound racing fund collected £8.87 million from bookmakers, up from £6.95 million in the previous 12 months. The Government continue to encourage any remaining bookmakers who have not signed up to the

voluntary arrangement to do so. I say to the Minister that any gambling authorities that will not pay up should be named and shamed. They cannot earn money from racing greyhounds if the greyhound race does not take place. The money that they earn when the bet is placed on greyhounds comes entirely from that industry. All aspects of the betting industry must pay up. However difficult it may be—or however difficult they say it may be—they should pay much more money. I would like to see the amount of money raised doubled. It is not impossible to do that.

In horse-racing, there is a statutory levy, where the bookmakers pay 10% of profits made from horse-racing bets. A compulsory 10% versus a voluntary 0.6% is a huge difference. The horse-racing levy raises £95 million—naturally, it is a bigger industry. Many of us want a very regulated industry but one that continues. However, if it is to continue, that money must be raised from the gambling sector to ensure that greyhounds are properly rehomed and not euthanised when they could be saved and have a good life thereafter.

When we did our 2006 report, we looked at the traceability of greyhounds through their lives. The Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations 2015 made microchipping dogs, including racing greyhounds, a legal requirement. As Members will know, one of the drawbacks with microchipping is that we still do not really have a central database, so once a dog changes hands, it is necessary to go back to the original owners and trace that dog back. There is much more we can do in that area—as we know, many greyhounds are bred in Ireland, and traceability is hugely important. Also, if a greyhound is going to race, it is not just about speed; we want greyhounds to be robust and their limbs to be strong. All those things need to be taken into consideration when we breed dogs for racing.

I cannot stress enough the importance of making sure we check the tracks and the vets on those tracks. We went to a GBGB track and to a non-GBGB track, and in all honesty, I was expecting to come away from both of those tracks being far more critical than I was. There is still much to be done, and when a Select Committee turns up to a racetrack, we have to ask whether it has been prepared for us in advance—we have to see through what we are given—but I think the tracks and the veterinary side have improved, and much of it is going in the right direction. My conclusion would be that we need to make sure the betting fraternity pays its dues—twice as much as it is paying at the moment. Let us make sure that inspections of the tracks take place and that the vets on those tracks are trained—I believe they are, but they must be. Those vets must be present at all times so that when they weigh the greyhounds and check them over before they race, they know that those greyhounds are in good condition and are ready to race.

If there is a problem or an injury, let us make sure that all those greyhounds who can be saved are saved, so that they can have a good life afterwards. Greyhounds make great pets in their future lives and, ironically, although they like to run fast, they do not need that much exercise. They are very good-tempered dogs: when we take our Labrador around Battersea Park, we very often meet a greyhound or two, and they are always a very gentle animal. I think we are all clear about the need for rehoming, including the welfare organisations—the Dogs Trust, the RSPCA, the Blue Cross—and everybody

who is working on this, including GBGB and all the little voluntary groups across the country that have been referred to that rehome greyhounds. There is one such group in my constituency, and all those organisations aim to do a good job, but I stress again that, while it is always laudable to raise money from individuals to help rehome greyhounds, I still believe that enough money is being made from betting in the greyhound industry for that rehoming to be properly funded.

We need to use today's petition as an opportunity to look at these issues. Ministers will know that, as Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, I take a very independent view of life. On this issue, I come down on the Government's side because I believe that greyhound racing should not be banned, but I also believe that it should be tightened up, that those betting organisations should pay their dues and that the Minister should bring in all those organisations and make sure they cough up the money. Let us make sure that the right greyhounds are bred and racing in future. As the hon. Member for Wansbeck said, where there are rotten apples, let us root them out, because we cannot and must not have greyhounds being ill-treated.

This petition is timely. The Government and the industry will need to take it very seriously. I thank the charities for the work that they do. As I have said, let us use this as a very positive approach in order to ensure that the welfare of the greyhound is much improved.

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): I remind the Front Benchers that it would be a courtesy to allow Christina Rees a couple of minutes at the end to wind up the debate.

5.30 pm

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I thank my good friend the hon. Member for Neath (Christina Rees) for securing today's debate on greyhound racing. The petition, which received about 105,000 signatures, is to ban greyhound racing and ensure that the welfare of redundant dogs is, via a levy on the industry, absolutely adhered to. May I say how apt it is that the hon. Member for Neath, a person who is absolutely steeped in sport and who understands and appreciates the benefits and value of sport, brings this sport in front of MPs for our attention and debate? I thought her speech was enlightening.

MPs across the room have made excellent points and raised concerns about the welfare of these beautiful animals. I, too, sympathise with the petition—I thank the 160 people from my own constituency of Falkirk who signed it, even though they do not have a dog track in their area—and its merits, aims and ambitions. Who would not do so when they read about the cruelty inflicted on the animals in this so-called sport? Why would we not have sympathy for them?

Sir Roger, let me take you back a wee while. May I take you back in time some 60 years to when, as a young boy growing up in Denny, I and my friends would sneak along to the local dog track? All innocent and all exciting it was, too, to watch these magnificent animals run. Then, as we grew, we started to learn a wee bit more about how the greyhounds were actually treated—including how they were fed a pie before the race to prevent them from running so fast. Goodness knows

what else they were being fed or injected with. And of course, when their usefulness was done, they were cruelly destroyed.

We probably did not know any better at the time, so what has improved? There are certainly fewer tracks now. The British Greyhound Racing Fund has awarded, as other hon. Members have said, more than £1 million to improve the racing tracks and welfare. The Greyhound Trust has received approximately £1.4 million to home retired greyhounds. That all sounds good and it leaves us wondering why, if greyhounds are such wonderful pets, there is such a problem with finding them homes. The answer is simple: it is down to the sheer number of dogs involved in greyhound racing. More than 30,000 dogs are surplus to requirements each year. In 2020, the Greyhound Board of Great Britain recorded, if my figures are correct—I think they are—3,575 injuries. In 2018, 324 greyhounds were destroyed; no home could be found for them. In 2019, 14 greyhounds a week died; they were destroyed because of injuries sustained while racing.

In Scotland, the welfare of greyhounds is covered by devolved legislation under the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006, but significantly there is no statutory legislation on greyhound racing in Scotland. Only two greyhound tracks are currently operating in Scotland. Thornton Greyhounds, in Kirkcaldy, is an unlicensed flapping track, and Shawfield greyhound stadium is licensed under the GBGB. In August 2019, the Glasgow track reduced its activity to a single night of racing per week—there were simply not enough dogs, I am told, to make up two nights' racing. The position was similar at Thornton. It seems evident that racing greyhound numbers are at their lowest in Scotland, at least, and the sport is on its last legs.

The Greyhound Board of Great Britain is the body responsible for the governance, regulation and management of the sport of licensed greyhound racing in England, Scotland and Wales, but oddly, the regulations on the welfare of the greyhounds do not apply to independent tracks. I find that quite odd. Could the Minister please confirm whether that is true?

The Scottish Government do not currently have plans to ban greyhound racing, but they are very much aware of the Animal Welfare Commission's interest in this vexatious business. I want to finish up with this letter I received on greyhound racing from Marie, a Falkirk constituent of mine. I am grateful to her for sending such a thoughtful and knowledgeable insight into why we are debating this. Marie said:

"I adopted Morag when she was five and a half. Out of all the wonderful, excited and noisy dogs in the Greyhound Rescue Fife's kennels that day, Morag was just lying there looking at me with her huge brown eyes. My heart went out to her. She had a rotten life. I'll never know whether she was just born terrified or whether her early experiences made her that way. Ironically, her racing name was "Honour and Love", but I saw no signs of her ever having been honoured or loved. She didn't know anything about the world outside of racetracks. She had never slept on anything except straw and probably old newspapers. Shut up and locked up in a crate for most of the day and night, Morag bears the scars of her racing career—not just mentally, but in the form of ugly, large blackheads on her abdomen, a nasty scar on her face and the loss of 17 teeth."

Many breeders and trainers do not bother to take care of the hounds' teeth. Why? It is because they will not have them long enough to have to deal with the resulting decay from the negligence. That happened at

[John Mc Nally]

Doncaster and Nottingham racetracks. Bookmakers, as the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) said, have a lot of money to put into their sport. They are taking a lot out of it. In the world of gambling, these wonderful, intelligent and innocent sighthounds do not matter. Only their ability to run for their lives at the snapping open of a metal trap matters.

Morag matters. When Morag first wagged her tail, when she first played with her toys and when she sighed contentedly in her basket, she had won the best race of all. She survived to have a better life and got her sweet revenge on those who mishandled her, filled her with drugs, did not show a minute of kindness and would have put a cattle bolt to her head, had the regulations not improved and had there not been the kindness of volunteers at rescue centres.

Due to Morag being so timid and scared, the Greyhound Rescue Fife advised Marie that a male dog companion would bring Morag out of herself. Marie went back up to Kinross and fell in love again, this time with her second sighthound, Hector—a big blue boy only 26 months old. He had been bought from his breeder in Ireland for £12,000. The trainer in Tranent who bought him raced him three times at Newcastle. The blue boy stopped to play at the last bend in each race, so he was disqualified. Luckily, he did not have to put up with a life of being a slave to the gambling industry for long.

Sandside Chief never made money for anyone, but he became a much loved part of her family, and every morning Marie wakes up to the pleasure of her wonderful greyhounds trotting towards her for hugs and food. She says:

“I adore them and all greyhounds. The racing greyhound is a special commodity. I would like to see the breed die out. I would like to see greyhound racing banned. Show greyhounds are looked after. Coursing greyhounds have a healthier lifestyle, but the racing greyhound is born into servitude and from the age of six weeks is trained for only one thing: to make money.”

We have all acknowledged a lot of problems in the industry. There is no doubt about that. If a ban is not forthcoming, then a better life for these greyhounds must be the absolute priority.

5.38 pm

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I am grateful for the opportunity to respond for the Opposition in this debate. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Christina Rees) for opening the debate and for raising a range of important, thought-provoking points that we must all take on board now and in the weeks and months ahead. It was a useful, constructive debate. It was almost harmonious. I get a little bit anxious when that happens, and this debating chamber has many such debates, but it is good that we are working together constructively.

I would like to acknowledge the colleagues who have spoken in the debate, including my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) and the hon. Members for Romford (Andrew Rosindell), for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) and for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish). I also acknowledge those who signed the petition. The top 10 constituencies are: Isle of Wight; Central Devon; Brighton, Kemptown; Brighton, Pavilion; Torridge

and West Devon; Tiverton and Honiton; Hastings and Rye; Camborne and Redruth, the seat of the Secretary of State himself; Edinburgh North and Leith, the seat of the SNP spokesperson; and finally, Somerton and Frome. It is important that we acknowledge when our constituents get involved and get active, and they have clearly done so on this important issue.

We are here this afternoon because this petition received more than 104,000 signatures from local people across the UK. I do not want to detain the House longer than is necessary, but I will say a few things that I hope will reassure those who signed the petition that those on the Opposition Benches are listening but, more importantly, we understand animal welfare.

We believe in honouring animal welfare, and we will always push for the strongest possible animal welfare policies. Like many on the Opposition Benches, I am concerned by the lack of transparency about what happens to greyhounds after they are no longer fit for racing, which means that nobody knows the real situation. I hope the Minister will address that specific point in the wind-up. It is important that we hear about the transparency point, because my party and I believe that we must ensure that all retired greyhounds are properly cared for.

We need proper guidance on best practice and responsible ownership; statutory minimum standards for racing and welfare; better mechanisms to trace ownership; and a centralised database to record what happens after greyhounds are no longer fit to race. Does the Minister agree? If she does, will she speak to each of those real and tangible objectives?

As colleagues will know, and as has already been outlined by the Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton, the welfare of racing greyhounds in England is covered by the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and the Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations 2010. The regulations were reviewed in 2016, and the Government state that they were found to be broadly effective. Ministers believe that a ban remains unnecessary, and the Opposition agree. I would be grateful, however, if the Minister outlined the most recent engagement with the Greyhound Board of Great Britain. What action is being taken to improve the welfare concerns outlined not only in this debate but by the more than 100,000 people who signed the petition?

Ministers indicated that from January 2021 all trainers' residential kennels will be subject to auditing and veterinary inspections. Can we have a progress check on that? Last week I spoke for the Opposition at the Humane Society International's parliamentary reception. In my speech I thanked the Secretary of State, who was present, for reading Labour's animal welfare proposals in such detail that he ended up pinching many of those proposals for his own animal welfare action plan. That is important, because his action plan made a commitment to considering further protection for racing greyhounds, including further steps to improve standards at trainers' kennels. Will the Minister outline in some detail what those further protections look like? I would be happy to receive a written report, but it would be great if we could have that information this afternoon. I am sure those sitting in the Public Gallery would be interested, too. Can the Minister touch on the steps being taken to reduce the number of dogs being put to sleep on humane

grounds following injuries at the track? That matter is of considerable interest to many, and some clarity would be appreciated.

I led for the Opposition on the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill—the hon. Member for Romford was a member of that Committee, too—the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill and a range of other related pieces of legislation, such as the Animals (Penalty Notices) Bill. In my role as shadow Minister for animal welfare, I am determined to keep pushing the Government to take the strongest possible action on animal welfare, to have the strongest possible resolve in the fight to act, and to not just make empty promises.

That is why I supported measures contained within the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act to increase maximum sentences for the most severe acts of animal cruelty from six months to five years. I am pleased that, in a moment of cross-party agreement, that legislation became law on 29 April 2021, after much hard work from Government Members and former colleagues such as Anna Turley, the former Member for Redcar. Their work means that the maximum penalty is five years' imprisonment, which is a good step for animal welfare and shows that change can happen if people want it.

Ministers can and should focus on the strongest possible support for greyhounds, notably those who have retired or been injured. They should make sure that this sport—a part of so many working-class communities across the United Kingdom—gets the safeguards and protections it needs. I outline the following as a starter for 10: proper guidance on best practice in responsible ownership; statutory minimum standards for racing and welfare; better mechanisms to trace ownership; and, as already mentioned, a centralised database to record what happens after greyhounds are no longer fit to race. That plan is ready to go, so I urge the Minister to go back to her Department after the debate and get on with it.

5.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rebecca Pow): It is a pleasure to have you in the Chair, Sir Roger, as I know you are particularly interested in animal welfare. I think we all agree that it has been a genuinely fascinating and moving debate, and I welcome everyone in the Public Gallery, including our canine friend, who I hope is comfortable. Clearly there is a great deal of love in the room for wonderful greyhounds, and I do not think anyone would deny that they are absolutely lovely creatures.

I thank the hon. Member for Neath (Christina Rees) for opening the debate and putting the case for the 104,000 people who have signed the petition. I want to say at the outset that the Government take the issue of greyhound welfare extremely seriously, which is clear from what everybody has said. I particularly thank the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee for its ongoing work on greyhounds. I was actually on the Committee when it did the inquiry back in 2016. I was not on the Sub-Committee, but I was very much involved in all the discussions and scrutiny that took place, and I urge the Committee to keep going with its scrutiny. A huge amount of progress has been made on improving greyhound welfare, so the Government believe that a ban on racing is unnecessary. However, improvements in welfare are always welcome, and we should always be working towards them, as many Members have said.

I will go over some of the history. It was in 2016 that DEFRA and the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee undertook the thorough review of the Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations 2010, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish). The regulations set welfare standards for all tracks in England while allowing the industry regulator—the Greyhound Board of Great Britain, known as GBGB—to enforce those standards at GBGB tracks. Independent tracks require a local authority licence. There is only one independent track in England, which is Askern in Doncaster.

The 2016 review looked at the performance of GBGB as an enforcer of the 2010 regulations and found it effective. The Select Committee reported that it had “not seen evidence of critical failings that warranted the creation of an independent regulator at this point.”

However, although the 2010 regulations were found to have improved track welfare, both the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and DEFRA stated that GBGB should be doing more. The Committee recommended that it is

“vital that the industry demonstrates capacity to initiate welfare reform without legislative compulsion if it wants to stay self-regulated.”

The Government then challenged GBGB to do more for greyhounds at trainers' kennels and to be more transparent. Since 2018, GBGB has published detailed figures on the number of GBGB greyhounds injured and euthanised annually. It has also published the number of greyhounds rehomed or kept by trainers.

Neil Parish: I thank the Minister for summing up. I think the issue for GBGB is to make sure that greyhounds can be given enough veterinary expertise. It must not be that a dog is put down because it is uneconomic for it to have veterinary care and operations to ensure that it can have a good life. It is key to make sure that whether a dog is euthanised is not an economic decision but an animal welfare decision.

Rebecca Pow: I will go on to talk a bit more about the national welfare strategy that is being worked on, which is very appropriately called, “A Good Life for Every Greyhound”. The point that my hon. Friend raises will be dealt with in the strategy, and rightly so.

The hon. Member for Neath mentioned that the stats—on the injuries, and so forth—were queried. However, those stats are independently verified in a manner approved by DEFRA. On data and stats, the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones), asked for a GBGB database; there is already a central database run by GBGB.

GBGB has also developed, with welfare groups—including the RSPCA, the Kennel Club, Battersea, and the Dogs Trust—-independent standards and a code of practice for trainers' kennels. GBGB trainers' kennels are now independently inspected against those standards. Before the end of this year, GBGB should be accredited as an enforcer of them.

Responding to the EFRA Committee in 2018, GBGB introduced its greyhound commitment, which set out further welfare reforms, including its injury recovery and retirement schemes. As I said, GBGB will shortly produce and launch its national welfare strategy, which will look across a whole range of issues, but will genuinely focus on welfare throughout the dog's life, not just

[Rebecca Pow]

during its racing career. I think that will address the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton.

I was concerned to hear the comments about the Valley track, which I believe is in Caerphilly. As I understand it, that is the only greyhound track in Wales and it is independent. Greyhound regulations are devolved, and, unlike England, Wales has no specific greyhound regulation—nor indeed does Scotland, I believe, although I listened carefully to what the hon. Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally) said. However, I believe that Welsh Ministers have recently announced that greyhound racing and its licensing will be considered as part of their animal welfare plan for Wales. Independent tracks in England have been required to be licensed since 2010, and the 2010 regulations apply to all tracks in England, including independent ones.

Christina Rees: The Minister has put her finger on the problem. The Valley track is in Ystrad Mynach, near Caerphilly, and is an independent track—although it is soon to be a GBGB track. The petition heard in the Senedd will be debated and will form part of the plan, so the Minister is quite correct. However, I would be interested to know what she thinks of the transformation from an independent track to a GBGB track.

Rebecca Pow: I thank the hon. Member for her comments, but that track is in Wales and the matter is still devolved. If she wants more detail on the transition to a GBGB track, I am happy to write to her.

Christina Rees: To be clear, what circumstances would the Minister consider important in the specific case of an independent track—say, in England—becoming a GBGB track?

Rebecca Pow: We only have one independent track in England, which I have named, just now, and as far as I know, it does not have any desire to transfer. However, if it did, it would have to adhere to all of the correct standards, exactly as all other tracks do. I am sure that if the hon. Member wants further detail, we can get back to her with that.

Bookmakers have also been encouraged by the Government to pay their fair share to fund GBGB welfare. However, consistently, about 95% of all licensed betting offices—including those online—are now contributing to the voluntary greyhound levy. I take the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton that the betting industry must be responsible in its contribution to funding welfare, addressing injuries, rehoming and so on. However, betting policy is led by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, so I urge him to raise that point with DCMS.

Neil Parish: There is no doubt that some in the betting industry are paying their dues, but others are not. That is the key: everybody should be paying. I am not the only one who can contact DCMS Ministers—I urge the Minister to do so, too, to make sure that we fight this hard. I am determined that the entire betting industry should pay its dues.

Rebecca Pow: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention and I completely take his point. The Government believe that greyhound racing currently has a very proactive, pro-welfare body in charge that wishes to work to improve animal welfare.

There has been a lot of agreement in this room. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell), in particular, for all the work he does for greyhounds with the Greyhound Trust and the all-party parliamentary group. We could not have a greater advocate for greyhounds, and I urge him to keep up his scrutiny of the industry. He painted such a great picture of his track in Essex. He was genuinely very supportive of the improvements made; I think we all agree that if there are more welfare improvements to make, we must make them. My hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) also raised that in his comments.

What a lot we learn about hon. Members in these debates. I have learned so much about the life of the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) and his experience with greyhounds. It has been a bit of a revelation, actually. I think he really brightened up the afternoon with his insights, experience and knowledge, for which I thank him. He clearly has so much knowledge and experience with greyhounds. I urge him to keep up his scrutiny and to work with other hon. Members present for the welfare of these absolutely lovely creatures. I think greyhounds quite like to sit on a sofa, as well as doing all that running—I have seen them be very lazy.

I will conclude there. I hear what has been said in the petition and I thank all those who signed it. I hope I have made it very clear that this Government take animal welfare as a whole incredibly seriously, and particularly the issue of greyhounds and greyhound racing. Improvements are yet to be made, and they will be made. I hope I have made that very clear. However, this Government do not feel that a ban on greyhound racing is necessary.

5.57 pm

Christina Rees: I thank all hon. Members for their contributions. Animal welfare is always very emotive, but this has been a very respectful debate. Again, I ask the Minister if she will meet with the petitioner, Vanessa—perhaps at Hope Rescue? Maybe the Minister can answer that in the few seconds remaining.

Rebecca Pow: I thank the hon. Lady for putting me on the spot. We in DEFRA are always pleased to hear if people have views about animal welfare that they want to communicate with us. I am not actually the Minister responsible for this issue; she currently has covid. I will pass on that message and, if she would like to meet the petitioner, I am sure she will be in touch.

Christina Rees: Again, I thank everyone for contributing to this debate, and I thank you, Sir Roger, for your excellent chairship as usual.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 554073, relating to greyhound racing.

Support for Black Victims of Domestic Abuse

[SIR CHRISTOPHER CHOPE *in the Chair*]

6 pm

Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 578416, relating to support for Black victims of domestic abuse.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Christopher. I thank the Petitions Committee and its Chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), for allowing me to move the motion despite not being a member of the Committee.

The petition we are considering is entitled:

“VALERIE’S LAW Compulsory Training for Agencies Supporting Black DV Victims”.

It calls on the Government to make

“specialist training mandatory for all police and other government agencies that support black women and girls affected by domestic abuse.”

The petition continues:

“Police and agencies should have culturally appropriate training to better understand the cultural needs of black women affected by domestic abuse.”

I thank the organisers of the petition—the specialist domestic violence organisation Sistah Space—and the 106,519 people who signed the petition, including 339 in my constituency. Sistah Space works with black women and girls who have experienced domestic or sexual abuse or lost a family member to domestic violence. Its mission is to encourage black survivors to report abuse by providing a safe cultural venue for victims to disclose abuse in a confidential environment and to encourage community integration. It also provides advice and support, as well as practical help, by providing hygiene and other essential items to women and girls who need them. I am very pleased that some members of Sistah Space have joined us in the Public Gallery today, and I thank them for helping me prepare for the debate.

The petition is about the support that black women and girls can and should expect from the police and other agencies that are supposed to help them when they experience domestic abuse, it is about the failures we too often see from the police and others in this regard, and it is about how we can make things better.

Before I come to the substance of the petition and the campaign for Valerie’s law, I want to speak a little about the context in which we are debating this issue. In the last few months, we have had the revelation that a 15-year-old black girl was taken out of an exam and strip-searched in her school by police officers on the basis that she smelled of cannabis—no drugs were found—we have had the shocking report into institutional racism and misogyny at Charing Cross police station, where male officers joked about beating their girlfriends and raping women, and we have had two Metropolitan police officers imprisoned for taking dehumanising photos at the murder scene of two black women, Nicole Smallman and Bibaa Henry.

The trust that black people—and perhaps especially black women—have in the police has been repeatedly damaged in recent months. It is, perhaps, at its lowest

point in decades. The police, and indeed the Government, must recognise that, acknowledge it, and set out how they intend to repair it. Even before we get to specialist training, we need basic confidence that the police will treat black women with respect.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): My hon. Friend has made an excellent start to her speech. She has touched on building trust and confidence in the police. Sistah Space has developed excellent campaigning tools and resources to educate people on the cultural differences that black African and Caribbean women make, but for that to take root and start to make a difference to the lives of black women, the Government and the police must recognise the role of institutional racism.

Abena Oppong-Asare: I thank my hon. Friend for making that point, which I completely support. In the last few months in particular, it has become even more apparent that we need that training.

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): Before I begin, I also thank those at Sistah Space for all the work that they have done, and I ought to mention that my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler), would definitely have taken part in the debate to voice her support but, as people will have seen, she is recovering from breast cancer.

Some 628 people from Hampstead and Kilburn signed the petition. Sadly, that does not surprise me. Women in my constituency—particularly black women—have told me how scandal after scandal has seriously undermined their confidence in the Met police. My hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare) has made an excellent start to the debate. Does she agree that the disturbing reports of racism and sexism at Charing Cross police station, which she has mentioned, have contributed to a breakdown of trust, and that specialist domestic violence training for the police would be an important first step in rebuilding trust between black women and the Metropolitan police?

Abena Oppong-Asare: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention and congratulate her on her work to bring Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe back to this country. What she said is important, and Sistah Space has very much been trying to put forward such training. The fact that so many people across the country have signed the petition, and that trust in the police is low at the moment, shows that now is the time for the Government to introduce some sort of training, which would help the police to regain the trust of many people, particularly black women victims of domestic abuse.

I will now turn to Valerie’s law. In March 2014, Valerie Forde and her one-year-old daughter, Jahzara, were murdered by her ex-partner. He attacked Valerie with a machete and a hammer, and slit Jahzara’s throat. Six weeks earlier, he had threatened to burn down the house with everybody inside. That was recorded by the police as a threat to property rather than a threat to life. The Independent Police Complaints Commission—as it was then—strongly criticised the Met’s failure, and found that officers’ inaction left Valerie alone with the man who killed her.

[Abena Oppong-Asare]

In Valerie's case, as in many others, there are real concerns that the police and other agencies have significant knowledge gaps when it comes to the black community and black victims of domestic abuse. I thank Valerie's daughter, who is in the Public Gallery, for joining us and for allowing me to share her mother's story. We cannot allow any more stories like that to happen again. I remind colleagues to be mindful of what they say in this debate.

Data from Agenda, the alliance for women and girls at risk, shows that black women who experience domestic abuse are less likely to be referred by police for specialist support. Agenda also found that black women who are supported by Refuge are 3% more likely to have experienced physical abuse and 4% more likely to have experienced sexual abuse than white survivors of abuse. That suggests that black women are more likely to reach Refuge services when they are experiencing the most visible and extreme forms of abuse, and that they may not be taken seriously when they report more hidden and insidious forms of abuse, such as psychological and financial abuse.

Agenda says that barriers to disclosing or reporting abuse for black and minority groups are rarely given sustained attention in policy making. According to Sistah Space, without basic understanding of the experience of black women,

"it is impossible for police officers and service providers to ensure black women are equally protected."

Valerie's law is simple: it would introduce mandatory specialist training for all agencies that help victims of domestic abuse. It would enable police officers, relevant Government agencies and domestic violence organisation staff to acknowledge and protect black women in abusive situations, through better understanding of the specific threats and challenges they face. To give a practical example, generally, bruises on black skin do not show the same way as on white skin. That means the crucial physical signs of violence can be missed or overlooked.

Agenda raised the issue of adultification, where black girls are viewed as older than their age and professionals assume they have greater levels of maturity and less innocence than their white peers. As well as informing more punitive responses to black girls and young women, that may reduce professionals' sense of their safeguarding responsibilities; practitioners highlight that stereotyping black young women as particularly resilient can be a barrier to accessing timely support. It is for those reasons that questions used to determine the level of risk should reflect the experience of black women and girls to better understand the danger they face.

Sistah Space is already delivering training to a variety of agencies, including local authorities. I welcome organisations and agencies that are taking the initiative right now to train their staff in that way, but it is clear that the Government need to take action to ensure that training is provided across the board. Unfortunately, the Government's response to the petition states that

"the Government does not feel it is necessary to mandate training"

on the specific needs of victims due to their ethnicity. I really hope the Government will reconsider their position during this debate. Only by making that training mandatory, whether in law or guidance, can there be accountability and assurances that agencies are providing it.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making a customarily excellent speech on a really important issue. I gave evidence to the Macpherson inquiry over 20 years ago. A number of the recommendations in the Macpherson report were about training police on a variety of issues, but this issue was not picked up. There is a range of issues, including domestic violence, where the police do not deal with black and minority ethnic communities in the same way as they do white communities and white victims of crime. Do we not need a broad look at all those issues, and mandatory training in all those areas, including domestic abuse?

Abena Oppong-Asare: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. The Macpherson inquiry was 20 years ago. Where are we now? Why is there no training being implemented to address these issues and support victims of domestic abuse? There is no reason it should not be implemented right now.

Sistah Space has made it clear that it is willing to work with the Government, other domestic abuse organisations and relevant bodies such as the College of Policing to develop a package of training that could be incorporated into existing training on domestic abuse. That would be relatively straightforward and would ensure that this important training is delivered to a wide range of police forces and agencies. But it requires the Government's support to make that happen. If the Minister cannot commit to that in full, I hope she will commit to working with Sistah Space and other organisations to see what progress can be made.

I note the Government's response to the petition states:

"To accompany the Domestic Abuse Act we will shortly publish statutory guidance for consultation that will provide further detail on how specific types of abuse can be experienced by different communities and groups, including ethnic minority victims."

Could the Minister give us more details? It sounds as though that could be a positive step towards ensuring that agencies provide support to all victims of domestic abuse, including black women, but it is crucial that the Government work with specialist organisations to ensure that the guidance is rooted in the reality that black and other minority victims face.

I want to mention several other connected things the Government can do to support black victims of domestic abuse, and I hope the Minister will be able to respond to some of them. First, the Government should provide substantial ringfenced funding for specialist services run by and for black women and girls. Secondly, they should fund further research into the prevalence and dynamics of violence, abuse and exploitation experienced by black women and girls, in collaboration with specialist services supporting them. That should be accompanied by robust data collection for inquiries into domestic abuse, with responses collected and published by gender, race, ethnicity, age, ability and other relevant protected characteristics. Finally, the Government should ensure that all public services respond appropriately to disclosures of domestic abuse. Safe reporting mechanisms for survivors accessing vital public services must be established, including for victims with no recourse to public funds so they feel confident making disclosures without fear of immigration enforcement.

I will bring my remarks to a close as I am looking forward to hearing from colleagues. I will end by acknowledging the experiences of victims and survivors. Last week, colleagues and I heard from a survivor who experienced domestic abuse from members of their family. The survivor had two children under three years old. Despite seeking help, they were turned away by multiple councils and other agencies, each saying that it was someone else's problem. Eventually, they were pushed back to their perpetrator. Victims and survivors may only have the energy to seek help once. That is why every agency, including councils, police forces, the NHS and third-sector organisations, must have the training skills to adequately support black women from the start. That is all that Valerie's law seeks to do. I hope the Government will do the right thing and support it today.

6.17 pm

Dame Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I warmly congratulate the Petitions Committee for having the foresight to take on this debate. Before I talk about the subject, I pay tribute to Valerie Forde. Valerie was my constituent. Her daughter is still a constituent. Valerie is still very warmly remembered. She was a big community figure and very active in the Hackney Marsh Partnership. She was very popular and is fondly remembered by anybody who ever met her. Valerie's daughter is clear that today we need to remember what she gave in life as well as how she left it. Her daughter, Jahzara, was bright and bubbly with everything ahead of her, but her life was cruelly cut short by an awful act of violence.

Valerie's family have asked me to reflect on the impact that her and Jahzara's murder has had on them. The impact goes on forever and ever. It will be felt by the family members and friends for a very long time to come. There are big issues, of course, about what happened at the time, which I will not repeat here in the time I have available. I refer hon. Members to my Adjournment debate in June 2020, when I highlighted some of the disparities in support for black women victims of domestic abuse. I put on record my thanks again to Sistah Space for its work in highlighting the disparities in support and, crucially, in understanding of black women victims of domestic violence.

The figures are stark. Freedom of information data from 30 police forces shows, as my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare) highlighted, that between 2016 and 2020 police forces were one and a half times more likely to bring forward a charge when the victim or survivor was white than when they were black. The proportion of black and minoritised victims since the start of the pandemic is higher than the previous 15-year average for domestic homicides and higher than the 2019 data by five percentage points. The number of high-risk domestic abuse cases heard in Hackney increased by 20% in the first year of the pandemic—that is, the financial year 2020-21.

Those are stark figures, and there are many reasons for that. Much of it is about misunderstanding, to put it politely; some of it is about unconscious bias; and some of it is about racist attitudes that lead to stereotyped views of how people should be treated. That is unacceptable. Domestic violence is a horrible thing to happen to anyone. It rips apart families and causes grief all round, but for there to be a disparity even in this horrendous

field because of the colour of your skin is unacceptable. Each of those domestic violence figures is one too many, so what needs to be done?

As well as Valerie's law, which is a really good initiative, there are wider things that can be done. Small specialist organisations that work with specific groups—in this case, black women—often find it hard to compete for the contracts that are let by local authorities, the Metropolitan police or the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, due to the funding cuts we have seen in local authorities over many years and the knock-on effect on the services those councils provide. We know that however good a council is, very often people need specialist services that are from the community and understand it, and can make sure that where there is a gap in understanding, it can be bridged. There is also clearly a need for greater representation of black women at policy level, as well as delivery level. Too often, we hear the phrase "BAME", which glosses over the many differences between different groups. It is really important that black women specifically have a space marked out for them to get the support they need.

If we are talking about things not being done about people without people, it is heartening that we are finally seeing far more black women in Parliament. For a very long time, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) was the only black woman in this place, and then for some time was one of only two. It is only in recent years that we have seen far more people in this place and, indeed, in government who have, and should have, more understanding of what is going on—a voice at the table to argue for people, which is a start. However, I think all my right hon. and hon. Friends would agree that that is not enough. It needs to happen at community level, from local council level right down to local delivery level—so that simple things, such as the colour of a bruise on black skin, do not have to be explained because somebody in that situation knows what they are looking for.

Valerie's law is a simple, proportionate step, and I hope the Minister will be sympathetic to it. It is about mandating guidance to police forces at the first stage of their training. It is not a difficult thing to do, and it can be taken beyond just black women, because it is important that the cultural sensitivities of other communities are understood. We are in the midst of recruiting a large number of additional police officers; that programme is going quite well in terms of numbers, but as the National Audit Office report that was published on Friday highlights, recruiting is only one step. Those officers then have to be trained and deployed—trained in training, but trained on the streets as well, the training that happens when a young officer turns up for the first time to a domestic violence situation.

Depending on that officer's background, they may never have met a black woman before. We know that happens in the Met, so it is really important that Valerie's law is brought in now so that those new police officers can start out to hopefully help transform the culture of the Met, which—as my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead has highlighted—has been rocked from top to bottom through a series of unacceptable racist and misogynist incidents. This law is a proportionate step that is simple to introduce, and I hope the Minister will embrace it quickly, so that those new police officers

[Dame Meg Hillier]

who are being recruited can learn from the beginning how they need to support black women who are victims of domestic violence.

6.23 pm

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): I also start by paying tribute to the fantastic work of Sistah Space. The fact that it is the only domestic abuse charity working with black and minority ethnic women shows the scale of the problem we are dealing with. I especially thank you, Ngozi, for the work you continue to do in leading this—I salute you.

Over 800 residents in my constituency signed this petition, which shows how important it is. I am proud to represent a vibrant constituency that is home to Brixton, Stockwell, Clapham, Kennington and Oval; a proud, diverse constituency where, if I am honest, a number of black women have raised this issue with me. They are worried. They are scared. They are fed up with seeing their black sisters dying. They are tired—we are all tired—but that does not mean we should not continue to campaign for this change. Today's debate and the associated work by Sistah Space highlights the fact that Valerie and her daughter were let down. If those threats had been taken seriously by the police, we would not be having this debate today—it is that simple. This debate cannot end without us asking the Minister what the Government will do to address the issue. Tragically, Valerie is far from alone in being a victim of domestic abuse, having found failures in the police, seemingly as a result of being black.

Research from Refuge found that between March 2020 and June 2021—in the midst of the pandemic that trapped domestic abuse victims in their home—black women were 14% less likely to be referred to Refuge for support by the police than white survivors of domestic abuse. That is despite the fact that Refuge found that black survivors were three times more likely to report that abuse in the first instance to the police.

Think about how difficult it is for these women to come forward in the first place. They may be in fear that their abuser will find out they have contacted the police. They have to summon courage, knowing that, by coming forward to the police, their life is at risk, and yet they are not taken seriously. These stark figures show that the police, often a frontline for domestic abuse cases, are letting down the black women who need their support at that critical time.

Every day a domestic abuse victim is left without support is another day they are subjected to torturous abuse, and it is another missed opportunity to get these women off the path that we sadly all know may escalate into deeper harm, physical violence and sometimes death. That is the reality facing so many women as we speak in this debate right now. So many women are scared to come forward and approach the police, because they do not know whether anyone will actually listen. We need to listen to these women.

Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Along with the incredible work being done by Sistah Space, Southall Black Sisters is running a pilot scheme with the Home Office to help women with no recourse to public funds.

These survivors will include many black women who have suffered domestic abuse but may be fearful of reporting it due to assumptions, stigma and biases that could lead to their deportation or detainment. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that we get clarity on what is happening with the Home Office funding for that pilot? Multiple reports suggest that it will end this month, which would force many women to stay in abusive relationships. That shows this Government's disregard when it comes to domestic violence and abuse, which they must take seriously.

Florence Eshalomi: I thank my hon. Friend for her powerful intervention. I commend her for speaking so publicly about what she experienced. By coming forward, she helped countless women she will never meet. It is so important that the Government look at how they respond to this. Migrant women, women with no recourse to public funds, BME women and LGBT women face different kinds of intersectionality in trying to get the right support. The Government need to understand that these women are being failed. I know that this is an area the Minister cares passionately about, and I hope that she will respond to these issues in her remarks.

The fact is that the current situation is unacceptable. We are calling for support for women and girls, and we need the Government to take leadership and ensure that there is no racial disparity in how victims of domestic abuse are treated. I mentioned that the Minister has taken some leadership on this, but I want her to go further. The draft statutory guidance under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has been referred to. That is welcome, and it mentions some of the problems faced by victims of domestic abuse, but it remains to be seen whether this change will go far enough in ensuring that we see a sea change in how black victims of domestic abuse are treated by professionals and agencies.

The Minister will be aware that the campaign for Valerie's law is advocating for clear cultural competency and training for police officers and service providers to ensure that black women facing abuse are given accurate assessments that correspond to the danger they are facing. They face danger almost on a daily basis. It is so important that the cultural environment and the barriers that black women face are understood and not overlooked and disregarded. I hope that the Minister will listen to everyone's contributions today and introduce meaningful ways to ensure that no other woman—no other black woman—will lose their life at the hands of violence.

6.30 pm

Taiwo Owatemi (Coventry North West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I thank the Petitions Committee for tabling this crucial debate, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare) for opening it and for all the work that she does on this issue.

As the shadow Minister for Women and Equalities and as a black woman, it is really important to me to be here today as we discuss how we can reform policing so that it better protects black women from violence. I want to thank all the charities, including Sistah Space, for their incredible work and their campaigning for change. As my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi) said, domestic abuse became even

more pervasive in British society during the covid-19 pandemic. It is harrowing that police recorded crimes of domestic abuse have doubled over the past five years, all while prosecutions have plummeted to an historic low.

We know that for many minority women the problems are compounded by institutional obstacles. Often, their ability to receive help, support and, ultimately, justice is impacted by institutional bias. According to the domestic violence charity Sistah Space, as many Members have mentioned, 86% of women of African or Caribbean heritage in the United Kingdom have either been a victim of domestic abuse or known a family member who has been assaulted.

However, even in the face of those alarming statistics, the police too often ignore barriers that prevent black survivors from getting the support they deserve. For example, too often, black women see their dangerous and life-threatening circumstances dismissed by the police because the police cannot recognise bruising on their skin. Bruises are not always as visible on black women as they are on women with lighter complexions.

Taking a step back to look at the broader picture, the UK's largest single provider of domestic abuse services, Refuge, recently published data showing that black survivors are 14% less likely to be referred by the police to use its services than white survivors. That is absolutely disgraceful. No domestic abuse victim should ever feel that they are being taken less seriously or given less support because of the colour of their skin. That is one of the many reasons why the Government need to act to provide specific training for police in supporting women of African and Caribbean heritage who are impacted by domestic violence and abuse.

That training should have been present when the police were handling Valerie's case, which is why today's debate is so important. As we have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead, Valerie Forde was a black woman who, along with her baby daughter, was murdered by her ex-partner in 2014. She reported the threats that she received to the police, but those threats were overlooked and the necessary response was not provided when it was needed. The anniversary of Valerie's death is three days from now, and there is no better way to honour her memory than by standing up here in Parliament and advocating for much needed and long overdue changes.

For far too long there has been a lack of specialist training for police and other key agencies supporting black women who face domestic abuse. Too many black women do not get the support that they need because the police are not trained enough to spot or deal appropriately with domestic violence in black communities. As a result, black women in this country are being impacted by violence and abuse and suffering unequal access to the resources and support that they desperately need. That is why we need mandatory specialist training for all police forces in England and Wales—something that the Labour party called for in its “Ending Violence Against Women and Girls” Green Paper last year and that I am calling for again today. I urge the Government to do right by black women in this country and to pass Valerie's law. I hope that the Minister will bring some positive news to this debate.

6.34 pm

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Christopher. I am grateful to the previous speakers, including the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare), who set out very eloquently why this issue matters and how we got here. I thank those in East Renfrewshire who signed the petition, and the more than 106,000 signatories overall. I particularly thank Sistah Space, which organised the petition so that we could focus our attention on Valerie's law and why it is so important, and I am pleased that some of the organisation's number are in the Public Gallery.

I have been struck by the power of the previous contributions, because they have focused on the real lived experiences of black women. The bottom line is that we need to listen to those experiences and be committed to upholding the fundamental human rights of women and girls. We need to recognise the lived experiences of black women and do our job, which is to make it possible for people to live their lives free from all forms of violence, abuse and harassment.

There is no doubt that there is a long history of systemic discrimination, which has led to real inequalities and disadvantage. If we are not willing to understand that, we will not be in a position to tackle it. I hope the Minister is able to explore some of that and talk to us about how UK Government policy can have an impact on gender equality and on this specific issue. If we recognise that there is a systemic issue, as undoubtedly there is here, it must be our priority to take action to deal with it.

The petition specifically asks for “specialist training” to be made

“mandatory for police and other government agencies that support black women and girls affected by domestic abuse.”

It is important that that is specified as culturally appropriate training, so that there is an understanding of the cultural needs and the potential backgrounds of these women. It is also important to recognise that the point made in the petition about too many women of African and Caribbean heritage not being afforded the same level of support in the past is true and has been illustrated very powerfully today. If we do not take the kind of action that is being sought, that will continue to be the case.

Obviously, that being the situation, black women are at increased risk, and we know that that will be the case if we do not seek to take action. Lots of things underlie that, and I will not necessarily dwell on them. However, I gently ask the Minister to reflect on policy and on where the UK Government are suggesting that we should go on some of these issues. If we are not clear that there is a systemic issue, it is not possible for us to deal with it. The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi) was incredibly clear when she set out why black women do not report domestic abuse, why they are so worried about doing that, and the stark consequences of their not coming forward.

The hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead mentioned young black women, and it is right that we have touched on the shocking situation of the young schoolgirl who was recently strip-searched. The hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Apsana Begum) rightly spoke of the additional complexity of women who have no recourse to public funds. I mention both things because they are examples of the need for the cultural competency that

[Kirsten Oswald]

the petition asks for. Knowledge of the realities of these women's lives must be an integral part of ensuring that change happens in a way that will actually make the difference that is needed.

The crime survey shows that as things stand in England and Wales, those in the "Black or Black British" and "Mixed" ethnic groups are significantly more likely than those in the "White", "Asian" or "Other" ethnic groups to experience sexual assault. I think that we can read across from that some of the additional vulnerabilities. As we have heard, these women are also less likely to report or disclose domestic abuse to the police, so there is a double whammy for their safety and wellbeing. We need to recognise that, so that we can talk about what needs to happen next.

I was struck by a quote from Halima Begum, the chief executive of the Runnymede Trust, who was talking about the UK Government's policy paper, "Inclusive Britain". She said:

"We need our government to take a whole-of-government approach to tackling racial disparities in our society, which means recognising how all of its actions, including its ongoing legislative agenda, impact black and ethnic minority communities."

That has to underlie everything that is done on this issue. I make a plea to the Minister to look again at the fact that the UK signed the Istanbul convention almost 10 years ago but is one of only a few European countries yet to ratify it and so is not bound by its provisions.

There are many things that the UK Government and Scottish Government are trying to do. I applaud them for their action, but what I am seeing from the UK Government at the moment will not be enough to deal with the systemic problems that we see. We have to be clear that none of us in any part of the UK is immune to the realities of discrimination. None of us is immune to conscious or unconscious discrimination. We need to accept that if we want to make a difference, and we need to reflect on what happens when we do not.

We have spoken about the scourge of domestic violence, but we have to recognise that all that is amplified—
[Interruption.]

Sir Christopher Chope (in the Chair): Order. There is a Division in the House and therefore the sitting is suspended for 15 minutes.

6.41 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

6.55 pm

On resuming—

Sir Christopher Chope (in the Chair): Order. The sitting is now resumed and we can continue until 7.45 pm.

Kirsten Oswald: Thank you, Sir Christopher. I am going to draw my speech to a close, but before I do so I want to speak a little more about Sistah Space, which has been so instrumental in moving us to a discussion of Valerie's law. I had a look at the group's website when preparing for the debate, and it was so eloquent in how it explored this challenging issue clearly. Despite the significant challenges that have been thrown their way, its members are making a marked and evident difference to lives.

It is important that we reflect on Sistah Space's campaign for Valerie's law and on why we are all here. The way that Valerie Forde is described on the website as a creative and community-focused woman is a real positive, and the way that the hon. Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier) spoke about her told us of a loved and loving woman. That matters and we should keep hold of it, because what happened to Valerie should never be anyone's story. We need to make sure that we listen to what we are told and press for this change, which will make a difference to the lives of black women who are impacted by domestic abuse. The best thing we can do today is hear those voices, recognise that we must do better and make sure that we take the opportunity to do better for black women and girls.

6.56 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate, Sir Christopher. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Opong-Asare) on her very informed and cogent speech. I point out to the Minister that we have an unusually large number of black people in the public gallery, which demonstrates the tremendous concern in all parts of the community about the issue. I hope that an acknowledgment of that concern will be reflected in what she has to say.

I want to start by talking about Valerie Forde, because we are talking about Valerie's law. As we have heard, she died in particularly tragic and violent circumstances in 2014 and it will be the anniversary of her death in three days. Although Valerie was a victim of domestic violence, she was much more than just a victim. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier) says, she was a vibrant woman who was extremely important and respected in her community. I think that her friends and family would want her to be remembered like that, for their contribution to the community.

As we have heard, Sistah Space has done tremendous work gathering all these thousands of signatures. Sistah Space has existed since 2015, but many of the women associated with it have been active in the community for much longer than that. The last time I saw some of them, last weekend, we were out campaigning on Child Q. I will just say a few sentences on Child Q, because that case reflects some of the institutional racism that Valerie's law is meant to address.

One thing that has emerged in the work and campaigning sufferers have done on the case is the wholly disproportionate number of black children who are strip-searched in London. We have some figures available, but I would say that they are almost certainly an underestimate. What strikes me in listening to accounts of what happened to Child Q is that the police came and strip-searched her—and they did not just strip-search her, they treated her physically in an extremely degrading way—and then went back to the station. They did not tell their sergeant and or anybody. For them, it was all in a day's work. That they were so casual about that extremely degrading strip search tells me that they have done it more often than the official figures reflect. I have still not had it explained to me why there are teachers in Hackney who think that the

appropriate thing to do if they think they smell cannabis on a schoolchild is not to let the parents know, but to call the police, and that that will deal with the issue. There is a lot more to say about Child Q, and I am sure that the opportunity to do so will come up in this Parliament.

On Valerie's law and black women victims of domestic violence, when I was listening to my colleagues, I was thinking of my mother, who never suffered physical violence but was the subject of extreme coercive control to the extent that she eventually moved out of our home, leaving my father, my brother and me. My father being no kind of feminist, I had to do all the housework and cooking when she left. What he did to upset me, and to point out his feelings about my mother, was to get a photograph of her, slash it with a knife, scribble red ink on it and pin it above the cooker, because he knew I would have to look at the picture three times a day.

My mother would never have dreamed of going to an institution, to a community group or to the state in any form whatsoever. That was 40 years ago, but I think that one of the issues around black women and domestic violence even today is that reluctance to go to institutions—partly through pride, partly through a fear of institutions, partly through an acceptance of patriarchy. That is why we need organisations such as Sistah Space, which can reach out to those women, and support and enable them to engage with the institutions that they need to engage with. Sistah Space is doing very valuable work. We know that black women are particularly vulnerable to domestic abuse and that they do not get the service and the care that they should from some institutions.

Just this afternoon, I spoke to a constituent who has been the victim of domestic abuse. She has been treated very poorly by the police at Stoke Newington police station and by the Crown Prosecution Service. Her husband was convicted of domestic violence, but he appealed and got off. In the end, the court was not willing to accept her word or her son's word—he witnessed what happened—and her husband was released from prison and continues to harass her. People sometimes talk about domestic violence as if it happens only to ordinary women. This woman is a very educated middle-class woman, and she is clearly completely traumatised by the physical domestic abuse that she has endured. She relates a lack of concern, poor treatment, an unwillingness to take a proper statement and all the other issues around the police, and if a highly educated woman like her can be treated so unprofessionally and so dismissively by the police, what happens to women who perhaps do not have her confidence?

As colleagues have said, there is clearly a real need for training in all aspects of domestic violence and women of colour, be they the cultural and even well-founded fear of going to institutions to complain about their partners or husbands, simple things such as being able to recognise bruises on black skin, or being able to understand the society and culture of black and minority ethnic communities. Clearly, there is an important need for training in all the institutions that deal with victims of domestic violence.

I would also say that, although in the short term we need the training, in the medium to long term we need to see black people in those institutions, whether as social workers and police officers or in management positions where they can take decisions. In the end, that

is what will make it possible for people like my constituent or even my mother to go forward and talk about some of the things they are suffering. But in the immediate short term, there has long been a need for proper training.

I hope the Minister has listened to my colleagues and seen the concern of the public, and will be able to come forward with a constructive response to what the petition for Valerie's law is asking.

7.5 pm

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): It is a real pleasure to follow a moving contribution by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott); she shared some of her lived experience that will stay with us and motivate us to go further and do more. I thank her for sharing her contribution.

As others have done, I thank the Petitions Committee for securing this incredibly important debate. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare), who opened the debate with an incredibly powerful contribution in which she made several serious points about practical measures that could, and should, be adopted almost immediately. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips); given her tireless work in this area, she would certainly be here were it not for a sudden family bereavement. I am sure all Members join me in sending her our condolences. I spoke to her ahead of the debate, and she spoke incredibly highly of Sistah Space.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead said, Valerie Forde was a mother, a daughter and a black woman. Six weeks before being brutally killed, Valerie reported her ex-partner's threats to her life to the police. The threat was deprioritised and reported as a threat to property rather than to her life. On 31 March, Valerie and her baby daughter were killed at the hands of her ex-partner. The eighth anniversary of this tragic, heartbreaking loss is this week.

This debate is about support and protection for black women experiencing domestic abuse. At the moment, society is failing victims. We have heard many shaming facts and the harrowing lived experience of survivors. To paint a brief, troubling landscape, and to echo the words of others, we know there are numerous intersecting inequalities that black and minoritised women face that result in a higher risk of experiencing violence against women and girls. Black women face significantly higher barriers to reporting abuse and accessing protection, refuge and support. Research shows that black and migrant women experience higher rates of domestic-abuse-related homicide, and 50% of victims experience abuse from multiple perpetrators.

Others have shared these statistics, but at the height of the covid pandemic, when domestic abuse services were inundated with calls for help, the charity Refuge found black women were 14% less likely to be referred to their services for support by police than white survivors of domestic abuse. That is despite black women being 3% more likely to report abuse to the police than their white counterparts. Black and minoritised women are more likely to report inappropriate professional responses from statutory and voluntary agencies, including responses based on cultural, ethnic and religious stereotypes. A 2020 report from the organisation Imkaan said of the police:

[Holly Lynch]

“Black Caribbean women in particular said the responses were sluggish and stereotypically cast them as aggressive rather than ‘victims that needed help.’”

There are things that we can and must do, including, as Valerie’s law asks, improving the training of institutions and professionals who work with survivors of domestic and sexual abuse with African and Caribbean heritage. The Labour party released the “Ending Violence Against Women and Girls” Green Paper last year, which stated that we would ensure

“Training on the experiences of violence and abuse faced by Black, Asian, minority ethnic, LGBT+, disabled and migrant women. Labour would ensure that police and RASSO units training recognises the intersectionality of prejudices and discrimination, and additional barriers to accessing support and protection, that contributes to these victim’s experiences of violence against women and girls.”

All victims of domestic abuse or sexual violence need to be protected and supported. Institutions whose job it is to provide that care, support and protection need to be trained in such a way that they deliver it, taking into account the specific needs and experiences of all groups. It is as simple as that.

We need processes in place to ensure that victims and survivors are protected from the conscious or unconscious bias that we know exists in society. We must ensure a system that provides access to support and protection; victims and survivors cannot carry that burden themselves. Victims should not have to navigate ignorance, cultural bias or overt racism to access basic rights. The responsibility for safety must lie with those who are meant to protect us: those in the criminal justice system. Effective cultural competency training can support that.

In response to the petition, the Government have claimed that it is not necessary to mandate training because

“Current training on domestic abuse should include recognising the specific needs of victims due to their ethnicity or cultural background”,

but the lived experiences of women and girls are telling us otherwise. It is imperative that we listen to Sistah Space—I am so pleased that its representatives have been able to join us—and all supporters of Valerie’s law on what needs to change. We support the call to make cultural competency training mandatory for Government-run institutions involved in supporting African and Caribbean-heritage survivors of domestic and sexual abuse.

Valerie’s law and Sistah Space have driven today’s debate, but there is much more to be done to better protect and support black women who suffer domestic and sexual abuse. To truly protect and support all women, we must ensure we tackle the significantly higher barriers to accessing refuge and support that black women face. We must support and expand the by and for services available that provide for black and minoritised women’s specific experiences and needs. Importantly, by and for expert services are trusted by the women they support, due to their understanding of intersectionality. Minoritised women’s experiences of abuse and violence often intersect with race, immigration status, age and poverty. Those multiple discriminations often mean that the trauma experienced by victims is complex, and only specialist practitioners with experience and understanding can provide the right support. However,

over the past decade, 50% of such specialist refuges have been forced to close, or have been taken over by a larger provider due to a lack of funding. According to 2018 data, there are fewer than 30 specialist by and for black and minoritised women’s refuges left in the whole of the UK.

As others have said, the situation is even more perilous for victims with no recourse to public funds. Just 5% of refuge spaces listed in 2019 were accessible to women with “no recourse to public funds” status. If a victim cannot access safety and support, what happens then? Black and minoritised survivors, who are disproportionately unable to access refuge, sometimes end up having to make the unthinkable choice between homelessness and remaining with their abuser. They also might be forced into exploitative and unsafe private shared housing, or sofa surfing—dangerous options that leave them vulnerable to repeat victimisation. We must ensure ring-fenced sustainable funding for by and for specialist providers. The Labour party’s violence against women and girls green paper commits to that, and so should the Government.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead said, we need to collect more vital data. Statistics and data that allow us to fully investigate and comprehend the relationship between protected characteristics and violence against women and girls are rare. The Femicide Census, which documents the women killed by men each year, tells us that during the period from 2008 to 2018, in 79% of cases in which a woman was murdered by a man, the ethnicity of the victim was not recorded. Also, while the Office for National Statistics provides an analysis of those involved in homicide offences by ethnic appearance, that data is not broken down by gender.

The Femicide Census reports that the lack of meaningful, verified data on ethnicity is an ongoing problem. It hinders proper research and our understanding of risk factors, barriers to support, and the need for specialist services. It states:

“The failure to record and publicise demographic data can also feed stereotypes, prejudice and assumptions. Media tends to over focus on the details of violence against women in certain communities and this in turn both feeds and reflects the existing prejudices and racism across UK society.”

The fact of the matter is that we count what we care about. We must gather better data to fully see and tackle the problem, so that we can truly protect all women.

Before closing, I thank Members for taking part, not least my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi), who said that every day we fail to step in and recognise that a woman needs help is a day we leave them at the mercy of their abuser. My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North West (Taiwo Owatemi) said that the failure to recognise bruises due to the lack of cultural competency was contributing to the failure to fully support women. My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier) spoke of how Valerie and her daughter lived and were very much loved.

The current failings are clear, and we know that there are changes that we can make to better protect and support black and minoritised victims of domestic abuse. We can save lives, and I urge the Government to act with the urgency that the situation demands.

7.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Rachel Maclean): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I thank the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Abena Oppong-Asare) for introducing the debate and setting out the excellent work of Sistah Space. I warmly welcome everyone from Sistah Space who has come to witness our proceedings. As she and they already know, I very much look forward to meeting them to discuss their work in much more detail, and to seeing how we can constructively take their important work forward. I thank them for their work more generally in campaigning on domestic abuse.

I, too, pay tribute to Valerie and her daughter Jahzara. Many Members have set out the work that she did, and the influence and impact that she had in her community. I very much agree with those remarks, and I hope that we will remember her for being more than just a victim. I hope that the debate will go some way to ensuring that. Obviously, the crime was horrific. My thoughts, and everyone's here, I am sure, are with the loved ones of the victim. We owe it to all victims and their families to use every measure at our disposal to prevent further tragedies. We expect all police forces to take necessary action to respond to all victims with the care and sensitivity that they deserve.

I will talk first about actions that the Government are taking to tackle domestic abuse. Then I will come on to the issue of training for the police. I will end by setting out my response as Minister to this petition. Our landmark Domestic Abuse Act 2021 will help the millions affected by these awful crimes by strengthening the response across all agencies, from the police and the courts to local authorities and service providers. It will also strengthen measures to protect victims, including children.

Our domestic abuse plan, which we will publish shortly, will seek to transform the whole of society's response, so as to prevent offending, support victims, pursue perpetrators and strengthen the systems and processes needed to deliver these goals. It will be closely aligned with the "Tackling violence against women and girls" strategy that we published in July last year. It will use the same call for evidence, which actively sought input from under-represented groups to ensure that we heard the perspectives of a diverse range of people, including victims and survivors from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Opposition Members have all highlighted that their constituents, and victims who they have worked with, have said that the response they received was not good enough. We as a Government agree with that. That is why we have taken the action that we have. We have brought forward the "Tackling violence against women and girls" strategy, and we will shortly publish the plan.

Florence Eshalomi: I thank the Minister for giving way and for her remarks so far. We all mentioned issues that our constituents have raised, but does she appreciate that for each constituent we referenced, there are thousands of other constituents who have not come forward, because they feel that no one will ever listen to them?

Rachel Maclean: Yes, I strongly agree. That was the evidence that came out of the call for evidence, which had the largest response of any Government consultation—or one of the largest; it was certainly a significant

response—and evidence came from many previously under-represented groups, victims and survivors. I do use the word survivor; that is the preferred word.

Of course we recognise that when it comes to these crimes, and many others that she and I discuss regularly, there are barriers to coming forward. The plan, and the "Tackling violence against women and girls" strategy, sets out how we intend to tackle those barriers and facilitate, make it easier for, and build confidence for victims and survivors to come forward and get the justice and response that they so richly deserve.

Specialist support, as many have highlighted, is vital, so the Government are funding those specialist by and for services, including with £2 million in the last financial year. Furthermore, as we committed to doing in the cross-Government "Tackling violence against women and girls" strategy, we have provided an additional £1.5 million this year for those valuable specialist services for victims of violence against women and girls.

As announced in the Budget, the Ministry of Justice funding for support services will increase to £185 million by 2024-25. It is vital that all agencies and professionals supporting victims of domestic abuse are aware that domestic abuse affects a wide and disparate group, and that a one-size-fits-all approach to support is not appropriate for all victims, especially those with specific needs and vulnerabilities, including ethnic minority victims.

Abena Oppong-Asare: I welcome the fact that the Government are looking at strengthening the support and abuse plan, which the Minister mentioned. However, does it specifically reference support for black women and girls?

Rachel Maclean: It does indeed. The hon. Lady will not need to wait much longer to read the domestic abuse plan in full, nor for the domestic abuse statutory guidance that she has asked about. We are in the process of finalising that, and it will provide further detail on specific types of abuse that can be experienced by different communities and groups, including black and other ethnic minority victims.

That guidance specifically mentions that ethnic minority victims might—and almost certainly do—experience additional barriers to disclosing domestic abuse and seeking help, including distrust of the police and other agencies. It mentions that professionals should be aware of that, and should actively seek to ensure that the right support is made available. We expect all agencies, and those working with victims of domestic abuse, to pay regard to that guidance.

Abena Oppong-Asare: I thank the Minister for being generous with her time. It is great that there is a guide. However, can she explain what references or recommendations are in the guidance specifically regarding black women and girls who are victims of domestic abuse?

Rachel Maclean: I urge the hon. Lady to have a tiny bit of patience, because if the usual channels provide me with the time, I will come to the House to speak in detail about the domestic abuse plan and guidance, and the accompanying statutory requirements. However, she may be reassured to know that that guidance went out for consultation, and many organisations in the sector specifically fed back on the needs of the victims and

[Rachel Maclean]

survivors whom they represent—including black women and girls, but also those of other ethnic minorities and intersectionalities that many Members have referenced.

The guidance is an important part of our work, but it is not the only part. The Crown Prosecution Service also plays a vital role in this space. It will soon launch a consultation on its domestic abuse legal guidance, which will include information on the impact that domestic abuse can have on different groups of people, including black and ethnic minority victims and survivors. The CPS is also developing a new training programme through engagement with community groups and stakeholders, and is seeking to deepen its understanding of the issues that different groups can experience when trying to access justice.

Turning to the police and the training, which are at the centre of the debate, the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead will hopefully find it useful if I set out the current training landscape. The College of Policing has mandatory foundation training for those entering the service, including all the new officers being recruited as a result of the police uplift programme. That training includes substantial coverage of police ethics and self-understanding, including the effects of personal conscious and unconscious bias. It also covers hate crimes, ethics and equalities, and policing without bias.

Further training is then provided in specialist areas throughout an officer's career. For example, training for those involved in public protection includes methods to raise officers' self-awareness of their own views, stereotypes and biases.

The College of Policing has also developed specialist domestic abuse training, the Domestic Abuse Matters programme, which helps first responders develop the skills they need when first on the scene of an incident or report. A core thread running through it is that it specifically considers the needs and vulnerabilities of different victims, including black and ethnic minority women and girls. The training specifically covers responding to so-called honour-based abuse, which, though not the subject of today's debate, is clearly of interest to many Members. That training has been delivered already to, or is in the process of being set up for, the majority of forces. We continue to work closely with the college to encourage further take-up.

The College of Policing issues authorised professional practice documents, which are the official source of professional practice on policing. The college's guidance on domestic abuse clearly sets out that victims may have specific needs or issues relating to their cultural background or immigration status that should be considered when understanding the risk and vulnerability of the victim. The college has also produced advice for police officers to advise first responders and investigators on how to deal with cases of honour-based abuse, which disproportionately affects members of ethnic minority communities. Last week, the Government published their updated guidance on forced marriage, which includes a chapter for police officers.

I have heard clearly the passionate calls from many Members across the House and about the excellent work done by the Sistah Space charity. As a Minister who is relatively new to this role, I undertake to bring together Sistah Space with the College of Policing and

the National Police Chiefs Council. I will facilitate that meeting to take place as soon as diaries can be synchronised, but I hope it will be within a relatively short period. I want the leaders in policing to hear directly from Members who are working with black and ethnic minority women and girls. I want them to explain the specific issues that have been discussed today, including that of bruising. Clearly, if there are gaps in police officer training, I know that they will be the first to put their hands up and say, "We want more information, because we want to protect our communities." Every police officer I have worked with, bar one or two, has absolutely wanted to do their best, whatever the colour of their skin, to protect women and girls.

I thank the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead for bringing this matter to the attention of the House and for her work, and the many hundreds of thousands of petitioners who have signed and shared on social media.

I have a couple of other points to set out—I think I have some time left, Sir Christopher.

Sir Christopher Chope (in the Chair): You have until quarter to eight.

Rachel Maclean: I will not detain you for that long, Sir Christopher, and I will allow the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead time to sum up.

The hon. Lady knows that we have a new full-time national police lead for violence against women and girls, Deputy Chief Constable Maggie Blyth. One of her key roles—I meet her regularly to discuss this and to ask her to ensure that she includes it—is to build trust and confidence in the police. Members have referenced various individual forces, but this wider piece of work is happening across all police forces in the country. That includes her working directly with charities that support black and minoritised women and girls, to make sure that the police are not overlooking their specific needs.

To finish, I will talk about domestic homicide, which is an utterly abhorrent tragedy. When it happens to women like Valerie, it is vital that we remember her legacy and that we learn lessons when such terrible crimes happen. We will continue to build our evidence base on domestic homicides through the domestic homicides project, which is now in its second year. That is built on the recognition that there is more to do in the case of domestic homicides to understand, to build that learning within the force and to ensure that the police improve their response to tackling domestic abuse, so that they can prevent more such crimes from taking place.

We are creating an online repository to hold all domestic homicide reviews in order to allow for more analysis of the patterns, trends and triggers for domestic homicide, and the data, as the hon. Member for Halifax mentioned, to allow us to prevent further tragic deaths.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): Will the Department also look at suicide rates and whether there is a connection to them? We know that in some cases violence in relationships ends up with women taking their own lives. I do not think that that is documented, but will it form part of the strategy, because it is as tragic an event as a homicide?

Rachel Maclean: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise that point. It is something that we are looking at very closely, because we recognise that the pattern of

domestic abuse leading up to suicide is sometimes overlooked. The work that is taking place in the domestic homicide review project is looking specifically at the tragic cases of suicide as part of the wider work, and I will be happy to update the House in the normal way.

I thank all the Members that have taken part in the debate, including the hon. Members for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi) and for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier), the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), and the hon. Members for Coventry North West (Taiwo Owatemi) and for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald). We have heard striking personal accounts from Members across the House, and I thank everyone who has shared their experiences. We all want to do better by those Members, their constituents and the victims and survivors represented so well by the Sistah Space charity.

I am grateful for the opportunity to address the Government's position. Domestic abuse is a terrible crime and we are committed to doing everything we can to stop it happening, to pursue perpetrators when it does, and to give victims the best possible support.

7.31 pm

Abena Oppong-Asare: First, I thank Sistah Space for all its campaigning, particularly its hard work in supporting victims of domestic abuse. I also thank Valerie's daughter for allowing us to share her story so that we can get mandatory training for people and organisations such as the police and other agencies.

I also thank hon. Members for their contributions on how things can be done better for victims of domestic abuse, particularly black victims. My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Dame Meg Hillier) spoke about Valerie and the impact on her family. My hon. Friends the Members for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi) and for Coventry North West (Taiwo Owatemi) also spoke, and I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) for sharing her personal story. It is not easy to share such stories, so I thank her for doing so. I also thank the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire

(Kirsten Oswald). As we know, the hard work has already been done by Sistah Space, so there is no reason why the training should not be put in place.

I thank the Minister for her approach to this debate. I welcome what she said about arranging a meeting with Sistah Space and the College of Policing. I am sure that Sistah Space will agree that that is a massive, positive step forward, so I thank the Minister for that.

I look forward to seeing the domestic abuse plan in detail. I will see that before I make any further comments. I welcome the guidance and new training for engagement with groups, but Sistah Space also needs to feed into it, along with relevant organisations that support black victims of domestic abuse, to ensure we get this right and no one is left behind. I spoke to Sistah Space before the debate and it said that the experience is so distressing for black women, and that that is so frustrating. We need to recognise people's trauma when they share their stories. As my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall said, many people have not spoken about their stories and it can be extremely triggering to do so. That even includes talking to the police about their experiences, because they may not always be taken seriously.

Ms Abbott: We all agree on the issues in relation to domestic violence and women of African and Caribbean descent, but there are also issues facing our south Asian sisters. As well as looking at issues in relation to black women, it is important that the Minister pays attention to the work being done by groups such as Southall Black Sisters.

Abena Oppong-Asare: I thank my right hon. Friend for mentioning the work of Southall Black Sisters. I know that the Minister works closely with them. This debate is a positive step forwards and I look forward to my meeting shortly with the Minister and Sistah Space to talk about next steps.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 578416, relating to support for Black victims of domestic abuse.

7.36 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 28 March 2022

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

Green Freeports in Scotland: Bidding Prospectus

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations (Michael Gove): On 25 March, the UK Government and the Scottish Government jointly launched the bidding prospectus for green freeports, expanding the freeport programme to Scotland. The bidding period will close on 20 June 2022. The green freeports in Scotland bidding prospectus can be found at the below page:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/green-freeports-in-scotland-bidding-prospectus>

Green Freeports will be at the forefront of delivering the Government's net zero and levelling up agendas in Scotland. Green freeports will promote regeneration in our local areas by attracting high quality employment opportunities, promoting decarbonisation, increasing trade, and attracting investment to form innovative business clusters. This collaboration between the UK Government and the Scottish Government is evidence of the opportunities available to the whole of the UK through joint delivery of ambitious programmes.

The green freeport programme is based on the same model as the English programme and offers the same raft of incentives. Devolved elements of the offer were created in conjunction with the Scottish Government, with the UK Government sharing the lessons learnt and expertise gained from the English freeport programme.

The customs and tax models are designed to incentivise businesses to invest in green freeports. This is supplemented with seed funding to develop key infrastructure to help level up communities. New measures that speed up planning processes will accelerate this development and new initiatives will encourage innovators to drive additional economic growth and create new jobs. Potential green freeports will have to outline a decarbonisation plan which will not only help protect our environment, but help to reduce our dependence on, and vulnerability to, the fluctuating international fossil fuel market.

Green freeports will be selected according to a transparent and fair competitive bidding process. Officials from the UK and Scottish Governments will jointly assess bids, with Ministers from both Governments having an equal say on the final selection. Both Governments will look for a commitment from prospective green freeports to collaborate closely with key partners across the public and private sectors.

The UK Government will build upon this success and continue to work with the other devolved administrations to extend the freeport programme across the rest of the UK.

[HCWS722]

CABINET OFFICE

Digital, Data and Technology Sourcing Playbook

The Minister for Brexit Opportunities and Government Efficiency (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg): HM Government have today published the "Digital, Data and Technology Sourcing Playbook". The Cabinet Office, in collaboration with industry, other Government Departments, the Central Digital and Data Office and the Digital, Data and Technology Function, has developed a 'Digital, Data and Technology Playbook'. It both mandates how central Government Departments and arms-length bodies (ALBs) should approach sourcing digital, data and technology products and services, while laying out best practice for the wider public sector.

The Playbook reflects HM Government's focus on maximising value for money for the taxpayer by setting projects and programmes up for success from the start. Alongside achieving value for money, our approach to commercial delivery will enable the Government to procure innovative and transformative ways of delivering public services while ensuring a focus on cyber security, tackling legacy IT and delivering on the Government's SME agenda.

The Playbook will support the Government in opening the door to SMEs and voluntary, community and social enterprises in the digital sector, who often lead the way in innovation and will support economic growth, employment and investment opportunities across the UK.

Applying the policies and principles from the Digital, Data and Technology Playbook will enable the Government to deliver on six cross-cutting priorities which set out the ethos for the Government's digital work and underpin what we need to consider as we undertake commercial activity:

Taking an outcome-based approach to delivering products and services focusing on user needs:

- Avoiding and remediating Legacy IT and tackling our technical debt;

- Ensuring cyber security to maintain operational resilience;

- Enabling innovation from continuous improvement to transform new products and services;

- Driving sustainability in our environment, commercial practices and economy;

- Levelling the playing field for SMEs to enable economic growth, employment and investment opportunities.

Digital, data and technology underpins everything we do and enables HM Government to provide vital services for millions of citizens every day. By improving our commercial approach to digital goods and services, we will progress to a more innovative and accessible digital sector which will benefit all of our citizens. The Digital, Data and Technology Playbook can be viewed in full on www.gov.uk.

A copy of the "Digital, Data and Technology Sourcing Playbook" will be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses in Parliament.

[HCWS723]

TREASURY

Devolved Administration Funding

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr Simon Clarke):

Recognising the pressures people are currently facing, on 3 February the Chancellor announced that households in England will receive a £150 council tax rebate. As a result of this measure, the supplementary estimates 2021-22 confirmed £576 million through the Barnett formula for the devolved Administrations. Exceptionally, the Chancellor set out that the devolved Administrations would have the flexibility to spend that funding this year or next.

The devolved Administrations have now all confirmed that they wish to carry forward this funding in full to spend in 2022-23. They will formally receive this funding at main estimates 2022-23.

£million	Scottish Government	Welsh Government	Northern Ireland Executive
Resource DEL excluding depreciation	295.954	180.196	100.066

The devolved Administrations' 2021-22 funding as at supplementary estimates 2021-22 is therefore being reduced by the same amount.

In line with the statement of funding policy the Welsh Government is also switching £595 million from Resource DEL to Capital DEL (general).

This means that revised 2021-22 funding is as follows:

£million	Scottish Government	Welsh Government	Northern Ireland Executive
Resource DEL excluding depreciation	37,543.254	16,504.940	14,239.497
Capital DEL (general)	5,326.302	2,985.238	1,817.601
Capital DEL (Financial Transactions)	235.694	179.726	124.656
Total DEL	43,105.250	19,669.905	16,181.754

[HCWS724]

DEFENCE

Baseline Profit Rate 2022-23: Single Source Defence Contracts

The Minister for Defence Procurement (Jeremy Quin):

I am today announcing that I have set the baseline profit rate (BPR) for single source defence contracts at 8.31%. This differs from the SSRO's recommendation of 8.07%.

The SSRO calculate the BPR by taking an average of the methodology of profits earned by comparable companies, usually over the preceding three years. This year's calculation therefore includes profits reported by

firms in the comparator group for the year ending March 2021, which was the year when covid-19 had its largest economic impact. The SSRO recommended reducing the immediate effect on the BPR by using a four year average rather than the usual three. While I believe this was a sensible approach, and I support the principles of the SSRO approach, I have decided that it would be fairer to remove the effects of covid-19 completely from the calculation by using the average of the three years prior to 2021.

My reason for this is that while this BPR will be used to calculate the profit payable on single source work contracted in 2022-23, much of the work will be undertaken several years in the future, given the long-term nature of many Defence contracts. I believe it would be unfair to include in this rate the effects of an event that is as extraordinary as covid-19. In reaching this conclusion I have drawn on the analysis produced by the SSRO on the extent to which last year's rate was unusual, and by my officials on its potential long-term effects.

I have asked the SSRO to engage with industry and my officials in returning—next year—to a market-based benchmark based on their established methodology that reflects my intention to remove the impact of covid-19. For the same reasons, I am also using the figures calculated by the SSRO for the last year before covid for the three capital servicing rates.

Last year I introduced a net zero Baseline Profit Rate for Government-to-Government Contracts. The SSRO has incorporated this into their recommendation this year. I have accepted this recommendation. I am also announcing that I am accepting the SSRO recommendation for their funding adjustment. Neither of these figures are significantly affected by wider economic factors.

These rates will also be published in the London Gazette, as required by the Defence Reform Act 2014.

All of these new rates will come into effect from 1 April 2022.

Recommended Rates agreed by the Secretary of State for Defence

Element	2021 Rates	2022 Rates
Baseline Profit Rate (BPR) (% on contract cost)	8.31%	8.31%
Baseline Profit Rate to apply to contracts between the Secretary of State and a company wholly owned by the UK Government and where both parties agree (% on contract cost)	0.057%	0.046%
Fixed Capital Servicing Rate (% on Fixed Capital employed)	3.27%	3.27%
Working Capital Servicing Rate (% on positive Working Capital employment)	1.33%	1.33%
Working Capital Servicing Rate (% on negative Working Capital employed)	0.65%	0.65%
SSRO	0.057%	0.046%

[HCWS726]

EDUCATION

National Funding Formula and School Improvement Consultation

The Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): Alongside the Schools White Paper, which will enable every child to fulfil their potential by ensuring that they receive the right support, in the right place, at the right time, I am providing an update on two related elements of the Government's work: the national funding formula and school improvement.

National funding formula

The Department for Education will today publish the Government's response to the public consultation on moving to a "direct" schools national funding formula (NFF), where the Department would determine funding allocations for schools directly, without adjustment through local authorities' funding formulae.

The Government response summarises views raised by respondents to the consultation, and confirms that the Government will bring forward the relevant legislation, to move to allocating funding for all mainstream schools according to a single, national formula, when parliamentary time allows. In addition, the process of transition to the direct NFF will commence in 2023-24, through bringing local authorities' funding formulae closer to the NFF; this provision will be included in the annual School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations. The Department will publish a second stage consultation with more detailed proposals on implementation in spring 2022.

The introduction in 2018-19 of the national funding formula for mainstream schools was a crucial step towards a fairer funding system and replacing the postcode lottery of the past. The changes set out in the Government's response to the consultation will make the system fairer still, by ensuring that each mainstream school is allocated funding on the same basis, wherever it is in the country, and every child is given the same opportunities, based on a consistent assessment of their needs.

School improvement consultation

The Government's 2019 manifesto set out a commitment to intervene in schools where there is entrenched underperformance. Building on this commitment, the Department for Education will today launch a public consultation seeking views on the introduction of a new measure to support schools that are not making necessary improvements. This will make schools that are currently rated as 'Requires Improvement' by Ofsted and were also rated less than 'Good' at their previous inspection eligible for intervention.

This new measure will enable the Department to support these schools, particularly those in new education investment areas, by moving them into strong academy trusts who can facilitate better collaboration, direct resources where most needed and enable our best leaders to support a greater number of schools.

The consultation will run for a period of eight weeks and will close on Monday 23 May 2022.

I will place copies of both the Government response on NFF and the consultation on school improvement measures in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS720]

Schools: Capital Funding

The Minister for School Standards (Mr Robin Walker): My noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the School System, (Baroness Barran), has made the following statement:

Today, I am announcing capital funding to support the creation of new school places and improve the condition of the school estate. This investment will support the Government's priority to ensure that every child has the opportunity of a place at a good school, whatever their background.

I am announcing £746 million to support local authorities to create school places needed for September 2024 and an additional £195 million to create places for September 2025.

I am also announcing £1.8 billion of capital funding in financial year 2022-23 for improving the condition of the school estate. This includes:

£1.1 billion in school condition allocations (SCA) for local authorities, large multi-academy trusts and large voluntary-aided school bodies—such as dioceses—to invest in maintaining and improving the condition of their schools.

Almost £500 million for the condition improvement fund (CIF). This is an annual bidding round for essential maintenance projects at schools in small and stand-alone academy trusts, small voluntary-aided bodies and sixth form colleges. Outcomes of the 2022-23 bidding round will be announced in due course.

Over £200 million of devolved formula capital (DFC) funding allocated directly for schools to spend on their capital priorities.

The funding announced today is part of the total £19.4 billion of capital funding announced at the 2021 spending review to support the education sector between 2022-23 and 2024-25. These funding allocations will allow local authorities and other responsible bodies to plan ahead with confidence, to invest strategically to ensure they deliver good school places for every child who needs one, and to maintain and improve the condition of the school estate to support effective education.

Full details have been published on the Department for Education section on the www.gov.uk website.

[HCWS721]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Covid-19 Vaccination: Booster Doses

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maggie Throup): The covid-19 vaccination programme has fuelled this country's journey along the road to recovery and the best way to protect ourselves and those around us is to get vaccinated.

Research from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) estimates that around 192,000 hospitalisations have been prevented by booster doses since mid-December.

We know that immunity to covid-19 begins to wane over time and that older people and the most vulnerable are at the highest risk from this waning. We know that infections and hospitalisations from covid-19 are on the rise across the whole of the UK, as they are across Europe.

Last month, we accepted advice from the experts at the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) to offer a spring booster to those at the greatest risk. The JCVI has advised that doses should be offered to anyone who is eligible around six months after their last vaccine dose.

From Monday 21 March the NHS has started offering a spring booster jab to people aged 75 and over, residents in care homes for older adults and people aged 12 years

or older who are immunosuppressed. Hundreds of visits to deliver vaccinations in care homes for older adults are planned in the coming weeks.

By the end of this week almost 1.3 million people will have been invited for their spring booster.

We have already seen a tremendous response with more than 308,000 people having received their fourth dose since the appointment system opened.

Over 5.5 million people will be eligible to get protected through this spring campaign over the coming weeks and months.

The NHS will contact people directly to let them know when it is their turn and we are asking people to wait until they are invited before they book their appointment. It will prioritise those whose clinical need is greatest, starting with those who have had the longest gap since their last dose and then working through the eligible cohorts to invite people who have waited for less time.

Everyone who is eligible will be offered a top-up over the spring and early summer and we will be keeping under close review whether these spring booster doses should be offered more widely.

People who are eligible are urged to take advantage of the protection that is on offer. Everyone across the country, no matter if this is their first jab or spring booster, is encouraged to come forward to ensure that we can all continue to work together to stay healthy and protect the NHS.

[HCWS729]

Antivirals and Therapeutics Taskforce

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maggie Throup): The UK has been a global leader in identifying and deploying successful treatments for covid-19. This work has been led by the UK Government's therapeutics taskforce, which was established in response to the pandemic in April 2020.

In April 2020 there were no proven effective treatments for covid-19 but within two years the therapeutics taskforce successfully identified and made available a range of life-saving treatments for hospitalised and community patients. This was made possible through collaboration with key delivery partners like the National Institute for Health Research, RAPID C-19, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, and the devolved Governments. The therapeutics taskforce and partners ensured the UK were the first to discover dexamethasone reduced the risk of mortality in hospitalised covid-19 patients requiring oxygen or ventilation by up to 35%. It was made available to patients the same day the trial results were announced. The therapeutics taskforce has also made available other treatments including tocilizumab, sarilumab and sotrovimab which are widely used across the United Kingdom.

In April 2021 the Prime Minister launched the antivirals taskforce. Modelled on the success of the therapeutics taskforce and the vaccines taskforce, its purpose was to drive forward the UK's antivirals programme with the clear objective of identifying safe and effective oral antiviral treatments that could be taken at home and deployed to UK patients this winter.

Under the leadership of the chair, Eddie Gray, the antivirals taskforce worked at pace to deliver this objective and has led the way in identifying and deploying oral antiviral treatments for covid-19. The antivirals taskforce negotiated deals on behalf of the UK Government to secure almost 5 million patient courses of oral antivirals, which is more both in volume and per head than any other country in Europe. We were also the first country in the world to administer oral antivirals to patients in the community in December 2021. The Government also funded the University of Oxford to launch the innovative, community-based PANORAMIC study, which is making oral antivirals available to individuals at high risk from covid-19 to better understand the effectiveness of these drugs in a largely vaccinated population.

The antivirals taskforce has ensured the UK is well-positioned to protect those at highest risk from severe disease progression, including those who cannot take a vaccine for medical reasons, and those for whom vaccines may be less effective, such as those who are immunosuppressed.

As Eddie Gray's tenure comes to an end, I would like to thank him for his leadership of the antivirals programme. His work has been instrumental to the success of the antivirals taskforce and I wish him all the best for the future. I also want to take the opportunity to thank the NHS for their incredible work, the willingness of patients to enrol in trials and the fantastic work of all our delivery partners across both the therapeutics and antivirals programmes.

The therapeutics taskforce and the antivirals taskforce have made significant contributions to the UK's pandemic response. The suite of effective treatments they have made available has played a vital role in lessening the severity and impact of covid-19 on individuals, the healthcare system and society. Now as the UK moves to living with covid-19, these treatments will form a vital part of the UK's pharmaceutical responses.

As part of the UK's strategy to live with covid-19, the therapeutics and antivirals programmes will be consolidated under a single taskforce, the antivirals and therapeutics taskforce. This taskforce will continue to work alongside the vaccines taskforce to make pharmaceutical interventions available to those who most need them. Additionally, the taskforce will continue overseeing the delivery of the PANORAMIC study and the eight national priority clinical trial platforms run by the NIHR; and ensuring lessons and innovations from our antivirals and therapeutics response to covid-19 are captured and, where appropriate, embedded.

Longer term, the work of the taskforce will transition to business as usual functions; as part of this process NICE will be undertaking a multiple technology appraisal of covid-19 therapeutics. This will involve evaluation of the clinical and cost-effectiveness of existing covid-19 therapeutics within their current or proposed marketing authorisations for treating people with covid-19. NICE has initiated preparatory work that will underpin the evaluation to enable it to issue recommendations rapidly when appropriate, and will continue to engage with stakeholders on this.

[HCWS727]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Leadership

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): Dame Cressida Dick will conclude her tenure as Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service in April. She deserves our profound gratitude for her decades of public service and leadership in policing, as well as our best wishes for the future. Dame Cressida has shown exceptional dedication to fighting crime in London and beyond throughout her time as Commissioner, as the first woman to hold the role of Commissioner.

The circumstances in which the outgoing MPS Commissioner is leaving her role warrant a closer look at the legislation which governs the suspension and removal of the Commissioner. I am pleased to announce that Sir Tom Winsor will be undertaking a formal review into the circumstances and implications of Dame Cressida's departure. Sir Tom brings a wealth of experience, most recently as HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services. I will return to this House with his key findings at the earliest opportunity.

The Metropolitan Police Service faces major challenges and needs to demonstrate sustained improvements in order to regain public trust in London and nationally. It is vital that we get the right person for the biggest leadership role in policing in this country.

I will shortly launch the process to recruit a new Commissioner and anticipate that it will conclude in the summer. I will then make my formal recommendation to Her Majesty the Queen. My recommendation will pay regard to the views of the Mayor of London, as occupant of the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime.

In the immediate term following Dame Cressida's departure, legislation enables the Deputy Commissioner, Sir Steve House, to exercise temporarily the powers and duties of the Commissioner. Sir Steve and the Mayor of London must drive improvement even before the next Commissioner is in place to ensure that the Metropolitan Police Service restores trust and takes every necessary action to keep the public safe.

[HCWS725]

TRANSPORT

New Non-zero Emission Buses: Consultation on End Date for Sale

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Trudy Harrison): My noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Baroness Vere of Norbiton) has made the following ministerial statement:

In November 2020, the Prime Minister announced his 10-point plan for a green industrial revolution. Its aim is to build back better from the pandemic, to use our recovery to level up the country, to scale up new industries and to support new green jobs across our industrial heartlands and throughout the United Kingdom as we work towards net zero by 2050.

Now, following the UK's demonstration of global leadership on climate change, as President and host of COP 26, I am pleased to tell the House that we continue to deliver on that plan. In Bus Back Better we committed to set a legal end date for the sale of new diesel buses—today we are launching a consultation to set an end date for the sale of new, non-zero emission buses across the UK, working together across the United Kingdom to provide certainty to the market, stimulating innovation and investment in alternative approaches and encourage local authorities and bus operators to plan together to deliver a decarbonised bus fleet.

Buses are at the centre of the public transport network, connecting people right across the country, playing a vital role in fostering and strengthening communities, reducing congestion and helping build a high-growth, high-productivity economy across the UK. Buses are already one of the most environmentally friendly ways of travelling, and this policy will go further, ensuring that their future operation produces no carbon impact—with no negative impact on passengers.

Last year, the Government published the Transport Decarbonisation Plan, which set out our plans to decarbonise all transport. The plan reaffirmed the crucial role that public transport has in tackling climate change, with buses having an integral position at the centre of the public transport network—but also recognising the huge contribution from the coach and minibus industry.

To this end we are today launching a consultation on setting an end date for the sale of new non-zero emission buses, at the very latest by 2032. Importantly this consultation also sets out calls for evidence on setting an end of sales date for coaches and minibuses.

Late last year, we announced almost £71 million in new funding to support 335 zero-emission buses across five local areas in England, and on Saturday we announced almost £200 million in further funding, for almost 1,000 more zero emission buses—delivering on our promise to build 4,000 new zero-emission buses right across the country. We will continue to go further and provide greater support for zero-emission buses through the Bus Service Operators' Grant, from April 2022, ahead of a wider reform to refocus the scheme on reducing emissions, levelling up and keeping fares low.

This Government's National Bus Strategy, Bus Back Better, lays out actions to drive this transition to zero-emission buses. This consultation begins to deliver one of the key commitments in the strategy. We want zero-emission buses not only to be the right choice environmentally but to be the default choice for operators economically, with maintenance and fuel saving costs making it the only logical purchasing decision.

As we recover from covid-19, we are putting transport at the heart of our decisions. Building back better and greener will make our economy more sustainable and resilient, help us deliver cleaner air and lower carbon emissions, and benefit passengers across the country. Accelerating the transition to a zero-emission bus fleet is absolutely key to this.

[HCWS728]

Petition

Monday 28 March 2022

OBSERVATIONS

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Community energy projects

The petition of residents of the constituency of Linlithgow and East Falkirk,

Declares that community energy is the essential grass-roots ally to obtain the consent and participation of the people in the urgent energy transition to net-zero and to invent and deliver essential local climate solutions, enabling the Green Recovery; further that, since the removal of the Feed-in Tariff, Export Tariff, Social Investment Tax Relief and the increase in VAT for solar and batteries, community energy struggles to make a business case to become active; further that the Smart Export Guarantee is insufficient in re-mobilising community energy and provides no certainty to investors; notes that the Rural Community Energy Fund is set to end in April 2022; declares that national growth funds are often closed or not applicable to community energy groups; further that the Net Zero Strategy contained neither the promised plan for community energy nor the practical support measures to harness its potential and enable the growth of community energy as recommended by the Environmental Audit Committee; further that a new Community Energy Booster would allow charities, development trusts and social enterprises to plan, develop, install and operate local renewable energy, low-carbon heat, retrofit and energy efficiency systems and solutions, working as equal partners with industry, SMEs and local authorities; further that this would deliver local jobs, reskilling, education and training opportunities, significant carbon savings and huge social and community benefits which would not be provided by commercial projects; and further that communities simply need a fair playing field to compete with commercial developers.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to follow the recommendations of the Environmental Audit Committee and reallocate existing funding to better support community energy projects through extending and expanding the Rural Community Energy Fund, as a minimum, to include urban, heat, retrofit and energy efficiency projects. The House of Commons should also urge the Government to reallocate funding to create a community equivalent to the Contracts for Difference scheme in order to give more certainty to potential investors. Petitioners also request the House to ask the Government to develop a Community Energy Strategy that recognises the importance of community energy and puts in place long-term policy support to enable community to be the local powerhouse of the net zero transition.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Martyn Day, *Official Report*, 25 January 2022; Vol. 707, c. 974.]

[P002707]

Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Lord Callanan):

The Secretary of State responded to the EAC inquiry outlining that plans for community energy would be outlined in the Net Zero Strategy. The Strategy, published in October 2021, acts in lieu of a community energy strategy, and recognised that community groups have a role to play in the Department's efforts to decarbonise the economy. Furthermore, it recognised the excellent work communities already do to help us achieve this goal. The Strategy also committed to re-establishing the Community Energy Contact Group to strengthen engagement with the sector.

On UK-wide growth funding schemes, as Members will be aware, Government funding opens in rounds, and we encourage community energy groups to work closely with their local authority to support the development of community energy projects within these schemes. For example, the Towns Fund and the Community Renewal Fund are the types of funding where local energy projects would often be eligible. The Towns Fund has awarded over £23.6 million to Glastonbury Town which includes the Glastonbury Clean Energy project that aims to generate renewable energy for use by other projects within the Plan, as well as local businesses and residents.

The recent Levelling Up White Paper also outlined that the new UK Shared Prosperity Fund would support interventions that reinforced the Government's commitment to reach Net Zero by 2050. This includes providing £2.6 billion of funding for community investment—including for community infrastructure projects.

Government also encourage community energy organisations to look at available funds outside of BEIS. For example, Ofgem has announced that it plans to welcome applications from community interest groups, co-operative societies, and community benefit societies to the Industry Voluntary Redress Scheme.

As stated in the petition, the Government currently funds the Rural Community Energy Fund, to support community energy projects. The £10 million scheme supports rural communities in England to develop renewable energy projects. The question of the level of funding for community energy, including RCEF, has not yet been decided.

On the petition's request for a community-based equivalent to the Contracts for Difference scheme, community projects below 5MW may be able to benefit from the Smart Export Guarantee (SEG). The SEG is a market-led mechanism that ensures that small-scale generators continue to have a route to market for the electricity they export to the grid following the closure of the Feed-in Tariffs scheme. While Government recognise that the SEG may be more suitable for some community projects than others, we are pleased to see the market responding positively in its first year with a range of export tariffs available.

The Secretary of State explained in the written evidence to the EAC inquiry that the Smart Export Guarantee (SEG) was a new mechanism that significantly differs from previous policies. It was not designed to replace the Feed-in Tariffs scheme (FIT), but rather to be a cost-reflective and market-led mechanism, helping to level the playing field for small-scale low-carbon generation whilst supporting the transition to a smart and flexible

energy system. At the time of its introduction, the main objective was to facilitate a competitive market. In its first year of operation the market has responded positively, with a range of SEG tariffs, demonstrating the fact that market-led approaches to delivering small-scale renewables can be successful. We will review again for signs of price competitiveness and innovation following Ofgem's annual report on the SEG in the autumn. Government also

note that Scotland has its own means of supporting community energy through the Scottish Government's Community and Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES).

CARES provides advice and support, including funding support—grants and loans—to community groups and organisations, rural SMEs, and other eligible organisations seeking to explore their renewable energy options.

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