

**Wednesday
20 July 2022**

**Volume 718
No. 39**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 20 July 2022

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

COP26

The President of COP26 was asked—

COP26 Outcomes

1. **Richard Thomson** (Gordon) (SNP): What steps the Government plan to take to help ensure the long-term effectiveness of COP26 outcomes after the transition to (a) a new Prime Minister and (b) an Egyptian presidency of COP. [901183]

The COP26 President (Alok Sharma): The UK is working closely with Egypt and other partners to ensure that the commitments made by countries at COP26 are delivered. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the UK will hold the COP presidency until COP27 in November, and in the remaining four months we will continue to urge nations to implement the promises that they made in Glasgow.

Richard Thomson: The outgoing Prime Minister's commitment to taking tangible climate change action has always seemed rather suspect, and, rather worryingly, the contenders to replace him seem to be even less committed. The President of COP26 himself, in a weekend interview with *The Observer*, described the commitment as "lukewarm". Will he tell us who exactly he had in mind for that soubriquet?

Alok Sharma: Let me say first that the Prime Minister has been totally resolute in pursuing the net zero agenda, which is about delivering not just an environmental benefit but jobs and economic growth across the country. The hon. Gentleman referred to the Conservative party leadership; certainly from what I have seen and heard, all three of the remaining contenders are fully committed to that agenda.

Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend comment on the ability of the current structure of government to achieve the ambitious target of the nationally determined contribution, namely a 68% reduction in emissions compared with 1990 levels by 2030?

Alok Sharma: My right hon. Friend has raised this issue with me before. It will of course be up to the new Prime Minister to see how he or she wants to strengthen the structures of government, but the key aim is for us to deliver on the commitments that we have made, and that is what we will be judged on at the next election.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The long-term effectiveness of COP26 outcomes derives at least in part from the credibility of pledges made in Glasgow and the serious implementation of climate policies at home, especially while we still hold the presidency. Does the President of COP26 share my concern about yesterday's High Court ruling that the UK's net zero strategy was unlawful because it failed to meet the Government's obligations under the Climate Change Act 2008? Is he worried about the message that that sends to other countries, and will he use his best offices to ensure that the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy does now fulfil its obligations as it is required to do?

Alok Sharma: Obviously, I saw the judgment as well. Let me first emphasise that the net zero strategy itself remains Government policy. That is not what has been squashed. The judgment was about providing information on the percentage of emissions reductions coming from individual policy elements. Of course BEIS is looking at this, and it will have to respond in due course.

Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con): Does the President of COP26 agree that the extreme hot weather this week serves as a stark reminder of the realities and danger of climate change, and the need for the UK and the rest of the world to strengthen their resolve to achieve the objectives set at COP26?

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend is entirely right. What we have seen over the last couple of days here is what many millions of people across the world experience on a regular basis. That is why it is so important to ensure that the commitments that have been garnered internationally are delivered on, but of course we also need to ensure that we do that ourselves.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow President of COP26, Ed Miliband.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): In the last two days, we have seen that the climate emergency is here and now, with wildfires raging across our country, tracks and runways melting, schools closing and the government under-prepared, and yet some people aspiring to the highest office in the land have suggested that tackling the climate crisis is a luxury that can be delayed—an indulgence, a niche project. Such people would put the safety of our citizens at risk. They are deeply irresponsible and they are economically illiterate. Does the President of COP26 agree that, given the demonstrable threat that we so obviously face, there is no place in serious political parties for such dangerous folly?

Alok Sharma: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I did make an intervention at the weekend. As I have said, from what I have seen and heard, all three of the remaining contenders for the leadership of the Conservative party and to be our next Prime Minister are committed to the "net zero by 2050" agenda, and also to the near-term policy commitments to get there. The final two will have an opportunity to set out further details over the coming weeks.

Edward Miliband: The President of COP26 was so appalled by his own party's leadership contest that he threatened to resign, and it is no wonder. He says that all the candidates are committed to the net zero agenda,

but only this morning the right hon. Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak), the frontrunner in the leadership race, said that he would double down on the onshore wind ban because of the “distress and disruption” that onshore wind causes.

What is causing distress is the worst cost of living crisis in a generation. What is causing disruption is the most extreme weather in our country’s history. Onshore wind is a vital tool in tackling these crises, but the bizarre state of the Tory party means that the former Chancellor panders to the fanatics and sides with the sceptics. Will the President of COP26 now repudiate that position and condemn it for the dangerous nonsense that it is?

Alok Sharma: I am not really in a position to repudiate anybody else’s proposals—[*Interruption.*] I say to the right hon. Gentleman that we have a clear plan for expanding offshore wind. There is another 32 GW—[*Interruption.*] I will come on to that. Another 32 GW is effectively in the pipeline. In solving the energy security strategy, we need to keep everything on the table. There is already 14 GW of onshore installed across the country, and where communities are positively welcoming of onshore in return for reduced bills, that is an issue that we should keep on the table.

Mr Speaker: We now come to the Scottish National party spokesperson, Deidre Brock.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The recent Climate Change Committee’s progress report concludes that the UK Government’s net zero strategy contains warm words but little tangible progress, and that it will not be fully credible until the Government develop contingency plans such as encouraging reduced consumer demand for high carbon activities. It also recommends carrying out a net zero tax review to see how that might best support the transition by correcting the distortions that often penalise low-carbon technologies. Do the Government intend to take action on these specific recommendations, and what will the President do to ensure that the next Prime Minister and Chancellor urgently act on all the Committee’s recommendations?

Alok Sharma: Obviously, the Government are looking at a response to this. Let me make a general point, which is that I believe the current Prime Minister has shown leadership on this issue. These policies work if there is leadership right from the top, so I will certainly want to see from any future Prime Minister a laser-like focus on ensuring that we are delivering on our policies on net zero emissions but at the same time pushing forward on more jobs, more growth and more inward investment, which we have seen coming in.

Finance for Loss and Damage

2. **Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with (a) Cabinet colleagues and (b) his counterparts in other wealthy nations on mobilising finance for loss and damage. [901184]

The COP26 President (Alok Sharma): In June at the Bonn intersessional meeting, the Glasgow dialogue on loss and damage was launched to discuss the funding arrangements for addressing loss and damage. This will continue to be a critical forum to discuss practical ways in which finance can be scaled up and effectively delivered.

Alison Thewliss: This week’s record-breaking temperatures across the UK show that climate change is on our doorstep, but many of the world’s poorest countries have been dealing with this climate crisis for years. The cost of not acting on climate change is spiralling out of control, so can I ask what specific steps the right hon. Gentleman is taking to put Scotland’s world-leading approach to funding loss and damage on the agenda for COP27?

Alok Sharma: As the hon. Lady knows, at COP26 we agreed a way forward with the Glasgow dialogue, and that took place in Bonn. I am quite sure that the issue of loss and damage will feature highly at COP27, in whichever forum. It is vital that we also support developing nations to make clean energy transitions, and that is something we are doing through the just energy transition partnerships with South Africa and other countries such as India, Indonesia, Vietnam and Senegal.

COP Presidency: Objectives

3. **Afzal Khan** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): What his objectives are for the remainder of the UK’s COP presidency. [901186]

12. **Gerald Jones** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): What his objectives are for the remainder of the UK’s COP presidency. [901196]

The COP26 President (Alok Sharma): The Glasgow climate pact was a historic agreement that the United Kingdom forged among almost 200 countries. Our presidency year has been all about getting nations to deliver on the commitments they made at COP26 across the areas of mitigation, adaptation and finance, and we will continue this work up to COP27.

Afzal Khan: The heatwave this week shows the need to take serious and immediate action on climate change. The Glasgow call for a phase-out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies is one prompt way in which the Government can swiftly work towards delivering net zero plans. Does the Minister agree that instead of fossil fuel subsidies, the Government should focus on home-grown, cheap, clean energy sources that guarantee our energy security?

Alok Sharma: The Government are focusing on that, and I refer the hon. Gentleman to the energy security strategy that was published a few weeks ago, and also to the recent contracts for difference auction process for offshore wind, which delivered a price for offshore wind that is almost 70% lower than in 2015 and four times less than the current gas price. The future has to be green energy.

Gerald Jones: Our schools often set a great example in raising awareness of the climate emergency. On my recent visit to Ysgol Rhyd-y-Grug in my constituency, the pupils told me of their concerns about deforestation in the Amazon and about the 1 million species at risk of extinction. We must urgently halt and reverse this loss, so will the right hon. Gentleman support the call, led by my hon. and right hon. Friends on the shadow Front Bench, for a “net zero with nature” test to align all public spending and infrastructure decisions with our climate and nature commitments?

Alok Sharma: As the hon. Gentleman will know, we got an agreement at COP26 from more than 140 countries, representing more than 90% of the world's forests, to halt and reverse deforestation by 2030. We now need to make sure this is delivered, and we are looking at mechanisms to keep this issue on the table so that countries are seen to be delivering on their commitments on an annual basis.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): The COP26 President will have been as struck as I was at COP26 by the plight of low-lying island nations, and he will have been moved by how they are doing everything they can to protect themselves through nature-based solutions. Above all, they need the large, developed countries to tackle climate change. Will he redouble his efforts to persuade some of these large, developed countries to do better?

Alok Sharma: My right hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right. The small island developing states face a very acute climate emergency that is putting many millions of lives and livelihoods at risk. Yes, we need every country to come forward and deliver on its commitments, and particularly the biggest emitters: the G20.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs published some excellent new targets for incineration in March. Will the COP26 President follow through on that and make a moratorium on waste incineration one of his objectives for the remainder of his presidency?

Alok Sharma: In this role, as my right hon. Friend knows, I am trying to corral international action. He raises an important point, and I will make sure it is raised with the appropriate Department.

Mr Speaker: We now come to the shadow Minister, Kerry McCarthy.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): Last month the Climate Change Committee issued a scathing annual progress report warning of "major policy failures" and "scant evidence of delivery" on net zero. This week, as we have heard, the Government had to be dragged to court to be told their climate plans are so woefully inadequate that they are unlawful and must be revised.

What kind of leadership does it set if the country holding the COP presidency cannot get its own house in order? I know the COP President will say that the Conservative party's leadership candidates have paid lip service to net zero, but does he really have any confidence that things will get better?

Alok Sharma: The Climate Change Committee has described the net zero strategy as "ambitious" and "the world's most comprehensive plan to reach net zero".

I have discussed the legal findings, but the principle is right. We need to do everything we can to make sure we deal with this issue. The last few days have been a real wake-up call for everyone in this country, and it is what many millions of people across the world experience on a regular basis. We have to deal with this issue.

Climate Targets: Energy Efficiency

4. Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential role of energy efficiency in meeting the UK's climate targets. [901187]

6. Dame Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment he has made of the potential role of energy efficiency in meeting the UK's climate targets. [901189]

8. Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential role of energy efficiency in meeting the UK's climate targets. [901192]

The COP26 President (Alok Sharma): Buildings are one of the largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions in our country, accounting for around 22% of total UK emissions. Energy efficiency measures are, indeed, a vital lever to drive down emissions, energy demand and, ultimately, bills.

Rachel Hopkins: Increasing the number of energy-efficient homes will help us to meet our climate targets and reduce bills. Around 70% of homes in Luton have an energy performance rating of band D or below, and these homes are more likely to include our town's most deprived households. What discussions has the COP26 President had with the latest Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities about ensuring the green rhetoric on homes is equitable so that everyone can benefit from an energy-efficient home?

Alok Sharma: The Government are making £6.6 billion available over this Parliament to improve energy efficiency, and nearly half the homes in England are now rated band C or above, compared with 14% in 2010. On the wider point, we need an even bigger focus on energy efficiency in homes and buildings, as it will also help our energy security by driving down demand and bringing down people's bills.

Dame Meg Hillier: The Government have had a series of failed programmes on home insulation: the green new deal failed, and the recent green homes grant scheme failed, as the Public Accounts Committee has repeatedly reported. Does the Minister have any confidence that the Government will listen and tackle this major cause of emissions? If it is not tackled, it will put a serious dent in achieving the target of net zero by 2050.

Alok Sharma: The Government will, of course, respond to the report on the green homes grant, but I point out that some elements of it—the local authority delivery element and the social housing decarbonisation fund—have provided significant amounts of funding.

Tony Lloyd: The COP President will know that the bulk of buildings that are around today will still be around in 2030 and 2050. Most of them are grossly inadequately insulated; even new buildings are not being built to an acceptable standard. When are we going to see some action on this crucial agenda?

Alok Sharma: I have set out the amount of funding the Government are providing over this Parliament—£6.6 billion on energy efficiency. I very much share the view that we need to be doing even more on this,

particularly as we face energy security issues and energy prices are so high; more insulation in homes will deliver lower bills for households.

Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con): On energy efficiency, decarbonising in-home heating remains one of our biggest challenges in reaching our net zero 2050 target, so will the Minister join me in welcoming plans for a hydrogen village by 2025? Will he also have a chat with the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Secretary to encourage him to back our plans for one in Redcar and Cleveland?

Alok Sharma: I know that my hon. Friend is a great champion of green energy and, in particular, hydrogen in his area. I wish him luck with the plans and of course I will raise this matter the Business Secretary.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): As has been pointed out, previous programmes to improve insulation in homes, under either this party or the Labour Party, have not delivered what any of us would have hoped. Does my right hon. Friend agree that if this was targeted effectively at the homes of those who suffer most, many of whom will also be paying unacceptable increases in their energy bills, we could have a very effective way of improving insulation, reducing energy use and improving energy efficiency?

Alok Sharma: I agree with my hon. Friend; this measure will not only lower bills, but reduce demand for energy at this critical point, where energy security is so important around the world and also in our country.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): One way we could improve energy efficiency is by ensuring that new homes are energy-efficient. Will my right hon. Friend put pressure on developers to ensure that they are called to follow modern efficiency standards rather than the old ones?

Alok Sharma: Having modern, up-to-date standards is vital, and I will make sure I raise this with the appropriate Department.

Topical Questions

T1. [901198] **John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con):** If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The COP26 President (Alok Sharma): On this day, I want to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for his domestic and international leadership on tackling climate change and biodiversity loss. He has championed both during his time as Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister, and he charmed, cajoled and corralled his international counterparts to ensure that more than 90% of the global economy is now covered by net zero targets. Under his premiership, the UK forged the historic Glasgow climate pact, bringing together almost 200 countries, and he has been the driving force to deliver a net zero emissions economy. He has championed the creation of well-paid green jobs, bringing in billions of pounds of private sector investment in the UK. In all these areas, he leaves a legacy to be proud of.

John Penrose: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the Whitetail project in Teesside, where an Allam cycle electricity generating plant will burn either gas or coal in pure oxygen, with zero carbon emissions? Does he agree that projects such as this ought to be fully compatible with not only our net zero commitments, but improved energy security, and that they could therefore form a long-term and permanent part of our future energy generating needs?

Alok Sharma: I am indeed aware of that project. My hon. Friend will know that the Government's innovation funding has supported the development of Allam cycle power generation technology since 2012. Almost £5 million has been provided to fund research and development, and £1.3 million has been provided for technical studies.

T5. [901202] **Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance):** The President well knows that tackling the cost of living crisis and achieving net zero go hand in hand. Will he go further and endorse a green new deal that brings together job creation, social justice and tackling climate change?

Alok Sharma: As a Government, we have a significant number of policies that are delivering, and we need to make sure that we double down on that. As I have said, we will be judged at the next general election on those policies and whether we have delivered.

T3. [901200] **Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con):** Does my right hon. Friend agree that net zero should be achieved through rolling out low-carbon technology and scientific solutions such as the gene editing Bill, rather than measures that dampen economic growth and depress living standards?

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Green technologies and innovations will help us to achieve the net zero target. He made reference to gene editing, and I would also reference the recent CFD auction, which has delivered record renewables capacity in this country.

T6. [901203] **Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab):** Well insulated homes protect against extreme heat as well as extreme cold, while reducing energy demand and cutting bills, emissions and fossil fuel imports. So why are the Government delaying their national energy company obligation 4 programme, with 56,000 households potentially missing out?

Alok Sharma: As I have pointed out, the Government are doing a significant amount on energy efficiency. Of course we should always look to see what more can be done.

T4. [901201] **Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con):** Will my right hon. Friend outline the discussions he has had with his colleagues in Government so as to act on the Climate Change Committee's recommendation on the need for further support aligned to net zero to help people with their energy bills?

Alok Sharma: As my hon. Friend knows, support is being provided to help households. In particular, the most vulnerable households will receive at least £1,200 pounds of support. Of course, we also need to

look at further energy-efficiency measures, and I am sure the new Prime Minister and Chancellor will look at all of that.

T7. [901204] **Ruth Jones** (Newport West) (Lab): Yesterday, a court found that the Government's net zero strategy was unlawful because it included only 95% of the emissions reductions required to meet the sixth carbon budget and did not include the detail required to enable Parliament to properly scrutinise it. What will the Minister do to rectify that, and which aspects of the strategy will he strengthen now?

Alok Sharma: As I said in response to an earlier question, the net zero strategy is not what has been quashed. Obviously the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy will look to respond to the judgment.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend for his amazing service as COP26 President. Will he make it his objective to ban the sale of Chinese lanterns across the UK? Across our tinder-dry land they are simply acting as unguided flamethrowers.

Alok Sharma: I thank my hon. Friend for her kind comments. I will make sure that the issue of these lanterns is raised with the appropriate Department domestically.

T8. [901205] **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): The President showed great leadership at COP26, which we all respect him for. Will he do the same again and cut back on a project that is polluting the lungs of both his and my constituents? Will he please revisit the issue of the biggest CO₂ emitter in the whole of Europe and think again about the new runway at Heathrow?

Alok Sharma: As the hon. Lady knows, my role as COP President is to corral the international community. She has raised a question, and I am sure the Department for Transport will respond.

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the dramatic increase in fuel prices presents opportunities for decarbonising fleets and vehicles in key sectors such as social care?

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend raises a very important point. Of course, decarbonising the transport sector, along with other sectors, should be a key priority going forward.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): The recent Carbon Tracker report set out the exposure of each financial sector across the world to stranded assets—over \$1 trillion in total. Will the COP President be engaging with each of the heads of the financial sectors—such as the Securities and Exchange Commission and the London stock exchange—to ensure that they cope with that problem?

Alok Sharma: The private sector is very focused on the issue of the move to net zero. As the hon. Gentleman will know, in Glasgow, \$130 trillion of assets were

signed up to net zero. Anyone investing in assets that might end up being stranded has to be very clear about the financial decisions they are taking.

Jerome Mayhew (Broadland) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that establishing a price for carbon would give the free market the signal it needs to invest in low-carbon alternatives across the economy? Does he also agree that a carbon border adjustment mechanism is a necessary first step to achieve that?

Alok Sharma: I know my hon. Friend has raised this issue previously. Tackling carbon leakage is a vital matter. As he is aware, Her Majesty's Treasury will be launching a consultation later this year and setting out a range of carbon leakage mitigation options, which includes looking at a carbon border adjustment mechanism.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Am I allowed to say to the COP26 President that many of us on the Labour Benches think that he has done a darned good job? If he survives the present wrangling in the Conservative party, will he make every effort to come back and “grassroot” what we are trying to do about climate change in every town, city and community? Let us have 500 sustainable towns and cities in this country. Does he agree with that?

Alok Sharma: In the words of Gloria Gaynor, “I will survive”. The point that the hon. Gentleman raises is that tackling the climate emergency is an issue for all of us—for Governments, civil society and individuals—and we all need to play our part.

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

I would also like to welcome Lord Mackay, who is retiring today. He served many distinguished years as Lord Chancellor.

Before I call Kim Leadbeater to ask the first question, it is only fitting to note that this is likely to be the final time that the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) addresses the House as Prime Minister. I wish him and his family all the best for the future. We have been through many dark times in this House, and none more so than through the pandemic. That will always be remembered because of what this House did and because of the way that you conducted those duties during those dark times, Prime Minister.

I understand that Members will have differing views about the Prime Minister's performance and legacy, and those views will be sincerely and passionately held, but I remind Members that our constituents and others around the world watch these proceedings. Let us conduct them in a respectful manner, focusing on issues and policies rather than personalities. I take this opportunity to remind Members of the words of Erskine May that

“good temper and moderation are the characteristics of the parliamentary debate.”

I expect to see that reflected today in the proceedings.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [901241] Kim Leadbeater (Batley and Spen) (Lab): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 20 July.

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson): Today marks the 40th anniversary of the bombings in Hyde Park and Regent's Park. Tomorrow sees the 50th anniversary of Bloody Friday. Such terror by the Provisional IRA was barbaric and shameful, bringing untold grief to countless families. Our thoughts are with all those who lost loved ones during the troubles. We as a Government remain determined to help build a better shared future for all the people of Northern Ireland.

I spoke to the chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council last night and this morning about the heroic work of firefighters in recent days. I know the whole House will want to thank them and all our frontline services who have been working hard to keep us safe. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will be making an oral statement later.

I know colleagues will wish to join me in wishing England's Lionesses well in their quarter-final match against Spain in Brighton this evening. I also know the House will want to congratulate Jake Wightman, who produced a stunning run to take gold in the 1,500 metres at the world championships in Oregon.

As you rightly say, Mr Speaker, last week I told the House that last week's PMQs was possibly my last. This week probably—certainly—will be my last PMQs from this Dispatch Box, or any other Dispatch Box. This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I will have further such meetings later today.

Kim Leadbeater: Summer recess gives all parliamentarians an opportunity to reflect on our ability to uphold the seven principles of public life: selflessness, openness, objectivity, honesty, integrity, accountability and leadership. Those are fine principles, but public trust in politicians is at an all-time low. Will the Prime Minister be using the next few weeks to personally consider why that could be? As the unedifying fight for his job continues, if those who are vying to replace him were to draw on his wise counsel—and why wouldn't they?—what advice would he give to ensure that the people we serve receive far better than they have from this Government?

The Prime Minister: I am afraid I did not quite catch the last part of the hon. Lady's question, but I will be using the next few weeks to do what I think the people of this country would expect: to drive forward the agenda on which we were elected in 2019 and on which I think the Labour party particularly fears the Conservative party, and that is the agenda of uniting and levelling up, and making sure that we invest in places that for decades were betrayed by Labour and left behind. That is what the Conservatives are going to do, and that is why we are going to win again.

Q2. [901242] Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): Russia's war in Ukraine continues. Now Turkey has withdrawn its opposition to Sweden and Finland joining NATO. What assessment does my right hon. Friend make of the short and long-term security of Europe now that that has happened?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for that excellent question. The accession of both countries will be good for them and make all our allies safer, and I think it will make the whole Euro-Atlantic security area stronger. I am proud of the role the UK has played in that accession.

Mr Speaker: We now come to the Leader of the Opposition, Keir Starmer.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I start by saying to the Prime Minister that I know that the relationship between a Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition is never easy, and this one has proved no exception to the rule, but I take this opportunity to wish him, his wife and his family the best for the future.

I put on record our gratitude to the fire and rescue services for all their courageous work yesterday in extreme temperatures. All our thoughts are with those affected by the fires, particularly those who have lost their homes. I join the Prime Minister in his comments about the bombing in Hyde Park and the other IRA bombings.

I also join the Prime Minister in his comments about the Lionesses. The coverage starts at 7.30 tonight on BBC One, and I am sure the whole country will be roaring them on. For anyone who does not fancy football, "EastEnders" is on, so if they would rather watch outrageous characters taking lumps out of themselves, they have a choice: Albert Square or the Tory leadership debates on catch-up. On that topic, why does the Prime Minister think those vying to replace him decided to pull out of the Sky News debate last night?

The Prime Minister: I am not following this thing particularly closely, but my impression is that there has been quite a lot of debate already, and I think the public have ample opportunity to view the talent, any one of which—as I have said before—would, like some household detergent, wipe the floor with the right hon. and learned Gentleman. Today happens to be just about the anniversary of the exit from lockdown last year, and do you remember what he said? He said—[*Interruption.*] No, I am going to remind him. He said it was "reckless". It was because we were able to take that decision, supported by every single one of those Conservative candidates, opposed by him, that we had the fastest economic growth in the G7 and we are now able to help families up and down the country. If we had listened to him, it would not have been possible, and I do not think they will be listening to him either.

Keir Starmer: Well, I am impressed the Prime Minister managed to get through that with a straight face, actually. I think the truth is this: they organised a TV debate because they thought it would be a great chance for the public to hear from the candidates first hand, then disaster struck because the public actually heard from the candidates first hand.

But I am interested in what the Prime Minister makes of the battle for his job, so let me start with a simple one. Does he agree with his former Chancellor that plans put forward by the other candidates are nothing more than the “fantasy economics of unfunded” spending “promises”?

The Prime Minister: Well, Labour know all about fantasy economics, because they have already committed to £94 billion of extra tax and spending, which every household in this country would have to pay for to the tune of about £2,100. It is thanks to the former Chancellor’s management of the economy—thanks to this Government’s management of the economy—that we had growth in May of 0.5%. We have more people in paid employment than at any time in the history of this country. I am proud to be leaving office right now with unemployment at or near a 50-year low. When they left office, it was at 8%. That is the difference between them and us.

Keir Starmer: Every Labour pledge made under my leadership is fully costed. Those vying to replace him have racked up £330 billion of unfunded spending commitments.

But I do note that the Prime Minister did not agree with his former Chancellor, so what about his Foreign Secretary? She was withering about the Government’s economic record. She said:

“If Rishi has got this great plan for growth, why haven’t we seen it in his last two and a half years at the Treasury?”

That is a fair question, isn’t it, Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: I think that everybody would agree that what we saw in the last two and a half years was because of the pandemic, with the biggest fall in output for 300 years, which this Government dealt with and coped with magnificently by distributing vaccines faster than any other European Government—faster than any other major economy—which would not have been possible if we had listened to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. That is why we have the fiscal firepower that is necessary to help families up and down the country, making tax cuts for virtually everybody paying national insurance contributions. There is a crucial philosophical difference between Labour and the Conservatives: under Labour, families on low incomes get most of their income from benefits; under us, they get most of it from earnings, because we believe in jobs, jobs, jobs. That is the difference.

Keir Starmer: Inflation is up again this morning and millions are struggling with the cost of living crisis, and the Prime Minister has decided to come down from his gold-wallpapered bunker for one last time to tell us that everything is fine. I am going to miss the delusion.

But his Foreign Secretary did not stop there. She also said that the former Chancellor’s 15 tax rises are leading the country into recession—and the right hon. Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt) was even more scathing. She said that

“our public services are in a desperate state...we cannot continue with what we’ve been doing because that clearly isn’t working.”

Has the Prime Minister told her who has been running our public services for the last 12 years?

The Prime Minister: Again, the right hon. and learned Gentleman is doing this—it is completely satirical. This is the Government who are investing £650 billion in infrastructure, skills and technology. He talks about public services; what really matters to people in this country right now is getting their appointments and their operations, fixing the covid backlogs—that is what we are doing—and fixing the ambulances. That is what he should be talking about. That is why we voted through and passed the £39 billion health and care levy, which Labour opposed. Every time something needs to be done, Labour Members try to oppose it. He is a great pointless human bollard. That is what he is.

Keir Starmer: If only it were satirical. It is what the future candidates think of his—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. We want to get through PMQs, because there are quite a few Members wanting to catch my eye. It would be more helpful if we got through things.

Keir Starmer: I appreciate that Conservative Members may not want to hear what their future leader thinks of their record in government, but I think the country needs to know. If only it were satirical, Prime Minister; it is what the candidates think of the record. Among the mudslinging, there was one very important point, because the hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Kemi Badenoch) claimed that she warned the former Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak) that he was handing taxpayer money directly to fraudsters in covid loans. She says that he dismissed her worries and that as a result, he “cost taxpayers £17 billion”. Does the Prime Minister think she is telling the truth?

The Prime Minister: This is one of the last blasts from Captain Hindsight, at least to me. They were the party, I remember, that was so desperate for us to be hiring their friends—they wanted a football agent and a theatrical costumier to supply personal protective equipment. Do you remember, Mr Speaker? We had to get that stuff at record speed. We produced £408 billion-worth of support for families and for businesses up and down the country. The only reason we were able to do it at such speed was that we managed the economy in a sensible and moderate way. Every time Labour has left office, unemployment has been higher. The Opposition are economically illiterate, and they would wreck the economy.

Keir Starmer: I think the message coming out of this leadership contest is pretty clear: they got us into this mess, and they have no idea how to get us out of it. The Foreign Secretary says we cannot go on with our current economic policy. The right hon. Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt) bemoaned:

“What we’ve been doing is not good enough”,

and the hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Kemi Badenoch) probably put it best when she simply asked:

“Why should the public trust us? We haven’t exactly covered ourselves in glory”.

Those are their words—their future leader’s words. They have trashed every part of their record in government, from dental care and ambulance response times to having the highest taxes in 70 years. What message does it send when the candidates to be Prime Minister cannot find a single decent thing to say about him, about each other or their record in government?

The Prime Minister: What does it say about the right hon. and learned Gentleman that no one can name a single policy, after three years, of the Opposition apart from putting up taxes? He is one of those pointless plastic bollards you find around a deserted roadworks on a motorway. We got Brexit done; he voted against it 48 times. We got this country fast out of covid, in spite of everything, when he would have kept us in lockdown. We are fixing social care, when the Opposition have no plan and no ideas of their own. We are now bringing forward measures, in the face of strikes, to outlaw wildcat strikes.

I can tell the House why the Leader of the Opposition does that funny wooden flapping gesture—it is because he has the union barons pulling his strings from beneath. That is the truth—£100 million.

We have restored our democracy and our independence. We have got this country through covid. I am proud to say that when it comes to tackling climate change or sticking up for Ukraine, we have led the world on the international stage. I want to thank my friends and colleagues on these Benches for everything they have done.

Q4. [901244] **Rob Roberts** (Delyn) (Ind): In September, it will be the 25th anniversary of the referendum on devolution in Scotland and Wales. One in 20 people in England on an NHS waiting list has been waiting for more than a year, but in Wales, the figure is one in five; and 75% of school leaders in Wales say that they do not have enough capital to maintain their buildings, let alone build new ones. Will the Prime Minister and Minister for the Union take this final opportunity at the Dispatch Box to agree that, in Wales at least, devolution has been a disaster?

The Prime Minister: I want devolution to work, and I have had some good conversations with Mark Drakeford, but the devolved authorities, particularly Labour in Wales, need to do their job properly.

Mr Speaker: We come to the leader of the SNP, Ian Blackford.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Mr Speaker, may I join you in wishing all the best, at his impending retirement, to—James Mackay and Beth, who are here. He has been a friend to many of us across the House, and we congratulate him on his service. I also join the Prime Minister in congratulating Jake Wightman on his success overnight in winning the 1,500 metres at the world athletics championships. What a fantastic achievement.

This week has seen historic records set across the United Kingdom, but let us look at the Prime Minister's record-breaking efforts in office. His Tory Brexit slashed £31 billion from the economy—the biggest fall in living standards since the 1970s. People's pay in real terms is falling at the fastest rate on record, and we have the worst economic growth forecast in the G20 outside Russia, and the highest inflation in 40 years.

Personally, I would like to thank the Prime Minister, in his capacity as Minister for the Union, for driving support for independence to new heights. Westminster is holding Scotland back. The economy is failing, and this Prime Minister has driven us to the brink of a

recession. Has not the Prime Minister's legacy of catastrophic mismanagement paved the way for the end of the Union?

The Prime Minister: That is not what I observe. The right hon. Gentleman talks about records; I point to the fastest vaccine roll-out in Europe, the lowest unemployment for at or near 50 years as I have said, the lowest youth unemployment, and the fastest growth in the G7 last year, in spite of everything. As for the Scottish nationalists' record, look at where they are. I am afraid to say that Scottish school standards are not what they should be, because of the failure of the SNP. It is failing people who are tragically addicted to drugs in Scotland, and the people of Scotland are facing another £900 million in tax because of the mismanagement of the SNP.

Ian Blackford: The Prime Minister might believe that nonsense, but the people of Scotland do not. They know the reality—that our NHS is the best-performing in the United Kingdom, and education standards under the SNP are moving in the right direction. *[Interruption.]* That is a good look, to the people of Scotland—the disdain that the Tories show for our country.

I hope that the Prime Minister will, with all his newly gained spare time, reflect on his conduct in office, and I genuinely hope that he finds some peace of mind. The fact is that as well as being a record-breaker, the Prime Minister is a rule-breaker—illegally shutting down Parliament, partying through the pandemic, handing out PPE contracts to cronies, and unilaterally changing the ministerial code. Let us not forget that the Prime Minister is still under investigation because he cannot be trusted to tell the truth. Shameful, disgraceful, and a complete waste of Scotland's time—that is how the people of Scotland will remember this Prime Minister. Should not the Prime Minister and his Government have had their last day a long time ago? Quite simply, Downing Street is no place for a law-breaker.

The Prime Minister: On the personal abuse stuff, I think the right hon. Gentleman is talking a load of tosh, but when he has retired to his croft—which may be all too soon—I hope that he will reflect on his long-running campaign to break up the greatest country in the world. I hope that he will reflect on the pointlessness of what he is trying to do, and think instead about the priorities of the people of Scotland, which are all the issues that he thought were trivial: education, crime, and the burden of taxation that the SNP is unnecessarily placing on the people of Scotland.

Q6. [901246] **Marco Longhi** (Dudley North) (Con): A long time ago, when I trained as a pilot, I had the luxury of being able to fly around turbulent storms. I also had the ability to rely on a team who kept my aircraft airworthy. As the Prime Minister prepares his new flight plans, may I suggest that he resets his compass to true north and stops off in Dudley, where he will always be welcomed with open arms and sincere affection, and where he will be able to see his legacy?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for that renewed invitation. I have spent many happy days with him in Dudley; let us hope that there are more to come.

Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): As the Prime Minister leaves office, I am sure that the whole House is looking forward to him completing his book on Shakespeare. We wait to read what he really thinks about tragic figures brought down by their vaulting ambition, or scheming politicians who conspire to bring down a tyrannical leader. The candidates now plotting to take his place all profess that they will bring a fresh start—a clean break from his Government—but does the Prime Minister not agree that a fresh start and a clean break would require a new mandate from the British people, and that before they strut and fret their hour upon the stage, there should be a general election?

The Prime Minister: Polonius—that's who the right hon. Gentleman is; he needs more matter with less art. The only thing we need to know is that if there were to be a general election, the Liberal Democrats would rightly get thrashed, because that would be the moment when the public looked with horror at what the Liberal Democrats' policies really are and all those rural voters would discover the massive green taxes that they would like to apply. The only risk is that there could be some kind of crackpot coalition between those guys on the Labour Benches, the Lib Dems and the Scottish nationalists to put that into effect. That is what we must prevent.

Q11. [901251] **Felicity Buchan** (Kensington) (Con): My constituents feel very let down by the Mayor of London: he is consulting on cutting 18% of London's buses; the Met is in special measures; he is looking to sell Notting Hill police station to the highest bidder; and he is looking to push through a completely unwanted overdevelopment of South Kensington tube station. Does my right hon. Friend agree that Londoners deserve way, way better?

The Prime Minister: London once had a Mayor who cut crime by 25%, cut the murder rate by 30% and built twice as many affordable homes as the current incumbent. What London needs is another Conservative Mayor.

Q3. [901243] **Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): May I add a personal note of thanks to Lord Mackay of Clashfern, who is retiring? He is a highland gentleman and has been very helpful to me for a number of years, and I am extremely grateful to him.

The Prime Minister knows that harnessing wind power is crucial to the United Kingdom. He also knows that the highlands have faced great historic difficulties over the years, so I hope that he agrees that a green freeport in the Cromarty Firth is vital to harnessing wind energy; it has the full support of the industry and is vital to the prosperity of the region.

The Prime Minister: I can confirm that we are committed to funding two new green freeports in Scotland to the tune of £52 million. That would not be possible, of course, if the SNP got its way and we returned to the EU.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his work to tackle regional inequality in this country through his levelling-up agenda. As he rightly reflects with pride this summer on the work of both himself and his Government, will he

urge all candidates in the leadership election and all colleagues in the House further to drive forward the levelling-up agenda to tackle inequality wherever it is found in the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: I heartily agree with my right hon. Friend. It is not just inequality; it is inequality of opportunity, and that is what levelling up addresses.

Q5. [901245] **Tony Lloyd** (Rochdale) (Lab): Very few people in the north of England believe that the levelling-up agenda has achieved anything at all. The Prime Minister has a few days left in office. Can he use that time to drive through the TransPennine rail system that we were promised would be finished in 2019 and will not be finished before 2030? It is a shambles, and he is responsible.

The Prime Minister: Actually, this Government are responsible for three new high-speed lines, including Northern Powerhouse Rail, which no previous Government have done.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): My right hon. Friend rightly paid tribute to our hard-working firefighters, who have been dealing with the fires over the past few days in this unprecedented weather. Will he take action to make sure that more fires can be prevented, by getting rid of disposable barbecues and Chinese sky lanterns?

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend very much for her suggestions. The key thing is for people to behave responsibly with the use of these things. It is clearly insane to take a disposable barbecue on to dry grass.

Q7. [901247] **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Due to Scottish Government investment in affordable housing, the Scottish child payment and extended free school meals, Scotland has the lowest level of child poverty in the UK, in contrast to the north-east, where it has risen by 50% on the watch of this Government.

In contrast, the Prime Minister took over £1,000 from the poorest families—so much for levelling up—and those fighting to replace him have been falling over themselves to promise tax cuts to the wealthy. If the UK is meant to be a voluntary Union, does he not recognise that voters in Scotland have the right to a referendum, so that they can choose a fairer future?

The Prime Minister: Actually, we increased the living wage across the whole of the UK by £1,000, we made sure that people on universal credit got their tax bills cut by £1,000, and over the last couple of weeks we have cut national insurance contributions by an average of £330. It was because of the Union that we were able to support families up and down the country, in Scotland, with the furlough and other payments, to the tune of £408 billion.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): May I thank my right hon. Friend for his commitment to Scotland and the entire United Kingdom over his years in Downing Street? I also thank him and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland for improving and increasing the visibility and involvement

of the UK Government in Scotland over the past three years. Does my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister agree that whoever takes his job, and whatever comes next, the United Kingdom will always be stronger together than it ever would be apart?

The Prime Minister: That was brilliantly put; I could not have put it better myself.

Q8. [901248] **Kate Osamor** (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): The Windrush compensation scheme was launched in April 2019. In the time since, we have seen this Prime Minister come and go. Meanwhile, just one in four applicants has received compensation so far, and sadly at least 28 have passed away without receiving compensation. Is it not about time for the Government to make the scheme independent of the Home Office, and finally provide justice to the victims before it is too late?

The Prime Minister: Actually, I think more people have got compensation. I renew my apologies to the Windrush generation for what they have suffered, but we have greatly increased the compensation available. We have paid out, I think, more than £51 million. We are working with voluntary groups to ensure that people get what they are entitled to. I may say that Labour has never apologised for its own part in the Windrush scandal.

Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for all the work he has done for Scunthorpe, but I give particular thanks to him for the work that he has done for steel. He has shown his understanding both of the challenges that steel faces and of its importance to this nation. He has kept every promise he has made to me on steel, and I thank him very much for his work on that. Does he agree with me that the future of steel is always safest under a Conservative Government?

The Prime Minister: Yes, and I thank my hon. Friend for everything she has done to champion UK steel, a vital national industry.

Q9. [901249] **Claire Hanna** (Belfast South) (SDLP): This Prime Minister has been the very embodiment of the excess and the vice that the ministerial code was designed to protect against, and once trust is broken it is very hard to rebuild. The trust of the Good Friday agreement between the peoples and the Governments of these islands has been systematically destroyed over the last six years, and people across the island of Ireland—whether Unionist, nationalist or neither—have looked on in horror at the degradation of the rule of law, the deterioration of Anglo-Irish relationships and the bolstering of the far right.

Many of us will work to try to restore those relationships and ensure that the decent people of Britain and Ireland live entwined lives for many years to come. If the Prime Minister is capable of any self-reflection, does he have any regrets about his legacy of damaging our fragile shared society and all the people of Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: I completely disagree with that. The whole objective of the Northern Ireland (Protocol) Bill that we have passed is to support the balance and

symmetry of the Belfast/Good Friday arrangements. I was very pleased that the Bill advanced to the House of Lords with no amendments.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): In recalling the situation that the Prime Minister inherited in July 2019, of a Parliament with a majority determined to frustrate the result of the 2016 referendum, led by a Speaker who was just slightly partial—the seemingly impossible situation he found—does my right hon. Friend understand that he has the gratitude of my constituents, who can identify the wood from the trees, and of myself, for his leadership over the last three years?

The Prime Minister: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. There is a fair amount of wood on the Opposition Benches and I think that is why we will prevail at the next general election.

Q10. [901250] **John Mc Nally** (Falkirk) (SNP): Since 2014, the Tory party has had more Prime Ministers than we have had referendums. May I remind the PM of the Smith Commission report, which states:

“It is agreed that nothing in this report prevents Scotland becoming an independent country”?

Therefore, does the Prime Minister believe in democracy and will he respect the people of Scotland’s right to self-determination?

The Prime Minister: I think the people of Scotland do not, frankly, want to be talking about constitutional issues and another referendum when the issues before the country—the cost of living, the educational issues we discussed, drugs and crime—are far more pressing.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): The Prime Minister spoke earlier about the atrocities carried out by the IRA. For decades, many men and women had the courage to put on the Queen’s uniform and uphold law and order in Northern Ireland on Operation Banner. One of the Prime Minister’s undoubted achievements is that he brought in the Northern Ireland (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill, so that those people who served their country can finally sleep safely in their beds. Thank you for that, Prime Minister, if I may be so presumptuous on their behalf. You kept your word to them.

The Prime Minister: I thank my old friend for everything he did to campaign on that issue for so long. I am glad that this Government were indeed able to fulfil their promise not just to veterans, but to their families as well. I renew my thanks to the security services, who do so much to keep us safe, and to all those who put on the Queen’s uniform.

Q12. [901252] **Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): Prime Minister, the OECD forecasts zero growth in GDP for the UK economy in 2023; that would be the worst performance in the G7. Ireland, Switzerland, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Iceland, Sweden, Austria, Belgium and Finland are all wealthier than the UK. Why should Scotland not be afforded the same opportunity to seek prosperity through being a sovereign independent nation, standing as an equal among other equal nations?

The Prime Minister: The UK had the fastest growth in the G7 last year and we will return to the top of the table soon because we came out of covid fastest. We had 0.5% growth in May. Do not forget that the people of Scotland, like the people of the whole of the UK, are supported by the massive fiscal firepower of the UK Treasury, and that is a great advantage.

Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): May I place on the record my thanks particularly to the firefighters of Cornwall, who were also extremely busy and courageous yesterday?

I thank the Prime Minister for his support and enthusiasm for Cornwall and the people of Cornwall over the last few years, and not least for the hosting of the G7 last year. I also thank him for the investment of £132 million from the shared prosperity fund, from which, with the national average at £17 per head, Cornwall receives £233 per head? Does my right hon. Friend agree that his enthusiasm for levelling up every part of the UK needs to carry on in the future?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is a fantastic champion for Cornwall and we will continue our programme to support the greater south-west, whether through the A303 or broadband. Cornwall has a bright future with her as a representative.

Q13. [901253] **Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): While the Prime Minister has been on the randan at Chequers, people in Scotland are suffering because of the Tory cost of living crisis and we are paying a high price for his disastrous hard Brexit, imposed against the wishes of Scottish voters. It is time to end this democracy denial, Prime Minister: Scotland cannot afford to stay shackled to this crumbling Union and Tory Governments that we do not vote for. Does the Prime Minister not accept that Scotland is a democracy? He has no right to overrule the votes of people in Scotland and we will have the referendum we voted for.

The Prime Minister: This is the country that secured furlough and that delivered the vaccine across the whole of the UK, while the SNP gets on with overtaking to the tune of £900 million—that is how much they are overtaking in Scotland. And we had a referendum in 2014.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I know that my right hon. Friend is aware of the importance of the seafood processing industry to the Grimsby-Cleethorpes area. However, there is one cloud on the horizon: the recently imposed 35% tariff on white fish, which is causing industry leaders considerable concern even though they recognise the importance of maintaining sanctions on Russia. Will my right hon. Friend arrange meetings with me and my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Lia Nici) with the appropriate Ministers, so we can discuss measures to mitigate the impact on the industry?

The Prime Minister: I will make sure that my hon. Friend gets a meeting as soon as possible with the relevant Minister, but it is very important that we encourage our great fish and chip shops in Grimsby, Cleethorpes and elsewhere to make sure they are not just using Russian fish for their fish and chips.

Q14. [901254] **John Nicolson** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): As the Prime Minister limps off into the history books, his name up there in the pantheon of greats alongside the Duke of Portland and Spencer Perceval, can he update us on his defenestration honours list? How many of his cronies will he ennoble? Can we expect him to surpass Harold Wilson with a lavender list of dodgy donors, obsequious courtiers and “pinchers by nature”?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that everybody who has served this Government loyally and well deserves recognition of some kind, but as for the honours list, I am afraid the hon. Gentleman will have to contain his excitement.

Mr Speaker: Order. May I just say that we wanted good temper and better, moderate language? I do not think we got it then—well, I know we did not.

Anna Firth (Southend West) (Con): I thank the Prime Minister for his support for the new city of Southend. Our brilliant hospital turns 90 next Tuesday, but our heroic NHS staff are hampered by the size of the A&E department. Conservative-led capital funding of £8.4 million to expand the A&E department was promised five years ago but has not quite arrived. Will my right hon. Friend encourage the new Health Secretary to give us the best birthday present ever and, in the words of Cuba Gooding Jr, “Show me the money”?

Mr Speaker: Order. I think the Prime Minister has got the message—also, I would like to hear your question as well.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is a brilliant champion for Essex and her hospital. I know the case is under review by the Department, but never forget it is only possible because of the money this Government are investing.

Q15. [901255] **Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister will be remembered as a man of his word: “Pile ‘em high”—200,000 dead, the most in Europe; “F- business”—[*Interruption.*] This is the truth; they don’t like it, do they?

Let’s listen to the truth: 400,000 fewer people in jobs than before the pandemic if we include the self-employed, which the Prime Minister does not. So will he now keep faith with the 3.7 million people who have taken out student loans since this Conservative Government have been in power and who now face rising inflation in terms of rent, heating and eating, and who now must pay—[*Interruption.*] Listen to that rabble. [*Interruption.*] Listen to them.

Mr Speaker: Order. Sit down a minute. When I stand, it is easier if the hon. Member sits down—it helps the whole House. I want to get to the end of questions, and I know that hon. Member is coming to the end of his question.

Geraint Davies: There are 3.7 million people who face 7% interest rates from September, as well as the inflation on heating and eating and rent, when mortgages are at 2%. Will the Prime Minister help those people in need, or will he help the City people—his friends—who are making all this money out of the cost of living crisis?

The Prime Minister: I will tell the hon. Gentleman what students want. They want to have a system where they do not pay back more than they borrow, and that is what we are putting in. They also want to make sure that they have a jobs market that will take them on with high-wage, high-skill jobs. The difference between Labour Members and us is that we get people into high-wage, high-skill jobs. They are prepared to let them languish on the dole, and that is the difference.

Mr Speaker: Final question: Sir Edward Leigh.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): On behalf of the House, may I thank the Prime Minister—*[Interruption.]* On behalf of the House, may I thank the Prime Minister for his three-year record of service? On behalf of some of the most vulnerable people in the country, can I thank him for his insistence on rolling out the AstraZeneca jab, which has saved thousands of lives around the world? On behalf of the 17.4 million people who voted Brexit, may I thank him for restoring people's faith in democracy? On behalf of northern towns, may I thank him for his commitment to levelling up? And most of all, on behalf of the people of Ukraine, may I thank him for holding high the torch of freedom and ensuring that that country is not a vassal state? For true grit and determination, keep going and thank you.

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend, and I want to use the last few seconds to give some words of advice to my successor, whoever he or she may be.

No. 1: stay close to the Americans; stick up for the Ukrainians; stick up for freedom and democracy everywhere. Cut taxes and deregulate wherever you can to make this the greatest place to live and invest, which it is. I love the Treasury, but remember that if we had always listened to the Treasury, we would not have built the M25 or the channel tunnel. Focus on the road ahead, but always remember to check the rear-view mirror. And remember, above all, it is not Twitter that counts; it is the people that sent us here.

And yes, the last few years have been the greatest privilege of my life. It is true that I helped to get the biggest Tory majority for 40 years and a huge realignment in UK politics. We have transformed our democracy and restored our national independence, as my right hon. Friend says. We have helped—I have helped—to get this country through a pandemic and helped save another country from barbarism. Frankly, that is enough to be going on with. Mission largely accomplished—for now.

I want to thank you, Mr Speaker. I want to thank all the wonderful staff of the House of Commons. I want to thank all my friends and colleagues. I want to thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford). I want to thank everybody here. And hasta la vista, baby. *[Applause.]*

Heatwave Response

12.50 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Kit Malthouse): I would like to make a statement on this week's heatwave. Coningsby in Lincolnshire broke records yesterday when it registered a provisional reading of 40.3°C. According to the Met Office, no fewer than 34 locations around the United Kingdom exceeded the country's previous highest temperature of 37.8°C, which was set in 2019.

We have seen a collective national endeavour to prepare for and manage the effects of the heat, from town hall to Whitehall and across various industries, to keep people safe and infrastructure functioning. From water companies and rail engineers to public servants across the land, everyone has pulled together, with members of the public responding in a responsible way that took the pressure off vital public services.

Our national resolve has been exemplified by our fire and rescue services, for many of which yesterday was the busiest day since world war two. They were undoubtedly stretched, but coped magnificently. The systems in place to make sure that the fire services can operate nationally as well as locally worked well. In tinderbox conditions, they have dealt with dozens of wildfires around the country over the past 24 hours. Fifteen fire and rescue services declared major incidents and handled emergency calls the length and breadth of the country.

Sadly, at least 41 properties have been destroyed in London, 14 in Norfolk, five in Lincolnshire and smaller numbers elsewhere. On behalf of the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and, I am sure, the whole House, I would like to pass on our sincere condolences to those who have lost their homes or business premises. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is working closely with local authorities to provide support to them.

Throughout recent days, the Prime Minister has monitored our work and has been specifically briefed on a number of occasions; we briefed him again this morning. The Prime Minister was briefed during the wildfires by Mark Hardingham—the chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council—and the civil contingencies secretariat. He has passed on his thanks to all the brave firefighters who have sought to control the flames in such debilitating conditions. I would also like to pay my tribute to the fire control staff, officers and support teams for their essential work and to the other agencies that have made such tremendous efforts in recent days: the NHS, our emergency call handlers, the police and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, among many others.

Hon. Members will be relieved to know that some pressure on these services will now ease as the fiercest heat has subsided. Many incidents are now being scaled back. Thunderstorms are likely this afternoon, but for much of the country, more clement, dry conditions are the pattern for the coming days. The Met Office, however, stresses that the summer is likely to bring further hot weather and wildfire risk remains elevated. That is why we are treating this heatwave as an exacting test of our national resilience and contingency planning. As always, there is no room for complacency.

We have seen over the past few days what we can achieve when we prepare properly and then work closely together. Owing to the technical expertise of the weather

forecasters who predicted with admirable precision the peak of the heatwave and how high the temperatures would be, the Government were able to launch an advance campaign of comprehensive public advice. Our early data shows how, well before the heatwave arrived, people were taking on board that advice from the UK Health Security Agency, the NHS, the chief and deputy chief medical officer, emergency services and key agencies on the ground.

Because of our established local networks and colleagues in the devolved Administrations, we had people spread across the UK ready to step in when it mattered. I am particularly grateful for the co-operation and support that we received from the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. We all need to manage these events together.

I would like to give some examples of how people taking the right action helped to mitigate the effects of the extreme weather, starting with the heeding of advice. Fully five times as many people accessed NHS England internet pages on how to manage the symptoms of heat exhaustion in the critical week beginning 11 July. We had feared that our vital 999 call services would come under untold pressure, yet as the mercury climbed inexorably on 18 July, fewer 999 calls but more 111 calls were made than the week before. That suggests that the public had heeded the advice to avoid 999 except in emergencies.

With travel, once again people were playing for the team. The public stayed at home to avoid the heat, not venturing far. The data bears that out: on Monday, footfall at major London stations was at approximately 35% of normal post-pandemic levels. Network Rail reports that passenger train numbers yesterday were approximately 40% down on the previous week. We did not forget those who cannot easily leave their homes; we asked people to look out for the elderly and for vulnerable family members and neighbours.

Tragically, 13 people are believed to have lost their lives after getting into difficulty in rivers, reservoirs and lakes while swimming in recent days; seven of them, sadly, were teenage boys. I would like to pass on our sincere condolences and those of the whole House to the families of the victims for their terrible loss.

Of course, we have still to work through the longer-term consequences of the heatwave. The true picture will not come until all incidents are analysed, all emergency teams are debriefed and all incident logs and data are reconciled. A great deal of data has yet to come in from colleagues in the devolved Administrations and from local authorities and agencies around the country. We recognise that we are likely to experience more of these incidents, and that we should not underestimate their speed, scope and severity. Britain may be unaccustomed to such high temperatures, but the UK, along with our European neighbours, must learn to live with extreme events such as these.

The Government have been at the forefront of international efforts to reach net zero, but the impacts of climate change are with us now. That is why we have a national adaptation programme under the leadership of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. As we have seen in recent days, we will continue to face acute events driven by climate change. It is the responsibility of Cabinet Office Ministers to co-ordinate work across Government when those events take place.

[Kit Malthouse]

The Government will continue to build our collective resilience. To that end, the national resilience strategy, about which I was asked on Monday, will be launched at the earliest possible opportunity by the incoming Administration. In the meantime, I will continue to co-ordinate the work of teams across Government in building resilience to make sure that the country is ready to meet the challenges of the autumn, the winter and beyond. In that spirit, I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Speaker: We now come to the deputy Leader of the Opposition.

12.56 pm

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): The events of the last few days have been incredibly traumatic for communities across Britain. Individuals and families have had their homes destroyed and, as the Minister said, lives have been lost. As the mother of teenagers, I reiterate that they must not swim in our rivers—it is too dangerous.

Farmers and businesses have seen their livelihoods go up in smoke. We saw horrifying images of the A2 on fire yesterday. I join the Minister in paying tribute to the incredible bravery of our fire services and those whose job it is to head straight into danger as the rest of us escape it. Sadly, four firefighters have been hospitalised in South Yorkshire and over a dozen have been injured in London. I know that the whole House will give them our gratitude and wish them well, but for too long our public servants have been underappreciated and undervalued by this Government. The Minister mentioned our fire services; over the last 10 years, the funding and staffing of fire and rescue services has been cut, and response times have gone up by 8%. Yesterday, no mutual aid was available to services facing literal firestorms.

Mr Speaker, this statement is far too late. The impact of this heatwave was completely predictable, so why the delay in coming to this House? It has literally taken the country going up in flames for the Minister to turn his focus to this emergency. Climate change will cause more and more national emergencies like this, from heatwaves to fires, floods and pandemics, but as we have seen over the past week, the leadership contenders are doing their hardest to outbid each other on how they would cut action on climate change. They will leave us vulnerable to more freak natural disasters.

The caretaker Minister says that it is his job to chair Cobra meetings, but it should be the job of the Prime Minister to lead. Yesterday, the remaining Cabinet gave the Prime Minister the complete volumes of Sir Winston Churchill as a leaving gift—but he is no Churchill. He has been missing in action. Can the Minister tell us where the Prime Minister was as the country burned? Where was he when Cobra was called last weekend? Has he attended any talks with Ministers or senior officials in the days since? Is the truth not that the Prime Minister and his entire Government have gone missing while Britain burns?

We might have cooler temperatures today, but another heatwave is inevitable as our climate heats up. Britain cannot continue to be so unprepared. The Minister tells people to drink water and wear a hat. It is just not good

enough. We need a long-term emergency resilience plan for the future, so can the Minister answer these questions? Where is the plan for the delivery of essential services? How will people be kept safe at work, on transport, in hospitals and in care homes? Where is the guidance for safe indoor working temperatures?

The Minister now says that the Government's national resilience plan will be published in due course, by the new Administration. It is already 10 months overdue. Why should the British people be forced to wait for a whole year? It is the primary duty of any Government to keep the public safe, and Britain deserves much better than this. Labour already has a resilience plan for the long term. We would implement a Department-wide approach and appoint a Minister for Resilience. We would give local government the resources that it needs to plan and prepare for emergencies. Local government has been on the frontline, and I pay tribute to its response to this crisis—and to what it did during the pandemic—but its resilience has been eroded by 12 years of cuts and austerity at the hands of this Government.

Finally, Labour would empower businesses and civil society organisations to strengthen our response. Homes have been destroyed, our brave firefighters have been hospitalised, and lives have been ruined and lost. Enough is enough. If the Minister is not willing to take the action that is needed, we on this side of the House are.

Kit Malthouse: What a shame that—notwithstanding the loss of some homes and some tragic deaths in water-related incidents—the right hon. Lady did not take the opportunity to recognise that by and large the system worked, and that, owing to our planning and the resilience that we built into all the public services and, indeed, public servants whom she lauded, the country got through this particular extreme weather event in pretty good shape. We obviously recognise that there were some unfortunate incidents—as I said, a number of homes were set on fire—but the fact that we kept the damage to a minimum and the vast majority of the population got through this difficulty well was not recognised by the right hon. Lady at all, and I think that that is a real shame.

The right hon. Lady claimed that no mutual aid was available. That is not correct. One fire and rescue service, Norfolk, called for national mutual aid, and mutual aid was provided from other parts of the country. The system that we have for flexing the use of the fire service throughout the country worked extremely well, as the chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council was able to confirm to the Prime Minister last night and, indeed, this morning.

The right hon. Lady seemed to claim that this was the first time I had turned up in the House to discuss this issue. It is not; it is the second time I have done so, and we have been working on this since the weather forecasters notified us that an extreme weather event was likely to occur. It is, however, the first time the right hon. Lady has turned up in the House. [Interruption.] You were doing a radio interview.

Angela Rayner: I was in my office.

Kit Malthouse: Being in your office is not being on the Front Bench. “Present but not involved” is, I believe, the claim from the Labour party. Before the right hon.

Lady starts flinging stones and claiming that others are not doing their job, perhaps she should polish the glass in her house.

As for the involvement of the Prime Minister, he has been kept in touch with our work throughout, either through personal briefings from me or, last night and this morning, through briefings from the chair of the National Fire Chiefs Council and the Civil Contingencies Secretariat. As the right hon. Lady will, I am afraid, never know—because, I hope, she will never be in the Government—No. 10 and the Cabinet Office work together very closely when emergencies such as this arise and we need to establish plans and specific co-ordination work to ensure that we all understand what the picture is.

As I have said, the resilience plan is in progress and will be launched as soon as we have a new Administration in No. 10, but the right hon. Lady should not mistake the question of the publication of a national resilience plan for our not having any plans at all. As we saw in all manner of elements of the function of our country, the plans that we had in place worked well, the capacity that we stood up flexed, often brilliantly, to deal with an ever-changing situation, and, as I have said, most of the country got through it in good shape.

As for the appointment of a Minister for Resilience, I am afraid that we already have one: it is me. The job of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is to look after the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, whose purpose is to deal specifically with issues of resilience and ensure that the system works, as it did—largely—yesterday.

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): Yesterday, wildfires in my constituency destroyed properties in Brancaster Staithe and also destroyed habitats and wildlife on the famous Wild Ken Hill estate, which is well known for hosting the BBC's "Springwatch". Let me put on record my constituents' immense thanks to Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service and the other emergency services, as well as all those in the local community who helped to tackle those blazes in such awful circumstances: they will recover and rebuild those community areas. May I also ask the Minister to reinforce our commitment to achieving net zero so that we are better protected from climate change?

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend is right: Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service was severely tested yesterday. As I said earlier, it received mutual aid—from, I believe, as far afield as Merseyside—to help it in that battle, and I understand that those services will remain in situ to ensure that Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service can get back on its feet and deal with any event that may arise over the next few days. My hon. Friend is also right to suggest that, while we are very focused on the continuing elevated risk of wildfires, the long-term work enabling us not only to make our own contribution to the battle against climate change but to lead the world and challenge some of its biggest polluters to change their habits and their uses of fuel is critical, and I know that in Parliaments to come he will be at the forefront of that fight.

Mr Speaker: I call the Scottish National party spokesperson.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and

I thank the Minister for prior sight of this statement.

Let me begin by paying tribute to those in all the emergency services who, once again, have gone above and beyond to help their fellow citizens in a time of crisis. Let me also extend our sympathy to the people whose homes and businesses have been destroyed in the fires that raged across parts of England.

We may not have known anything like this before, with record temperatures being set in three of the four nations of the UK and the symbolic 40°C barrier being broken in England, but, sadly, I predict that this—or something like it—is here to stay. We are all going to have to live with it, and Governments are going to have to prepare for it in the future. Climate scientists have been warning us for decades that this day was coming, and it would be disingenuous in the extreme for anyone to claim that it was a one-off freak event or dare to compare it with the summer of 1976. This is the climate emergency. This is exactly what we were told would happen if we did not change our ways. This is what COP26 was all about, and that is why those who are still part of the Tory leadership race cannot, and must not, renege on the commitment to achieving net zero in return for securing votes from the party's base.

Can the Minister tell me where is the plan to increase and bolster resilience so that the Government's response to the guaranteed future heatwaves is more co-ordinated and strategic than what we have witnessed on this occasion? Given the melting roads, buckling rail tracks and dissolving runways, what plans are being considered to make our critical infrastructure more resilient to this type of heat? Finally, does the Minister agree with me—and, I suspect, the vast majority of the country—that the optics of the Prime Minister's decision to party while parts of the UK literally burned showed a complete lack of self-awareness and a complete dereliction of duty?

Kit Malthouse: First, let me join the hon. Gentleman in celebrating our firefighters. It is a remarkable form of public service to run towards an inferno in all circumstances, and particularly in the case of wildfires, which I know can be very challenging for firefighters to address, not least because they often cover a much wider area than, say, house fires. It was, I understand, particularly difficult yesterday because the ambient temperature was so high: firefighters have to wear very heavy clothing and equipment, so it was particularly debilitating for them physically.

As for building resilience into our infrastructure, I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware that we have a national adaptation plan. As we go through periods like this particular heatwave, we shall need to learn the lessons and adjust that plan accordingly. For example, over the last 24 hours there has been much debate about the impact on the rail system—a wide impact, obviously—and the tolerances to which we build our railways. We need to learn from our European partners in this regard. While it may be possible to stress a railway to enable it to deal with high temperatures, that stressing may not accommodate very low temperatures—in Scotland, for instance—and uniformity across the country is critical.

The hon. Gentleman alluded to attendance at Cobra. Let me gently point out to him that the First Minister of Scotland did not attend either. Happily, the Deputy First Minister and other Cabinet Members joined us, and they were able to function perfectly well in Cobra, as I am sure the First Minister would have done.

Jackie Doyle-Price (Thurrock) (Con): I associate myself with the comments made by all the hon. Members who have paid tribute to the emergency services who fearlessly tackled the challenges, particularly the fire at Wennington, which generated a smoke cloud that spread across the whole of east London and Thurrock. That showed just how challenging it was. I would particularly like to draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the River Thames. He mentioned drowning incidents, and for many years it has been challenging for the Port of London Authority to encourage local authorities to do their bit on drowning prevention by raising awareness of just how dangerous the River Thames is as a waterway and also by ensuring that there is sufficient safety equipment. Will he take this opportunity to remind local authorities to work collaboratively with the PLA to address that?

Kit Malthouse: One of the lessons for all of us—not least in Scotland where the school term has finished—is the need to underline the dangers inherent in bodies of water to people who live by them or want to use them. My hon. Friend is quite right to say that the Thames might look like an innocent retreat from the heat, but beneath the waves there are strong currents and we often see people get into difficulty therein. She raises a good point about the PLA and I will take that away and see what more we can do to co-ordinate the work of the PLA and the riparian authorities.

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): The men and women of the fire and rescue services were quite simply awe-inspiring yesterday, as they regularly are, but they cannot continue to work miracles. The impact of 12 years of cuts and austerity on the fire and rescue services has been an absolute disaster. They quite simply need much more critical investment if we are to tackle climate change correctly. The morale within the fire and rescue services is at an all-time low, but this week the Government offered their members a paltry 2% pay increase. It is absolutely outrageous to offer 2% to the men and women who, as the Minister says, were running towards the inferno yesterday. It is time we stopped clapping the great members of our fire and rescue services and started paying them.

Kit Malthouse: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, the pay of firefighters is not within the control of the Government. It is set by a body that involves both employees and employers, many of which are Labour-controlled local authorities. He may have strong views about the percentage that has been offered to the firefighters, but this is a challenge that he has to put down to some of his own colleagues, not to the Government. As he knows, the fire service has been remarkably successful over the last decade or so—or longer—in driving down the absolute number of fires with which it has to deal. Much of that is about its prevention work, which has been brilliant, but it is also about technology changes, not least in furniture composition. I am sure the hon. Gentleman is also aware that there is a White Paper on fire reform out at the moment, and I hope that he will make a useful contribution to it.

Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement, and I thank him and those in his Department and across Government who are working on planning and resilience

in these unprecedented weather times. I also thank our emergency services, people in the public services and in the NHS on the frontline, people in fire and rescue, the police, our local authorities and our transport networks and people at large: our community volunteers. Will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to those people in Cumbria and right across the UK for all that they have done, and continue to do, to keep people safe?

Kit Malthouse: That is a very welcome question from my hon. Friend, and I am more than happy to join him in thanking all those people who played on the team to get us through in such good shape. There were obviously some tragedies, but the fact that we were able to minimise the number was a tribute to the work of all the organisations he has mentioned.

While I am answering, I also want to take the opportunity to pay tribute to my staff in the civil contingency secretariat who have worked round the clock over the last few days, in particular working closely with the Met Office, as we sought to predict and to prepare the country, co-ordinating across Whitehall and all the other agencies. It has been a really remarkable effort and, notwithstanding the terrible tragedies that we have seen, the fact that we got through in good shape was down to all of their work.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I think that this is the first opportunity I have had to congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his new role. We shall miss scrutinising him on the Home Affairs Committee. Can I also add my thanks to the emergency services for everything they did yesterday to save property and lives? As the Minister has said, there is a White Paper out about the fire and rescue services, and its consultation has a deadline of 26 July, which I think is Sunday. In the light of the fact that the Home Affairs Committee will be looking at this in the autumn, I wonder whether it would be sensible to extend that deadline. The events of this week show that there is clear evidence of climate change-driven volatility, which will have serious implications for the fire and rescue services. This might be a good time to reflect on that before submitting to the consultation, so if the deadline could be extended, that would be helpful.

Kit Malthouse: I have certainly enjoyed being constructively challenged by the right hon. Lady during my three years in the policing job. I hope I made a small difference to the safety of the public during those years, but obviously that will be for others to judge. The timing of the White Paper is not within my remit, but I undertake with her to raise it with the Minister concerned and make the point that she has made.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I also congratulate the emergency services on their excellent work, but is it not a fact that while we have been pursuing a policy of decarbonisation and spending huge amounts of money on it—£50 billion to the energy industry in the last 20 years, with another £50 billion estimated by the Office for Budget Responsibility in the next three years—it is having little effect on our own climate or the world's? We can wave our puny fists at the forces of nature, but the fact of the matter is that it is not working. Instead of spending money on expensive attempts to decarbonise, would it not be far better to spend that money on

adapting to the inevitable changes in our climate, to make people safe when we have extreme flooding or extreme heat?

Kit Malthouse: I am sure the right hon. Gentleman would agree that we should do both. We should adapt, and we have a national adaptation strategy, but I urge him to be more optimistic about the impact that human ingenuity can have on solving the world's problems. We have seen throughout our history that the invention of technology in this country, once established and proven to work, often accelerates progress in other parts of the world, whether it was with the invention of the spinning jenny and the loom or the silicon chip and the smartphone. The iPhone was invented less than 15 years ago, and just over a decade later pretty much the whole world has one. These things often start slowly, but once they accelerate they make a huge impact.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Bobby Seale wrote a campaigning book called "Seize the Time". Can I ask the Minister to seize this time and this opportunity? Many of us have been campaigning on climate change and global warming for a long time. A really pivotal moment was when I read and reviewed Professor Steve Jones's book "Here Comes the Sun" about four years ago. We are all campaigners in this place, and the truth is that we know when a particular incident is suddenly going to change the public mood and the public mind in terms of urgency, priority and the dramatic need for action. Will the right hon. Gentleman please say to his Ministers, to future Ministers and to the future Prime Minister that this is the time to capture the imagination and really get the public behind this?

Kit Malthouse: The hon. Gentleman is correct that incidents such as these often serve to underline the importance of our collective mission on climate change. As somebody who has campaigned and been an enthusiast for the hydrogen economy for over 20 years now, I am always keen to welcome more people to the cause, but as we have seen in the debate elsewhere over the last couple of weeks, we have to take care that as we seek to progress and fight climate change, we bring the population with us. We need to illustrate to them that the work we are doing will not only make their lives better but, critically, make their children's lives better, rather than characterising it as purely a cost today.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I am interested in what the Minister says about taking the public with us. Surely, following the past few days, the public are well aware of the impact of climate change and see the heatwave here in the United Kingdom and the five heatwaves across Europe as a consequence of inaction, or of being too slow to react to climate change. I am concerned about the contradiction between what he has said today and what we hear from his party's leadership candidates about climate change and the action to combat it. Can he assure us that the Government are committed to continuing the fight to reach net zero as quickly as possible?

Kit Malthouse: The battle against climate change has been a central part of Conservative policy since the heady days of David Cameron, who campaigned on the slogan "Vote blue, go green."

Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab): An illegal net zero strategy, no national resilience strategy, 15 areas declaring major incidents, 11,500 firefighters cut since 2010 and a 2% pay offer on the table. Does the frontline of the climate emergency not deserve better?

Kit Malthouse: As I said earlier, the hon. Lady needs to pose that question to her colleagues in local government. As she knows perfectly well, and as the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Miss Dines)—she is here on the Front Bench—knows perfectly well, pay awards for firefighters are not within the Government's control and are settled by a body that includes both employers and employees.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): I pay tribute to South Yorkshire fire and rescue service, which did amazing work yesterday in very difficult conditions to keep communities safe in my part of the world. I am sure the Minister will be aware that the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy is conducting a timely inquiry into critical national infrastructure and climate adaptation. What plans does he have to follow suit?

Kit Malthouse: As we deal with these incidents, both in the last few days and over a summer in which the forecasters tell us the risk remains elevated, we will learn exactly the lessons that the hon. Gentleman is asking us to learn, and obviously we will review the Joint Committee's report. He will know that we pay constant attention to the resilience of our critical national infrastructure. As the climate changes, so should we.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I, too, commend the work of NHS staff and North Yorkshire fire and rescue service, which is currently facing cuts. I urge that those cuts do not go ahead.

Having dealt with a lot of flooding, I know what a resilience plan looks like, and yesterday there just was not a resilience plan. There were no checks on the most vulnerable people in our community, and no rest rooms or cool spaces for people who do not have such facilities. Will the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster go back and instruct all resilience areas to put in place a proper integrated resilience plan?

Kit Malthouse: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is in close touch with the resilience forums and, indeed, attended the meeting of chairs earlier this week. These are very good challenges and questions for the hon. Lady's local resilience forum, and I would be happy to arrange for her to meet the lead body on the resilience forum in York so she can reassure herself that it has the right plans in place.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): I thank the Minister for his statement. Yesterday was the busiest day for London firefighters since the second world war, and I thank firefighters across the UK for keeping us all safe.

I also express my deepest condolences to the families of those who have died in recent days after getting into difficulty in the water. What support are Ministers giving to organisations such as the Royal National

[Margaret Ferrier]

Lifeboat Institution and campaigns such as Respect the Water to raise awareness of the dangers of open water swimming on hot days?

Kit Malthouse: I echo the hon. Lady's thanks to the fire services, and I know that all of us, particularly the fire Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales, have been watching in awe as the firefighters did their job over the past 48 hours.

There has been a strong communication campaign, in co-ordination with the devolved Administrations, not least in Scotland where the schools are not open at the moment, to illustrate the dangers of young people specifically, but all of us generally, diving or jumping into water about which we know very little. One of the lessons that has come out of the last couple of days is on our need for more targeted communication. As we review what has happened over the last three or four days, we will make sure this is one of the key things we examine.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is always a pleasure to hear the Minister, and I thank him for his statement. I also thank all the fire and rescue services for their endeavours and for the vital work they do across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Have there been any discussions with the Ministry of Defence about using our armed forces personnel to police our lakes and rivers as the heatwave pushes people to swim in unsafe areas? As the Minister said, 13 people are believed to have lost their lives, and I add my condolences to all the families who are grieving with an empty chair in their house. I think of them all.

Does the Minister believe the Government can increase public safety to prevent further tragic loss of life such as we have seen over the last few days?

Kit Malthouse: In contemplating any civil contingency situation, we examine whether we have the capacity needed to deal with it and, therefore, whether we need to seek it elsewhere. I am sure the hon. Gentleman will remember the worst pictures we saw during the extensive wildfires on Saddleworth moor and Winter hill in the north of England in 2018, when the armed forces were deployed to assist the emergency services. That was not deemed appropriate this time. In fact, our judgment that the emergency services would cope proved to be correct.

On the hon. Gentleman's challenge on whether we can do more to educate people and to target bodies of water that might prove dangerous, and as I said to the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier), that is definitely something we will need to take away and consider. Obviously, we urge parents to take responsibility by understanding where their children are and by warning them about the dangers, as we did through our health messaging on looking after elderly neighbours. We all have to work together to keep our young people safe. We will examine what more we can do as we learn the lessons from this incident.

Women's Health Strategy for England

1.27 pm

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Barclay): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on the women's health strategy for England.

I know that many hon. and right hon. Members will agree that, for too long, women's health has been hampered by fragmented services and women being ignored when they raise concerns about their pain. On too many occasions, we have heard of failures in patient safety because women who raised concerns were not heard, as with the Ockenden review into the tragic failings in maternity care and the independent inquiry into the convicted surgeon Ian Paterson. I also remember the outstanding work of my constituent Kath Sansom and her Sling the Mesh campaign where, once again, the response was too slow when women raised issues with their care.

We are embarking on an important mission to improve how the health and care system listens to women's voices and to boost health outcomes for women and girls, from adolescence all the way through to later life. This is not only important for women and girls; it is important for everyone. This work is already well under way.

Last month we announced the appointment of Professor Dame Lesley Regan, one of the country's foremost experts in women's health, as the first ever women's health ambassador for England. On top of this, we are investing an extra £127 million in the NHS maternity workforce and neonatal care over the next year, and we are creating a network of family hubs in local authorities in England.

Today we are announcing the next step. We are publishing the first ever women's health strategy for England, which sets out a wide range of commitments to improve the health of women and girls everywhere. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the almost 100,000 women who took the time to share their stories with us, as painful as it may have been. Your voices have been heard and were vital in shaping this strategy.

I will now set out the key components of the strategy. First, we are putting in place a range of measures to ensure that women are better listened to in the NHS. Indeed, 84% of respondents to our call for evidence recounted instances where they were not listened to by healthcare professionals. We need to do more to tackle the disappointment and disillusionment that many women feel. We are working with NHS England to embed shared decision making where patients are given greater involvement in decisions relating to their care, including when it comes to women's health.

Secondly, we want to see better access to services for all women and girls. Women and girls have told us that the fragmented commissioning and delivery of health services can impact their ability to access them. That means they have to make multiple appointments to get the care they need, adding to the NHS backlog. There are better ways to deliver women's health through centres of excellence in the form of women's health hubs, designed specifically to holistically assess women's health issues and where specialist practitioners can be more attuned to concerns being raised. We are encouraging

the expansion of those hubs, and indeed I visited Homerton University Hospital this morning to see the benefits these local one-stop clinics bring, enabling women to have all their health needs met in one place.

Thirdly, it is essential that we address the lack of research into women's health conditions and improve the representation of women's data in all types of research. Currently, not enough is known about conditions that only affect women, as well as about how conditions that affect both men and women impact them in different ways. The strategy sets out how we will tackle the women's health data gap to make sure that health data is broken down by sex by default.

Fourthly, we will provide better information and education on issues relating to women's health. Our call for evidence showed that fewer than one in 10 respondents feels they have enough information about conditions in areas such as the menopause and that many people wanted trusted and accessible information about women's health. The NHS website is currently a trusted source of health information for many people, and we will transform the women's health content to improve its existing pages and add new pages on conditions that are not currently there. But we know that the NHS will not be everyone's first port of call for health information, so we will expand our partnerships, such as the one between YouTube and NHS Digital, who are working together to make sure that credible, clinically safe information appears prominently for UK audiences. It is also important that medical professionals have the best possible understanding of women's health, and I am pleased that the General Medical Council will be introducing specific assessments on women's health for medical students, including on the menopause and on gynaecology.

Fifthly, our strategy sets out how we will support women at work. In the call for evidence, only one in three respondents felt comfortable talking about health issues with their workplace, and we also know that one in four women has considered leaving their job as a result of the menopause. So we will be focusing our health and wellbeing fund over the next three years on projects to support women's wellbeing in the workplace, and we will be encouraging businesses across the country to take up best practice such as the menopause workforce pledge, which was recently signed by the NHS and the civil service.

Sixthly, we will place an intense focus on the disparities in women's health. We know that although women in the UK on average live longer than men, they spend a significantly greater proportion of their lives in ill health and disability than men. Even among women there are marked disparities and our strategy shows our plans to give targeted support to the groups who face barriers accessing the care they need, for example, disabled women and women experiencing homelessness. It also shows how we are putting an extra £10 million of funding towards 25 new mobile breast screening units that will target areas and communities with the greatest challenges on uptake and coverage.

Finally, as well as these cross-cutting priorities, the responses to our call for evidence also highlighted a number of specific areas where targeted action is needed. Those include fertility care, where we will be removing barriers that restrict access that are not health-based but based, for example, on whether someone has had a child from a previous relationship, and making access

to fertility services much more transparent. Another of our priority areas is improving care for women and their partners who experience the tragedy of pregnancy loss. At the moment, although parents whose babies are stillborn must legally register the stillbirth, if a pregnancy ends before 24 weeks' gestation there is no formal process for parents to legally register their baby, which I know can be distressing for many bereaved parents. So we will be accepting the interim update of the independent pregnancy loss review and introducing a voluntary scheme to allow parents who have experienced a loss before 24 weeks of pregnancy to record and receive a certificate to provide recognition of their tragic loss.

This is a significant programme of work but we cannot achieve the scale of change we need through central Government alone. We must work across all areas of health and care. We will need the NHS and local authority commissioners to expand the use of women's health hubs; the medical schools, regulators and Royal Colleges to help us improve education and training for healthcare professionals; the National Institute for Health and Care Research to help make breakthroughs that will drive our future work; and many others to play their part. I would like to finish by thanking everyone involved in the development of this important strategy, including the Minister of State, Department for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), who is on the Front Bench with me today, for the determination she has shown in taking this strategy forward. I would also like to pay tribute to my predecessors, my right hon. Friends the Members for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock) and for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid), the latter of whom is in his place, for their commitment to this important issue, even during the pressures of the pandemic. This is a landmark strategy, which lays the foundations for change and helps us to tackle the injustices that have persisted for too long. I commend this statement to the House.

1.37 pm

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): Let me begin by thanking the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement and adding my thanks to the Minister of State, to his predecessor as Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid), who is sat opposite, and to officials in the Department for the work they have done. I am genuinely glad that this work is out of the door when so much else has been in hiatus because of the wider political change afoot in the Government. I join the Secretary of State in recognising the campaigning efforts of his constituent Kath Sansom, as well as the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), who has campaigned tirelessly to raise awareness of the menopause and has been a driving force for change on behalf of women everywhere.

For too long, women's health has been an afterthought, and the voices of women have been at best ignored and at worst silenced. Four out of five women who responded to the Government's survey could remember a time where they did not feel listened to by a healthcare professional, and that has simply got to change. In recent years, we have seen a string of healthcare scandals primarily affecting women: nearly 2,000 reported cases of avoidable harm and death in maternity services at Shrewsbury and Telford; more than 1,000 women operated

[*Wes Streeting*]

on unnecessarily by the rogue breast surgeon Ian Paterson; thousands given faulty PIP—Poly Implant Prothèse—breast implants; and many left with traumatic complications after vaginal mesh surgery. Meanwhile, every woman who needs to use the NHS today faces record high waiting times. The NHS is losing midwives faster than it can recruit them. Gynaecology waiting lists have grown faster than those for any other medical specialty. The number of women having cervical screening is falling. And black women are 40% more likely to experience a miscarriage than white women. That is the cost for women of 12 years of Conservatives mismanagement, so I want to address each part of the strategy in turn.

The strategy promises new research, which is of course important. Studies suggest that gender biases in clinical trials are contributing to worse health outcomes for women. There is evidence that the impact of women-specific health conditions such as heavy menstrual bleeding, endometriosis, pregnancy-related issues and the menopause is overlooked. So of course what the Secretary of State has said today about improving data is so important, but will he also set out how exactly the Government intend to make use of this new data to improve outcomes for women?

Improving the education and training of health professionals is essential, because when we do not do that, there are consequences. Almost one in 10 women has to see their GP 10 times before they get proper help and advice about the menopause, and half of medical schools do not teach doctors about the menopause, even though it affects every woman. I challenge the Secretary of State to go further than the proposal he outlined to train incoming medical students and incoming doctors. What plans do the Government have for clinicians who are already practising? We need to upskill the existing workforce, not just the incoming workforce. However, let us be clear: informing clinicians is no good if we do not also improve access to hormone replacement therapy, so where is the action in the strategy to end the postcode lottery for treatment?

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in the UK, and the NHS offers regular breast cancer screening to women aged between 50 and 70. That can prevent avoidable deaths by identifying cancer early, when it is more treatable and survival is more likely. Yet, fewer women in the most deprived areas than in the most affluent areas receive regular breast screening. Even before the pandemic too many women with suspected breast cancer were waiting more than the recommended two weeks to see a specialist. How will the programme announced today make a difference to outcomes for patients if, once diagnosed, they just end up on a waiting list that is far too long and they cannot access the treatment they need?

I welcome what the Secretary of State said about removing barriers to in vitro fertilisation for women in same-sex couples. For far too long they have faced unnecessary obstacles to accessing IVF, for no other reason than that they love another woman. It is high time that we put that right.

I also want to mention endometriosis. Tens of thousands of women provided testimony to the Government about the issues they face with diagnosis and treatment. Will the Secretary of State give the House an assurance that

every woman who is treated for this disease will have equal access to specialist services from day one? Will he make sure that they do not have to fight to get the diagnosis in the first place?

On polycystic ovary syndrome, what will the Secretary of State do to make sure that we equalise access to a range of treatments, not least for women for whom the pill is simply inappropriate? We must make sure we end the division between those who receive a prescription on the NHS and those who go private, receiving better treatment.

I also want to raise some points about what has not been mentioned today. In addition to the appalling figures on black maternity deaths, a quarter of black women surveyed by Five X More felt that they received a poor or very poor standard of care during pregnancy, labour and post-natal care. Women who live in deprived areas are more likely to suffer a stillbirth than their richer counterparts. My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds), the shadow Secretary of State for Women and Equalities, has pledged a new race equality Act to tackle the structural inequalities in our society, including in healthcare. However, the Government are more interested in stoking culture wars than in acknowledging that these inequalities even exist. Surely that has to change when there is a new leadership of the Conservative party.

In conclusion, the reality that faces women in this country is this: breast cancer waiting times are through the floor, half a million women are waiting for gynaecology treatment, black women are four times more likely to die in pregnancy and childbirth, and too many women still cannot get HRT when they need it. This strategy simply will not solve the depth of the crisis in women's healthcare after 12 years of Conservative mismanagement. Every day this Conservative Government remain in office is another day when women will have to wait far too long for the care they desperately need.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I call Sajid Javid.

Steve Barclay *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Oh, I beg your pardon! It is probably a good idea if I allow the Secretary of State to answer the shadow Secretary of State. I am too many steps ahead.

Steve Barclay: I do not want those on the Opposition Front Bench thinking that their points have not been addressed.

I think there is much common ground on both sides of the House on the importance of this strategy and the need for a culture and system change in the NHS to address many of the concerns raised in past debates in the House on issues such as mesh, Paterson and Ockenden. I also think there are a lot of areas where colleagues on both sides of the House will work together to encourage commissioners in our constituencies to reshape services in a way that better reflects the needs set out in this strategy.

The hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) is right to highlight the fact that many respondents felt they had not been heard in the past. That is why we have taken the first step of appointing a women's health ambassador—Professor Dame Lesley Regan, who is an extremely respected figure in women's health—to better

champion women. It is also why I signalled in my statement the importance of data and of breaking it down by sex by default to better target our research on conditions that impact women differently from men or that affect only women and that are often not as well researched as they should be. Again, I think there is common ground on both sides of the House on the issue of research.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the need to improve training for existing clinicians as well as for those new to the profession. That is why I signalled in my statement our desire to work with the royal colleges and others to make sure that that continuing professional development is there.

The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of access to HRT. He will be aware that we have put prepayment certificates in place from April next year so that someone will pay only the equivalent of two prescription charges for their HRT supply. Officials in the Department have done considerable work on supply chain issues to tackle some of the difficulties that were there in the past.

On the hon. Gentleman's point about how we address outcomes for patients, I saw a good illustration this morning at Homerton. Redesigning services avoids the need for invasive and more expensive theatre treatment, and the use of new equipment allows a better service to the patient. In the strategy, Professor Dame Lesley Regan makes the point that the irony is that we could deliver services that are far better for the patient but also cheaper for the taxpayer if we embraced a women's hub model of the sort we see in Homerton. I very much look forward to taking the data we have forward in conversations with other commissioners around the country.

I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman recognised and welcomed the removal of barriers to IVF, as will Members on both sides of the House who have seen the challenges that that issue presents in constituency cases.

On speed of service, community diagnostic centres have an important role to play. The hon. Gentleman also raised the issue of ethnic minorities. We have put in place a maternity disparities taskforce, and ministerial colleagues have already met three times as part of that taskforce, so the characterisation that Ministers are not engaging on the issue is, I am afraid, wide of the mark.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned breast cancer. He will have noted from my statement that an additional £10 million has been targeted specifically at that issue, with a further 25 mobile units. Again, that is about addressing the disparity in women's health data in different parts of the country.

Overall this is an important strategy. We have listened to the very large number of responses to the consultation, and that is reflected in the strategy. I think this is an area on which there is much common ground on both sides of the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): And now I call Sajid Javid.

Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con): There was a time when I would follow right after the shadow Secretary of State, but not any more. However, I am very pleased to follow my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and

I welcome him to his new role. He has the privilege of running a fantastic Department that is so important to the British people. He has excelled in every role he has held in Government so far, and I know he will do so again.

I strongly welcome the women's health strategy—as we heard, it is the first published by any Government. I congratulate everyone involved, including all the officials and especially the excellent Minister of State, Department for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), who is sitting on the Treasury Bench, and the previous Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Ms Dorries).

Does the Secretary of State agree that, when it comes to women's health, early diagnosis is essential? I absolutely welcome the commitment in the strategy on mandatory training in women's health issues for new doctors, but will my right hon. Friend say a little more about what can be done on training for existing doctors and clinicians?

Steve Barclay: The work on this strategy was done before I arrived in the Department, so it was down to my right hon. Friend and to the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield). It is great to have this opportunity to pay tribute to my predecessor for all that he did to drive this agenda forward. He is absolutely right about the importance of training and early diagnosis. That is why addressing the issue of fragmented services is so important. As a respondent said, where women raise concerns, they often feel like a lone voice in the wind—that was a phrase in the strategy that really resonated with me. Having hubs, centres of excellence and the ability to look at that data and identify it early, alongside the other initiatives in which he played a major role as Secretary of State, such as the diagnostic hubs, are all a key part of the delivery of this strategy.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): I rise to speak specifically on the menopause services included in the strategy. As co-chair of the Government menopause taskforce, I broadly welcome the strategy but feel that it falls short in some places.

Although better menopause training for doctors of the future is essential, there is not much in the strategy now in terms of upskilling GPs or prescriber medics, such as pharmacists or women's health nurses. With only 14% of women accessing hormone replacement therapy and menopause care, through medical lack of awareness in diagnosing and prescribing, training medical professionals of the future does nothing for women today.

With 50% of women not even discussing their symptoms, we need a public awareness campaign—outside the one being run by the media and by grassroots and celebrity activists—to ensure that all women get the memo, as it were. We need a commitment to a national formulary for HRT to end postcode lottery in quality, quantity and availability of body identical hormone replacement therapy—I emphasise body identical.

As for HRT costs, I am delighted that my private Member's Bill that I negotiated with the Government last October now appears as part of the strategy, but I am bitterly disappointed that the timeframe for that once annual charge is delayed until April 2023—

[Carolyn Harris]

18 months after it was promised—demonstrating to me a lack of urgency in dealing with women's health issues that affect 51% of the population.

As we are talking about delays and women not being listened to, I am still waiting on responses to six letters to either this Secretary of State or to his predecessor dating back to 5 May asking to discuss all the issues that I have raised today. I would be grateful to have a meeting to discuss them further.

Steve Barclay: The hon. Lady says that she is not being listened to, but my understanding is that she is co-chair of the menopause taskforce, which has been set up to look at these issues. Indeed, she has also had meetings with officials on the subject of HRT. It is slightly remiss of her to suggest that she is not being listened to when Health Department officials are meeting with her and when we have a taskforce under way. There is much consensus around the points that she raises. She has highlighted, quite rightly, the importance of HRT, and we have acted on that. Part of the reason for the delay until April is that the IT systems need to be put in place. I well recall, when I was a Treasury Minister, being asked to move at pace in response to covid, because of the cash-flow pressures on businesses, and sometimes having the same colleagues complaining that forward controls and other issues had not been put in place. We need to put the right IT in place. We will do that for April, and the work is under way. The issues that she raises are being addressed, but in an effective way.

As I said to the shadow Secretary of State, we will work with the royal colleges to address the issue of training. It is a perfectly fair point, and I do not think there is disagreement in the House on that. On the wider issue of addressing disparities, that is exactly what the taskforce is about. That is why we have such a relentless focus on data, why we have a women's health ambassador to give greater voice to these issues, and why we have brought forward specific measures, such as the family hubs and mobile breast screening units, to better address those disparities.

Dame Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and its recognition of the need to have specific strategies to make sure that women have equal access to services. However, it is silent on the biggest healthcare injustice that women face in our country—that abortion is still treated under Victorian criminal law, with the most draconian laws in the world. Seventeen women in the past eight years have been subject to criminal investigation, including simply because they suffered the appalling issue of stillbirth. This strategy should stop that by expanding the Government's own change in the law in Northern Ireland to ensure that abortion is an issue between women and their doctors, and that every woman is protected from criminal investigation at a time when what they need from us is care and compassion.

Steve Barclay: My right hon. Friend is right that there is a need for care and compassion, and she highlights an extremely important point. She will be aware that the sexual health review is currently being conducted. That will report later this year and will look into the issue that she raises.¹

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): How will this strategy address the postcode lottery associated with gynaecological wait times?

Steve Barclay: Again, it is partly by having an ambassador that will be tasked with advocating in that space, by having the data to give visibility to that, and also by working in partnership with commissioning groups, with the NHS, and with the royal colleges on training, that much greater focus will be brought to these issues.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I thank the Government for bringing forward this strategy. It really is astonishing that this is the first Government ever to have produced such a strategy. Will my right hon. Friend use this to drive forward improvements in care for endometriosis, including, in particular, updating the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines NG73 to make sure that people have earlier diagnoses and better access to pain relief for this debilitating condition, of which too many doctors do not have a high enough awareness?

Steve Barclay: That was one of the key issues that came out of the consultation responses. Indeed, in my conversation with Dr Watson at Homerton, we looked at different pathways for treatment that avoid the need for theatre. Key to that is some of the innovation on pain management that physicians are looking at, and how, through NICE, we socialise that innovation across the NHS.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The north-east has some of the highest levels of health inequality in the country. North-east women spend more than a quarter of their lives in not good or poor health, which is almost 3 percentage points above the national average. Will the Secretary of State set out the steps that he plans to take to target those areas that already have high levels of inequality? Does he agree that, when he talks about research—I very much welcome the additional research—that should also target areas with high levels of existing inequality, which, unfortunately, is not the case at the moment?

Steve Barclay: We are already doing so on things such as the 75 family hubs that we have put in place. Again, a key part of this strategy is to then look at having women's hubs, particularly in those areas where there is greatest disparity.

Jackie Doyle-Price (Thurrock) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to his place and the appointment of Dame Lesley Regan as the women's health ambassador. I know them both to be very passionate and outcome-focused, and, between the two of them, I hope that we will make some headway. He rightly talks about how women do not feel listened to, and we know that women go for many years suffering from very common gynaecological conditions that do not get diagnosed. What role does he think that more public health education about healthy menstruation and what constitutes a healthy period can play to make sure that women are more empowered to look after themselves and get treatment earlier?

Steve Barclay: I thank my hon. Friend for her warm welcome. I agree with her about empowering patients, women in particular, with information. That is why part

1. [Official Report, 5 September 2022, Vol. 719, c. 2MC.]

of the strategy is to focus on the information provided on the NHS website. There is also the need to work with trusted partners—to look at where people go for their health information, and how we can better empower them. For example, in the consultation, we heard of patients being told that heavy bleeding was normal—that it was something that they had to accept. Again, that was an issue highlighted by respondents in the call for evidence. It is about making sure people realise that, where there are issues, their voices are heard. That is at the heart of the strategy that we have set out.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): I am delighted to see the UK Government follow in the footsteps of the Scottish Government with a women's health plan. I am also pleased to see that they have taken on board the Stonewall campaign to bring the rest of the UK into line with Scotland on female same-sex couples' access to in vitro fertilisation, because for far too long it has been a postcode lottery and lesbians have been discriminated against.

As co-chair, with the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy), of the all-party parliamentary group on endometriosis, I am pleased to see the recommendations for more research and better care for those who suffer from that condition, but can we be certain that that will be backed up by proper support and funding? Women's healthcare champions are fantastic, but they cannot replace proper funding and a proper strategy. I pay tribute to the work of Sir David Amess: I have no doubt that this strategy and the endometriosis aspects of it would not be there without the great work he did as chair of the all-party group.

Steve Barclay: I thank the hon. Lady in particular for that tribute to the work Sir David contributed to this, and agree with her on the issue of same-sex couples having access to IVF. She is right about better research and how we highlight that; that is a key part of the strategy. It is also interesting from the comments of the health ambassador that services can be reconfigured in a way that gives better outcomes for the patient without leading to higher cost. By having centres of excellence where the woman's voice is heard, treatment comes more quickly and that delivers better patient outcomes.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): May I welcome my right hon. Friend to his place and say how good it is that he has had direct experience with Kath Sansom and the work of Sling the Mesh? I also pay tribute to the hon. Members for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) and for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy); the three of us have worked closely cross-party to bring these issues to the Floor in Westminster Hall debates and in this Chamber, which I think has played a big part in today's strategy. I thank them across the House for that work.

Within the strategy there is talk of centres of excellence and mesh centres, but those must be carefully monitored, because we are getting a lot of feedback now that mesh centres are perhaps not working in the way we think they are. That must be carefully monitored, and data collections may not be working in the way my right hon. Friend would hope, so that will be important.

I welcome the strategy on listening to women. Anecdotally, too often the words “sexist” and “misogynist” have been used about the NHS's attitude to women, and we need to move to a stage where those words are no longer used and it is not saying, “Go and take some painkillers,” patting them on the head and saying, “It's all very normal.”

On that final point, will my right hon. Friend talk to our right hon. Friend the Education Secretary about teaching in school about diseases such as endometriosis? If people do not know a disease exists, how can they know they have it? That is an important point. Overall, I welcome this strategy as a massive step forward, but we must all recognise that we cannot give up. There is much more to do to ensure that what is in the strategy actually works.

Steve Barclay: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who I know has campaigned for many years on this; mesh is a particular issue that he and I have spoken about in the past. On the quality of data I am very happy to work with him on any specific examples, and indeed with colleagues across the House, because I know there are others who have worked closely on the mesh campaign, to see how we get the right consistency and the right analysis of data, because that is a shared interest of all of us in the House today.

In terms of the Department for Education, I am very happy to take the matter forward with my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary to look at what schools can do to raise awareness. That ties in with the wider point about ensuring that patients have the right information and that, where issues and concerns arise, they are not fobbed off but taken seriously.

Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab): There have certainly been times, including now, when it has been very difficult for me to talk about my experience of miscarriage—an experience that is shared by one in five women and that happens in one in four pregnancies.

Last year, I held a debate and got the Government to agree to support some of the measures in the review on miscarriage in *The Lancet*, named “Miscarriage Matters”. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists now supports abandoning the three miscarriage rule in favour of a stepped response and graded model of care.

However, I want to know whether the other things promised at the end of that debate are included in this strategy. The first was access for everyone to 24/7 care. The second was data and recording of miscarriage on medical records; when I was called for my flu jab and asked why I had been called, the nurse said, “Because you're pregnant,” then looked down and said, “Oh, well, you're not, are you?” The third was stopping the need for unnecessary miscarriages by making the care better; we can prevent miscarriage in some cases even when it is beginning, and stop people having multiple miscarriages and having to live with this pain, increasing their risk of suicide.

We could do so much more. Miscarriages are taboo and too often they are put in the “too hard to deal with” box. A certificate would be lovely, yes, but that is not enough. We need adequate care that rapidly reduces the need for people to go through this trauma again and again.

Steve Barclay: The heart of the whole House goes out to the hon. Lady, because the trauma of those experiences is so visible; I am hugely grateful for the powerful way she highlights them to the House. She will be aware that we have the pregnancy loss review reporting later this year, and we will be looking at the important issues she raises. I know she met recently with the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), to discuss those and, as someone new to post, I will certainly look closely at the points she raises.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Olivia Blake), because I know exactly what she is feeling. This is the place to make a difference, so I offer her every encouragement to keep going. This is an extremely good strategy and will make a difference to women. I thank the Secretary of State for recognising that domestic violence has a dramatic impact on women's health, particularly for women who are reluctant or embarrassed to go to their GP. Can he ensure that there is more training in primary care settings to recognise and help those vulnerable women?

Steve Barclay: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the importance of tackling domestic abuse. Indeed, last year the Government brought forward and the House passed the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 in recognition of that. There is an important read-across from issues of domestic abuse into the wider piece about data and how that in turn links into prosecutions, evidence gathering and empowering those who are victims with the support they need. It is an extremely important issue, and it is important that we take that legislation forward.

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): We know that midwives and maternity services are struggling across the country. In my own constituency, we have seen Bedford hospital, despite its best efforts, struggling with midwife recruitment and retention. What steps are the Government actively taking as part of the women's health strategy to ensure that maternity services are well staffed and resourced?

Steve Barclay: While this strategy sets out a number of future steps, there are also steps we have already taken, including on maternity services. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we have announced an extra £127 million of support for the NHS maternity workforce and £95 million to recruit an additional 1,200 midwives and 100 consultant obstetricians. Steps have been taken, and more steps are set out in this strategy.

Dame Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): As one of the former Health Ministers who carried the baton on this strategy for some time, I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's words and his commitment. It is so important—not least the commitment to addressing some of the fertility inequalities across the country. I met with his predecessor because my constituency is one of those most severely affected by that postcode inequity.

As my right hon. Friend says, there are some real health inequalities in the services provided—not just for women, but between women, particularly those women who are vulnerable and hardest to reach. It is not just about money, which is why I am pleased with his

commitment to hubs, but about ensuring that integrated care systems have a focus on place and on the needs of local communities. I would love him to commit more to that.

Since 2015, there has reportedly been a 42% real-terms fall in contraception spending, so I would also like to have my right hon. Friend's commitment that this document will align with the sexual and reproductive health action plan. That is important because for every £1 spent on those services, we save £9 on other public health spending.

Steve Barclay: I am grateful for the work that my hon. Friend did as a Health Minister in championing this agenda. She is right to highlight the difficulty, often, of accessing contraception, which is very much at the heart of the responses we had on the fragmented service that many women have experienced. She will be aware that a key part of our approach is the health and wellbeing funds and working with the voluntary and community sector on support in areas such as pregnancy loss.

A key part of this is the visibility of the women's health strategy. Putting that to the fore in terms of a women's health ambassador is, as she says, part of these conversations with the integrated care systems to ensure that this gets greater prioritisation within commissioning. A key part of securing that is having the data to demonstrate its importance and benefits.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): I, too, pay tribute to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Olivia Blake) for her very powerful and moving personal testimony.

Last year, my constituent Nicola experienced her seventh miscarriage, which was her third in just 12 months. One in 100 women suffers recurrent miscarriage, often without known cause and without effective treatment, and a disproportionate number are black, Asian and other ethnic minority women.

I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to boost research in this area, but I am afraid that we have not heard any specifics on how much. Last year, the National Institute for Health and Care Research spent only 5% of its budget on reproductive health and childbirth, yet these issues affect some 17% of the population. Will he give an indication of how much more he is going to spend on research in this area?

Steve Barclay: Through highlighting the tragic case of Nicola, the hon. Lady demonstrates very effectively why research in this area is so important and the fact that it has been insufficient in the past. The amount of funding is, to a large extent, shaped by the research proposals that come forward. A key part of the strategy is the clear signal that we are sending to the research community that we are encouraging those willing to do research in the areas that have not been focused on in the past so that funding can be prioritised to them.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): As joint chair of the all-party parliamentary group on endometriosis, with the hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell), and as joint chair of the APPG on surgical mesh, with the right hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke), I welcome this strategy, but I want to raise two issues that we would be really keen for the Secretary of State to look at.

First, we would like to see all the recommendations of the Cumberlege review implemented, including redress for the people impacted by vaginal mesh. Secondly, it was good to hear him talk about recognising how women's health affects women in the workplace, but the charity Endometriosis UK is promoting making workplaces endometriosis-friendly by recognising that women who have endometriosis may have shorter periods of time off more regularly, which, in terms of HR policy, is frowned on and looked on badly, resulting in some women losing their jobs through no fault of their own.

Steve Barclay: I know from my own involvement in the mesh campaign just how central the hon. Lady's role was in it, and I pay tribute the work that she has done on that and a number of other campaigns over recent years. In respect of mesh, she will be aware that an annual review is published. On the workplace issue, a key thing that comes out of the report is the significance of the time off work that many women are experiencing, with the difficulty, quite often, in having these conversations with employers. It is very welcome that the civil service has taken a lead, as has the NHS, in certain aspects of that, but there will clearly be more to do, and the point she raises will be part of that wider conversation.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I welcome the appointment of the women's health ambassador, Dame Lesley Regan. It is an excellent appointment to that role.

The 2020 report on access to contraception by the all-party parliamentary group on sexual and reproductive health found that the current fragmented commissioning arrangements have a severe impact on women's access to contraception due to a lack of joined-up services. With 45% of pregnancies in England being unplanned, what specific plans does the Secretary of State have to remove the barriers to co-commissioning of reproductive healthcare to require different parts of the system to work together to meet women's healthcare needs?

Steve Barclay: I welcome the hon. Lady's acknowledgement of the expertise that Professor Dame Lesley Regan brings as ambassador. I think she will be fantastic in that role. A key part of this strategy is addressing the fragmented health system and how that impacts on areas such as contraception. That is why we are having, for example, the women's health hubs to provide a one-stop shop and centre of expertise so that we can better identify the services that people need.

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab): Black women are four times more likely to die during pregnancy and childbirth. What targeted preventive solutions will the maternity disparities taskforce apply to address this totally unacceptable position?

Steve Barclay: We are working through the taskforce's recommendations and will publish our response shortly. Part of the reason the taskforce was set up is the disparity in data, which we clearly need to address.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I really welcome this women's strategy and hope that it will mean better care for women in relation to gynaecological and reproductive issues, breast cancer and so on, but it needs to go further. Too often, women experiencing severe levels of pain are sent away from their GP with painkillers and find out further down the line, sometimes too late, that they were actually experiencing a real health problem, whether lupus, cancer or one of any number of health conditions. This is backed up by a 2021 study that showed that men and women experiencing the same levels of pain are not treated equally by clinicians. Will the Secretary of State ensure that the focus on clinical training and retraining also addresses gender stereotyping in diagnosis and support?

Steve Barclay: Part of the reason this is a 10-year strategy is that we do need a change of culture as well as a change of systems, and that is what the strategy maps out. A key component of that is how we empower patients through areas such as the NHS website, working with trusted partners who provide health information. The hon. Lady is also right about training, not just for new entrants into the medical profession but for existing clinicians. We will be working with the royal colleges and others to drive that forward.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): And finally, Jim Shannon.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have the strongest legs in the Chamber.

I very much welcome the Secretary of State's announcement of additional moneys for women's health training. He referred to one-stop clinics. I coincidentally spoke to a medical student who graduated in Cardiff today, who feels that more is needed for the specialty of women's health, and specifically the menopause, which the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) mentioned. What training will be extended to GPs, in the context of one-stop clinics, to ensure that each surgery has a trained GP available to advise and to help?

Steve Barclay: One of the key issues highlighted in the response to the call for evidence was how areas such as the menopause were being dealt with by the NHS. That is why we have a menopause taskforce looking at specific recommendations, one of which concerns the training of clinicians.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the Secretary of State and everyone who took part in the statement.

Points of Order

2.19 pm

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I draw your attention to the fact that the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the right hon. Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng) has, at just a couple of hours' notice, today notified the Environmental Audit Committee that both he and his officials are withdrawing from today's critically important evidence session on North sea oil and gas transition, which was due to start at 3.20 this afternoon. This was done without explanation or apology. Madam Deputy Speaker, do you agree that this shows extreme discourtesy to the House and a complete disregard for scrutiny?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the hon. Lady for having given me notice of her intention to make a point of order. I am most concerned about the point that she raises. It is indeed, as she suggests, a discourtesy to the Committee, and therefore to the House, for a senior Minister to withdraw from an advertised session to give evidence on an important matter. Mr Speaker has repeatedly said that it is extremely important that Ministers give evidence to Committees in a timely way. That is a perfectly reasonable rule or convention of this place, and I trust that the Committee will note the displeasure of the Chair and that the Secretary of State will hopefully, through his colleagues on the Treasury Bench, realise that he has been discourteous and in the first instance apologise and, secondly, appear before the Committee as soon as possible.

John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, on 19 May, when responding to a question from the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq), the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport claimed that the Channel 4 reality series "Tower Block of Commons" deceived the viewing public using actors rather than real tower block residents. She said:

"They were not really living in a flat—they were not real. They were actually actors."

Indeed, she claimed that a number of the participants had confessed this to her at a subsequent dinner in the House of Commons. It is a serious charge, not least since the Secretary of State currently holds the fate of Channel 4 in her hands.

Channel 4 has now investigated and interviewed the production company and all the participants who dined with the Secretary of State, who said that the conversation she cited never happened. Channel 4 has released a detailed report rebutting the Secretary of State's claim. The Select Committee Chair, the hon. Member for Solihull (Julian Knight), wrote urgently to the Secretary of State, offering her the opportunity to withdraw her claim, but she has refused to do so. Misleading the Select Committee is obviously a serious matter, so can I ask for your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker, about what I and other Members can now do, given the impending recess and the Secretary of State's possible impending flight to another place?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. First, I caution him to be very careful when he says in this place that a Member has

misled anyone in the course of their duties in this House, before a Committee or in the Chamber. If any misleading has been done, it will of course have been inadvertent, and I would be grateful if in the first instance he would acknowledge that any misleading would be inadvertent.

John Nicolson: The Secretary of State has a reputation for extreme probity, so I am sure that is the case.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman. That is probably as good as I am going to get. He will appreciate that it is not for the Chair to assess whether evidence given to a Committee is accurate, but I understand why he wants to raise the point before the House today. If the Committee concludes that information has been given that is not in fact accurate, it will be up to the Committee to decide how to pursue the matter and possibly construct another evidence session. I thank the hon. Gentleman for drawing this important matter to the attention of the House.

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Rother Valley Labour party has this week been running paid-for Facebook attack adverts featuring images of my wife and my two children, one of whom is seven months old and one of whom is 27 months old. Images of my young family have also been circulated online in an attack post by a Rotherham Labour councillor. Like many MPs in this place, my family and I have faced death threats and threats of violence, and the circulation of images on attack posts, including by Rother Valley Labour members who I had to block previously for harassment, puts the lives of my family at further risk.

I have written to the leader of the Labour party, the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), asking him to suspend the Labour party members involved and to formally investigate the individuals responsible. What further guidance can you offer, Madam Deputy Speaker, to political parties and journalists on the unauthorised usage of pictures of MPs' young children and families?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for having given me notice of his point of order.

This is an appalling situation. Regardless of political party persuasion, everyone present in the Chamber will share my serious concern about the situation that the hon. Gentleman has described. I will be careful about what I say, and I urge him to be careful about what he says, because this is really a matter of security, and we do not discuss security matters on the Floor of the House. I hope that he is in contact with the parliamentary security team about it. If he would care to contact me privately, I will make sure that the case is taken up by the parliamentary security team.

I cannot be too strong in making the point from the Chair—Mr Speaker has said this many times—that we all deplore any attempts to attack the families of those of us who are engaged in politics. That is bad enough when those families are grown up and able to defend themselves, but it is nothing less than appalling when the family concerned are very small children. The hon. Gentleman and his family have my sympathy, but also

my attention. Let us take this matter forward and make sure that the parliamentary security authorities can deal with it.

Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, I was horrified to hear of the experiences of my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Alexander Stafford), but I want to raise other cases of abuse. I feel that these attack ads are deliberately formulated to stoke up anger and contempt for Members on the Government Benches. I have received a death threat on the back of Labour's attack ads, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson), although he is not able to say so himself. His children were threatened on the back of these ads. These attack ads have consequences. The consequences of our actions should be on us, and I would be grateful for your advice, Madam Deputy Speaker, on how we should deal with these things.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for her further point of order. Again, I am appalled and have every sympathy with her and indeed with the hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson), who I appreciate because of his Government position cannot raise this matter on the Floor of the House on his own behalf. The hon. Lady is speaking both for herself and for him.

This is an appalling state of affairs, and once again I will say what I said to the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Alexander Stafford) a few months ago: it is a matter to be dealt with by the parliamentary security team, who will take it very seriously. Again, if the hon. Members have not had a timely response from the parliamentary security team, although I am sure they will, I ask them to please come privately to me and I will take the matter up on their behalf. It is appalling that deliberate attacks are made on the young families of Members of Parliament. It directly undermines our democratic system and the freedom that our democracy protects.

Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. What my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Alexander Stafford) has had to go through is disgusting. My thoughts are with his family; it must be an awful situation to be in. Sadly, I have seen this kind of abuse from my local Labour party in Hyndburn; there have been a series of events in which people have tried to undermine me and my confidence, including through these misleading attack ads, which show our faces. It got to a point where, for a time, I did not feel comfortable going back to my constituency, and feared for my safety. All I am trying to do is represent the people of Hyndburn and Haslingden. As a young woman, I want people to come into politics, but I worry that, when they witness this constant abuse, and personal attacks on Members of Parliament, it pushes them away. I seek advice on how we can improve this culture, call this behaviour out, and call it what it is: unacceptable.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order. The behaviour that she describes is indeed unacceptable. She asks for my advice; I will give the same advice that I gave other

hon. Members a few minutes ago. The Parliamentary Security Department is a most efficient and hard-working organisation. I am constantly in touch with it on behalf of Members, as is Mr Speaker. I meet the Director of Security regularly, and get updates on matters that affect Members. We take these matters very seriously indeed, and it is simply not acceptable that the hon. Lady feels unsafe going to her constituency. It is very important that these matters are dealt with, not only for the sake of Members of this House, their families and friends, but for the protection of the democracy for which we all work, and through which we defend freedom in this country. I hope that the hon. Lady will bring the exact details to me privately, because the exact details should not be discussed on the Floor of the House.

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. What my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe) says is all too familiar and depressing. I have had my own experience with Labour party attack ads, but that is not the issue that I want to raise in this point of order.

On Monday, in the debate on confidence in the Government, the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant)—I have notified him of this, and he has acknowledged the notification—mentioned my sexuality, and told me that I should be ashamed to support the Government. The Chair ruled that that was in order, and I accept that. However, all too predictably, the next morning, my inbox was full of the vilest, most threatening and homophobic abuse possible. It specifically referenced the hon. Gentleman and support for what he said. This is not my first experience of senior Members of the Labour party dishing out abuse, and of my having to live with the consequences. Madam Deputy Speaker, may I seek your guidance on how we ensure that Members are mindful of the consequences of the language that they use in the Chamber, and how it may affect other Members?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. It is appalling that—[*Interruption.*] We will not have an exchange while I am answering a point of order. It is unacceptable and extremely concerning that the hon. Gentleman has had death threats; it is a dreadful situation. As I said in answer to other points of order, the parliamentary security team will take this matter very seriously. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is saying that the incident was sparked by something that an Opposition Member said about him in the House; I was present when that happened, so I can say to him what Mr Speaker has said on many occasions, and what the other Madam Deputy Speaker said at the time: “Erskine May” makes it clear, and we all know, that good temper and moderation are the characteristics of parliamentary debate. All Members should employ good temper and moderation at all times, no matter how strongly they feel about the matter under debate. If the hon. Gentleman continues to have difficulties, I hope that he will come directly to me privately, so that the parliamentary security team can look at the problem.

BILLS PRESENTED

FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, supported by the Prime Minister, Kit Malthouse, Secretary Greg Clark, Mr Simon Clarke, Lucy Frazer, Alan Mak and Richard Fuller, presented a Bill to make provision about the regulation of financial services and markets; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 146) with explanatory notes (Bill 146-EN).

FIREARMS AND HATE CRIME BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Luke Pollard, supported by Sir Gary Streeter, Mr Ben Bradshaw, Karin Smyth, Abena Oppong-Asare, Mrs Sheryll Murray, Anne Marie Morris, Alex Sobel, Alyn Smith, Selaine Saxby, Valerie Vaz and Caroline Lucas, presented a Bill to prohibit the keeping of pump action firearms in homes, with exemptions for professional pest controllers and farmers; to make provision about medical requirements for holders of firearms certificates; to make provision about the disclosure of mental health concerns relating to holders of firearms certificates; to extend offences of stirring up hatred to cover hatred on the basis of sex or gender; to make provision by misogyny an aggravating factor in sentencing for violent crimes; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 25 November, and to be printed (Bill 147).

BUS SERVICES BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Helen Morgan, supported by Richard Foord, Tim Farron, Wera Hobhouse and Jamie Stone, presented a Bill to place a duty on the Government to ensure that every town with a population of more than 10,000 people has a regular bus service operating seven days a week, and that local health services, including hospitals and GP surgeries, are served by those buses; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a second time on Friday 28 October, and to be printed (Bill 148).

Pensions (Extension of Automatic Enrolment)

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

2.36 pm

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about the extension of pensions automatic enrolment to jobholders under the age of 22; to make provision about the lower qualifying earnings threshold for automatic enrolment; and for connected purposes.

I agree with the comments that you made a few moments ago, Madam Deputy Speaker, about my hon. Friends the Members for Hyndburn (Sara Britcliffe), for Rother Valley (Alexander Stafford), for Wolverhampton North East (Jane Stevenson), and for Wolverhampton South West (Stuart Anderson). The abuse that they have recently received has been unbelievable. All of us need to be able to go about our business in the House and in our constituency without fear, so that we can serve our constituents as best we can.

I thank not only the Bill's sponsors, but my hon. Friends the Members for Bishop Auckland (Dehenna Davison), for Workington (Mark Jenkinson), for Darlington (Peter Gibson), for North Norfolk (Duncan Baker), for Sedgefield (Paul Howell), for Stockton South (Matt Vickers), for Barrow and Furness (Simon Fell), for Birmingham, Northfield (Gary Sambrook), for Dover (Mrs Elphicke), for Burnley (Antony Higginbotham), for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart), for Grantham and Stamford (Gareth Davies), and for Clwyd South (Simon Baynes), who have indicated their support for the legislation. Many other Members have also told me privately that they are very supportive of the Bill.

The Bill amends sections 3 and 5 of the Pensions Act 2008 to lower the age of auto-enrolment to 18, and section 13 to lower the earnings limit. Crucially, it allows the Secretary of State to make those change through regulations. The legislation does not bring in those changes now, automatically; it puts the ability to do so in the hands of the Secretary of State, who can, in accordance with our manifesto, bring those changes forward in due course, when the Government feel that the time is right.

I thank my the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), who has been so supportive throughout the process; he was supportive when I brought forward a private Member's Bill, a ten-minute rule Bill in the last Session, and this Bill. I am also grateful to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to whom I spoke in a brief meeting today. I look forward to further fruitful discussions with him in the not-too-distant future.

The legislation would drive forward a major change in policy. It is worth a huge amount of money—it will roll in over a long period—to people in lower-paid work, and to people who start work at age 18. It is worth trillions of pounds over the 50-year working lifetime of the current labour force. This policy was introduced in the Conservative party manifesto, and has been recommitted to, at the Dispatch Box, since the 2019 general election.

This Bill on the expansion of auto-enrolment is about helping people to entrench their ambition for the future, and about protecting them in retirement. It is about people's ambition to look after themselves, their families and their communities—the towns and villages they live in. In North West Durham, that includes communities from Consett to Crook, and from Lanehead to Langley Park. It means an extension of the transformation that we have seen with auto-enrolment over the past few years—an extension that will be as big as the share ownership changes of the 1980s and right to buy under the then Conservative Administration, enabling people to look after themselves and provide for their families into the future. At the moment, three quarters of those aged over 22 are automatically enrolled into pension schemes and, for every 50p, £1 is saved. Yet for those under the age of 22, the figure is only 20%. The Bill will make a massive difference to the lives of those young workers.

For part-time workers, auto-enrolment stands at below 60%, compared with almost 90% of workers in full-time jobs. If we assume that a move from the age of 22 to 18 will bring about a similar take-up, the Bill will see roughly an extra third of the part-time workforce auto-enrolled, which is an increase of 50% on present numbers. That would mean that millions of people—mostly women, those from ethnic minority communities, and those who are socially disadvantaged—would be brought into lifetime savings for their futures. The Bill seeks to make a difference to the lives of those people.

Analysis by the think-tank Onward shows exactly where such people are located. They are in places such as North West Durham, Workington in Cumbria, Hyndburn in Lancashire and Mansfield in Nottinghamshire—the parts of the red wall that the Conservative party won at the last general election—as well as in large parts of the south-west, the midlands, Scotland, north Wales and the north-east. They are from areas of the country that are seeking the broad transformative change that this Conservative Government are seeking to achieve.

Let me give a couple of examples. First, the Bill would mean that a full-time worker on the national living wage would gain almost an extra £100,000 over their lifetime—a 60% increase on today. That is not money that goes out all in one block, but small savings over time when the change has been introduced after the next general election; it is about an incremental change to make real differences to people's lives.

The average younger worker aged between 18 and 22 who is working full-time on the living wage would pay in just a few hundred pounds a year—literally a few pounds a week—but with 50 years of compound interest, £1,000 paid in over three years could mean £25,000 to £30,000 added to their pension pot at the end of their life. That is a huge difference.

There is one example that really astounds me. People who earn £9,000 from two separate jobs—who may be working 12 to 18 hours a week, juggling their jobs around childcare or caring responsibilities—do not currently get the benefits of auto-enrolment at all. Under this legislation, somebody in that position would see their pension savings almost triple to up to £300,000 over a lifetime. That might mean that they could give their children a deposit and help themselves out in retirement. It could give them that comfort, the ability to look after younger family members in later life, and security in retirement and old age, so that they are not reliant on

the state, but self-reliant. Those are real examples from people I have met in my constituency, and our party should be doing everything possible to help those people with their long-term savings.

The Government's programme of auto-enrolment expansion has been fantastic. It is not hyperbolic to say that it is one of the best changes the country has seen over the last 10 years. With all the evidence of the huge positive impact it can have, it is a no-brainer that we now need to extend auto-enrolment to those aged 18 and above. It is outrageous that the legislation currently says to graduates, "As soon as you graduate, you will be auto-enrolled," but to kids in my constituency, 70% of whom leave school aged 18 and go into work, "You aren't auto-enrolled until you're 22 years old." It is a scandal that we need to deal with. The more that young people save and the sooner they save, the more they will get into a routine of saving, and the more they will be providing for themselves and their security in retirement.

This is a serious piece of legislation that could make a serious change. It is about bringing people security in their old age, at minimal cost to them when they are younger. It is about engineering a revolution for working-class people who are undertaking apprenticeships, among other things. The changes were initially thought of back in the late '70s and were talked about again in the late 1990s, but it is only now that they are being pushed for in this private Member's Bill, which would mean a real expansion of auto-enrolment to everybody, so that everybody has their own pension in addition to their state pension in retirement and has that comfort in old age.

We must table legislation now so that businesses can prepare for the future. There is no better way to help low-paid workers in constituencies like mine who have gone through the pandemic, sometimes with great difficulty, such as those in the retail sector and the care sector. They are the ones who will directly benefit from this legislation.

I must be clear that this policy will have no fiscal impact before the next general election; it will just create the primary legislation necessary for the Bill's implementation, without tying the hands of future Ministers. It leaves the details of secondary legislation for the future Government to stipulate and ultimately implement. The aim is not to tie anyone's hands, but to have legislation that is ready to go. It is about giving a signal to business, and a signal to society and working people that we are on their side.

This legislation will transform the lives of the millions of working people who are often not in great jobs but in low-paid work, and who are the backbone of our country. Votes were lent to us at the last general election, and we have to deliver for those people. Alongside changes such as those to Solvency II, the Bill could help to put cash into communities such as North West Durham and help to provide the extra private sector money to deliver the levelling up we need, because it cannot all be delivered through the Government and taxpayers' cash. We need to think creatively and constructively to deliver long-term investment outside of metropolitan London. This Bill seems like one of the clearest and easiest ways to do so, and to benefit the working people of the country. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

[Mr Richard Holden]

That Mr Richard Holden, Robbie Moore, Shaun Bailey, Nicola Richards, Miriam Cates, Simon Jupp, Mark Eastwood, Anthony Browne, Aaron Bell, Jonathan Gullis and Sir Gavin Williamson present the Bill.

Mr Richard Holden accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 28 October, and to be printed (Bill 149).

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You will realise that there was a point of order a little while ago from the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson), who said that he had notified me in advance of the point of order, in which he named me, as you know. In actual fact, he sent me an email at 2.20 pm, in which he said, “I wanted to make you aware that I intend to name you in the Chamber today,” but he did not say when, when he perfectly well knew he was going to do it in about five minutes’ time. I replied, “When, and in what context? I don’t think that is a proper notification.” He replied, “The consequences of intemperate language in the Chamber.” It is perfectly fair for him to raise a point of order, but he did not give me proper notice; I think you would agree, Madam Deputy Speaker, that that is not proper notice. If he had given me proper notice, I would have made sure that I was in the Chamber to answer it for the convenience of the House.

Secondly, the hon. Member said that I had referred to his sexuality in the debate on Monday. I would never, ever do so; and as *Hansard* records, I did not do so. That is simply untrue. I very much hope that the hon. Member will withdraw that allegation. I certainly do think that there are problems relating to the way in which the Government have created a hostile environment for LGBT people in this country. [Interruption.] I am simply citing the former Government Equalities Minister, the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer), who said so himself when he resigned. That was the only point that I was making.

I, of course, wholly abhor and hate the idea that anybody, as a result of anything I might say either in this Chamber or anywhere else, might have death threats addressed towards them. I have had plenty myself and have had the police at my house this week, so I wholly deplore that idea. If there is any sense in which the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton has felt antagonised and that that has been brought on by anything I have said, I apologise, but I would say that I did not say what

he said I did; I simply quoted the former Conservative Government Equalities Minister, who, when he resigned, said that he was doing so because the Government were creating a hostile environment for LGBT people in this country.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. I have to separate out from what he said that which is a point of order for the Chair and that which is an expression of political opinion. He is entitled to his political opinion and I, of course, would make no comment on it whatsoever. If the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson) has not properly given notice to the hon. Gentleman that he intended to mention him here in the Chamber, then that is quite simply wrong. I cannot, from the information that is available to me now, ascertain whether due notice was given or not, but I will discuss the matter with Mr Speaker and consider the evidence.

The hon. Gentleman also makes reference to what was said here in the Chamber on Monday evening. I was still in the Chamber at the moment of the exchange, having just left the Chair, and it would be an understatement to say that tempers were running high on all sides that evening. As I mentioned a few moments ago, good temper and moderation ought to be the characteristics of parliamentary debate. I am not satisfied that either good temper or moderation were present at that point in the debate on Monday evening, and I sincerely hope that, however strongly Members feel about a particular issue that they are addressing, we can approach most matters in a calm fashion that will allow us to debate the facts rather than the emotions—although I am not negating the place of emotions in some debates.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will leave it with me to look further into this matter.

2.52 pm

NORTHERN IRELAND PROTOCOL BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)

Ordered,

That the Order of 27 June 2022 (Northern Ireland Protocol Bill: Programme) be varied as follows:

(1) Paragraphs (4) and (5) shall be omitted.

(2) Any proceedings on Consideration and proceedings on Third Reading shall be taken on the third day of proceedings in Committee and shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion seven hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Bill on that day.—(*Suzanne Webb.*)

Northern Ireland Protocol Bill

[3RD ALLOCATED DAY]

Further considered in Committee

[Relevant document: Oral evidence taken before the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on 29 June 2022, on Brexit and the Northern Ireland Protocol, HC 285.]

[DAME ELEANOR LAING in the Chair]

Clause 13

IMPLEMENTATION, APPLICATION, SUPERVISION AND
ENFORCEMENT OF THE PROTOCOL

2.53 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move amendment 38, page 7, line 27, leave out “the Minister considers appropriate” and insert “is necessary”.

This amendment changes the threshold for giving a Minister power to make regulations under this Clause. The threshold is amended to make it objective rather than subjective.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Eleanor Laing): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Clause stand part.

Amendment 39, in clause 14, page 8, line 22, leave out “the Minister considers appropriate” and insert “is necessary”.

This amendment changes the threshold for giving a Minister power to make regulations under this Clause. The threshold is amended to make it objective rather than subjective.

Clause 14 stand part.

Amendment 12, in clause 18, page 10, line 9, leave out subsection (1).

This amendment would remove the Minister’s power to engage in any conduct in relation to any matter dealt with in the Northern Ireland Protocol, not otherwise authorised by this Act, if the Minister considers it appropriate to do so.

Amendment 42, page 10, line 11, leave out “the Minister of the Crown considers it appropriate” and insert “it is necessary”.

This amendment changes the threshold for giving a Minister power to make regulations under this Clause. The threshold is amended to make it objective rather than subjective.

Amendment 48, page 10, line 12, after “this Act” insert

“and a motion approving the conduct has been passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly.”

This amendment would subject the exercise of the Minister’s power to engage in conduct in relation to any matter dealt with in the Northern Ireland Protocol that is not otherwise authorised by the Act to a motion approving the conduct in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Amendment 49, page 10, line 15, at end insert—

“(3) Each Minister of the Crown must have due regard for the principle that the Belfast Agreement, including its subsequent implementation agreements and arrangements, should be protected in all its parts.”

This amendment is based on the fourth point in the Preamble to Northern Ireland Protocol.

Clause 18 stand part.

Amendment 46, in clause 20, page 10, line 32, at end insert—

“But this section may not be brought into force unless it has previously been approved by a resolution of the Northern Ireland Assembly.”

This amendment would prevent the Bill’s proposed departure from the terms of the Northern Ireland Protocol, or from any related provision of the EU withdrawal agreement, in respect of the previously agreed role of the European Court (CJEU) unless clause 20 had first been approved by the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Amendment 13, page 10, line 37, leave out subsection (2)(b).

This amendment would remove the prohibition on a court or tribunal referring any matter to the European Court, where the matter relates to the Northern Ireland Protocol or any related provision of the EU Withdrawal Agreement, or domestic law relating to the Northern Ireland Protocol or any related provision of the EU Withdrawal Agreement, given that subsection (4) would give ministers the power to make regulations regarding references on a question of interpretation of EU law to be made by Courts and Tribunals.

Amendment 43, page 10, line 38, leave out “the Minister considers appropriate” and insert “is necessary”.

This amendment changes the threshold for giving a Minister power to make regulations under this Clause. The threshold is amended to make it objective rather than subjective.

Clause 20 stand part.

Stephen Doughty: It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair today, Dame Eleanor, as we enter the third day of Committee on the Bill. As we do so, it is evident that instead of working to fix the genuine challenges that the protocol poses, the Government continue to push forward with a Bill that disregards the UK’s international legal obligations and threatens to throw Britain’s global reputation into disrepute, and which also—we shall discuss this today—gives them sweeping powers without restriction. Tearing up binding agreements, threatening to break international law and walking away from the table are not the composites of a good negotiating strategy; they are the hallmarks of a zombie Government, out of steam—a Government who have constantly put their own party squabbles and obsessions before the interests of the people of the UK, and indeed the people of Northern Ireland.

Tragically, they also risk dividing the UK and the European Union when we should be standing shoulder to shoulder in opposing Putin’s barbaric war in Ukraine, and in finding ways to make Brexit work in a spirit of trust and co-operation. This is not how a responsible Government should behave, and many Members across the House know that. What we need is cool heads, statesmanlike behaviour and a search for long-term solutions.

On the Opposition Benches, we feel that the Bill is counterproductive, but that solutions are there if the Government are prepared to seek them. That requires compromise, hard work, and flexibility on all sides, including of course the EU, not knee-jerk reactions. I have listened to the very many genuine concerns that have been voiced about the functioning of the protocol. I have the pleasure of being a member of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly in addition to my shadow Front Bench role. I have listened to businesses. I have been in Dublin and Belfast. I have listened to people on all sides and have heard genuine concerns, including from those in the Unionist community.

[Stephen Doughty]

For months, Labour has called on the Government to do the responsible thing—get back around the table to do what we have always done, and what any Government worth its salt would do, which is to negotiate, in the interests of finding workable, practical and technocratic solutions that command the consent and support of all communities in Northern Ireland, and have the means to bring back power sharing in a meaningful and lasting way. In that spirit, we have offered amendments to the Bill today in good faith, to begin to correct the issues that are manifest across this legislation—starting today with the Henry VIII clauses that we have heard about, and which the amendment that we have tabled in this group address.

As the shadow Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), set out during Second Reading, 15 of the 26 clauses included in the Bill confer powers directly on UK Ministers. Those include the power to use secondary legislation to amend or modify Acts of Parliament—Acts that have been subject to the full scrutiny of this House. As the Bingham Centre for the Rule of Law sets out, the Henry VIII powers given to Ministers in the Bill

“are numerous, extensive and subject to very low hurdles before those powers may be exercised.”

Indeed, Professor Catherine Barnard of Cambridge University has called these powers “eye wateringly broad”. The Hansard Society, deeply respected on both sides of the House, describes them as “breath-taking”. And we should not just take their word for it. The Chair of the Justice Select Committee, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill), last week put it perfectly when he said,

“there are Henry VIII powers and Henry VIII powers; and this is Henry VIII, the six wives, Cardinal Wolsey and Thomas Cromwell all thrown in together.”

He went on to describe the Henry VIII powers as

“almost Shakespearean or Wagnerian in their scope and breadth.”—*[Official Report, 13 July 2022; Vol. 718, c. 370.]*

Awarding Ministers these enormous powers is not a strategy, and the people of Northern Ireland will see it for what it is—a blatant power grab.

The hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst identified one of the key problems with these powers when he explained that the test that Ministers must meet before using these powers is “extraordinarily low”. I agree. As the Bill currently stands, in many cases Ministers may use these powers merely if they consider it “appropriate” to do so. That is simply not good enough. Not only is that a woefully low threshold, but it lacks any kind of objectivity. We cannot have a situation where Ministers can make sweeping changes that are not necessarily in the interests of all communities of Northern Ireland, and without proper scrutiny and process; and those of us on the Opposition Benches are extremely concerned about what Ministers may deem appropriate in the future.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. I have just one point to add. Does he agree that there is a certain irony in the fact that probably large numbers of the 52% who voted for Brexit voted to strengthen, solidify and consolidate parliamentary sovereignty, but these Henry VIII powers are strengthening the hand of Government and weakening

the hand of Parliament? Does not that seem to run directly counter to what many people who voted for Brexit were voting for?

Stephen Doughty: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. Indeed the Bill not only takes powers away from this place, but takes on powers without the consent of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): Further to that point, I do not understand why the official Opposition don’t get it. There is a democratic deficit as a result of the Northern Ireland protocol. The hon. Member bemoans the fact that Parliament might lose some powers to the Government, but in Northern Ireland we today are faced with the imposition of regulations—hundreds and hundreds of them—over which neither Parliament nor the Government have any say, nor the Northern Ireland Assembly or Executive, yet I hear nothing from the Opposition Benches about that democratic deficit. At least the Government are attempting to address it. What do the official Opposition intend to do about it?

Stephen Doughty: I always listen with great respect to the right hon. Gentleman. He talks about a democratic deficit. The Government, of course, negotiated the protocol. He has been consistent in his criticisms of it. The Government knew that when they negotiated it. They knew there were issues that needed to be addressed. It seems to me very odd that the Government are proposing to take a huge amount of powers that would have no scrutiny in this place and no scrutiny in Northern Ireland.

3 pm

Claire Hanna (Belfast South) (SDLP): We hear a lot about the egregious use of powers and regulations being imposed, but we hear very little about what specific powers people do not want to have. I think they are about the volume of lawnmowers and other such crucial things. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is more damaging to democracy to withhold the Northern Ireland Assembly, in which elected Members are supposed to address wider issues around health, education, the economy and everyday issues for Northern Ireland? The Assembly being withheld creates a far wider democratic deficit.

Stephen Doughty: Indeed. The point I have made is that the powers the Government are taking remove responsibilities from the Northern Ireland Assembly. We want all communities to have a say on matters that affect them going forward. I am sure we will come on to a number of those amendments in due course.

In the same vein, we would support amendment 12, which relates to clause 18, tabled in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), were he to press it to a Division. As the Hansard Society points out, clause 18 would give Ministers the power to “engage in conduct” relevant to the Northern Ireland protocol if they consider it—again this word—“appropriate” in connection with one or more of the purposes of the Bill. However, the Bill provides no elaboration on what type of activities that “conduct” could involve. Nor have the Government given a justification for why the additional power is needed. Indeed, the

former head of the Government Legal Service, Sir Jonathan Jones QC, someone who has said a lot about the legality of the Bill, described this as a

“do whatever you like power”.

Given that the Government can provide no assurances on what types of “conduct” the power will be restricted to and that we have no justification for why it is even needed, this is not something we can support. That is why we support amendment 12, tabled by my right hon. Friend. The Government are in no position to expand their powers to such a degree, particularly in areas so sensitive. Not only are they a gross overreach of power, but they are also disrespectful to the constitutional role of this House.

I turn to some of the amendments that have been tabled. Labour has been clear, since the Bill was first introduced, that the way to solve the problems before us is to negotiate, and to do so in good faith. We recognise that the operation of the protocol has created genuine tensions that need to be addressed, but that is best done by all sides listening to each other and acting in good faith, and with the Belfast/Good Friday agreement at the heart of those discussions. I contend that the Bill simply does not do that. It is not an act of good faith for Westminster to unilaterally impose a solution, not least across Northern Ireland, and nor, tragically, will the solution proposed achieve its ultimate objectives. Only an agreement which delivers for the people and businesses of Northern Ireland, and respects the wishes of those on all sides and all communities, will provide a long-term and sustainable solution to this problem. That is why we support amendment 49, which references the fourth point in the protocol and the importance of protecting the Belfast/Good Friday agreement in all its parts, if it were to be pressed to a Division. Unilateralism is not the way forward on matters of such sensitivity.

I do not want to detain the Committee further at this stage. We have many amendments to get through today. To conclude, Labour’s amendments will prevent handing the Government overreaching powers that they are simply not fit to hold. Our amendments will protect the much-valued scrutinising and functioning of this House, and give a voice in this hugely delicate and important process to the people of Northern Ireland.

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Michael Ellis): Allow me, Dame Eleanor, for I think the penultimate time, to thank hon. Members who have spoken in Committee. I would like to turn to the clauses under discussion in this debate. With the leave of the Committee, I will deal with some of the amendments very briefly.

Clause 13 outlines the exclusions that seek to redress the feeling that there is a democratic deficit created by the arrangements for the implementation and enforcement of the protocol. The present role of the Court of Justice of the European Union clearly causes Unionists to feel less connected to, and part of, the United Kingdom. That was reflected in the September 2021 joint statement by all Unionist parties on the protocol. Clause 13 provides that any provision of the protocol that confers jurisdiction on the CJEU over arrangements in Northern Ireland is excluded provision. That means that CJEU decisions, including infractions, will no longer have effect in domestic law across the entire protocol.

I confirm to the Committee that the Bill does not disapply the withdrawal agreement’s arbitration process, which would be convened at the international level in the event of a dispute. It simply affirms that the arbitration provisions in the withdrawal agreement do not have effect in our domestic law, and that is normal for international treaties. It then helps to restore the UK Government’s sole oversight of arrangements on the ground in Northern Ireland, providing that the provisions relating to the powers and presence of EU representatives are excluded. Finally, via subsections (4) and (5), clause 13 allows for the establishment of new arrangements for co-operation with EU authorities to monitor the trade boundary regime, and enables us to implement robust data sharing on the operation of the trusted trader scheme and on all goods moving between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. That will support assurance processes to uphold our commitment to protect both the UK internal market and the EU’s single market.

Clause 14 supports the coherent functioning of the Bill by fully insulating any excluded provision from being brought back into our domestic law as a result of obligations arising from other provisions of the protocol and withdrawal agreement. If needs be, regulations under subsection (4) can be used to make appropriate provision in connection with any provision of the protocol or withdrawal agreement to which this clause relates. The clause provides important clarity on the interaction between excluded provision and any wider provisions in the protocol or withdrawal agreement related to it.

Clause 18 provides a power for a Minister to engage in non-legislative conduct where they consider it appropriate in connection with one or more of the purposes in the Bill. The clause also clarifies the relationship between powers to make secondary legislation under the Bill and those arising by virtue of the royal prerogative. The clause will ensure that actions not requiring legislation, such as issuing guidance to industry or providing direction to officials, can be taken in a timely manner by a Minister of the Crown. It is not, as I think has been misconstrued in some quarters, an extraordinary power. It simply makes clear, as would normally be taken for granted, that Ministers will be acting lawfully when they go about their ministerial duties in support of this legislation.

Clause 20 allows for the proper functioning of domestic court proceedings following the removal of the domestic effect of CJEU jurisdiction. That means that domestic courts would no longer be bound by CJEU principles or decisions when considering matters relating to the protocol. The clause provides a power to make related new provision. Regulations made under the power could, for example, provide for a procedure to refer questions of interpretation of EU law to the CJEU if a domestic court considered it necessary to conclude its proceedings.

Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance): Will the Minister give way?

Michael Ellis: If the hon. Member would not mind, I will give way to him when I come on to his amendment specifically. I would be very grateful if he would give me that indulgence.

Clause 20 is important to the functioning of the Bill to allow domestic courts to consider proceedings relating to the protocol without being subject to CJEU jurisdiction, in line with the general principles of the Bill.

[Michael Ellis]

I now move on to the amendments in order. Some, with the leave of the House, I can deal with very briefly. Amendments 38, 39, 42 and 43, in the name of the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) and the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), would, as has previously been explained regarding similar amendments, in our view wrongly apply a necessity test for the use of such powers. Parliament has previously determined, for example in the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, that “appropriateness” is the appropriate word. That is my response to that series of amendments.

Amendment 12 in the name of the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) would remove the power for Ministers to engage in conduct in relation to the protocol which is normally within the Executive’s competence but not otherwise authorised by the Bill. As I explained a short while ago, this provision simply makes it clear that, as would normally be taken for granted, Ministers of the Crown would be acting lawfully when they go about their ministerial duties—for example providing instruction to civil servants or guidance to industry—in support of this legislation. It is not an extraordinary power, but rather it provides certainty that the Government can implement our proposals. I urge the right hon. Gentleman to withdraw his amendment.

Amendment 48 from the hon. Member for Foyle (Colum Eastwood) would be unworkable. It would require the Assembly—which is of course not sitting, which is part of the whole essence of this Bill—to pass a prohibitive number of votes to enable swift implementation of the solutions delivered by the Bill, so I ask him to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment 49 also from the hon. Gentleman would require Ministers to have due regard for the principle that the Belfast/Good Friday agreement should be protected in all its parts. The hon. Member states this amendment is based on the fourth point in the preamble to the protocol which sets out the United Kingdom and the European Union’s affirmation of their commitment to do just that. The Government’s overriding commitment—I emphasise this as strongly as I can—is to protect the Belfast/Good Friday agreement in all its dimensions. That commitment is absolute, but the balance within that agreement, and which was critical to its negotiation, must be maintained, and it is for that very reason that the Government have introduced this Bill. Although I welcome and endorse the sentiment underlying the amendment, it is, for the same reason, unnecessary, and I urge the hon. Member to withdraw it.

Amendment 46 from the hon. Member for North Down (Stephen Farry) would require the Assembly to approve clause 20. That is inappropriate under the devolution settlements because it would prevent the Bill from making important changes that go to the heart of the current democratic deficit. Does the hon. Gentleman wish me to give way now?

Stephen Farry: Yes, I am grateful to the Minister, and I assure him this is only a probing amendment and I will not be putting it to a vote. In terms of the Government’s position of removing the ultimate jurisdiction of the ECJ, do they recognise that in doing so they will in effect unpick Northern Ireland’s access to the single market for goods in that we would not be fully in line with the required EU law for that to take effect?

Michael Ellis: I do not accept that characterisation. This is very important to the whole community in Northern Ireland and it is very important that we have cross-community consensus in the working of these operations. I do not accept the premise of the hon. Gentleman’s point.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Does the Minister accept that in fact this Bill makes all the provision necessary for firms in Northern Ireland that wish to access the single market to be able to do so by opting for dual regulation? Dual regulation is what gives them access to the single market, not oversight by the ECJ.

Michael Ellis: The right hon. Gentleman is certainly right about the dual regulatory regime, as the Committee discussed at some length yesterday; I agree with his contention.

Claire Hanna: Will the Minister please clarify? I am struggling to understand. He repeatedly refers to the need for cross-community consent. Does he understand and has he noted the letter from a majority of MLAs—*[Interruption.]* Does he acknowledge that all MLAs representing others and representing nationalists reject this Bill in the strongest possible terms, and can he outline how these recommendations and powers have cross-community consent if they are rejected by two of the three traditions in Northern Ireland?

3.15 pm

Michael Ellis: As I think the hon. Lady knows, this cannot be about majoritarianism, and by the way I note a poll in December 2021 that indicated there was 78% agreement in Northern Ireland that the protocol needed to change. There is a requirement that there is cross-community consensus and—

Claire Hanna: And there is not cross-community consensus!

Michael Ellis: The hon. Lady is shouting from a sedentary position, but I think I have made the position clear. *[Interruption.]*

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. The hon. Member for Belfast South (Claire Hanna) knows she cannot shout like that while she is sitting down. If she wishes to intervene again she can try to intervene; I will not have this shouting.

Michael Ellis: Thank you, Dame Eleanor.

I simply reiterate to the hon. Lady and the whole Committee that our overriding priority is preserving peace and stability in Northern Ireland, and I make no apology for repeating that. The situation as it stands is undermining the Belfast/Good Friday agreement and it is undermining power-sharing, as proven by the very fact that we do not have an operating Northern Ireland Assembly—surely that is proof positive.

Sammy Wilson: Does the Minister share my bafflement at the intervention that he has just had to respond to? On the one hand, SDLP amendment 49 requires the Government to ensure

“the principle that the Belfast Agreement, including its subsequent implementation agreements and arrangements, should be protected in all its parts”,

yet at the same time we are being told that a majority in the Assembly—which does not include one Unionist: a key principle of the Belfast agreement—should override any of the views being expressed by Unionists on these Benches today.

Michael Ellis: The right hon. Gentleman makes his point with his usual eloquence, and the citation he makes from the agreement is irrefutable; it is simply on the face of the document.

Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP): Can the Minister point out the line, paragraph and page of the Good Friday agreement that he is quoting? This does not make any sense.

Michael Ellis: The hon. Gentleman is being mischievous in the best possible sense of that word; he is very familiar with the agreement and does not need me to cite the passages in question. I am sure all sides would agree that what is most important is the preservation of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement; that surely is irrefutable.

Amendment 13, tabled by the right hon. Member for Leeds Central, would bind domestic courts into the existing CJEU reference procedure without any choice as to what the new arrangements are. In the Government's view, that would not resolve the current democratic deficit.

I have given the position of Her Majesty's Government on the amendments; I hope I have outlined that in sufficient detail. I therefore recommend that these clauses all stand part of the Bill.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: I am happy to follow the Minister. Reference has been made to the oversight of the European Court of Justice. Although our primary concern about the protocol is in respect of trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, we do have a concern about the role of the European Court of Justice in respect of oversight, where there is a dispute between the United Kingdom and the European Union on matters pertaining to the protocol. We believe it is unfair and unreasonable that the European Court of Justice should be the final arbiter on such matters.

Sammy Wilson: Does my right hon. Friend accept that in no other trade agreement would one side be able to adjudicate on whether the terms were to be accepted? However, in this case, the EU, which has skin in the game, would be the final arbiter in any dispute. That is totally unfair, totally unwarranted and totally unprecedented.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: Indeed, and that speaks to the issue that I raised about the democratic deficit. The Government are endeavouring, through the Bill, to correct the flaws that were evident in the protocol. Although some in the House will point out that the Government signed up to the protocol, I welcome the fact that the Government recognise that the protocol is not working, that it is harmful to Northern Ireland and that changes need to be made. That is very important.

We believe that the democratic deficit needs to be addressed. The European Union has so far shown an unwillingness to introduce proposals that would meet the United Kingdom's concerns in that regard. We do

not yet know whether there will be a change of heart, but in the absence of that, we are with the Government on this: we want a fair and reasonable system.

I repeat what I have said throughout the Committee: if we set aside the process of how we got here and examine the detail of the Government's proposals as a framework to provide solutions to the problems, I believe that that framework is fair. It respects the integrity of the EU single market and its right to protect that market. However, for us, it also fundamentally recognises and respects the United Kingdom's right to protect the integrity of and to regulate its internal market. The protocol prevents the Government from doing that for the whole United Kingdom. Northern Ireland is currently subject to regulations that are introduced by the EU in a manner over which we have no say.

Other Members have raised the fact that, at the moment, we do not have a fully functioning Assembly and Executive in Northern Ireland, yet I still do not see or hear an understanding from them of how that situation has arisen. It was with great reluctance that we took the decision to withdraw the First Minister back in February. It only happened after much delay; I stood on the green outside this building and was mocked by the hon. Member for Foyle (Colum Eastwood) for not having followed through on the warning that I had given to withdraw the First Minister. He goaded us, saying that we had not followed through, and he sits on these Benches now and attacks us for taking the decision that we warned we would have to take if progress was not made towards addressing the issues related to the protocol.

I have also said, and reiterated during these debates, that as we make progress and as decisive action is taken by the Government in implementing this legislation, we will of course restore those political institutions, because we want them to work and function in the way that they were intended to. The hon. Members for Foyle and for Belfast South (Claire Hanna) seemed to suggest from a sedentary position that the concept of power sharing and consensus was not a fundamental principle of the Belfast agreement. I have to differ from them on that: I believe that power sharing is at the heart of the Belfast agreement and in the principle that, in a divided society such as Northern Ireland, we cannot have one side with all the power and others excluded from power. Therefore, the concept of power sharing was embraced by the political parties in Northern Ireland and has been the basis on which those political institutions have operated. However, if power sharing is to work, it requires cross-community consensus.

I hear this new language from the SDLP, in particular, and also the Alliance party, who constantly talk about a "majority" of this and a "majority" of that. When Unionists had the majority, however, we were told that majority rule was anathema to the Alliance party and the SDLP—that we could not have a Unionist majority governing in Northern Ireland and there had to be cross-community consensus. However, when Unionists have concerns and issues and say that the cross-community consensus does not exist, our concerns are almost dismissed. Lip service is paid to them but, at every opportunity, there is opposition to reasonable change that would address Unionists' concerns.

I have not heard from the likes of the SDLP what the solution is, beyond saying, "Let's have negotiations with the EU". But negotiations have been tried—there have

[*Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson*]

been 300 hours of negotiations. If the EU is prepared to come back to the table, change its negotiating mandate and act in good faith to get a solution that restores the cross-community consensus in Northern Ireland, bravo. But we see no inclination from the EU that it will do that.

So what do we do? Do we sit back, rub our hands, say, “It’s all too difficult” and wait for the day when, hopefully, the EU will come riding over the hill and rescue the political stability in Northern Ireland, rescue the Belfast agreement and rescue the concept of power sharing on the basis of a cross-community consensus? That has not happened, despite the EU’s bold claims that the protocol was designed to protect the Good Friday agreement and the political institutions. Those institutions are not functioning precisely because there is not a cross-community consensus in support of the protocol.

We need arrangements that reinstate and restore Northern Ireland’s place in the UK internal market, which respects the outcome of article 1 of the agreement—that Northern Ireland remains an integral part of the United Kingdom—as was recognised by the Irish Government and by the people of the Republic of Ireland, who voted in a referendum to change its constitution to recognise that Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom. I am afraid that the protocol has disrespected that constitutional settlement—that recognition that, for the time being, that is the settled will of the people of Northern Ireland. These issues are fundamentally important, and addressing the democratic deficit is important.

Colum Eastwood: Despite what the right hon. Member has been saying, I am very grateful to him for giving way. I know that he is a new convert to supporting the Good Friday agreement; in fact, he left the talks before they were concluded and then opposed the Good Friday agreement from the outset. That is fine—that is his right—but I wonder whether he can explain what version of Brexit can get this mythical cross-community consensus. The word “consensus”, in that sense, is not in the Good Friday agreement.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: I am not going to delve back into the history of Northern Ireland and leave the Committee bemused by an exchange on the Opposition Benches about the wherefores and merits of the Good Friday agreement in 1998. Yes, I did vote against the agreement in 1998, because I was opposed to what I regarded as deep flaws in it—not least its abject failure to address the needs of the innocent victims of the troubles, which were trampled over in the initial format of the agreement.

We are now trying to deal with the legacy not just of 30 years of violence, but of almost 25 years of an agreement that failed to address the issue in the first instance. I happen to believe that an important part of it that ought to have been dealt with in 1998 was not dealt with. I voted against the agreement on that basis, but, to be clear, at no stage did I ever oppose it on the basis that I opposed power sharing or that I believed that the only way forward was anything other than cross-community consensus. I have argued consistently as a Unionist that in a divided society, cross-community consensus has to be the way forward.

3.30 pm

If I am a relatively recent convert to the agreement, my conversion—if it be that—was at St Andrews, when we got the changes that we needed so that its flaws could be addressed in a proper way. I would rather have experienced that than pedal in the opposite direction, saying, “We are moving towards majority rule. Those Unionists should get back in their corner; they may have their concerns, but we don’t want to hear about them.”

Colum Eastwood: What about the nationalists?

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: Yes, nationalist concerns need to be heard. I believe that the proposals that the Government have made address the concerns on both sides of the community. They address the need to protect the integrity of the European Union and the need to protect the integrity of the United Kingdom.

Do you know what? In 1998, when the referendum was held on the Good Friday agreement, I voted against it—but on the day the result was announced, I stood outside at Balmoral, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Belfast South, and declared that I accepted the result and would continue to work to change the agreement in a way that would benefit all the people of Northern Ireland. I would love to hear some day from SDLP Members that they finally accept the result of the largest democratic vote ever held in this United Kingdom, in which the people of this nation voted to leave the European Union. If they do not like what has happened, they should work to change the arrangements, as we are trying to do, rather than going back to 2016 and saying, “It’s all too difficult, it’s all terrible and therefore we can’t do anything about it.” The essence of democracy and the essence of good politics is that when you do not like something, you seek to change it.

Sammy Wilson: Can my right hon. Friend understand why nationalists will not accept this Bill? I cannot, because first, it will ensure their primary consideration, which is that there be no border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic in terms of infrastructure. Secondly, it will address their concerns about the EU single market and ensure that their friends in the EU are protected, because goods going into the Republic will be examined as they come through Northern Ireland and companies in Northern Ireland will be required to abide by EU rules. Thirdly, courts in Northern Ireland will ensure through heavy sanctions that those who try to break the regulations will be punished. At the same time, the Bill will address Unionist concerns about the democratic deficit and ensure that goods can move freely into Northern Ireland from elsewhere in the UK and are not impeded in any way. Does my right hon. Friend agree that both sides can find something in the Bill?

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. I believe that if we examine the proposals that the Government are making, we can see that they are fair and balanced. Despite the criticism that some have made that my party supported Brexit, at no stage in the process have we argued for a hard border on the island of Ireland. That is because we recognise the sensitivities of nationalists—it is precisely because as Unionists we are alive to and aware of the sensitivities of nationalists about having infrastructure on the border.

We have therefore sought to encourage a solution that respects and acknowledges their concerns, but it would be nice to have a bit of reciprocation from the nationalist side for a change, and a recognition of our concerns that a border in the Irish sea is offensive to us in the same way that a hard border on the island of Ireland is offensive to nationalists.

There are reasonable solutions that can ensure that we avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland and that we avoid a border in the Irish sea for goods moving within the United Kingdom. That is what this Bill does. That is precisely the outcome that it seeks to achieve, and in that respect it is, I think, balanced and fair.

Claire Hanna: Can the right hon. Gentleman explain why, in the case of all the Bills that preceded Britain's exit from the European Union, he repeatedly voted against all the SDLP's amendments to design in consent for the people of Northern Ireland? Where was this regard for the delicacies of the Good Friday agreement then?

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: I am a democrat, and I accepted the outcome of the referendum. The British people had voted for Brexit, and I was not going to go along with the SDLP's desire to hold the United Kingdom within the European Union and its proposals to keep us in the single market and the customs union, because I believed that that was contrary to what the British people had voted for. We therefore sought a solution.

At the time, in 2016, the former First Minister of Northern Ireland, Arlene Foster—Dame Arlene Foster—wrote to the then Prime Minister and to the Irish Prime Minister, the Taoiseach, making it clear that we needed a solution for Northern Ireland that took account of the distinct situation that pertained. We always recognised that arrangements in respect of Northern Ireland would take account of the sensitivities, but that should and must include the sensitivities and concerns of Unionists as well as nationalists. The solution provided for in the Bill, I believe, does that. It avoids a hard border on the island of Ireland, meeting the needs and the sensitivities of nationalists—of the constituents, in particular, of the hon. Member for Foyle: I acknowledge that many of them cross the border every day. I do not want impediments to be put in their way, but nor do I want impediments to be put in the way of my constituents, because trade with the rest of the United Kingdom is the lifeblood of their business, or of the consumers who live in my constituency, who simply want to buy British products from British companies in England, Scotland and Wales in the way that they have always enjoyed. For all those reasons, we will oppose the amendments. On balance, we believe that the Government's proposed framework for the solutions that will flow in the form of regulations will protect Northern Ireland's place within the United Kingdom.

Let me say this to the Government. I said it yesterday, I repeat it now, and we will come to it again later today. I know that the Government are currently consulting on what schemes they want to introduce to give effect to the Bill. It is important that there is consultation with business and with the political parties, that we have an input, and that the regulations are published as soon as possible so that we can all see that they do not pose the threat that some suggest they do, but instead offer us the solution that we need.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson). I oppose all the amendments and I support all the clauses standing part of the Bill, and the reason I do so is that, as we have heard repeatedly in the Chamber over the past days, the Northern Ireland protocol is causing unacceptable disruption and friction to the UK's internal market. So radical is the impact of the protocol that we have seen the astonishing court ruling that, in voting through the protocol, this Parliament has partly suspended article 6 of the Acts of Union, one of its foundational statutes.

The EU's insistence that the protocol requires full compliance with its regime for food and goods, which is applied in a one-size-fits-all way to countries around the world with far lower standards than ours, is simply unreasonable. Northern Ireland's chief veterinary officer has estimated that if the current grace periods were removed, the number of food certificates required in Northern Ireland could soon almost match the total number processed in the entire EU, so 50% of all food-related EU certificates would be issued in relation to trade between Britain and Northern Ireland. That is not just unreasonable; it is disproportionate, and arguably violates the fundamental international trade principle that border-related checks and controls need to be based on evidence and risk. The millions of checks being asked of us by the EU are in no way proportionate to the risk posed by GB food to the internal market of the European Union.

I noted the comments of the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), about what he perceived as some kind of democratic deficit in relation to the delegated legislation clauses, but I think the democratic deficit is far more serious, in that we are asking the people of Northern Ireland to live indefinitely under rules made in the European Union over which they and their elected representatives have no say whatsoever. That is not sustainable. I believe that the protocol arguably violates a core principle of the Belfast/Good Friday agreement, because it has altered the status of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom without the consent of its people, and the one-off majoritarian vote every few years provided for by the protocol is just not sufficient to signify consent or to deliver political stability under the Good Friday agreement.

There can be no doubt that the protocol is the root cause not only of the practical disruption but of the political instability we have witnessed in Northern Ireland over the last few months. We cannot ignore the fact that every single one of the recently elected Unionist Assembly Members is against the protocol, and we cannot stand by while Northern Ireland is deprived of its power sharing agreement.

Claire Hanna: I genuinely share the right hon. Lady's concern that all the elected Unionist Members oppose the protocol. It is not a desirable situation, which is why I poured six years of my life into preventing it at the time. Will she also acknowledge that every single other Member of the Assembly is against this Bill? Could she also please outline what aspects of societal disruption she is referring to and which products are not available in Northern Ireland?

[Claire Hanna]

Theresa Villiers: What I want to emphasise is that this Bill, once it is adopted, will deliver a system that will deal with the worst aspects of the friction and disruption that have been occurring. I also believe that it is important to build support for the Bill among all sides of the community in Northern Ireland. It is not in the interests of one side for other side to be alienated, as it is at present.

On the disruption being caused, the hon. Lady will be aware that it is partially mitigated at the moment by the grace periods that are in place. However, if we were to have the full panoply of EU rules on food, it would mean huge disruption to food being transferred between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and it is essential that that is dealt with.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): As everyone here knows, I represent my constituency of Strangford, but I have had representations from people in the South Down and Belfast West constituencies—people with different political aspirations and different religious viewpoints—who have asked me to make sure that this Northern Ireland Protocol Bill goes through because it will advantage them as well. So it is wrong for some people in this Chamber to adopt the attitude that this is all to the advantage of Unionists. It is more than that; all the people of Northern Ireland will gain the advantage if this Bill goes through. The right hon. Lady knows that—[*Interruption*]/—unlike this yapping person on my right-hand side.

Theresa Villiers: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The reason I am supporting this Bill is that I believe it is in the interests of everyone in Northern Ireland. On the disruption, whether it is related to food, to the movement of pets and assistance dogs or to the soil and trees for planting as part of the Queen's green canopy for the jubilee, these are disruptions that need to be addressed. What also needs to be addressed is the fact that, for the moment, Northern Ireland is subjected to laws made in Europe that it does not influence. For all those reasons, we need this Bill.

We cannot stand by while Northern Ireland is deprived of its power sharing Government and its devolved institutions because of the intransigent attitude of the European Union. We have heard from the Opposition spokesman that we should give more time for negotiations, but after 18 months of fruitless negotiations, the UK Government are right to act to remedy the worst of the practical problems caused by the protocol. We simply cannot carry on as we are, with the EU refusing to consider changes to its negotiating mandate to allow constructive talks that might resolve this issue.

The Bill will deliver pragmatic changes. It does not rip up the protocol or violate international law. It is in line with the protocol's provisions that acknowledge its potential replacement by alternative arrangements. The protocol itself also recognises the primacy of the Good Friday agreement.

3.45 pm

The system envisaged by the Bill will continue to safeguard the integrity of the EU single market without requiring new infrastructure or checks on the north-south

border. The creation of a “super green” channel should take a significant proportion of businesses and trade out of the protocol rules and compliance requirements. The Bill involves awkward compromises—I can accept that there will be some complexity with dual regulation, for example—but, let us face it, the same can be said of many laws, statutes and agreements that have been crucial in moving Northern Ireland forward and in safeguarding political stability in the 24 years since the Good Friday agreement. Of course, the door remains open to the European Union for a negotiated solution.

I close by commending the Foreign Secretary for introducing the Bill. I appreciate that it must have been immensely hard to get it through the machinery of government. No doubt the opposition in the other place will be ferocious, but I urge Ministers to stick with the Bill and to reject all the amendments before us today and those that will be tabled in their hundreds in their lordships' House.

The stakes are high. It is not just the integrity and stability of our UK internal market that is at stake; it is the integrity and stability of our Union of four nations, the most successful political union in history. We jeopardise it at our peril and we must strive to ensure that Northern Ireland can continue to enjoy all the benefits that our Union offers.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Brexit undoubtedly casts a heavy shadow over this debate. The point raised by the right hon. Members for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) and for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) on the democratic deficit is fairly made, although almost all the laws under which Northern Ireland is currently operating apply in the United Kingdom because of retained EU law. We must not get this entirely out of perspective because the Government chose, at the moment of withdrawal, to take EU law, move it across and stick it into UK legislation.

Sammy Wilson: Although the right hon. Gentleman makes a valid point about EU law being retained for the rest of the United Kingdom, the vital difference is that the 82 pages of EU law contained in the protocol can be changed. Those changes apply to Northern Ireland, which is where the democratic deficit comes in.

Hilary Benn: The right hon. Gentleman makes a fair point, and I understand it entirely. I am talking about the situation as it is today. We should, therefore, be calm and reasonable in describing it.

Let us not forget that Northern Ireland is in a unique and favourable position compared with my constituents, precisely because it has access to both the market of the United Kingdom and the market of the European Union, which is why the polling indicates that businesses in Northern Ireland are very much in favour of having this privileged access, which other parts of the United Kingdom would greatly like.

The right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet correctly made a point about the grace period. I do not understand why the Government did not just continue negotiating within the grace period. [*Interruption.*] The Minister for the Cabinet Office raises his eyebrows, but we have now been in the grace period for 18 months. I believe there is a problem with the checks that needs to be sorted out, as I have said on the record many times. In my conversations with European colleagues, I have

asked them to give me one example of how the integrity, safety and security of the single market has been compromised during the grace period. I have yet to receive an answer that a problem has actually arisen. The longer that goes on—perhaps that would have been the better approach for the Government—the more difficult it becomes for the EU to argue, “There is a fundamental difficulty here, which is why we need the whole panoply”. In the end, we are going to have to identify where the real risks are, and it is a relatively limited number of products. For the rest, particularly those goods that come to supermarkets and businesses in Northern Ireland that are not going anywhere else, a completely different solution could be required, although the Government are going to have a job on their hands to differentiate between the two.

I wish to speak in support of my amendment 12, which I hope might be voted on later, my amendment 13 and other amendments. I said last week that the Bill as a whole was egregious, but clause 18(1), to which amendment 12 refers, is particularly so, because it states:

“A Minister of the Crown may engage in conduct in relation to any matter dealt with in the Northern Ireland Protocol...if the Minister of the Crown considers it appropriate”.

Basically, that is asking the House to legislate to give Ministers a power to do whatever they feel like, provided, in their opinion, that they think it is appropriate. We should listen to what Sir Jonathan Jones, the former Treasury Solicitor has had to say. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), who is on our Front Bench, mentioned, Sir Jonathan described this power as “extraordinary” and said it is a “do whatever you like” power, and no wonder. He also said in the article he wrote that the United Kingdom Internal Market Bill, which led to his resignation, was bad enough, but this Bill is of a “wholly different order”. The Hansard Society has criticised the clause as not being subject to any parliamentary scrutiny whatsoever, a criticism also made by the House of Lords Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee, which said:

“There is no definition of ‘conduct’ in the Bill itself. And there is nothing on the face of clause 18 that would prevent it from creating legally binding rules of general application.”

The Committee has previously criticised what it calls “disguised legislation,” by which it means

“instruments that are legislative in effect but often not subject to parliamentary oversight. Examples include guidance, determinations, arrangements, codes of practice and public notices. Clause 18 appears to allow all these things to be done, without any parliamentary procedure and in a way that is binding on the general public.”

So the question the Committee reasonably ask of the Minister is: what is this power and what do Ministers want it for? If I heard the Minister correctly, he said that the clause was there merely to ensure that Ministers acted lawfully. What is this “conduct”? I ask because “engage in conduct” is, as the very helpful House of Commons Library note says,

“an unusual form of words for a statutory power.”

If we turn to the Bill’s explanatory notes for some enlightenment, we see that they state that clause 18(1) authorises “sub-legislative activity”. I have been in the House for a few years and I have never come across the concept of “sub-legislative activity”, whatever that is. The only example given in the explanatory notes is guidance. If the Government’s aim is to have a power to issue guidance on matters that they have not thought

of in the rest of the Bill or might think of at some point in the future, why does the clause not say, “The Minister will have the power to issue guidance”? It does not say that.

The other example the Minister gave left me even more perplexed. He said that this was to enable Ministers to issue instructions to civil servants. I was a Minister for nine years and I am not aware that I had to refer to a bit of legislation to give instructions to civil servants. I find the explanation wholly incredible, so it begs the question, and ought to beg the question for the Committee, whether one supports the principle of the Bill or not: what are the Government actually seeking to do? The Hansard Society, in its excellent note, makes it clear that that is not a narrow, obscure point. It is about ensuring that relevant legal provisions are drafted and treated consistently with other legislation. That is why the Hansard Society says:

“It also ensures that law-making does not circumvent the publication requirements that accompany, and the parliamentary scrutiny that is afforded to, primary and delegated legislation.”

In this case, the Government have given no explanation of why they believe that the powers are needed—apart from in relation to guidance and instructing civil servants, as we have just heard from the Minister—or why they believe that the powers are administrative rather than legislative. We need to hear from the Minister in his further contribution precisely what conduct is covered by clause 18(1). If he has a list of things in mind, will he please amend the Bill and put them in one by one so that we can see what they are? Secondly, will he give a categorical assurance that this provision will not permit legally binding obligations to be made as a result of that conduct? I raise that issue because the Government have not included clause 18(1) in the Bill’s delegated powers memorandum, which is quite a significant point.

The clause is also indicative of the Government’s wider ambitions for, and the problems they are having with, the Bill. What they really want to do—the Minister has been absolutely open about this, to his great credit—is give themselves the power to do whatever they want in relation to the protocol. They want to be able to turn things on, turn them off and even turn them back on again whenever they feel like it. The fundamental problem, which has become evident over the last two days in Committee, is that, in fairness, Ministers are not entirely clear how some of their proposals—for example, a red customs lane and a green customs lane, or the dual regulatory regime, which we discussed at some length yesterday—will work in practice.

To take the example of the dual regulatory regime, when pressed on whether firms would be required to choose whether to follow EU or UK rules, the Minister said yesterday:

“clause 7 makes it clear that businesses will have a choice which regulatory route to follow when supplying goods to the market in Northern Ireland.”

However, later he said that clause 11 would

“allow a Minister to prescribe a single regulatory route for specific sectors, including a UK-only route with no application of EU law”—[*Official Report*, 19 July 2022; Vol. 718, c. 877-79.]

In other words, businesses will be absolutely free to choose which system they want to use, unless and until the Government tell them which one they must use.

There is a confusion and a contradiction here. Why would Ministers want to take such a power if they are

[Hilary Benn]

confident that they have already worked out how a dual regulatory system will work? I do not think they are confident, because they do not know the answer. That is why so many of these Henry VIII powers are dotted throughout the Bill to give the Government the cover they require. For me that goes to the heart of why clause 18(1) is so objectionable and why it has been more widely criticised—apart from the Bill itself—than any other clause: the Government are trying to give themselves a sweeping power and a sweeping-up power. That is why this provision should be removed.

Let me turn briefly to my amendment 13. To be frank, I tabled it as a probing amendment because I was trying to understand the Government's intention in allowing courts or tribunals in the UK to refer matters to the European Court. There is a bit of a contradiction between clause 20(2), which would prevent any UK court from referring a matter to the European Court, and clause 20(4), which would allow the Government to lay down in regulations a procedure under which courts could refer matters of interpretation of EU law to the European Court. To put it simply, if the Government are planning regulations to allow referrals—if they are not planning that, why does subsection (4) exist—why take a blanket power two subsections earlier to prevent any referrals whatever. The thinking does not seem clear.

Finally, given what I have said about the inappropriate use of the word “appropriate” in the Bill, I support the Opposition amendments, including new clauses 11 and 12, which would change the word “appropriate” to “necessary”. It seems to me that that would provide a better and a higher test for the exercise of ministerial discretion rather than the wide latitude allowed for in the Bill, which has rightly led to so much criticism from so many quarters.

4 pm

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): It is a pleasure, as always, to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans, as we discuss the Bill this afternoon.

I wish to say at the outset that I am speaking very much in support of the Government's position on the Bill. It seems to me that we are dealing with a very complex, sensitive and fluid situation. I recognise that we have heard from everybody, from the former Labour Prime Minister, Tony Blair, right through to business organisations on the ground, all of whom recognise that there is no clear right or wrong to this situation at the moment, that we need to take forward this debate in a constructive way, and that we need to reach solutions that continue to support stability and the economic development of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom.

My attention was particularly drawn to amendment 51, because of the points that it illustrates about referring disputed matters to the UK-EU Joint Committee, which is envisaged as part of the withdrawal agreement. That highlights that there remains a number of avenues still to explore, and it is with a sense of optimism that I look at those avenues. It is clear that the political situation that we face today, with the departure of one Prime Minister and a new Prime Minister to be elected, creates an opportunity for a reset in the relationships and the

negotiations that are taking place with the European Union on this issue. It was clear from the Dispatch Box when we first debated the Bill that it remained the Government's preferred outcome that negotiations would result in changes that would address fully the issues of concern to all communities across Northern Ireland and, indeed, to those in my own constituency, whose businesses are involved in trade with the UK single market and the European single market. They are watching closely at what the outcomes of this will be because of the implications for other parts of our international trade in future.

The success that we have seen in Northern Ireland—in particular its ability to attract inward investment to drive that economic growth, to be the other region of the United Kingdom, outside of London, that is really bouncing back strongly—demonstrates the strength that there is in that economy and that community, and that it deserves the support and attention of this House to a greater degree perhaps than it has enjoyed in the past. The reality is that the protocol that we are discussing today is clearly our Prime Minister's protocol, and we now have an opportunity to revisit those negotiations and find a new way forward.

I wish to address the point that was made strongly by the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) in his eloquent contribution around the issue of a democratic deficit. There was one thing that piqued my attention. I have served as a member of the Committee of the Regions, alongside cross-party members from Northern Ireland, such as Jonathan Bell, Arnold Hatch, Stewart Dickson—all of whom were part of a process that was set up, as an EU member state, whereby the elected politicians from different parts of the European Union undertook a supervisory and oversight role on the operations of the European Union and the single market.

I spent a good part of my life in the Centre Borschette in Brussels—the conference centre in which the European Union undertook its negotiations and discussions about the development of the single market. I was there to talk about education. I was sharing that building with people who were there to deal with anything from veterinary products, to agriculture and to any other conceivable economic area of interest. It is clear that, now that we have left the European Union, we need to make sure that we are putting in place an equivalent degree of oversight so that everybody involved in the community has the opportunity to play an appropriate part in the development of these markets. It is clear from the eloquent contributions that we have heard from a number of Members on the Benches opposite that there remains a very live concern in Northern Ireland about whether the arrangements currently in place allow for that to happen.

Even with the results of the recent election, where I recognise that the majority of people in Northern Ireland voted for parties that were in favour of the protocol, it is clear that the essence of the peace and stability that supports that economic development is that everybody has the opportunity to be part of that discussion. We know that that has not always been done as fully as it should have been in the past, and as we debate the Bill in this Committee we have the opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to ensuring that that does happen in future.

It is also important to recognise, when we look at the important progress that Northern Ireland is making in its economic development and in bouncing back from the covid pandemic, that the European Union is making a reasonable point about the need to ensure that we carry out the relevant checks on goods and products that are traded in and out of that single market—a point that we have an equivalence for in our own United Kingdom single market. There is a lot of history to that. The United Kingdom has historically been notorious, as a member of the single market, for not carrying out the checks on goods and services that we were committed to carrying out as part of that single market.

Indeed, the United Kingdom was significantly fined for having failed to carry out those checks. I know that there are businesses in my constituency trading in goods and services that have seen their ability to do so undercut when the integrity of that single market has been damaged by our failure to carry out those checks. That failure means that we have, for example, counterfeit car parts being brought into the United Kingdom and traded—not only putting people's lives and wellbeing at risk, but damaging the economic prospects of those businesses.

As we take those negotiations forward in a constructive spirit, while we are rightly determined to protect the integrity of the UK, it is absolutely right that we also recognise that the United Kingdom has not always been as good at this as we should have been. The constructive partnership with the European Union means that we must recognise that and show our commitment to ensuring that those checks and standards will be carried out in future in a way that we have not always done in the past. It may well be that the joint committee referred to in amendment 51 will play some role in ensuring that, as negotiations progress and those matters are taken to a lower level, there will be an opportunity to drive forward to reach agreements.

I will finish where I started. The opportunity of a change of leadership is that it creates some scope for a reset in the relationship that has been clearly described at the Dispatch Box as the Government's preferred route for achieving a better outcome. I entirely support the Government in that objective. We have already heard intimations from some of our partners across the European Union that, regardless of what they think about the merits of any individual, that reset is the chance for a fresh start.

I hope the outcome will be that we reach that negotiation without any of the powers that have been referred to at the Dispatch Box and that are causing concern ever having to come into play, exactly as we saw with the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020. The priority for this Committee, for Members and for my constituents whose trading interests are strongly affected by this Bill is that we ensure that we respect the complexity of the politics of Northern Ireland, to which we have often paid far too little attention in this House. We must support all our colleagues in achieving a deal that they can live with, one that will continue to support the stability and economic development of both the Republic of Ireland, our ally, and Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom.

Claire Hanna: This afternoon's amendments focus on the disapplication of the protocol and the extravagant powers that the Government hope to grant themselves. Our amendments, consistent with our amendments tabled

on other days—I think we are on day 712 of this Bill—seek to balance and, where necessary, curtail those powers, to ensure that Ministers have due regard for the views and the needs of all the people in Northern Ireland and their elected representatives.

Through amendment 49, we also propose to formalise the safeguarding of the Good Friday agreement. It is referenced just once in this Bill, where I believe it is being used as an amulet to defend against repudiation of an international treaty. We are told repeatedly, although it does not reflect the understanding of the agreement that many of us have, that this Bill is about protection of the Good Friday agreement, so it is difficult to see why codifying that is being so forcefully rejected. As a lifelong and committed follower of John Hume, I am always very pleased when his ideas get a new airing and a new audience. However, it is frustrating when the concepts and ideas he spent his life developing and persuading Northern Ireland to adopt—many people took a lot longer than others to finally adopt those views, while we all seemed to happily operate in this framework—are misrepresented and distorted, as they have been at some stages of this debate. John Hume argued and finally persuaded, through the Good Friday agreement, which has enormous consent in Northern Ireland and is sovereign in Northern Ireland, that consent should rest on the will of the majority of people in Northern Ireland. Crucially, he framed that within the architecture and the institutions of the three-stranded approach in the agreement, which explicitly saw Ireland's and the UK's joint membership of the EU as underpinning that, and underpinning the relationships east-west and north-south, regardless of Northern Ireland's constitutional settlement.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: There is, though, a clear distinction between the principle of consent, which relates to the ultimate question of Northern Ireland's place within the United Kingdom, or constitutional change affecting our place in the United Kingdom, and the principle of consensus, which applies to the operation of the political institutions. My point throughout this debate has not focused primarily on the principle of consent, although that is important, but relates to power-sharing on the principle of consensus. Without Unionist support, there is not a consensus, and that is simply the reality.

Claire Hanna: I am glad the hon. Member brought up that point, because I am sure that all the Members in the Chamber have read the Good Friday agreement and will know that in the original 1998 document, the only—only—aspect that required parallel consent, other than the potential petitioning of motions, was the joint nomination of the First Ministers. Would Members like to hazard a guess as to which party disapproved that one use of parallel consent in the Good Friday agreement? It was the DUP, at St Andrews, that ruled it out. The principle of consent, as codified very clearly in the Good Friday agreement and in the Northern Ireland Act 1998, is about the constitutional status of Northern Ireland and about the consent of the majority of the people. Those are the facts, and, as people are disappearing up their own contradictions to try to justify support for this damaging Bill, those remain the facts.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: I am afraid that I must disagree with the hon. Lady. Parallel consent does not apply on only one issue. In strand 1 of the agreement,

[*Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson*]

the requirement for cross-community consensus applies to matters that are controversial, so the idea that consensus applies only on the constitutional issue is simply not true. The power-sharing institutions operate on the basis of consensus. If cross-community consensus was not required for power-sharing, then why on earth have we no power-sharing Executive fully functioning today in the absence of Unionist support? The facts speak for themselves: Unionists absent, no consensus, no power-sharing. For the hon. Lady to try to suggest that consensus is not required for power-sharing frankly leaves me bemused, because it is at the heart of the Belfast agreement.

Claire Hanna: This is the problem we had in the stop-start 25 years of devolution: an obsession with and an addiction to veto by the DUP, and others. Some of these points would have more coherence and would be less hypocritical if that party had not correctly—correctly—bemoaned Sinn Féin holding the institutions to ransom, which was undemocratic when it did it between 2017 and 2020. The Member was not slow in pointing that out, rightly, and his words now would have a little bit more credibility if that had not been the case. There is a difference between consent and consensus. Again, it would be a little bit more credible if he was not repeatedly ignoring the fact that a democratic majority of people in Northern Ireland oppose Brexit, particularly the hard form of Brexit that is being applied without any form of consent. I say respectfully that his words do not have credibility on this. In fact, Hume developed the notions of complementary consent, north and south, for any agreement produced by negotiations for future constitutional change in Northern Ireland. The Good Friday agreement was mandated on that basis, and while I appreciate—I was a teenager at the time, so I do not recall the press conference—that the right hon. Member said on that day that he accepted the result of the referendum, it is a matter of record that his party spent many years doing everything they could to thwart its implementation.

4.15 pm

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: This debate is not about history, but at the time I was actually a member of the Ulster Unionist party, not the Democratic Unionist party—a small fact. As a member of the Ulster Unionist party at the time, even though I voted against the agreement, I said I accepted the democratic outcome. Subsequently, when I joined the Democratic Unionist party, I worked with my party to bring about the change required democratically to ensure that the flaws in the agreement were addressed. I am simply saying to the hon. Lady that that is what we are engaged in now in respect of the protocol. Let us get the change that works for everyone in Northern Ireland, rebuilds the consensus on a cross-community basis and gets us back to doing what we need to do for Northern Ireland.

Claire Hanna: I desperately hope with every fibre of my being that the position the right hon. Gentleman sets out in his final words is the one we reach at the end of this process. The people of Northern Ireland want more than anything in this world to not hear this situation being played out aggressively in a toxic fashion

day after day, as it has for the last six years, but they do not believe it will happen unilaterally through this Bill. Anybody who legitimately and thoroughly supports the Good Friday agreement and the teachings of John Hume will know that this Bill is a world of logic, decency and reality away from what he outlined about consensus and power sharing.

We have tabled amendment 49 to give an opportunity to protect fully and truly the Good Friday agreement with negotiated solutions. That is where we want to get to. Members should be fair and current about the context in Northern Ireland, because people at home do not recognise the Mad Max scenario being portrayed of people unable to access goods and services in Northern Ireland—it is just not reflective of the reality. Once again I say, as I have probably done every time I have spoken on this issue, that I fully understand the hurt of many Unionists. I have also spoken about the constitutional identity of many of us. I am Irish and I am Northern Irish, and I do not pay my taxes to the same state that my passport comes from—I understand that those are compromises, and it is frustrating when the impression is given that such compromises are for non-Unionists, but Unionists should never have to compromise on their lines of governance.

In terms of the actual material effect on people's identity, I quoted yesterday words from the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (*Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson*) that I agree with. He said clearly that customs checks do not alter the constitutional status of the UK, and I think he is correct, but it is also appropriate that people reflect on the reality of what is and is not happening with goods moving through, where there is not the full panoply of EU checks. The situation is evolving. We were not given the benefit of an implementation period—such was the rush from other parties to get Brexit done, they did not allow businesses a period in which to adapt—but as was always envisioned, the protocol is evolving and the EU has set out legally dropped checks that are available permanently for easement, so Members should be rational about that.

Members should also be rational about the impact of the European Court of Justice. If I understand it correctly, it applies to the sovereign parts of Cyprus in the absence of Brexit. Perhaps Ministers in their summing up could advise whether the constitutional status of those UK sovereign areas of Cyprus has changed due to the jurisdiction of the ECJ.

Consistent with those points, amendments 48 and 49 would try to apply the consensus and the trust of the Northern Ireland Assembly to some of the powers that will be exercised apparently for its benefit. That consent from the Assembly will better reflect the range of views across Northern Ireland's diverse communities, as well as businesses, whose representative groups—Members and in particular Ministers should be honest about this—have all rejected this Bill and set out their grave reservations about it. It is important that those views be reflected, if only because Members have, shamefully, maligned some of those business representatives in the Chamber, and I do not believe that their accusations have been withdrawn.

When Ministers sum up, will they say whether they will table a report that gives qualitative and quantitative information on the feedback that the Government have received from businesses on the Bill? It is frustrating for

many that little pieces of feedback are being appropriated by some, while the vast majority of feedback—the representative feedback—is being distorted. I ask the Government to commit to publishing a report on the feedback—anonymised, where appropriate—that they have received, so that we can ensure that the voices of the economic actors in Northern Ireland are heard without distortion or impediment.

It is wrong to imply, as some did in debate yesterday, that Northern Ireland exporters will have a choice on regulations and standards. In fact, customers will have that choice; that is how these things work. The UK proposes a dual-regulation system on an open border. That will require customers—mostly other businesses—to make judgments and assumptions about the validity and standards of Northern Ireland produce. The Bill creates that serious reputational risk to businesses. I must repeat that the Bill's powers, to the extent that they can be quantified—there are a lot of unanswered questions—are unwanted by a majority of Members of the Legislative Assembly, and by all the business organisations. Our amendment will help to ensure that those powers are appropriately moderated by the Northern Ireland Assembly. I do not want to hear the all-purpose excuse, "The Assembly isn't sitting." We are told, as part of the two-step that is going on between the Government and the Democratic Unionist party, that once the Bill passes, the Government will give democratic governance to the people of Northern Ireland, so that should not be an impediment. I ask the Government to accept that.

Stephen Farry: It is a pleasure to speak in the debate. I want to make a few points about the European Court of Justice and my amendment 46. It is important to recognise that the ECJ has not been a big issue in Northern Ireland to date. No business has ever expressed any concern to me about its jurisdiction. Indeed, it was a very minor issue in political debate in Northern Ireland until Lord Frost took it upon himself to escalate the issue in a speech that he made last October in Lisbon, I think. It was on the eve of the European Commission tabling proposals for breaking the deadlock on this issue; that shows how well the Government have handled some of the so-called negotiations. The European Court of Justice seems to be an obsession for hard-line Brexiteers in this Chamber and elsewhere, and for those who advocate what could be described as a purist and old-fashioned approach to sovereignty that denies entirely the realities of the modern, interdependent world.

It is important to focus on the distinction between dispute resolution mechanisms in a free trade agreement, and the situation regarding the protocol. Many people suggest that we should simply have an arbitration mechanism for the protocol, and deliberately conflate the two types of agreement. It is entirely appropriate to have an arbitration mechanism for the trade and co-operation agreement, which is a free trade agreement between the United Kingdom and the European Union. It is about two equals coming to the table and working out exactly how things will be taken forward. The position on Northern Ireland and the protocol is qualitatively different; we are talking about a region that continues to have direct access to the single market for goods, and is required to remain aligned with a body of European law, as is set out in annex 2 of the protocol. We will in a minute discuss the pros and cons of that,

and the justification for it, but that is the situation that pertains, and why there is a different arbitration mechanism for a free trade agreement.

If the ultimate jurisdiction of the European Court is removed, that will jeopardise or destroy Northern Ireland's ability to access the single market for goods. It is important that Members are fully aware of the implications of going down this particular road, because the two go hand in hand. Northern Ireland needs to remain in line with that law, and the European Court is part and parcel of how the situation works. Of course, if that were to happen, there would be massive implications for all businesses that operate on a north-south basis or that trade directly into the European Union. It is important that we do all we can to preserve that jurisdiction, while at the same time trying to fix the issues that pertain across the Irish sea. Through the Bill, a unilateral approach will be imposed on the European Union that probably will not address the issues across the Irish sea and at the same time will undermine Northern Ireland's current dual-access opportunities.

I will go further and say this: we do not simply have to tolerate and put up with the situation. I maintain that being within the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice is actively in Northern Ireland's interests, because there may well be situations that come to light over the years where—due to the complications around the protocol, and the distinctions between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom—some businesses and places in the European Union do not accept goods from Northern Ireland, because they are confused about the overarching situation. In such situations, it is crucial that we have the European Court of Justice to enforce the rules and protect the rights of Northern Ireland businesses. If we are to change the jurisdiction, there is a real danger and risk that we throw away the opportunity and advantage that we have.

Last night, I had a conversation with a major export business in my constituency, whose representatives said that they were recently at a trade fair in Italy and people said to them, "Thank God you're still part of the single market via the protocol, because we cannot do business readily with your counterparts in Great Britain, but because you're part of the protocol we have that export opportunity." Many hundreds of people are employed by that company. It is important to recognise that issue.

Hilary Benn: The hon. Gentleman is making an interesting and important speech. In clause 20(4), the Government propose to allow cases to be referred to the European Court; they say they want the European Court to have nothing to do with any of this but are then taking a power to allow referrals. Does he, like me, think that that is because businesses in Northern Ireland that choose to operate under the dual regulatory system under EU rules may themselves, in the circumstances he has just described, want to go to the Court to demonstrate that they are abiding by the rules, and therefore ensure that the Republic or any other EU country cannot say, "We are not taking your goods"? That is in the interests of business in Northern Ireland, is it not?

Stephen Farry: Absolutely. I am grateful to the right hon. Member for reinforcing that point; there is a kernel of rationale as to why the provision is in the self-interest of Northern Ireland businesses. If the

[Stephen Farry]

Government even slightly recognise that—without, perhaps, wanting overly to acknowledge it—that is indeed welcome. I hope that the Minister will expand on that whenever he speaks.

I want to make some closing comments on the democratic deficit. Of course, the largest democratic deficit we currently face in Northern Ireland is the fact that we do not have an Assembly, which means that we cannot do any self-government, pass any laws or strike a devolved budget, and there is money building up through Barnett consequential to address the cost of living that cannot be allocated to help struggling households. That is the big democratic deficit that the people of Northern Ireland are talking about at present, not the intricacies of European law.

4.30 pm

That said, I recognise that there is an issue in relation to the evolution of EU law in annex 2, over which Northern Ireland currently has no direct say. I do not want to go back through history too much, but when we were part of the EU we had, through the good offices of the UK Government, a front-row seat at discussions around the evolution of EU law. Whether it was an update of EU law or the conclusion of a new law, the UK was very much part and parcel of that.

Now, however, outside the EU, we have a degree of democratic deficit. That has been recognised. The EU has set out four strands for future negotiations—medicines, sanitary and phytosanitary issues, the customs issue and governance—so there is an open door to discuss those issues. It will not be easy to find a solution, because Northern Ireland is not a member state of the EU and will not be treated as such in terms of any future outworkings; but we have to think as creatively as we can, to give Northern Ireland political voices and as direct seats as possible at the table.

The EU proposals do not currently go far enough in that regard. They are essentially around what we would term some form of super-consultation or targeted consultation with Northern Ireland businesses, which is fine as far as it goes; but we need some means by which the directly elected political representatives in Northern Ireland can sit down with their EU counterparts and discuss the evolution of EU law. I stress that those conversations are perhaps most important in the initiation phase of the law, rather than further down the line. It is about simply saying, “That type of proposal will have a differential impact on Northern Ireland,” and it is important that we flag that early.

I recently had a discussion with representatives of the Norwegian Government. They are, of course, part of the European economic area and do not have a direct seat at the table in terms of initiation. They take a very strategic approach to trying to engage in terms of the way in which EU law is developed, and they pick the most important issues. For Northern Ireland we will have a broad range of interests for our interaction with the EU. It will be a challenge, but it is one that we must overcome.

The final point that I want to make is about the debate that has emerged around cross-community consent. It is probably a better discussion for the next stage of the Bill, but unfortunately a lot of our discussions

overlap. Absolutely it is important that we have a cross-community consensus in Northern Ireland on these issues. However, we are currently seeing that a minority in Northern Ireland has pulled down the institutions and we do not have power sharing at all. To me, power sharing is about power sharing happening; it is not about blocking it from happening.

In turn, however, the Government constructed the entirety of their narrative around the Bill by saying, “Unionists have withdrawn from the institutions; therefore we must proceed with this legislation.” In that regard they are addressing only a minority. We have moved from a situation of asking whether the Government are doing something to appease the majority in Northern Ireland, or to appease a cross-community situation, to one where the Government are directly, openly and deliberately only addressing the concerns of a minority—and that includes a minority of political representatives and of business representatives.

It is worth stressing time and again that a majority of the MLAs and of the voters in Northern Ireland are at least pragmatic around the protocol, and that applies to the vast majority of businesses. Of course people recognise that there must be some degree of modification to the protocol to address the genuine concerns, but I have deep reservations if the Government twist that type of situation to say that there is justification for the Bill. We see opinion polls saying that 68% or 70% of people want to see the protocol modified or read that virtually all political parties recognise that there are changes, but that is a million miles away from any notion of majority support in Northern Ireland for this legislation. I fear that Parliament is proceeding on a false pretence to pass very dangerous and destructive legislation.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr Nigel Evans): I am now going to call Jim Shannon as the last contributor on this group, and then we will have two brief contributions from the Front Bench. We anticipate that two Divisions will follow.

Jim Shannon: I am very pleased to be called to speak, Mr Evans. The Minister referred to the democratic deficit and clause 13, and that is what I want to focus on. I want to focus on the effect it has on my constituents in Strangford. I thank the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) for her significant contribution, too.

I have informed the hon. Member for North Down (Stephen Farry) that I intend to refer to some remarks that were made yesterday. Yesterday, I listened to him as he told hon. Members in the Chamber what conversations took place—he seemed to know better than I did—between me and Lakeland Dairies. To go on the record, let me be quite clear: I have been assured not that Lakeland Dairies is for or against the protocol; rather that it looks at the issue of the protocol and simply wants to know how we intend to deal with it in this place, so it has the information to move forward.

I refuse to allow others in this place to misrepresent me and my relationship with one of the largest employers in my constituency of Strangford. It is also noteworthy that meetings took place on a regular basis between myself and Lakeland Dairies staff, because they understand that I am up to the case and up to the job of helping them. I have had meetings with Lakeland Dairies directors,

the Minister here and Ministers in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. They were quite clear where they are on those issues. So that is where we are, on the record.

I want to see a way that works for Lakeland Dairies, but also for the seed farmers in my constituency, for the small business person, for the dog owner and for the pharmacist. Lakeland Dairies is not against that either. It has stated an opinion on how its business is currently operating and wants to know how to continue to grow its incredible global enterprise. That should not be twisted by any Member, whether it be the hon. Member for North Down or any other Member.

Stephen Farry: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. It is perhaps useful to distinguish between what are two separate conversations. One is a business saying that, on how the protocol is addressed, it is pragmatic, open-minded or indeed that it does not take a position in that respect. Yesterday, we were having a very good separate discussion on dual regulation. I was articulating the views expressed quite openly by the Dairy Council. It is worth making clear that the authoritative information I have is that Lakeland Dairies is entirely in agreement with the stated public position of the Dairy Council.

Jim Shannon: For the record again, I repeat, and do so with authority: Lakeland Dairies has told me that whatever legislation is in place, if it assists the Bill to go through it will work with that, north and south, to make it happen—and that is the important point.

It is all very well for the hon. Gentleman to read off a bit of paper and say this group supports this and that groups supports that, but let me tell him something. He reads it off a bit of paper. The difference between him and me is that I live this every day. When it comes to knowing the difference between a field of barley and a field of wheat, do you know something? I know it because I live it. When it comes to knowing the difference between a cauliflower and a cabbage, I know it—I don't read it on a bit of paper. When it comes to knowing the difference between a Friesian cow and a Dexter cow, I know the difference. You know why? Because I live it. The hon. Member just reads it on a bit of paper.

If you want to know the difference, Mr Evans, between a John Deere tractor and a Ford tractor, I know it because I live it every day. I do not read it off a bit of paper. With great respect to the hon. Gentleman, he can read it off a bit of paper and know nothing about it, but you can live it and know everything about it. That is the difference—

Stephen Farry: I've milked the cow!

Jim Shannon: Well, have you brought your wellies? He wants to go and buy himself a pair of wellies. Before he goes on to the farmer's field, he'd better ask for the farmer for his permission.

I am quite concerned about how we are, so let me be rightly understood in the Committee today. The protocol can undoubtedly work for some—I have never said that it does not—but the fact of the matter is that the majority of individuals who have approached me in my constituency have told me that it does not work for them and their businesses.

If the hon. Member for Belfast South (Claire Hanna) was here, I could ream off to her, if she had the time and the patience to listen to me, perhaps 100 businesses in my constituency that are impacted by it. They have told me that it does not work for them or their businesses. I believe that to be replicated in other constituencies. In my intervention on the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet, I referred to businesses in South Down and West Belfast. I mentioned another one yesterday. Again, the hon. Member for North Down ignored it as if it did not matter, but it matters to me because a constituent of mine is involved.

Sam McChesney, who was on "Countryfile" on Sunday night, said that the protocol as it is at this moment impacts greatly on him, and on his cattle and his sheep. He cannot take his cattle across to the markets in Carlisle and the rest of north England or in Scotland without a financial equation being involved. Just for the record, he happens to be a member of the Ulster Farmers Union, as am I—I declare that as an interest. The hon. Member for North Down can read things off a bit of paper and hold up some names, but he does not know it because he has not lived it, unlike we who understand the agricultural business and who speak to the farmers.

I spoke to farmers on the 12th day; they happened to be in my lodge, Kircubbin LOL 1900—true blues they are, just for the record. They were telling me their thoughts on the Northern Ireland protocol and why they want it changed. When we live with them, understand them, socialise with them, and are members of a lodge with them, then when they tell us what their problems are on the farm, we know it because we live it—we don't read it off a bit of paper. That is the issue for me; I just want to put it on the record.

I also have concerns about the 300 hours spent by the EU not to find a solution—if only that were the case—but just to be obstinate and awkward, and never at any stage to have it in mind to deal with this.

I want to ask the Minister some questions because yesterday I met people involved in the pharmaceutical business; I will be happy if he can come back to me at a later stage with answers. Should the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill pass, can the Government confirm that the regulation of all medicines, health technologies and vaccines in Northern Ireland will fully and exclusively fall under the remit of the UK Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency as the primary assessor and regulator, and no longer under the European Medicines Agency, as is currently the case? I want to make sure that what I am looking for and what they asked me to ask about is in place. They also seek confirmation that in such an eventuality all pharmacovigilance reporting for drugs, medicines and vaccines will thus transfer fully and exclusively to the UK MHRA.

Similarly, can the Government confirm that should the Bill become law the testing and batch release of relevant health technologies and vaccines will fully and exclusively fall under the UK National Institute for Biological Standards and Control, and that the European official medicine control laboratories network will no longer have any responsibility for Northern Ireland? Can it subsequently be confirmed that the requirements under the falsified medicines directive, which includes products having to be serialised and barcoded for

[*Jim Shannon*]

decommissioning, will also no longer be required for Northern Ireland, as is already the case for the rest of the UK?

Importantly, pharmacies and pharmaceutical companies are asking for the same thing that the agricultural representative bodies that I referred to earlier are looking for: an explanation of the transitional arrangements and preparations that have been made and an account of what guidance will be issued to urgently bring clarity. Most businesses understand the nature of this Bill, but they need to know that they will have useful information from day one and not be left uncertain, as they have been in recent days.

Certainty is the order of the day: certainty that Northern Ireland can trade with her biggest market; certainty that Northern Ireland citizens can access the same medicines as the rest of the United Kingdom; certainty that farmers can get seed potatoes from, or sell their beef to, their biggest market, the UK mainland; certainty that people can take their dog on a staycation trip to Scotland without a costly pet passport; certainty that they can see their Amazon order delivered without a message telling them the seller will not post outside the United Kingdom because they think Northern Ireland is not part of the United Kingdom; certainty that they can order dog biscuits, frames or plastic flowers from their supplier without needing to fill out paperwork for each colour of each flower, which shows how absurd the EU is and why this Northern Ireland Protocol Bill needs to be law, giving us in Northern Ireland the same opportunities as the rest of the United Kingdom; certainty that our Chancellor and Government in this House can progress state aids which are currently being withheld from the people in Northern Ireland struggling with the price of daily living; certainty that the Unionist voice in Northern Ireland in terms of the upholding of the Belfast agreement is on equal footing with the nationalist voice, facilitated in this House by the SDLP and Alliance party pan-nationalist front, which is aided, disappointingly, by some on the Labour Benches—there are some that do not, but there are some that do; and certainty that, unless the people of the Province determine otherwise by a democratic specific vote, we still have the right to call ourselves as British as Finchley, as Margaret Thatcher once famously said.

This Bill is not perfect, but it starts a journey back to certainty that every single person in Northern Ireland deserves. I ask that we do the right thing.

I will refer briefly to clause 18 and the amendments tabled by SDLP and Alliance party Members, including amendments 46, 48 and 49. Despite the fact that all those Members have sat in the Northern Ireland Assembly and that they are intelligent and thoughtful individuals, there seems to be a grave misunderstanding about the role of this House in legislating through the Bill. It is not for the Northern Ireland Assembly to circumnavigate the decisions of the Minister as they pertain to individual protocol issues. Those Members should well understand the role of this House in rectifying the complete override of this House that was caused by accepting the role of a foreign power in Northern Ireland—namely, the EU: that insatiable giant that soaks everything up and takes all the goodness away. Its power was abused to punish the temerity of the British people for seeking to withdraw

from Europe. We wanted to withdraw from Europe, and the Bill would give us the same authority and make me as British as Members on the Government Benches.

4.45 pm

This United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland voted to leave. The EU abused that. Hon. Members have been unsuccessful thus far with their copious wrecking amendments. I trust that today's latest attempt to remove authority from this place and devolve the power to the Northern Ireland Assembly, as another attempt to bypass Brexit, will suffer the same fate. We will oppose all the amendments tabled by the hon. Members for North Down, for Belfast South and for Foyle (Colum Eastwood).

I am anxious to get the right thing done in this place and to allow our capable MLAs to get back to their seats and do their day-to-day job by legislating and providing the accountability that is missing. These matters are solely the responsibility of this House. Customs, goods regulation, VAT, state aid, rules on agri-food and our very legal standing as UK citizens are being circumnavigated by the ECJ. All those are part of the package deal of being a member of the UK and ensure that Northern Ireland gets more than its fair share as a member of the UK. That power must lie here—not in Brussels, but with all 650 Members of this House and with the people of Northern Ireland through their MPs. That is who should be able to make these changes. It should not be down to some faceless bureaucrat in the EU who sits in a warm office, never sees the sunlight, looks across at us here and makes a decision about what we are going to do. My goodness, let us put that to bed—put it in the bin—tonight.

The amendments are not a serious attempt to add a layer of security. They are wrecking amendments to remove power from this place, and that should not be accepted. Members are content to receive the Barnett consequential of Treasury funds—I am talking about Members from all the parties: if they are given the money, they will grab it. We will take it because it is ours, but we in this place should have responsibility for legislating and the rule of law.

In conclusion, I oppose the amendments. I oppose the rationale behind them by the pan-nationalist front of the SDLP, the Alliance party and some Labour party Members here. The Bill must be passed. The time for Northern Ireland to pay the price has come to an end. Members should do what they constantly ask us to do: accept the will of the people and work in this place get the best for their individual constituencies and our wee nation in this United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Stephen Farry: On a point of order, Mr Evans. Will the hon. Gentleman reflect on the use of the term “pan-nationalist front”? I appreciate that this is a heated debate, but I understand that there have been multiple pieces of guidance on the use of temperate language. The use of the term “pan-nationalist front” has led to people being put under threat of their lives. It is a dangerous concept that implies that both my party and the SDLP are somehow in league with other nefarious forces who are trying to do certain things to people. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not like me to refer to the “pan-Unionist or loyalist front” for exactly the same reason.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Clearly, Mr Speaker asked people today to use temperate language, with reference to “Erskine May”, and that stands not just for Prime Minister’s Question Time but for all debates. I know that this is an emotional, sensitive Bill, but people must be very careful with the language that they use at all times.

Stephen Doughty: This has been a very wide-ranging and thoughtful debate, albeit with passion at various points. The question of a democratic deficit is one of the key issues that we have discussed. I recognise the concerns of Unionist colleagues in the Chamber, but I find it odd that the Government are pursuing a Bill with parts that remove powers from this place and the Northern Ireland Assembly and give them to Ministers here. It strikes me that that is the real democratic deficit that we are dealing with.

I hope that the other place will look at these matters in great detail in the weeks to come. I indicate our support for amendments 12 and 49, if those are put to a separate decision, but I will withdraw amendment 38.

Michael Ellis: I thank hon. Members, who have all spoken passionately. I will try very briefly to address some of their points.

The hon. Member for North Down (Stephen Farry) asked about the impact of CJEU provision on Northern Ireland access to the EU single market. When he raised the point, I reiterated the importance of cross-community consent; I should also reassure him and the Committee that we want and intend to retain elements of the protocol that are working and preserve north-south trade and co-operation. As the Prime Minister has said, we want to fix it, not nix it. The Bill just makes targeted changes to address key concerns and restore balance.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) raised some technical questions about pharmaceuticals; I will write to him about them.

The right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) referred to clause 18, which I assure him is genuinely less exciting than some might think. Normally, as he knows, the lawfulness of Ministers’ non-legislative actions can be taken for granted or implied. The Bill is slightly unusual in that it clarifies how new domestic obligations replace prior domestic obligations that stem from international obligations. Those international obligations are currently implemented automatically by section 7A of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. That conduit pipe currently constrains—and could cause confusion in future as to—how Ministers can act in support of the Bill. Clause 18 will remove that potential confusion.

The hon. Member for Belfast South (Claire Hanna) juxtaposed Northern Ireland with Cyprus. I do not need to say to anyone on the Committee, particularly anyone from anywhere on the island of Ireland, that the history and geography of Northern Ireland is vastly different from that of Cyprus, so it is clear that different issues might arise from the remit of the CJEU. On that note, I recommend that the clauses stand part of the Bill.

Stephen Doughty: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clauses 13 and 14 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Amendment proposed: 12, in clause 18, page 10, line 9, leave out subsection (1).—(*Hilary Benn.*)

This amendment would remove the Minister’s power to engage in any conduct in relation to any matter dealt with in the Northern Ireland Protocol, not otherwise authorised by this Act, if the Minister considers it appropriate to do so.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Committee divided: Ayes 197, Noes 277.

Division No. 49]

[4.52 pm

AYES

Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Amesbury, Mike
Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Bardell, Hannah
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blake, Olivia
Blomfield, Paul
Bonnar, Steven
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Chamberlain, Wendy
Chapman, Douglas
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Cooper, rh Yvette
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Creasy, Stella
Cryner, John
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Davey, rh Ed
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Davies-Jones, Alex
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dodds, Anneliese
Doogan, Dave
Doughty, Stephen
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill

Evans, Chris
Farry, Stephen
Fellows, Marion
Ferrier, Margaret
Fletcher, Colleen
Flynn, Stephen
Foord, Richard
Foxcroft, Vicky
Furniss, Gill
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Glindon, Mary
Grant, Peter
Green, Kate
Green, Sarah
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Dame Nia
Hanna, Claire
Hardy, Emma
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Jones, Darren
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Kane, Mike
Kendall, Liz (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr Pat McFadden*)
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Lake, Ben
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lightwood, Simon
Linden, David
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John

McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Murray, James
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Rachel
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd

Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Sobel, Alex
 Stephens, Chris
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Twigg, Derek
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Wakeford, Christian
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad

Tellers for the Ayes:
Gerald Jones and
Liz Twist

NOES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan (*Proxy vote*
cast by Scott Mann)
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter

Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Butler, Rob
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carter, Andy
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey

Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Docherty, Leo
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Firth, Anna
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Hall, Luke
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James

Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lockhart, Carla
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherylyn
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McVey, rh Esther
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Nici, Lia
 O'Brien, Neil

Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John

Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Young, Jacob

Tellers for the Noes:
 Joy Morrissey and
 Suzanne Webb

Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Creasy, Stella
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Doughty, Stephen
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foord, Richard
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glendon, Mary
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Kate
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Kane, Mike
 Kendall, Liz (*Proxy vote cast
 by Mr Pat McFadden*)
 Khan, Afzal

Kinnock, Stephen
 Lake, Ben
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 Mearns, Ian
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Rachel
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Sobel, Alex
 Stephens, Chris
 Streeting, Wes

Question accordingly negated.

Amendment proposed: 49, in clause 18, page 10, line 15, at end insert—

“(3) Each Minister of the Crown must have due regard for the principle that the Belfast Agreement, including its subsequent implementation agreements and arrangements, should be protected in all its parts.”—(*Colum Eastwood.*)

This amendment is based on the fourth point in the Preamble to Northern Ireland Protocol.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Committee divided: Ayes 196, Noes 278.

Division No. 50]

[5.7 pm

AYES

Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Amesbury, Mike
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia

Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam

Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Wakeford, Christian
Webbe, Claudia

West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Whitley, Mick
Whittome, Nadia
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Winter, Beth
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad

Tellers for the Ayes:
Gerald Jones and
Navendu Mishra

NOES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan (*Proxy vote cast by Scott Mann*)
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Jake
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Buckland, rh Sir Robert
Burghart, Alex
Butler, Rob
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chishti, Rehman
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James

Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Coutinho, Claire
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Docherty, Leo
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Double, Steve
Dowden, rh Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Firth, Anna
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
French, Mr Louie
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James

Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Griffiths, Kate
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Hall, Luke
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Hinds, rh Damian
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Howell, Paul
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hunt, rh Jeremy
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kruger, Danny
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Lamont, John
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lockhart, Carla
Logan, Mark
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McVey, rh Esther
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen

Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Nici, Lia
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, Chris
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Pursglove, Tom
Quince, Will
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Roberts, Rob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Simmonds, David
Skidmore, rh Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, rh Mark
Stafford, Alexander
Stephenson, rh Andrew
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, rh Rishi
Swaine, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig

Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
Trott, Laura
Tugendhat, Tom
Vara, rh Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig

Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Young, Jacob

Tellers for the Noes:
Joy Morrissey and
Suzanne Webb

Question accordingly negated.

Clauses 18 and 20 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 19

NEW AGREEMENTS AMENDING OR REPLACING THE
NORTHERN IRELAND PROTOCOL

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

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr Nigel Evans): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Clause 21 stand part.

Amendment 50, in clause 22, page 11, line 16, at end insert—

“(1A) A Minister of the Crown may not exercise any power to make regulations conferred by this Act unless a Legislative Consent Motion approving a draft of the regulations has been passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly.”

This amendment would prevent a Minister of the Crown seeking to use powers conferred by this Act to make regulations unless and until the consent of the Northern Ireland Assembly to said regulations has been obtained.

Amendment 51, page 11, line 16, at end insert—

“(1A) A Minister of the Crown may not exercise any power to make regulations conferred by this Act before a Minister of the Crown has presented a draft of the regulations to the UK-EU Joint Committee for discussion and has laid a full report setting out the details of those discussions before each House of Parliament and provided a copy to the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly.”

This amendment would prevent a Minister of the Crown seeking to use powers conferred by this Act to make regulations unless and until said regulations have been presented by a Minister to the UK-EU Joint Committee for a discussion and a report detailing those discussions had been laid before each House of Parliament and a copy provided to the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Amendment 55, page 11, line 16, at end insert—

“(1A) A Minister of the Crown may not exercise any power to make regulations conferred by this Act in contravention of views agreed by the North-South Ministerial Council on EU matters, including those regarding future policies, legislative proposals and programmes under consideration in the EU framework as provided for in Paragraph 17 of Strand Two of the Belfast Agreement.”

Amendment 53, page 12, line 15, at end insert—

“(6A) A Minister may not exercise the power to make regulations under subsection (6) with respect to a devolved authority in Northern Ireland unless the exercise of any power by that devolved authority is approved by the First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly—

- (a) on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive,
- (b) following a resolution by the Northern Ireland Assembly, or both.”

This amendment would prevent a Minister of the Crown seeking to use powers conferred by subsection (6) without the agreement of the First Minister and deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland acting jointly has been. The First Minister and deputy First Minister may be acting on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive and/or following a resolution of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Clause 22 stand part.

Amendment 19, in clause 23, page 12, line 25, leave out from “to” to “unless” in line 26 and insert “draft affirmative procedure”.

This probing amendment would apply “draft affirmative” procedure in place of regulations being subject to annulment.

Amendment 20, page 12, line 33, leave out “draft affirmative procedure” and insert

“super-affirmative procedure (see section (Super-affirmative resolution procedure: general provisions))”.

This probing amendment would replace draft affirmative procedure with super-affirmative procedure (see NC6).

Amendment 21, page 12, line 33, leave out from “procedure” to the end of line 37.

This probing amendment would prevent Henry VIII powers (amending Acts of Parliament by regulations) being made using the “made affirmative” procedure.

Amendment 22, page 12, line 38, leave out subsections (7) to (9).

This probing amendment would remove the “made affirmative” procedure.

Clauses 23 and 25 stand part.

Amendment 2, in clause 26, page 15, line 41, leave out subsections (2) to (5) and insert—

“(2A) This section comes into force on the day on which this Act is passed.

(2B) The other provisions of this Act come into force on such day as the Secretary of State may by regulations made by statutory instrument appoint.

(2C) A statutory instrument containing regulations under subsection (2B) may not appoint a day for the commencement of any section unless—

- (a) a Minister of the Crown has moved a motion in the House of Commons to the effect that a section or sections be commenced on or after a day specified in the motion (“the specified day”),
- (b) the motion has been approved by a resolution of that House,
- (c) a motion to the effect that the House of Lords takes note of the specified day (or the day which is proposed to be the specified day) has been tabled in the House of Lords by a Minister of the Crown, and
- (d) the day appointed by the regulations is the same as or is after the specified day.

(2D) Regulations under subsection (2B) may—

- (a) appoint different days for different purposes;
- (b) make transitional or saving provision in connection with the coming into force of any provision of this Act.”

The intention of this amendment, linked to Amendment 1 to clause 1, is to require parliamentary approval for bringing into force any provisions of this Act.

Amendment 33, page 15, line 42, after “section” insert

“, section [consistency with international law]”.

This consequential amendment would bring NC11 into force on the day the Act is passed.

Amendment 3, page 15, line 44, at beginning insert

“Provided that the Northern Ireland Assembly has first passed a resolution indicating support for this Act.”.

This amendment, together with Amendment 4, will make all operational aspects of the Bill dependent upon the approval of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Amendment 4, page 15, line 45, at end insert—

“(3A) A motion for a resolution of the Northern Ireland Assembly referred to in subsection (3) must be tabled by either—

- (a) the First Minister and Deputy First Minister jointly, or
- (b) any Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly.”

This amendment, together with Amendment 3, will make all operational aspects of the Bill dependent upon the approval of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Amendment 47, page 15, line 45, at end insert—

“(3A) Regulations under subsection (3) may not be made unless a draft of the regulations has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, each House of Parliament, except that regulations under subsection (2) relating to tax or customs matters may not be made unless a draft of the regulations has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, the House of Commons.”

This amendment would make all the commencement regulations subject to parliamentary approval.

Clause 26 stand part.

New clause 6—*Super-affirmative resolution procedure: general provisions*—

“(1) For the purposes of this Act the ‘super-affirmative resolution procedure’ in relation to the making of regulations subject to the super-affirmative resolution procedure is as follows.

(2) The Minister of the Crown must have regard to—

- (a) any representations,
- (b) any resolution of either House of Parliament, and
- (c) any recommendations of a committee of either House of Parliament charged with reporting on the draft regulations, made during the 60-day period with regard to the draft regulations.

(3) If, after the expiry of the 60-day period, the Minister of the Crown wishes to make regulations in the terms of the draft, the Minister of the Crown must lay before each House of Parliament a statement—

- (a) stating whether any representations were made under subsection (2)(a); and
- (b) if any representations were so made, giving details of them.

(4) The Minister of the Crown may after the laying of such a statement make regulations in the terms of the draft if the regulations are approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.

(5) However, a committee of either House charged with reporting on the draft regulations may, at any time after the laying of a statement under subsection (3) and before the draft regulations are approved by that House under subsection (4), recommend under this subsection that no further proceedings be taken in relation to the draft regulations.

(6) Where a recommendation is made by a committee of either House under subsection (5) in relation to draft regulations, no proceedings may be taken in relation to the draft regulations in that House under subsection (4) unless the recommendation is, in the same Session, rejected by resolution of that House.

(7) If, after the expiry of the 60-day period, the Minister of the Crown wishes to make regulations order consisting of a version of the draft regulations with material changes, the Minister of the Crown lay before Parliament—

- (a) revised draft regulations; and
- (b) a statement giving details of—
 - (i) any representations made under subsection (2)(a); and
 - (ii) the revisions proposed.

(8) The Minister of the Crown may after laying revised draft regulations and a statement under subsection (7) make regulations in the terms of the revised draft regulations if the revised draft regulations are approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.

(9) However, a committee of either House charged with reporting on the revised draft regulations may, at any time after the revised draft regulations are laid under subsection (7) and before the revised draft regulations are approved by that House under subsection (8), recommend under this subsection that no further proceedings be taken in relation to the revised draft regulations.

(10) Where a recommendation is made by a committee of either House under subsection (9) in relation to revised draft regulations, no proceedings may be taken in relation to the revised draft regulations in that House under subsection (8) unless the recommendation is, in the same Session, rejected by resolution of that House.

(11) For the purposes of subsections (4) and (8) regulations are made in the terms of draft regulations if the regulations contain no material changes to the provisions of the draft regulations.

(12) In this section the ‘60-day period’ means the period of 60 days beginning with the day on which the draft regulations were laid before Parliament under section 23 of this Act.”

This new clause sets out the bi-cameral super-affirmative procedure regulations under the Act, except in relation to tax and customs matters.

New clause 11—*Consistency with international law*—

“(1) A Minister of the Crown must not make regulations under this Act unless both the conditions in subsections (2) and (5) have been satisfied.

(2) The condition in this subsection is that a Minister of the Crown has laid before both Houses of Parliament a consistency report from a qualified person in relation to the provisions of the Northern Ireland Protocol that are, in consequence of the regulations, to become excluded provision (‘the provisions at issue’).

(3) For the purposes of subsection (2), a ‘consistency report’ is a report as to whether, in the opinion of the qualified person, it is consistent with the international obligations of the United Kingdom for the provisions at issue to become excluded provision, and which—

- (a) sets out the reasons for its conclusions;
- (b) sets out the steps taken by the qualified person to obtain the views of persons appearing to the qualified person to have appropriate expertise in questions of international law; and
- (c) attaches, or contains references to a publicly available version of, all materials considered by the qualified person in the course of preparing the report.

(4) For the purposes of subsection (2) a ‘qualified person’ is a judge or former judge of—

- (a) the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom;
- (b) the Court of Appeal of England and Wales;
- (c) the Inner House of the Court of Session; or
- (d) the Court of Appeal of Northern Ireland.

(5) The condition in this subsection is that—

- (a) the House of Commons has approved a resolution to take note of the consistency report on a motion moved by a Minister of the Crown; and
- (b) a motion for the House of Lords to take note of the consistency report has been tabled in the House of Lords by a Minister of the Crown and—
 - (i) the House of Lords has approved a resolution to take note of the report, or
 - (ii) the House of Lords has not concluded a debate on the motion before the end of the period of five Lords sitting days beginning with the first Lords sitting day after the day on which the House of Commons passes the resolution mentioned in paragraph (a).”

This new clause would prevent any clause of the Bill (or regulations made under it) that create ‘excluded provision’ from coming into force until (a) an authoritative and independent legal expert presents a report to parliament as to whether it is consistent with the international obligations of the United Kingdom, and (b) the House of Commons has passed a motion noting that report, and the House of Lords has debated that report.

New clause 12—*Adjudications of matters pertaining to international law*—

“No later than two weeks after any finding by any international court, tribunal or arbitration panel that any provision of this Act, or any action taken by a Minister in exercise of powers granted by this Act, is inconsistent with the international obligations of the United Kingdom, a Minister of the Crown must—

- (a) report to each House of Parliament setting out the extent to which the relevant court, tribunal or arbitration panel has found that any provision of, or any exercise of power under, this Act is inconsistent with the international legal obligations of the United Kingdom; and
- (b) set out what steps Ministers propose take in order to bring the United Kingdom into compliance with those international obligations.”

This new clause would provide that, if an international court, tribunal or arbitration panel found as a matter of fact that any actions taken by the government under the Bill were inconsistent with the UK’s international legal obligations, the Minister must report this finding to the House, and set out what steps the government will take to ensure the UK is in compliance with its international obligations.

New clause 16—*Impact assessment*—

“Within six months of a Minister of the Crown exercising any power conferred by this Act to make regulations, a Minister of the Crown must publish a full impact assessment of the effect of the regulations on businesses and consumers in Northern Ireland.”

This new clause would require a Minister of the Crown who has exercised any power conferred by this Act to make regulations to publish a full impact assessment of the effect of said regulations on businesses and consumers in Northern Ireland within six months.

New clause 17—*Consent of the Northern Ireland Assembly*—

“(1) A Minister of the Crown may not exercise the powers to make regulations conferred by this Act before a Legislative Consent Motion approving a draft of the regulations has been passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly.

(2) A Minister of the Crown must, at the end of the relevant period, seek a Legislative Consent Motion approving the continued application of regulations made under the powers conferred by this Act.

(3) For the purposes of subsection (2), the ‘relevant period’ is—

- (a) the period ending four years after the powers are exercised; or
- (b) the period ending eight years after the powers are exercised where the original Legislative Consent Motion was approved by—
 - (i) the support of a majority of Members, a majority of designated Nationalists and a majority of Unionists,
 - (ii) the support of 60 per cent of Members, 40 per cent of designated Nationalists and 40 per cent of designated Unionists, or
 - (iii) the support of two thirds of Members.”

This new clause would require a Minister of the Crown to obtain the consent of the Northern Ireland Assembly in order to exercise the power to make regulations conferred by this Act. It would also require a Minister of the Crown to obtain the consent of the Northern Ireland Assembly for the continued application of the said regulations within the relevant period. The relevant period would be four years unless the vote passes with a majority in any of the ways described in Clause 3(b), in which case the relevant period is eight years.

New clause 19—*Expiry*—

“(1) The powers conferred by this Act upon a Minister of the Crown will expire if the Northern Ireland Assembly passes a resolution pursuant to Article 18 of the Northern Ireland Protocol (Democratic Consent in Northern Ireland).

(2) A resolution of the Northern Ireland Assembly under subsection (1) can only pass with one or more of the following measures of representational support—

- (a) the support of a majority of Members, a majority of designated Nationalists and a majority of Unionists,
- (b) the support of 60 per cent of Members, 40 per cent of designated Nationalists and 40 per cent of designated Unionists, or
- (c) the support of two thirds of Members.”

This new clause provides a sunset clause whereby the powers expire if the Northern Ireland Assembly does not vote to approve the continued application of the Northern Protocol in 2024 in the vote required by Article 18 of the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Michael Ellis: Let me, for the last time, thank hon. Members who have spoken in the previous Committee stage debates. I remind hon. Members that, although the Northern Ireland protocol was agreed with the best of intentions, it is causing real problems for people and businesses in Northern Ireland, and this legislation will fix those practical problems.

Let me turn to the clauses under scrutiny this afternoon. Clause 19 gives powers to Ministers to implement a new agreement with the European Union as soon as one can be reached. A negotiated agreement with the EU remains the preferred outcome of this Government and this clause demonstrates that very commitment.

Clause 21 allows for preparatory spending undertaken to support the aims of the Bill to be made proper in the eyes of this place. This ensures that the Government can get on with delivering the new regime as soon as possible for the businesses and people of Northern Ireland.

Clause 22 sets out the general scope and nature of the powers contained in the Bill. This will ensure that the powers have the appropriate scope to implement the aims of the Bill, including setting out that regulations made under the Bill can make any provision that can be made by an Act of Parliament.

Regulations under this Bill may not create or facilitate border arrangements between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, which feature at the border either physical infrastructure, including border posts, or checks and controls that did not exist before exit day. I know that some Members are concerned about the possibility of border checks on the island of Ireland. This is the clearest possible way to show that this Government will not do that.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: Further to that point, will the Minister also assure us that, consistent with clause 1, regulations brought forward as a result of this Bill will not harm the integrity of the United Kingdom and will respect Northern Ireland’s place within the Union?

Michael Ellis: Yes, indeed.

Subsection (6) provides that a Minister can facilitate other powers under this Bill to be exercisable exclusively, concurrently or jointly with devolved Administrations to implement the aims of the Bill, and that is our intention where this is possible and appropriate.

Clause 23 sets out the process and parliamentary procedure for regulations made under the Bill, except for those in relation to tax, or customs, or commencement, which have been dealt with in other clauses by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury. Clause 23 will ensure that the appropriate level of parliamentary scrutiny is in place for the different arrangements that will be necessary for the functioning of the new regime.

[Michael Ellis]

I will now move on to clause 25, which sets out the definition of relevant terms in the Bill, including by cross reference to their definition in other pieces of legislation. This is a normal and regular feature of all legislation. Clause 26 makes a number of final provisions in the Bill relating to extent and commencement, which are a normal part of all legislation. That clause is vital to ensure the smooth commencement of the new regime and to give business certainty.

Moving briefly to amendments 50 and 53 in the name of the hon. Member for Foyle (Colum Eastwood). This would require approval from the Northern Ireland Assembly before the Bill could come into effect, but the Northern Ireland Assembly is not currently sitting and it is precisely because of this breakdown of institutions that we need this Bill, so I ask the hon. Member not to press the amendments.

Amendment 51 is in the name of the hon. Member for Foyle. This would require secondary legislation under the Bill to be presented to the Joint Committee. It is wholly inappropriate, in our view, to give scrutiny of UK domestic legislation to the EU in this way, as it would effectively give it a procedural veto, so I urge the hon. Member not to press that amendment.

Amendment 55 in the name of the hon. Member for Foyle relates to the role of the North-South Ministerial Council. As the hon. Member knows, the North-South Ministerial Council includes Members of the Government of the Republic of Ireland and, as I said yesterday, it would be wholly inappropriate and a wholly inappropriate role for the Irish Government potentially to veto the Acts of a sovereign United Kingdom Parliament. I therefore urge the hon. Member not to press the amendment.

I will consider amendments 19 to 22 and new clause 6 together. They are in the name of the hon. Member for Gordon (Richard Thomson). My right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury covered similar amendments to clause 24 of the Bill during the first day of debate. I reiterate her comments that the normal affirmative and negative procedures for statutory instruments provide effective scrutiny for the House. I therefore urge the hon. Gentleman not to press his amendments.

I will touch on amendments 2 and 47 in a little more detail. They are tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) and seek to require a parliamentary vote prior to the commencement of the substantive provisions of the Bill. As I have outlined to the House, the EU is not prepared to change the protocol to resolve the problems we face, and there is no prospect of seeing a power-sharing Government restored in Northern Ireland if we are unable to tackle those problems. We need to bring in solutions as soon as possible to help the businesses and consumers of Northern Ireland. Additional parliamentary procedures would risk delays to the regime's coming into force and undermine the certainty and clarity that we are looking to provide through this very Bill.

Turning to amendment 47 specifically, it would also set a concerning precedent that, when the legislature has passed legislation, the Executive are not free to bring it into force. That freedom has been a long-standing rule and one that a Government of any party would not

wish to depart from. Furthermore, the amendment deviates from the previous one in that, rather than offering this House a single future debate on the issue at hand, it hands an effective veto on most of the Bill to the other place. I understand that some may find that an attractive outsourcing of opposition and a way around the conventions governing relations between the two Houses. However, the Executive, as my hon. Friend is well aware, is grounded in this honourable House and must be able to commence legislation they have agreed with Parliament. I urge him not to press his amendments.

I come now to amendment 33 and new clause 11, in the name of the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy). He is right to raise the important question of the relationship between this Bill and the United Kingdom's obligations in international law. However, the consistency report that he proposes in his amendment, is unnecessary in our view. The Government have already been clear that the proposals of this Bill are consistent with international law, so I ask him not to press his amendment or the new clause.

I respectfully point out to the hon. Member for North Down (Stephen Farry) regarding his amendments 3 and 4 that, while we need to see the restoration of the institutions as quickly as possible, it is exactly because of the breakdown of those institutions that this Bill was needed in the first place. That is why we cannot have a resolution of the Assembly before it comes into force. His amendments, by contrast, would allow the Northern Ireland Assembly to constrain the UK Parliament's power to legislate, even if that legislation relates to a reserved matter. That cannot be right; it would be wholly inappropriate under the devolution arrangements, and for that reason and the others I have mentioned I respectfully urge the hon. Gentleman not to press his amendments.

Moving on to new clause 12, and coming rapidly to a conclusion, this new clause is not necessary, as we have been clear that proceeding with this Bill is consistent with our obligations in international law and in support of our prior obligations to the Belfast/Good Friday agreement. The Government have published a summary of our legal position alongside the Bill and would robustly defend our position in any relevant legal proceedings, should they occur. I therefore ask the right hon. Member for Tottenham not to press this new clause.

New clause 16, tabled by the hon. Member for Belfast South (Claire Hanna), would require an impact assessment to be published within six months of making regulations. We are currently engaging with businesses on the detail of regulations, but we need flexibility so that any regulations brought forward as the product of that engagement ensure that the new regime is as smooth and operable as possible.

Penultimately, new clause 17, tabled by the hon. Member for Foyle, would allow the Northern Ireland Assembly to constrain the UK Parliament's power to legislate on reserved matters. As I have said before, that is inappropriate under the devolution settlements.

New clause 19, tabled by the hon. Member for Foyle, would remove the powers provided by the Bill in the event of a Northern Ireland Assembly vote for continued application of the protocol. This would freeze in place a muddled set of arrangements in Northern Ireland and remove the ability of the UK Government to manage them, so the new clause should also be withdrawn.

This Bill provides a comprehensive and durable solution to the existing problems with the Northern Ireland protocol. The Government remain open to a negotiated outcome with the EU on the protocol, but the urgency of the situation means that we cannot delay. We must act to preserve political stability in Northern Ireland and fulfil our duty to uphold the Belfast/Good Friday agreement. I therefore recommend that these clauses stand part of the Bill.

5.30 pm

Stephen Doughty: It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Dame Rosie, for the second part of this debate. I will speak to new clause 12 in my name and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends.

In the debate so far, we have focused, rightly, on the Henry VIII powers that the Government seek to gift themselves, but of course the problems with this Bill stretch far beyond the sweeping powers that Ministers are attempting to take. We seem to have forgotten at various points during its passage that this is a Foreign Office Bill because it relates to an international treaty and our international obligations. Indeed, there are many crucial issues at stake in that regard, because, as has been recognised by right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House, the Bill is incompatible with international law. It is not just those who have spoken up in the House who have said that. The Bingham Centre states unequivocally:

“The Bill is in clear breach of international law”

and that the breach is “without legal justification”. It, along with many others, has argued that the Government’s so-called defence of the Bill, grounded in the doctrine of necessity, is completely baseless. As the shadow Foreign Secretary my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) set out in great detail on Second Reading—many more have done so subsequently—each of the elements of the justification for the doctrine of necessity fall flat. This is a difficult situation that we all want to see resolved, but it is not a situation of grave and imminent peril, no more than the doctrine of necessity is an excuse for countries to abandon other responsibilities or dig themselves out of holes.

Similarly, the Government’s proposed actions are not the only way possible to resolve the issue. Although imperfect, there are clear mechanisms within the protocol for resolving disputes, meaning that the passage of this Bill is not the only way to resolve these challenges. Indeed, the Government themselves continue to maintain that they seek a resolution with the EU through negotiating, which is of course what Labour Members would want to see. Therefore, not only is this Bill a clear obstacle to these apparent efforts, but for as long as a solution is even remotely possible through negotiation, breaching the obligations of the protocol cannot be the only way to protect the UK’s interests. We have discussed at great length the fact that trust is at an all-time low with this Government, and this will do nothing to help to rebuild it. Unilateral action will not find us a way forward. Either the Bill is necessary because the Government are certain that negotiations will not lead to any kind of resolution or they still hope for a breakthrough with the EU, rendering the Bill unnecessary under the doctrine.

Given this confusion and the flawed justifications offered, we have tabled new clause 11—although we do not seek a Division at this stage—which would prevent

powers of the Bill from coming into effect until an authoritative and independent expert set out whether it is consistent with international law. The Government keep stating their position, but that is their interpretation. The problem is that we do not trust the Government on this, and neither do many others outside the House, while many have criticised the Bill from an independent perspective, so it is important that we understand all those views. An independent expert could make a determination on the legality of this issue before any clause unilaterally altering the protocol came into effect.

There was a time when having to table an amendment to this effect would have been unthinkable—a time when we would have legitimate political differences here in the Chamber but would never wilfully break with our international obligations as a first recourse. As I said, we do not intend to seek a Division on new clause 11, but I hope the other place will look carefully at the Government’s legal justifications to see whether they stack up. I do not believe they do and neither do many others.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Has the hon. Gentleman or his party ever once lobbied the EU in public or in private to shift its position to accommodate the very reasonable grievances and to deal with its illegalities under the protocol?

Stephen Doughty: I do not agree with the last part of what the right hon. Gentleman said, but actually I sat around the table with EU ambassadors and, indeed, the EU ambassador to the UK to discuss these very issues just weeks ago, so I have sat down in private, and we have said so publicly on a number of occasions. The right hon. Gentleman should be reassured on that point.

It is not just Members on the Opposition Benches who have talked about the incompatibility with international law; Government Members have done so, too. The former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) said:

“My answer to all those who question whether the Bill is legal under international law is that...it is not.”—[*Official Report*, 27 June 2022; Vol. 717, c. 64.]

The Chair of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) said:

“Respect for the rule of law runs deep in our Tory veins, and I find it extraordinary that a Tory Government need to be reminded of that.”—[*Official Report*, 17 May 2022; Vol. 714, c. 550.]

Beyond this House, the Taoiseach has said:

“Unilateral action to set aside a solemn agreement would be deeply damaging”,
and would

“mark a historic low-point signalling a disregard for essential principles of laws which are the foundation of international relations.”

Is that what global Britain has come to mean to this Government?

The Bill must comply with Britain’s international obligations, or we risk a collapse of our global reputation, discord with allies at a time of crisis in Europe and the risk of a raising of trade barriers during a cost of living crisis where billions are already struggling to make ends meet. That is why we want to see new clause 12 put to a separate vote today, because a piece of legislation that runs even the remotest of risks of breaching the UK’s international obligations should never pass this House, but we must be prepared if it does.

[Stephen Doughty]

Under new clause 12, if an international court or tribunal found that actions taken by the Government were inconsistent with the UK's legal obligations, the Government would have to immediately set out to Parliament what steps they would take to rectify the breach. Quite simply, once the Bill is passed, if the Government's actions are found to be unlawful, it is only right that a Minister is brought to the House to explain how that has come to be and what they will do to put it right. The Government should not be afraid of that measure, because if their arguments hold sway, it would not be needed, although many others out there disagree with the position they have taken. There must be a mechanism to ensure that we can urgently restore our compliance and mitigate further damage to our global reputation, if indeed this Bill is found to be unlawful. We should not need to be pushing for this change, but if the Government insist that this is their chosen course, Members are duty-bound to do everything in our power to ensure that the Government do the right thing.

In the TV debates in the latest Tory leadership contest, the Foreign Secretary has been boasting about this legislation as an example of her effectiveness and her ability, but we see it differently. If she were so effective in her role, she would get back around the negotiating table, rather than countenance the UK breaking the international legal framework it should be championing, with huge impacts for Britain's wider reputation and effectiveness. [Interruption.] The Minister, who I have a great deal of respect for, is chuntering from a sedentary position, but the collapse in trust in this Government has been made clear to us. With this zombie Government, it is likely that that trust has fallen to an even lower level.

I will speak briefly to some of the other amendments. I will not rehearse the arguments we have already made about the Henry VIII powers and the related amendments that we discussed in the earlier debate, except to add that many reasonable amendments have been tabled, including amendment 2 by the Chair of the Justice Committee, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill). Taking back control for this Parliament should mean that parliamentary approval is required for operationalising provisions of this Bill.

Equally, we support the principle behind amendment 3 in the name of the hon. Member for North Down (Stephen Farry), which would make the consent of the Northern Ireland Assembly required—we all want to see the Assembly functioning again—and ensure that the views of all communities are heard and considered before unilaterally making changes with wide-ranging implications, as this Bill does. Both those amendments would undo the real power grab by this zombie interim Government, trying to approve large numbers of unaccountable powers in areas of huge sensitivity. It is simply not the way to proceed. I will seek a Division on new clause 12, but we will not press new clause 11 at this stage. I look forward to hearing the contributions of others in this debate.

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Dame Rosie. I am grateful to the Minister for the constructive approach

he has taken, as always, and I am grateful, too, to the Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office, particularly the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns), who is not in his place. He has been very helpful in a number of discussions we have had. I welcome my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to his place for the first time in the Chamber.

The reason behind my two amendments, 2 and 47, was well rehearsed on Second Reading and on the first day in Committee, so I do not seek to repeat that. As the House, and my hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench, know well, I have misgivings about the Bill, as do a number of right hon. and hon. Members, and I cannot say that that has changed. My right hon. and learned Friend says that amendment 47 is unprecedented. With respect, it is unprecedented for regulations to breach international law; that is why I tabled the amendment. However, he and I, and everyone in this House, hope that we will never get to that stage; of course, by far the best outcome would be for negotiated changes to the protocol, which we all want, to be brought into force. Those with whom I have engaged, on both sides of the Irish sea, have good will and are men and women of honour; I hope that that will enable us to find a window for that negotiation, if the Bill passes its stages in this House.

Of course, the Bill would then go to the upper House. As the Bill was not in an election manifesto, that revising Chamber will be entitled to look with considerable care at the issues that I and others have ventilated in these debates. The best outcome would be if that never became necessary, for the reasons that we have all rehearsed.

I have set out the caveats, have said where I hope this matter will go, and have said that it will be troubling if the Bill needs to go through the whole parliamentary process and ever needs to come into force; I hope it is made redundant by a negotiated change. In that spirit, I will not press my amendments to a Division.

Stephen Farry: I will speak to my amendment 3, and some others. The Bill is notionally about the good of Northern Ireland, but we cannot escape the reality: it is not supported by the majority of people or businesses in Northern Ireland, which rather prompts the question: why is the Bill going forward, if it is so unwanted there, and is seen as damaging to the wider community and the economic life of the region?

We could discuss consent to Brexit and the protocol, and how we got here, but I will not give into that temptation. I will focus on consent to where we are on the Bill. Brexit, the protocol and any modifications to it are matters for the UK Government and the European Union to work through in negotiations. Northern Ireland is not directly party to those negotiations. The issue of the consent of Northern Ireland, and specifically the Assembly, is recognised in article 18 of the protocol. I believe that was inserted into the protocol at the insistence of the UK Government, rather than the European Commission, so the Government have recognised the importance of the views of the Assembly.

The Government talk about the importance of Unionist concerns, and of getting some degree of cross-community consent, but the bottom line is that the Government are working towards a minority agenda. It is fine to have a debate about whether the aim should be majority consent

or cross-community consent, particularly in the context of a divided society, but I am not aware of any democratic society in the world where progress is based on the views of a minority.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: Northern Ireland.

Stephen Farry: Well, obviously, that is about to happen in Northern Ireland, if the Bill goes through its stages. We cannot escape the reality that a majority of MLAs have signed a letter making it very clear that they do not support the Bill. I urge all Members of this House, and of the House of Lords, to respect the views of the people of Northern Ireland, who have a direct mandate. Obviously, we have a group of MPs here who represent Northern Ireland, though some of them do not take their seats, which is regrettable. The views of the DUP are not the views of Northern Ireland. Of course, we have to address the views of the DUP, alongside the views of others, in trying to find a way forward, but it is not consistent with democracy to allow that view to dictate what happens to the overwhelming majority of people in Northern Ireland.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): I have listened to the hon. Member outline to the Committee that the majority of people in the Northern Ireland Assembly are against the Bill. We hear him say that he recognises there are issues that need to be resolved, yet he was fully supportive of the Northern Ireland protocol and talked about its full implementation. He was supportive of New Decade, New Approach in 2020, yet he was against the provisions within it on the UK internal market. His party was against the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020, against triggering article 16 when the conditions were met and outlined in the White Paper, and now against this Bill. When are we going to get to the stage where we actually resolve the issues in Northern Ireland?

5.45 pm

Stephen Farry: There is a lot in that intervention. I hope that I can address the hon. Member's points in order. I have been consistent throughout this process in recognising that there is a need for pragmatism, but the bottom line has to be that outcomes are mutually agreed between the UK and the European Union, and they have to be sustainable and legal solutions. I very much supported New Decade, New Approach; I did not support the UK Internal Market Act, because that diverged from that. Of course I want Northern Ireland to have full access to Great Britain and Great Britain to have access to Northern Ireland, and to reduce the impediments as far as possible.

We have discussed at length on many occasions a range of constructive proposals to address the issues, including the red and green channel proposal, which can only be delivered through negotiations, and wider sanitary and phytosanitary measures—preferably a wider UK-EU veterinary agreement—to address movements across the Irish sea. Those are pragmatic solutions that would address the vast bulk of the issues raised by businesses, as opposed to the ideological matters of sovereignty spoken about by people in here or elsewhere in Great Britain; that is an important distinction to make. I regret to say that at various times, such solutions—particularly the veterinary agreement—have been rejected by Unionism, and I confess that I find that bizarre.

There are some genuine concerns about the implications of the Bill. There are major implications for Northern Ireland's economy, particularly for the ability of businesses to access the single market. There are also implications for the UK as a whole. The UK's international image will take an even further hit from breaking international law and undermining the rules-based international order, at a time when that is so important whenever we are facing down Russian aggression against Ukraine, and other countries around the world are potentially breaching international law—I am looking at China in particular, among a number of other situations.

The UK is also risking economic retaliation from the European Union, which I do not want to happen, but is a genuine risk if this legislation passes. At a time of major economic pressure in the UK as a whole, it is bizarre that anyone would seek to make the situation worse through a trade confrontation with the European Union.

It is absurd for people to vote for and proceed with the passage of the Bill—to take all that pain and those consequences—in the name of doing Northern Ireland a favour, when the majority of people and businesses in Northern Ireland do not believe it is a favour; indeed, they believe it is incredibly harmful. The Government have acknowledged that the Sewel convention should apply to this legislation, but also recognise that, unfortunately, in the absence of an Assembly, that becomes moot.

We are in a chicken and egg situation. The Government are saying, “We can't talk about consent of the Assembly in the absence of the DUP,” but want the Bill to get the DUP back into power sharing. Of course, if amendment 3 were accepted, there would be a huge incentive for the DUP to go back into power sharing in order that eventual consent or otherwise could be considered by the Assembly, if warranted. There is a certain inbuilt incentive to put that challenge to return to the DUP.

My amendment would essentially link commencement of the Bill to the democratic vote in the Northern Ireland Assembly. We can discuss whether that should be a majoritarian vote or a cross-community vote in the Assembly, but either would be far better than a situation where we have a minority dictating an outcome. There is, in theory, an article 18 vote scheduled for 2024, and that covers the continued application of articles 5 to 10 of the protocol. That vote will become null and void if the Bill is passed and implemented, and in particular whenever large aspects of article 5 have become excluded provisions. Indeed, the Bill goes even further; it even allows Ministers to do away with article 18 votes on a legal basis, so that the views of the Assembly in 2024 could be absolutely taken away.

The amendment would ensure that the democratic voices of the people of Northern Ireland, as expressed through the Northern Ireland Assembly, were taken into account. If the Bill is genuinely about the good of Northern Ireland, respect will be given to the views of the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 19 accordingly ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 21 to 23 and 25 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 26

EXTENT, COMMENCEMENT AND SHORT TITLE

Amendment proposed: 3, in clause 26, page 15, line 44, at beginning insert “Provided that the Northern Ireland Assembly has first passed a resolution indicating support for this Act,”

This amendment, together with Amendment 4, will make all operational aspects of the Bill dependent upon the approval of the Northern Ireland Assembly.—(Stephen Farry.)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Committee divided: Ayes 194, Noes 275.

Division No. 51]**[5.51****AYES**

Abrahams, Debbie	Elmore, Chris
Ali, Rushanara	Eshalomi, Florence
Ali, Tahir	Esterson, Bill
Amesbury, Mike	Evans, Chris
Ashworth, rh Jonathan	Farry, Stephen
Bardell, Hannah	Fellows, Marion
Barker, Paula	Ferrier, Margaret
Beckett, rh Margaret	Fletcher, Colleen
Benn, rh Hilary	Flynn, Stephen
Betts, Mr Clive	Foord, Richard
Blackford, rh Ian	Foxcroft, Vicky
Blackman, Kirsty	Furniss, Gill
Blake, Olivia	Gardiner, Barry
Blomfield, Paul	Gibson, Patricia
Bonnar, Steven	Glindon, Mary
Brennan, Kevin	Grant, Peter
Brock, Deidre	Green, Kate
Brown, Alan	Green, Sarah
Brown, Ms Lyn	Greenwood, Lilian
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Greenwood, Margaret
Bryant, Chris	Griffith, Dame Nia
Buck, Ms Karen	Hanna, Claire
Burgon, Richard	Hardy, Emma
Byrne, Ian	Harris, Carolyn
Byrne, rh Liam	Hayes, Helen
Cadbury, Ruth	Healey, rh John
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Hendrick, Sir Mark
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Hendry, Drew
Carden, Dan	Hillier, Dame Meg
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Hobhouse, Wera
Chamberlain, Wendy	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Chapman, Douglas	Hollern, Kate
Charalambous, Bambos	Hopkins, Rachel
Cherry, Joanna	Huq, Dr Rupa
Cooper, rh Yvette	Hussain, Imran
Cowan, Ronnie	Jardine, Christine
Coyle, Neil	Jarvis, Dan
Creasy, Stella	Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Cryer, John	Jones, Darren
Cunningham, Alex	Jones, Gerald
Daby, Janet	Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Davey, rh Ed	Jones, Ruth
David, Wayne	Kendall, Liz (<i>Proxy vote cast by Pat McFadden</i>)
Davies, Geraint	Khan, Afzal
Davies-Jones, Alex	Kinnock, Stephen
Day, Martyn	Lake, Ben
Debbonaire, Thangam	Lavery, Ian
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Law, Chris
Dodds, Anneliese	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Doogan, Dave	Lewis, Clive
Doughty, Stephen	Lightwood, Simon
Duffield, Rosie	Linden, David
Eagle, Dame Angela	Lloyd, Tony
Eagle, Maria	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Eastwood, Colum	Lucas, Caroline
Efford, Clive	Lynch, Holly
Elliott, Julie	

Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 Mearns, Ian
 Mishra, Navendu
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Rachel
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt

Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Sobel, Alex
 Stephens, Chris
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Wakeford, Christian
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Jessica Morden and
 Sarah Owen**

NOES

Adams, rh Nigel	Bottomley, Sir Peter
Afolami, Bim	Bowie, Andrew
Afriyie, Adam	Bradley, Ben
Aldous, Peter	Brady, Sir Graham
Anderson, Lee	Braverman, rh Suella
Anderson, Stuart	Brereton, Jack
Andrew, rh Stuart	Bridgen, Andrew
Ansell, Caroline	Bristow, Paul
Argar, Edward	Britcliffe, Sara
Atkins, Victoria	Browne, Anthony
Bacon, Gareth	Bruce, Fiona
Bacon, Mr Richard	Buchan, Felicity
Badenoch, Kemi	Buckland, rh Sir Robert
Bailey, Shaun	Burghart, Alex
Baillie, Siobhan (<i>Proxy vote cast by Scott Mann</i>)	Butler, Rob
Baker, Mr Steve	Campbell, Mr Gregory
Baldwin, Harriett	Carter, Andy
Baynes, Simon	Cartlidge, James
Bell, Aaron	Cash, Sir William
Beresford, Sir Paul	Cates, Miriam
Berry, rh Jake	Caulfield, Maria
Bhatti, Saqib	Churchill, Jo
Blackman, Bob	Clark, rh Greg
Blunt, Crispin	Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Bone, Mr Peter	Clarke-Smith, Brendan
	Clarkson, Chris

Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Docherty, Leo
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, James
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Firth, Anna
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Hall, Luke
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lockhart, Carla
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McVey, rh Esther
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryl
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Nici, Lia

O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Young, Jacob
Tellers for the Noes:
 Suzanne Webb and
 Joy Morrissey

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 26 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New Clause 12

ADJUDICATIONS OF MATTERS PERTAINING TO INTERNATIONAL LAW

“No later than two weeks after any finding by any international court, tribunal or arbitration panel that any provision of this Act, or any action taken by a Minister in exercise of powers granted by this Act, is inconsistent with the international obligations of the United Kingdom, a Minister of the Crown must—

- (a) report to each House of Parliament setting out the extent to which the relevant court, tribunal or arbitration panel has found that any provision of, or any exercise of power under, this Act is inconsistent with the international legal obligations of the United Kingdom; and
- (b) set out what steps Ministers propose take in order to bring the United Kingdom into compliance with those international obligations.”—(*Stephen Doughty.*)

This new clause would provide that, if an international court, tribunal or arbitration panel found as a matter of fact that any actions taken by the government under the Bill were inconsistent with the UK's international legal obligations, the Minister must report this finding to the House, and set out what steps the government will take to ensure the UK is in compliance with its international obligations.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Committee divided: Ayes 192, Noes 273.

Division No. 52]

[6.5 pm

AYES

Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Amesbury, Mike
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Creasy, Stella
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Doughty, Stephen
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foord, Richard
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glindon, Mary
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Kate
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Lake, Ben
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Linden, David
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 Mearns, Ian
 Mishra, Navendu
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex

O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Rachel
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Sobel, Alex
 Stephens, Chris

Streeting, Wes
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Wakeford, Christian
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad

Tellers for the Ayes:

Jessica Morden and
 Sarah Owen

NOES

Burghart, Alex
 Butler, Rob
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carter, Andy
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Docherty, Leo
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan (*Proxy vote
 cast by Scott Mann*)
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert

Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Firth, Anna
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Kate
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Hall, Luke
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus

Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lockhart, Carla
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McVey, rh Esther
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Nici, Lia
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, Chris
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul

Seely, Bob
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Iain
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly

Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Young, Jacob

Tellers for the Noes:

**Suzanne Webb and
 Joy Morrissey**

Question accordingly negated.

The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair.

Bill, not amended, reported.

Third Reading

Queen's consent signified.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I must inform the House that Mr Speaker has not selected the reasoned amendment in the name of Ian Blackford.

6.17 pm

Michael Ellis: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

While the debates in Committee have been heated—literally, given the ambient temperature—the exchanges have been productive. Members heard detailed scrutiny of the Bill and the Government's planned solutions to the problems that the protocol is causing in Northern Ireland. Some Members do not agree with the Government's diagnosis, but it has been reassuring to note how many Opposition Members do agree and accept the problems, even if they do not currently accept that the Government have no choice but to proceed unilaterally. I can understand that, but unfortunately, while our door is always open, there does not appear to be a fruitful negotiation to be had with the European Union at present.

We have not had a Report stage debate, as the Committee did not see fit to amend the Bill. I, and the Government as a whole, see that as a strong vote of support for our proposals, and we hope that those who are eagerly waiting for them to come to pass in Northern Ireland will take heart in the knowledge that they may not have to wait too long, and that the House of Commons has heard them. I hope that the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) and his party will hear that too, and will continue their moves towards returning to power sharing.

[Michael Ellis]

The Bill is a powerful toolkit. I know that there are noble Lords in the other place who might think it too powerful, but the Government have been clear on our policy and the range of detailed regulations that will be required, and these are the tools for the job. The Bill provides certainty that the elements of the protocol that have developed into problems will no longer apply in our domestic law and, alongside that, ensures that the Government can honour their promises to the people of all the communities in Northern Ireland. We will protect that which is working to maintain the economic and social framework for north-south traders and nationalists, and we will fix that which is undermining the lives and livelihoods of east-west traders and Unionists.

This Bill is the Government's top legislative priority. Given the grave situation in Northern Ireland, it must be so. Negotiations will always remain a possibility, and the Bill ensures that implementation of any agreement will not cause further delays. Negotiations tomorrow are always a day away, but it is today in Northern Ireland and the issues are clearly with us now. In the absence of other comprehensive and durable solutions, the Government and Parliament must act. I therefore commend the Bill to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the shadow Minister, Stephen Doughty.

6.21 pm

Stephen Doughty: As if we needed any more evidence that this zombie Government are even now doing everything they can to avoid proper scrutiny, here we are as they push this Bill through its Third Reading with less than 24 hours' notice—[*Interruption.*] We had 24 hours' notice of Third Reading, despite what the Secretary of State is chuntering. If only Conservative Members had had the courage to remove the Prime Minister sooner, Northern Ireland and Britain's international standing could have been spared the fallout that will be inevitable from this legislation. Just now we have heard that there are two candidates vying to take his position who are just as tied up in this mess and in whom trust has fallen to at an all-time low.

This week, Labour Members—indeed, hon. Members on both sides of the House—have tabled amendments to improve the Bill by ensuring that it would comply with our international legal obligations, to prevent a brazen ministerial power grab not just from this House but from the people on Northern Ireland, and to ensure that the changes to the protocol would have the consent of all the communities of Northern Ireland. Conservative Members have voted each one of them down, but not without knowing the facts. They know what this Bill is and what it means—but don't take my word for it. Take it from the right hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman), who called the Bill “unamendably bad”, or from the former Attorney General—

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Stephen Doughty: I will not give way. The hon. Gentleman has not been here throughout the course of the debates on the Bill today.

The former Attorney General, the right hon. and learned Member for Torridge and West Devon (Sir Geoffrey Cox), admitted:

“I do not believe that this legislation will produce a permanent solution”.—[*Official Report*, 13 July 2022; Vol. 718, c. 399.]

Even the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), said that the Bill failed on all three counts of upholding international law, achieving its aims and maintaining our global standing. From these assessments and countless others, it is clear that the Bill does not address the challenges of the protocol.

Only to this outgoing Prime Minister, his zombie team of Ministers and those who have not yet had the courage to disown him completely is the Bill worth defending. Regrettably, it could be said to represent the state of certain parts of the Conservative party today. We can say that because it proposes a complete abdication of responsibility from resolving challenges that the Government themselves have created. We must remember that it was this Prime Minister who negotiated the protocol and ran an election campaign on it, and now it is the Foreign Secretary who, in vying for his job, seeks to advance her own political fortunes by unravelling it. We are truly through the looking glass. Time and again we have seen senior members of the Government attempt to make political gains from what is a very serious and fragile situation. To them, damaging our reputation on the world stage is a second thought and risking trade barriers during a cost of living crisis is a price worth paying—never mind the issues that this Bill could cause for the people of Northern Ireland.

When it comes to the protocol, Labour would not act like this. As the party that negotiated the Belfast/Good Friday agreement, we would do what we have always done: get around the table and negotiate in good faith. We would find workable, practical and sustainable solutions such as a veterinary agreement and a data sharing deal that would eliminate the need for the vast majority of checks. We would negotiate with the EU to seek more flexibility on VAT and use that to take VAT off energy bills to help with the cost of living crisis. We would not breach our international obligations or derail our relationship with European partners while gifting Ministers powers without proper scrutiny, as this outgoing Government seem ready to do.

Before Members are tempted to go there, this is not about trying to relitigate Brexit. We want to see it work, which means leadership and negotiation to defend the UK's interest, to safeguard peace and stability in Northern Ireland and, crucially, to ensure that our word continues to mean something internationally. Trustworthiness and a commitment to the international rule of law are British values, yet those values are impossible to reconcile with this Bill and the Government's agenda in forcing it through.

We know the protocol is not perfect, but we have all known that from the very beginning. The Government, however indignant they may be today, knew we would reach this moment. We have listened to the legitimate concerns expressed by colleagues on both sides of the House and from all communities about the functioning of the protocol and its ability to deliver for Northern Ireland and its people. Those legitimate concerns need to be addressed, and the EU needs to show flexibility and understanding in addressing them. We are under no illusion in that regard, but let us be crystal clear that this

Bill does nothing whatsoever to remedy that. Labour will be voting against this Bill tonight to uphold the rule of international law and to protect our global reputation.

6.26 pm

Sir William Cash: It is a great pity that the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) says I have not participated. I did not participate this afternoon, as the House can well understand, but what difference does it make? I spoke in Committee on previous days, and I spoke on Second Reading. We only have this Bill because of the work done by a number of people to ensure it got its Second Reading. I will leave it at that for the moment.

The hon. Gentleman, in his arguments on international law, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) and the other people whose assertions he quoted, are talking through their hats. The reason I say that is terribly simple: for those who have any knowledge of these matters—*[Interruption.]* Yes, I mean that. For those who understand these matters, this Bill is the only way to address the democratic deficit created by the protocol.

I am the Chairman of the European Scrutiny Committee, and we receive a tsunami of legislation every single week that comes into Northern Ireland as a matter of EU law and binds voters and businesses, whom the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth claims to be trying to protect, without their having any involvement or influence. They have no protection from Westminster, and this Bill is so important because it gives back to the people of Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom, through a sovereign Act of the United Kingdom, the right to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland are listened to and protected.

This democratic deficit—*[Interruption.]* I see that some Opposition Members obviously know nothing about this Bill and its content, or any of the principles of international law that quite clearly—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth is shouting at me across the Chamber, but it makes absolutely no difference whatsoever. He does not know what he is talking about, and some people who have studied this do.

The words on state necessity are “grave and imminent peril”. Nothing could be more perilous to the people of Northern Ireland than to be legislated for in absentia by an unelected Commission making proposals that are agreed in the Council of Ministers, behind closed doors, without so much as a transcript and by a majority of other countries.

Northern Ireland belongs to the United Kingdom, and it belongs to the democratic decision making of its people, just as constituencies such as mine do. I do not have to enlarge upon this but to say that the Bill is essential to protecting Northern Ireland and its constitutional integrity, irrespective of the rantings of those who claim it is a breach of international law when, actually, state necessity does provide an answer and a remedy to the democratic deficit that the hon. Gentleman does not seem to understand and clearly does not care about.

6.29 pm

Richard Thomson: I rise to confirm on Third Reading that the SNP will also oppose this Bill, and to take the opportunity to thank Maria-Clorinda Luck from our

research team and all the House staff for the support they have given us throughout this process. It has been very much appreciated.

Despite our opposition to this Bill throughout, and despite the fact that the protocol was of the Government's own doing, we have always accepted that seeking a renegotiation of its terms was a legitimate aim. So we have tried to stay focused throughout on the content and intent of the Bill, and through doing that I have learned a number of things. Perhaps first and foremost, I have learned that the words “urgent” and “necessity”, at least in the eyes of the Paymaster General, do not mean quite what I previously thought. That was an education.

More importantly, the people of Scotland will have learned something about their own place and standing in the Union. The Paymaster General has more than once in Committee dismissed amendments that would have given the Northern Irish Assembly oversight and democratic control over whether aspects of the Bill would ever be switched on; they have been dismissed on the grounds that there is, clearly, no Assembly sitting. He has, however, also been happy to go past the fact breezily that a Parliament within these islands that is sitting, in Edinburgh, at Holyrood, has declined to give its legislative consent—but still the legislation continues without that consent.

I have tried throughout to empathise with and understand how Unionists in Northern Ireland would feel, and I have said on more than one occasion in this House that I cannot for the life of me understand how any Unionist Government who seek to have that label attached to them could ever have left Northern Ireland in a situation where there was, in effect, a trade border down the Irish sea; it is inconceivable that any competent Government could have done that. However, if this Bill brings some satisfaction to some in Northern Ireland, it throws a few issues for voters in Scotland into very sharp relief. We have found out that the precious Brexit has at all stages throughout this pantomime been much more important than the previous Union. We have found out that we do not exist in anything remotely approaching a partnership of equals. We have also found that we are no longer part of a state that can claim with any shred of credibility to stand up for international law and the rule of law and that can be respected for the stance it takes as part of that rules-based international order.

Sadly, this is not going to be the end of the process, because if the measures in the Bill are used, owing to the Government's inability to negotiate and push at, what is, an open door, we are going to find ourselves, at the height of a cost of living crisis, experiencing even more frictions than we are currently for our manufacturers and our consumers. We will also find this legislation being prayed in aid by despots around the world as they seek to escape their own obligations under international law. What is clearest of all is that the Union in which Scots were invited to vote to remain in 2014—to “lead not leave”, as the slogan had it—has been changed utterly and is now unrecognisable. That, above all, is why we can, we must and we will have a referendum on Scotland's future.

6.33 pm

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: I will be brief. I thank the Minister and his team for the work they have done on this Bill, and I thank other right hon. and hon. Members for the contributions they have made to the Committee stage. The Democratic Unionist party supports this Bill.

[Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson]

We believe that the Government are right to act at this time; that a very real issue needs to be addressed; and that Northern Ireland at the moment is without a fully functioning Government, because the consensus essential for power sharing to operate has broken down, and the reason for that is the protocol—that is acknowledged.

Even those parties that supported the protocol initially recognise that change is required. We have waited and we have been patient. The European Union has refused to change the negotiating mandate of Maroš Šefčovič, which means he is limited in his scope as to what can be negotiated. The solution that is required necessitates the EU changing its negotiating mandate. If it does, let us see where a negotiation—a meaningful negotiation—leads, but I am sceptical that the EU will change its mandate. In the absence of such a change, the Government are right to act, because their first priority is the integrity of the United Kingdom and ensuring that all parts of the United Kingdom can function properly, that the Acts of Union are respected and that article 6 and the rights that flow from it mean that Northern Ireland has the right to trade freely with the rest of the United Kingdom.

This Bill offers a framework to correct the difficulty that we face and to deal with the real problems that the protocol has created not just for business and consumers in Northern Ireland but by undermining the identity of the majority of people in Northern Ireland who want to remain part of the United Kingdom. We have heard a lot in this debate about majorities, but there is no evidence whatever that anything other than the greater number of people in Northern Ireland want to remain part of the United Kingdom. That is their settled will, and it should be respected. The protocol does not respect it, and that is why change is required. This Bill offers the opportunity to deliver that change, and we support it.

In closing, I say this to the Members of the House of Lords, who will consider the Bill in due course. They may be tempted to make radical changes to it, but they need to understand that the choice is not merely one of determining whether the Bill is a good thing or not. The Bill is essential to protect the Belfast or Good Friday agreement, to protect political stability in Northern Ireland, to restore the political institutions in Northern Ireland and to restore the consensus that is at the heart of power sharing. That is the choice, and if they should try to wreck the Bill, they need to understand that, in so doing, they will also destroy the consensus—the basis, the foundations—for the Belfast agreement. That will fall to them. Without that consensus the agreement does not work; that is what we are talking about here—that is the choice for those in the other place. Do they want to protect the Belfast or Good Friday agreement and restore stability in Northern Ireland and the consensus that is required for the agreement to operate, or do they not? I put that choice to them, and I hope they will be wise in the decisions they have to make.

6.37 pm

Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP): I promise to be brief, because we have heard a lot over the last number of days and we have heard a lot repeated as well. The Bill clearly and blatantly breaks international law. It

breaks an agreement that the Government made with the European Union and that was trumpeted to the electorate as a fantastic deal. I think the Bill will end up going the same way as the Prime Minister.

Sir William Cash: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Colum Eastwood: No, I will not.

Sir William Cash: Will the hon. Gentleman be good enough to give way?

Colum Eastwood: I will not. Sit down!

This Bill is a sop to the DUP and a campaigning tool for the Foreign Secretary in the Conservative party leadership election. If it is driven through, the only likely outcome is a trade dispute with the European Union. Well, good luck to the next Prime Minister if they want to go into the general election with prices going even higher than they already are.

I have heard a lot from some interesting people about the Good Friday agreement. I have always supported the Good Friday agreement, and I am delighted that so many people support it now. However, there is a nonsense at the heart of the argument that the Good Friday agreement is based on consensus. It is not; that is not possible. I sat in the Northern Ireland Assembly for almost nine years, and there was very little consensus in that place. Things got gone and things got voted on, but majorities made decisions.

The reality for all those people who say they care about the people of Northern Ireland is that the people of Northern Ireland do not want this Bill. Their elected representatives do not want this Bill. The representatives of the business groups we have been told so much about do not want this Bill. Anybody with any sense knows that this is a blatant breaking of international law.

We have also heard an awful lot about the Union. I think that some people in this place, who have talked a lot about the Union but have acted in a certain way around this Brexit farce since 2016, will come to regret it. There will be statues erected in the new Ireland to Boris Johnson and some of the Members of the DUP, because that is the road that they have taken us down. I fully respect—by the way—the principle of consent, and it was my predecessor who made sure that it was in the Good Friday agreement. The constitutional position of Northern Ireland, whatever anybody says and however much I want to change it, cannot be changed until the people of Northern Ireland and the people of the Republic of Ireland vote to change it. To say anything else is just not true.

I wish to end my remarks with an ask of the DUP. We have been told over the past number of months that the Northern Ireland Assembly cannot meet unless this piece of legislation goes through. Well, this piece of legislation is just about to go through the House of Commons. Will the DUP now take the opportunity to go back into Stormont to live up to their responsibilities as democratically elected leaders in Northern Ireland and do the job that people are crying out for them to do? If they do not do so, the SDLP will put a recall motion into the Northern Ireland Assembly tonight, asking them to come back in to nominate a Speaker and to nominate a Deputy First Minister, who I hope will be the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson).

Despite all the talk about the Good Friday agreement, we have to get back to working together, to working the common ground, to dealing with the issues in our health service, in our economy and in all those issues that people say they care about. We will not be able to do that if we stay out of Government for months upon months upon months, because that is how long it will take for this Bill to get Royal Assent. That is my appeal to the DUP.

I make this appeal to the Government: there is no option to unilaterally rip up an agreement. The only way that we can do these sensitive, difficult things is to sit down with our partners and negotiate. I met Lord Frost many, many times when he was in that position. I did not get the sense that he was a man determined to find accommodation and compromise. Whatever things may look like in September, I appeal to the Government to sit down with the European Union and stop using Northern Ireland as a political football.

6.42 pm

Hilary Benn: There is a problem with the operation of the Northern Ireland protocol and it needs to be sorted out, but this Bill is not the way to do it. Indeed, it will end up making matters worse, because it has damaged trust—the very thing that is required to solve the problem. That is why I will not be voting for the Bill tonight.

6.43 pm

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP): You will be glad to know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I will also keep my remarks very brief.

Tonight, we have reached a milestone and we can say that we are off to a good start in this place. I am pleased that the amendments designed to wreck this Bill have been defeated, safe in knowledge that they were more about grandstanding than actually helping the businesses and constituents who, day in, day out, are affected by the protocol.

The Bill, as it is, certainly does have the potential to restore devolution in Northern Ireland and preserve the constitutional balance. Although the SDLP Members have consistently called for the re-establishment of the Executive, they fail to recognise why that Executive are not sitting—it is the fact that not one Unionist party in Northern Ireland supports the protocol. We are actually elected on that mandate. The SDLP forget and ignore our mandate, which is to ensure that our constitutional place within the United Kingdom is restored and the economic impediments to trade are scrapped.

Throughout the course of the debate, it was and is very clear that there is no alternative to the Bill. This Bill is the only solution, after everything else has been tried, to help restore devolution.

Let us now address the EU and the pipe dream of further negotiations. It is fact that negotiations have been tried and have failed. It is abundantly clear, as per the reports today in *The Daily Telegraph*, that the EU is not in a position to renegotiate a satisfactory outcome. We only have to look at the fact that it is continuing to pursue legal action against the UK for grace periods that virtually everyone in Northern Ireland supports as essential.

As the EU continues to demonstrate a complete indifference to the real challenges in Northern Ireland, it is naive to believe that there is a negotiated solution

that comes close to delivering the objectives of this Bill. A new Prime Minister is not going to change the EU's fundamentally belligerent approach, which in truth is less about protecting the single market and more about punishing the UK and warning other countries not to consider leaving.

Today is an important staging post, but we know there is a long road ahead. I have no doubt that the other place will try to thwart the will of this House—those actually elected to legislate on these matters—but I warn those in the other place that, if they wish to see devolution restored, they will leave well alone.

The Social Democratic and Labour party and the Alliance party parrot the narrative of others who will not even come and sit in this House. They were slow to realise the damage the protocol was doing in Northern Ireland. They eventually caught up and sought mitigations, but they still bury their heads in the sand regarding the consent of the Unionist community in Northern Ireland to the protocol. It is all smoke and mirrors to deflect from the folly of their own position.

The UK as a whole voted on the same ballot that the whole UK should leave, and leave on the same terms. It does not matter who the leader of the Conservative party is; it only matters that they repair the damage that has been done in the form of the protocol and are not bullied by the EU.

Robin Millar (Aberconwy) (Con): The hon. Lady makes an important point about the leadership of the Conservative party. As one of many on the Conservative side of the House who pushed for this Bill, I think it is important that the House understand that the two candidates who go forward for the leadership have also given strong undertakings on the importance of Northern Ireland within the UK and the importance of the protocol. I hope she can take that as reassurance.

Carla Lockhart: I agree wholeheartedly with the hon. Member. We welcome those comments, but we hope and trust that the incoming Prime Minister will not be bullied by the EU, but will bring Northern Ireland with them, restore its place in the UK's internal market and allow it to trade on the same terms as the rest of the United Kingdom.

Sir William Cash: A number of assertions have been made during the course of this debate about the breaking of the international rule of law and the rest of it. Has the hon. Lady heard of the House of Commons Library paper that clearly indicates that de Valera himself broke the Anglo-Irish treaty in 1938? Not only that, but A. J. P. Taylor, in his extremely erudite book, also says that the treaty was ripped up by de Valera in 1938.

Carla Lockhart: I thank the hon. Member for that wonderful point. I genuinely thank every hon. Member who has put their trust in this Bill and supported it; the hon. Member for Aberconwy (Robin Millar) has been a real friend to Northern Ireland. We will be supporting the Bill tonight.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The House divided: Ayes 267, Noes 195.

Division No. 53]

[6.48 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan (*Proxy vote
cast by Scott Mann*)
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Browne, Anthony
Buchan, Felicity
Burghart, Alex
Butler, Rob
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Docherty, Leo
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.

Double, Steve
Dowden, rh Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Firth, Anna
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Griffiths, Kate
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Hall, Luke
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Hinds, rh Damian
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John
Howell, Paul
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hunt, Jane

Jack, rh Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenkyns, Andrea
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kruger, Danny
Lamont, John
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lockhart, Carla
Logan, Mark
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McVey, rh Esther
Merriman, Huw
Metcalf, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Milling, rh Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Nici, Lia
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, Chris
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Pursglove, Tom
Quince, Will

Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Simmonds, David
Skidmore, rh Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, rh Mark
Stafford, Alexander
Stevenson, Jane
Stewart, Iain
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, rh Rishi
Swaine, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
Trott, Laura
Vara, rh Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Mr Robin
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Young, Jacob

Tellers for the Ayes:
Suzanne Webb and
Joy Morrissey

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie

Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir

Amesbury, Mike
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Chapman, Douglas
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Creasy, Stella
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 Debonnaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Doughty, Stephen
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foord, Richard
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glindon, Mary
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Kate
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Hamilton, Fabian

Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Kane, Mike
 Kendall, Liz (*Proxy vote cast by Pat McFadden*)
 Khan, Afzal
 Lake, Ben
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 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
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 Mearns, Ian
 Mishra, Navendu
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Pollard, Luke

Powell, Lucy
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Rachel
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Sobel, Alex
 Stephens, Chris
 Streeting, Wes
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison

Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Wakeford, Christian
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad

Tellers for the Noes:

**Jessica Morden and
 Sarah Owen**

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time and passed.

DEFERRED DIVISIONS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 41A(3)),

That, at this day's sitting, Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply to the Motions:

(a) in the name of Lucy Frazer relating to Neonatal Care (Leave and Pay) Bill: Money;

(b) in the name of Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng relating to the draft Register of Overseas Entities (Delivery, Protection and Trust Services) Regulations 2022; and

(c) in the name of Secretary Dominic Raab relating to the Remote Observation and Recording (Courts and Tribunals) Regulations 2022 (SI, 2022, No. 705).—(*Craig Whittaker.*)

Question agreed to.

NEONATAL CARE (LEAVE AND PAY) BILL (MONEY)

Queen's recommendation signified.

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Neonatal Care (Leave and Pay) Bill, it is expedient to authorise:

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenditure incurred under or by virtue of the Act by the Treasury; and

(2) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—(*Craig Whittaker.*)

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):
 With the leave of the House, we shall take motions 5 and 6 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

COMPANIES

That the draft Register of Overseas Entities (Delivery, Protection and Trust Services) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 22 June, be approved.

CIVIL PROCEEDINGS

That the Remote Observation and Recording (Courts and Tribunals) Regulations 2022 (S.I., 2022, No. 705), a copy of which was laid before this House on 27 June, be approved.—(*Craig Whittaker.*)

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Conviction of Yasin Malik

7.2 pm

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I rise to present this petition concerning the unfair trial of Yasin Malik, and his consequent unsafe conviction, on behalf of nearly 4,500 constituents and residents across the UK. The petitioners

“request that the House of Commons urge the Government to raise Yasin Malik’s unfair trial with the Indian Government, call for immediate medical aid for Mr Malik and his removal from solitary confinement, and request that the Indian Government release Mr Malik on bail, pending a new trial.”

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The Petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the trial of Yasin Malik contravenes article 10 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights regarding his receiving a fair trial and India’s own constitution; notes that Mr Malik was arrested and taken to Jammu Jail in 2019 shortly after the Indian Government banned the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, then transferred to Tihar Jail on the outskirts of Delhi on 7 May 2019, where he was kept in inhumane conditions; further that he was arrested on a contrived offence by the Indian Government under the Public Safety Act (PSA) and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA); further that the PSA and UAPA have been condemned by the United Nations as contravening human rights law, the Geneva Convention and the Constitution of India 1950; declares that the Indian government is failing to observe 1948 United Nations Resolution 47 which states: “The Government of India should themselves and through the Government of the State declare and make known that all subjects of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, regardless of creed, caste or party, will be safe and free in expressing their views and in voting on the question of the accession of the State and that there will be freedom of the press, speech and assembly and freedom of travel in the State, including freedom of lawful entry and exit”; further that India is still using colonial detention laws from 1860 especially the Law of Sedition under Penal codes 121 & 124, which

was abolished in the UK in 1967; and further that there are concerns about the independence of the Special Additional Sessions Court in relation to the National Investigation Agency.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to raise Yasin Malik’s unfair trial with the Indian Government, call for immediate medical aid for Mr Malik and his removal from solitary confinement, and request that the Indian Government release Mr Malik on bail, pending a new trial.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002758]

Liberty Pressing Solutions

7.3 pm

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): I rise to present a petition on behalf of Coventry South residents about Liberty Pressing Solutions, a manufacturing firm in Coventry with a skilled workforce who have recently been handed redundancy notices. The petition notes that this has happened

“during the cost-of-living crisis and will have a devastating impact on workers and their families”.

It notes the “woefully inadequate” redundancy offer. It declares that the owner, the Liberty Steel Group,

“has not done enough to protect jobs, prioritising profits over people.”

The petitioners therefore urge the House of Commons “to do more to support skilled manufacturing jobs like those at Liberty Pressing Solutions, including through encouraging Liberty Steel Group to redouble efforts to find a buyer and, failing that, encouraging an improved redundancy offer to Liberty Pressing Solutions workers.”

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The Petition of residents of the constituency of Coventry South,

Notes that redundancy notices have been handed out to workers at Liberty Pressing Solutions in Coventry; further that this is happening during the cost-of-living crisis and will have a devastating impact on workers and their families; further that the redundancy offer made to workers is woefully inadequate; and further that Sanjeev Gupta, the owner of the Liberty Steel Group, has not done enough to protect jobs, prioritising profits over people.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to do more to support skilled manufacturing jobs like those at Liberty Pressing Solutions, including through encouraging Liberty Steel Group to redouble efforts to find a buyer and, failing that, encouraging an improved redundancy offer to Liberty Pressing Solutions workers.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002760]

Rural Communities: Housing and Planning

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Craig Whittaker.)

7.4 pm

Ben Everitt (Milton Keynes North) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for granting this Adjournment debate on such an important topic—one that is close to my heart and to many of my constituents' hearts.

I want to get straight to the point: community-led planning needs to be right at the core of the levelling-up agenda. When we empower local communities by involving them in planning, better results are achieved for everyone. That is especially important in rural areas, where a balance must be struck between building more houses and protecting our countryside. I know that my constituents in Milton Keynes North feel the effects when the process goes wrong. It is not hard; it just requires thought, ambition and vision.

Milton Keynes is proud to be a new city—so new, we are still building it! It worked because it was planned: a bold vision from the 1960s, with grid roads, planned infrastructure and green spaces. Urbanism, modernism and functionalism blended with nature and created strong thriving communities. We all love planning when it is done right, but reckless over-expansion in rural areas is a real and pressing danger. My constituents who live in rural communities and market towns such as Olney and Newport Pagnell, do not want, and do not deserve, to be swamped by poorly planned, sprawling housing developments. We need to make planning work better for people and their communities. We need to get back to pure principles, just as the visionaries who built Milton Keynes did.

This is not a case for nimbyism. Of course, rural communities face their own distinct housing challenges, and we must cater for them. The issues include an ageing population and higher house prices due to second home ownership. Although there is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all approach, we must take heed of the issues and adapt planning policy to help, rather than hinder, rural areas.

I am clear that housing must be sustainable, appropriate, affordable and proportionate. It is on those four pillars that I make my case to the Minister. What is a sustainable approach to housing? How can it be achieved? When I talk about sustainability, I mean two equally important things: first, community involvement, because a development without a community at its heart is, by very definition, unsustainable; secondly, protecting the environment. Those two factors, successfully combined, are a sure-fire way of achieving sustainability.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The hon. Gentleman certainly has a reputation for looking after his constituents and I commend him for bringing the issue to the House; well done. Before the debate, I spoke to him about the natural environment. Does he agree that the current planning regime, which involves costly applications for farm buildings, needs to be overhauled to ensure that farmers are not paying to carry out work that is essential to their business and will ultimately be approved as a matter of course, and that more support could be given to the isolated rural communities to which he is referring to enhance the community while at the same time protecting the natural environment?

Ben Everitt: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct. Of course more can be done. Too often, rural communities and farmers feel that the planning system is stacked against them and that they have to jump through so many hoops—often, as he mentions, at great expense—to continue doing the job they have done for thousands of years. Farmers are the custodians of our countryside and the people who look after our food production, but the planning system in its current form does not support some of the things they need to be able to do to adapt to the modern world. We need a sustainable approach, which includes nature, as the hon. Gentleman says, and productive farmland.

A sustainable approach to planning is akin to growing a family. Rural villages and towns should expand just as a family expands: slowly, carefully and at a sustainable rate. In fact, we often forget that at the heart of planning are people, their loved ones and of course, as the hon. Gentleman mentioned, their livelihoods. However, as of now, the current planning system favours larger-scale developments, which are often unfit and unsustainable in rural villages.

Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. He is outlining some problems in Milton Keynes that we are experiencing in Eastleigh. He knows that the Liberal Democrat council in Eastleigh are proposing a new town in Fair Oak of 2,500 homes, which is in their budgets going forward and being built by them. While I do not think that is a problem, we are seeing a lack of democratic accountability when it comes to the composition of the council. He knows that I brought forward a ten-minute rule motion several months ago about independent oversight on these planning issues. Does he agree with me, and can he outline how he sees democratic oversight going forward in the planning system, which needs desperate reform?

Ben Everitt: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I totally agree; in fact, I was happy to co-sponsor his ten-minute rule Bill, so I am very familiar with the situation. I found it frustrating and amusing in equal measure that in a recent by-election in Chesham and Amersham, the Liberal Democrats campaigned against development, and yet in Eastleigh, as we have seen, they are acting as both a mega-developer and the planning authority. This is the point at which democratic oversight has clearly failed, because there is no superior power. The council is both the developer and the planner. So we need to get local leadership into the planning system that fits with the local vision, but ultimately loops round to engagement with local communities so that people can have their say in what they want, and not experience the like of the situation that my hon. Friend has described, where they feel like they are being built around and villages become suburbanised as part of sprawling developments.

I have long believed that town planning should strengthen family bonds. We need sustainable planning policies that keep families together, so children can live near their parents, and grandparents can live near their children—think of the childcare benefits. Ultimately, that is better for society and better for our local economies, and would demonstrate genuine learning from the pandemic.

Sustainable planning is also about understanding the people who live in rural communities, their needs and their livelihoods, and how those differ from those of

[Ben Everitt]

more built-up urban environments. Sustainable planning keeps communities together, rather than pulling them apart.

Not only do we need to make housing and planning more sustainable, but it needs to be appropriate. In my experience both as a councillor and now as a Member of Parliament, the worst way to do developments is to put up huge sites that swamp villages and suburbanise market towns. Why? Because it is bad for nature and biodiversity, worse for farmland and food production, and worse still for rural communities. Small and medium enterprise builders tend to come off badly as well, getting locked out of the market, which reduces competition. As a Conservative, this contradicts the political values that I stand for. And this simply cannot continue.

The data backs that up. Rural areas are 18% less productive than the national average. But where there is a large gap, there is opportunity. If we can make a concerted effort to close that gap with appropriate growth, it could add £43 billion to the national economy alone.

When we talk about levelling up, we often talk about increasing economic growth in ways that we have not yet imagined. But one area that we know would promote that is the link between good planning and economic growth in rural areas. Planning policy is a multiplier. It influences housing allocation, socioeconomic conditions and the wider environment. If we view planning as just being about houses and physical infrastructure, we ignore those wider impacts and the potential for structural policy change.

If we can truly realise the appropriate planning policies that we need, we can start to build sensitive yet beautiful smaller housing for young people, their families, and older people. That not only supports housing targets with appropriate housing, but could also free up the logjam within the existing housing stock.

However, appropriate housing planning is conditional to affordability. Affordability in rural communities is of critical importance. Data from 2019 shows that only 9% of rural homes were affordable, compared with 19% of homes in urban areas. Lack of affordable homes in rural communities is a huge problem, as young people and young families find it harder to get on the housing ladder. I am very clear that the Government must commit to a single definition for affordable housing. That way, we can start building homes that are genuinely affordable in the areas where they need to be built. Without that, young people and young families will continue to be locked out of the housing market. The lack of affordable housing is as much to do with land supply, material availability and labour supply as it is to do with the type of housing that gets built. Those issues also need to be tackled.

On a positive note, affordable homes can unlock underutilised economic potential in rural areas. I know how crucial that could be for many other Members whose constituencies are also home to rural communities. For every 10 affordable homes built, research shows that the economy can be boosted by £1.4 million, creating 26 jobs and generating a quarter of a million pounds in Government revenue. It does not take a maths degree to know what happens if we can implement this strategy at scale. That is why I keep banging on about this. If we set

manageable localised targets and work co-operatively with town planners and developers, we can turn up the gears on economic growth, while providing a future for the younger generations in areas where we previously thought it might be difficult to do so. I am optimistic that we can achieve that.

The fourth and final pillar is a proportionate approach. We all know that Rome was not built in a day—and, of course, neither was Milton Keynes. Now a city, it is 55 years old. It has taken 55 years to get to where we are and we are still building it. Up to this point, it has taken considered, careful planning, because—this is really important—communities do not grow overnight. Communities are nurtured. Taking a proportionate approach means scaling housing developments to the areas they are built for. For rural areas, it is much more efficient to have smaller scale development, where as few as 10 homes or a similar sized development in each village would solve the existing rural housing crisis.

By taking a proportionate approach, the identities of market towns and villages can be protected, while ensuring there are enough homes for everyone, including young families. Gentle, beautiful density can work in villages as much as towns, so long as we build the right kind of houses in the right place, at the right time and at the right rate. We all know that more houses are needed, but a tailored approach must be taken in rural areas. It should not be as hard as we are making it for ourselves.

What is abundantly clear is that our planning system also requires radical reform. While not a technical term in the world of planning, we need to make the planning profession sexy again. We can achieve that by implementing a series of changes and innovations to level up planning in the UK. First, we need to modernise the planning system and existing methods of construction. In practice, that means we need to be more digital, more codified and more transparent. Bringing the planning system into the 21st century should be a priority in any successful levelling up agenda. Let us be honest: a digitised planning system would represent a more desirable industry for young, talented people to begin their careers. The benefits would be twofold: far more efficient planning and a higher influx of talent into the sector.

Backing that up, we need to invest in degree apprenticeships for planning. We need to work with degree apprenticeships providers to build up to date curriculums that reflect a modern approach to planning. If we can get more people into those types of programmes, we can put the brakes on the brain drain in the private sector. We can also make structural changes to attract more talent into the sector. Local authorities need to be supported in providing appropriate resources to planning departments.

Better resource allocation equals more efficient planning departments, which in turn will make planning more desirable. Even smaller changes, such as making the role of a senior planner akin to that of a deputy chief executive, could change that narrative. Levelling up our planning system will be for nothing if we do not stop the brain drain, so I am strongly in favour of an integrated approach. With the modern reforms I have mentioned, I truly believe we can build beautiful houses that are not just identikit cut-and-paste estates. This is about taking pride in planning again and taking pride in the homes that we build.

But I want to offer a word of caution: while we rightly move at speed to achieve these changes, we must rely on local leadership within the levelling-up agenda. We know that there is an important cycle in levelling up: education, skills, jobs, inward investment, business growth and infrastructure growth all lead to local economic growth and more jobs, and we do not even know yet the skills needed for those jobs, so that loops back into education. Some or all of these themes could require some form of Government intervention at some point, depending on the local circumstances. That means local leadership is key, as is remembering that levelling up is about opportunities and that people and their homes and communities are at the heart of this cycle.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill will be vital in catalysing this cycle, but, first, housing development planning must change, and fast. It is the hardest, most expensive, most time-consuming bit to do, but it is the most important. When we do not focus on sustainable, affordable, appropriate and proportionate housing, the results are detrimental to many and the environment.

I have seen this in my own constituency, where the MK East development encapsulates what can go wrong. This development does not respect the character of local villages—a factor I know my constituents care deeply about. Secondly, it takes farmland out of production during a time when the world is facing a food crisis, when instead we need all our farms to be at full pelt. How can this be considered sustainable, appropriate, affordable and proportionate?

When local leadership lacks clear policy direction, it fails, and we end up with poor planning. I argue that local leadership needs to be informed of new policy and, critically, the four pillars that I have put forward today. Of course, there are reasons to be positive and I welcome the recent White Paper on the private rented sector. However, there is always more to do if we are to truly look forward to levelling up housing quality across the country.

Whether as MP for Milton Keynes North or through my role as chair of the all-party group on housing market and housing delivery, I will continue to bang the drum on this issue. We must integrate planning with the needs of rural communities and the villages and towns within which they live, making housing more sustainable, appropriate, affordable and proportionate. Only then will we be able to protect our bustling high streets and thriving local businesses, which provide so much of our great country's unique and enduring character.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call Minister Marcus Jones.

7.22 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Mr Marcus Jones): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker; it is a pleasure to serve at the Dispatch Box with you in the Chair. It is four and a half years since I last had the pleasure of speaking from the Dispatch Box and two weeks ago I did not expect to be standing here tonight, but in my 12 years in this House I have learned to expect the unexpected.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Ben Everitt) on securing this important debate and his thoughtful and impressive speech; he is a

passionate champion for his constituency and I listened intently to his remarks. While this debate may specifically apply to his constituency in Milton Keynes, it touches on issues that matter to people in every constituency in the country: how we empower communities to be more strongly involved in the planning process; how we deliver the housing needed in our communities; how our planning regime properly reflects the true interests of our constituents; and how we protect rural areas that give our great nation its reputation for outstanding beauty.

I applaud my hon. Friend for his clear commitment to this issue, and I and the Government share his sentiments. We share his determination to strengthen and protect rural communities and reinforce the bonds that tie them together, and we share the view that our planning rules and regulations must help facilitate that ambition, not hinder it. My hon. Friend has become a well-established Member of the House and, as I am sure he will understand, I cannot comment on the specifics of the Milton Keynes local plan, owing to the Secretary of State's quasi-judicial role in our planning system. It is good to see the Secretary of State sitting here on the Front Bench tonight; that shows his commitment to the subject. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North will appreciate that, again, I cannot talk too closely to individual planning applications. As he will know, however, local authorities are required to undertake a formal period of public consultation prior to any planning applications. Where relevant concerns are raised, those must be taken into account.

My hon. Friend will know that I can speak to our unwavering commitment to Britain's rural communities and to keeping this country green and beautiful, as well as what we are doing to protect those areas while encouraging development in the places where it is most needed. Importantly, I can speak to our priorities and what we as a Government expect from local plans.

My hon. Friend rightly champions the vital role that communities should play in the planning process and makes the case for why they should be more involved in the process of bringing forward new development. The Government agree. As part of our levelling-up agenda, we believe that communities need to be at the heart of the planning process.

Paul Holmes: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Jones: I will make a little more progress and, if I have time at the end, I will give way.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): The Minister has not been given a lot of time to respond.

Mr Jones: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. A core part of our levelling-up White Paper was how we make sure that, alongside globally competitive cities that are dotted around the country, we have thriving rural communities. Our view is that levelling up for rural areas should preserve what gives those areas an identity and what makes them special—the things that draw in millions of tourists to many of our rural areas because they are the most beautiful parts of our country. As a Government, we recognise that the needs of rural areas and the needs of urban areas are often profoundly different.

[Mr Marcus Jones]

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, which is weaving its way through Parliament, will deliver a planning system that puts further power back into the hands of communities. My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North has spoken about the need for a less adversarial system of planning rules and the need to get communities involved at a much earlier stage in decisions. That makes me think that he must have had some role in drafting the Bill, because that is exactly what we have set out to do.

The Bill will place a duty on local authorities to engage with their communities on proposed plans and reform the process for producing plans, so that it is simpler, faster and easier for communities to engage with. The days of residents ploughing through dozens of PDF files set out in a confusing manner should be over. This will be a clear opportunity for local people to get involved at a key stage in the planning process, with longer minimum periods for engagement than there are now. That will be made easier by plans being shorter, with more accessible documents. At the same time, we will increase the opportunities for involvement to ensure that development is brought forward in a way that works best for local people.

The Bill includes measures to improve our planning system and to bring it into the 21st century by digitising it in a way that helps to radically improve people's access to the relevant information about plans and planning applications, while removing barriers to engagement by creating a more democratic planning system with planning decisions and local plans being informed by a larger and more diverse range of community views. Our new measures will also give neighbourhoods greater say in how their area looks and feels. In practice, that means that they can help define things such as design codes so that they can shape how their area looks. That kind of transparency will make the process smoother for all parties, while putting more power back where it belongs—in communities' hands.

I will also cover what we expect from local plans. At the most basic level, local plans are responsible for identifying what development is needed in an area, setting out where it should go and, in doing so, providing certainty for communities, businesses and developers. Any local plan has to pass through a series of checks and balances, including a public consultation and public examination in front of an independent inspector, who is charged with examining plans impartially to make sure that they are legally compliant and sound. Councils can adopt a plan only if it is sound: it should be consistent with national policy, be supported by evidence and, importantly, take the views of local people into account.

I will not comment on the content of the local plan in Milton Keynes that covers my hon. Friend's constituency, but I know that it was adopted in 2019, so it is less than

five years old. An up-to-date plan is crucial, because it reduces speculative development, supports our villages and towns to develop, and can be written in a way that preserves the unique character of their communities. We would expect local planning decisions in Milton Keynes to be made in a way that is consistent with the local plan and that honours the agreement made between the local council and the local community when the plan was formed.

One area in which rural communities have much in common with urban communities is that they all want more affordable housing. As my hon. Friend points out, house prices have continued to defy gravity for years and years, which has had a profound impact on many people who want to become homeowners but have been priced out of the majority of homes in their area. I agree with my hon. Friend that affordable homes are key to ending the housing crisis. Local communities like those of his constituents in Milton Keynes rightly want and expect the Government and local authorities to deliver the kind of homes that help their children and give young people and older people who have always lived in an area the chance to buy their own home.

If we are serious about levelling up and restoring people's pride in their communities, we have to match our commitment with affordable homes that give local people the opportunity to stay local. We need to rectify the situation, and we have a plan to do so. Our landmark affordable homes programme is one of the central ways in which we are making that happen. Between 2010 and 2021, the scheme has delivered more than 212,000 affordable homes in rural local authority areas. It recognises the needs of rural communities, which is why between April 2015 and March 2021, 10% of all new affordable homes were built in villages with a population under 3,000. The value of those homes goes way beyond mere statistics: each one has the potential to transform the life of hard-working families in an area.

The Government share my hon. Friend's determination to protect rural communities and strengthen the fabric that holds them together. Once again, I thank him for securing this debate; with so much focus on other events, it is important that in this House we keep discussing and debating the issues that make a real difference to people's lives. I can only apologise that I could not get into the specifics of some of the constituency matters that he has mentioned. As he knows, we have further to go on the issue and we need to get the balance right between protecting green land and ensuring the homes that the country needs for the future. I look forward to continued dialogue with my hon. Friend, who is a champion for his local area, as the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill goes through the House. I very much welcome his engagement tonight.

Question put and agreed to.

7.33 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 20 July 2022

[DAME ANGELA EAGLE *in the Chair*]

War in Ukraine: UK Farming and Food Production

9.30 am

Dame Angela Eagle (in the Chair): While the heat remains at this level, although in this room it is perfectly nice and a bit more survivable outside, I am content for Members not to wear jackets or ties in Westminster Hall. Those Members who have ties on might get to be even less formal, but apparently, there will be a lot more application of the dress code when we get back in September, both in the Chamber and here.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the effect of the war in Ukraine on UK farming and food production.

It is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair, Dame Angela, and thank you for your kind guidance on the dress code. I will make do at the moment, but we will see how we go when the heat of debate ratchets up.

For me, the debate had its genesis in discussions with many of the farmers in my constituency, and I start by paying tribute to them for their help with my preparations for today, and also to the National Farmers Union, which has given me so much information. The war, which in many respects came out of nowhere, has piled additional pressures on a sector that was already facing great difficulties. At the outset, however, I want us to turn our thoughts to the brave defenders of their Ukrainian homeland and the colossal humanitarian disaster that they face in Ukraine. I am afraid to say that we now also need to remember the countless victims, it would seem, of war crimes, the evidence for which mounts daily.

The invasion exacerbated existing inflationary and supply chain pressures, which will have lasting consequences for the scale of UK agricultural production. Globally, the conflict will exacerbate the pressure on food supplies in the poorest parts of the world. British farmers are growers, and they are price takers. That means they are exposed and vulnerable to the challenges of rising inflation in times of economic pressure. The cost of producing food in the UK has increased drastically in recent months. The cost of all agricultural inputs is going up, including fuel, feed, packaging, transport, energy and, of course, labour costs.

I pay tribute to all those who work in farming and food production. It is a tough sector to work in, and for people in such vital sectors, conditions have rarely been tougher. Costs are spiralling and profit margins are falling, but they keep going every day. The farmers from Cheshire I spoke to were absolutely clear that they love what they do, and they keep going because agriculture sits at the heart of the Cheshire economy and at the heart of the British economy. They do that to keep the

country fed, and if we do not give them help—the help that they need—they will not be able to do it for much longer.

The humanitarian disaster in Ukraine is being felt across the globe. Large parts of the Ukrainian breadbasket are in conflict zones and crops cannot be harvested, or if they can, the grain and the produce cannot be exported, or, as we are seeing, they are being stolen by Russia.

We are seeing the crisis impacting across the world, especially in developing countries. Ukrainian grain feeds 400 million people. The UK is also affected. Brexit has not helped, with large reductions in the labour supply, but I was astonished to hear that last year an incredible 60% of the seasonal agricultural workforce came from Ukraine.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): I thank the hon. Member for making that point. Ukrainians did indeed make up 67% of seasonal workers between 2020 and 2022—a huge contribution to the British farming sector. With more men staying in Ukraine to fight the war, does he share my concerns about the knock-on effect that that will have on UK food production?

Christian Matheson: I absolutely do, and the hon. Lady is right. Many of those workers are back defending their homeland—who can blame them for that? The resultant labour shortages have been met with an inevitable demand for increased wages. One Cheshire farmer told me of an 11% increase in this year alone. Without sufficient labour, farms simply cannot be profitable and, frankly, sometimes cannot work. As one farmer put it, “We’re all running hand to mouth.”

I am not going to query or reject the idea that farm labourers should not get a decent pay rise. I am a trade unionist and I absolutely support that, but the costs need to be shared fairly across the sector and borne by the whole chain. Day-to-day costs are rocketing. Fertiliser, which can increase crop yield by about 30%, has become crippling expensive. One Cheshire farmer estimated to me that his fertiliser costs had risen by 300% in just over a year, while another suggested that he was being optimistic and it was more than that.

The situation has not been helped by the closure of the CF Fertilisers factory in Ellesmere Port. I know how hard my neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) has been working to find a solution to keep the factory open, and he has told me that he is in regular contact with the Minister and her Department—I thank her for that. I desperately hope that we get a solution to the problem, and I thank them both for their work.

Without fertiliser, crop yields will fall. I remind the House that farmers do not tend to buy fertiliser on the spot. They are already ordering their supplies for next year, just as they are already planning crops, ordering animal feed and securing energy deals for six, 12 and 18 months ahead. The uncertainty globally and domestically is impossible to live with.

One of the big asks of the NFU is to have a gas fertiliser price index. Fertiliser markets are opaque, meaning that farmers have low trust in those markets, and are receiving poor market signals to enable them to be responsive. That is a threat to confidence, because farmers do not want to invest in fertiliser, which is

[*Christian Matheson*]

stalling fertiliser sales, as well as threatening farmers' productivity and the UK's productive capacity. The NFU wants farmers to have access to proactive forward prices on fertiliser, allowing producers, distributors and farmers alike to manage their risk. That will require Government to establish a trusted gas fertiliser index with the industry, to drive transparency in fertiliser markets.

In addition, the industry needs to be able to see clearly where the market is relative to the global benchmark prices. That is well established in the grain, dairy and meat markets. It is also a fact that much of the gas that was used to produce the fertiliser came from Russia. I welcome the fact that we are reducing—I hope to zero—any dealings that we have with Russia, including buying gas from it, but we have to recognise that that will have a major impact on this market.

Fuel costs are also on the rise. Red diesel is more expensive, with one farming contractor I know of having to increase their cash reserve by an astonishing £50,000 to pay for fuel costs. Meanwhile, farmers pay more than ever to fill up the machines that keep their businesses going. Those affected ask me why crude oil prices fall, but their costs go up. The answer is sadly clear: this is a broken market, and without action to address it, things will only go downhill.

Food production relies very much on the packaging available, much of it specialised for certain foodstuffs. Even essentials such as cardboard and the necessary plastics for meat storage are in short supply, before we consider more specialised materials such as silage. British food has some of the lowest carbon footprint in the world, due to how efficient British farmers are, but there is only so much they can do on their own. Such businesses are starting to feel that they are, almost literally, at the bottom of the food chain.

As things stand, the risk is entirely with the farmer. For example, a potato farmer stored his crop from the 2021 harvest until June 2022—just last month—without earning an extra penny from the processor. One grower was paid £200,000 for potatoes, which sold in the supermarket for £4.2 million, so the grower received only 4.7%. Free-range eggs have also gone up at least 20p per dozen in supermarkets, but only 5p of that increase goes to the producer. Farmers want to grow, to survive and to flourish, but we must have a market that allows that. We need to take the bottlenecks out of the system, so that it flows more smoothly. Only by threatening to withhold supplies did dairy farmers secure a slightly better deal, and they are still struggling.

This period of unprecedented agricultural inflation coincides with the introduction of the agricultural transition plan from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, under which the old direct support payments to farmers in England under the common agricultural policy are being reduced. Farmers have already received significant cuts to those old direct payments, with further to come this year. The largest farms will receive cuts of 40%.

The Government are in the process of rolling out new support schemes, but the NFU is seriously concerned that the new schemes simply are not ready for farmers to be able to access them and start to make up the shortfall. That is not just the view of the NFU; it has

been echoed by the National Audit Office, the Public Accounts Committee, and the Institute for Government. Vital farm supplies sit inaccessible in Ukraine, and veterinary medication sits undeliverable in Northern Ireland because of the problems with Brexit. Alternative options are becoming scarce.

When British farmers suffer, so does the rest of the world. As the crisis in Ukraine hits other nations, one farmer asked me why Britain, as a leading member of the G7, does not consider its own agricultural sector to be part of the solution. The farmers who told me their stories also tell a sorry tale about the future of the sector. One simply asked, "Where is the future?" Every year, 8% of dairy farmers quit their business. Previously, others would step in to replace them. That, it seems, is no longer the case. As confidence falls, young farmers find that they cannot get loans. They cannot get started and cannot continue this proud British tradition.

I wish to finish on a positive note on behalf of the UK farming sector. I want to celebrate the success of the sector and the hard work and 365 days a year commitment of our farmers and farm labourers. Let us make every day Back British Farming Day and let us resolve to get a fair deal for farmers. The future could be positive. As I have said, British food has one of the lowest carbon footprints in the world. Our farmers tell me they want to adapt to further change—certainly moving away, for example, from carbon-intensive fertiliser—but they want to be able to do so in a managed way and not in a way where they are faced, as they currently are, with the shock brought about by the war. They want to reduce emissions and move to more sustainable fertiliser, as I have said. They want to reduce antibiotic use and further increase animal welfare, but they are doing that now on wafer-thin margins. As one farmer put it in what is probably a very agricultural farming way, "We have no fat on our backs right now, and we need this."

Farmers want to grow, survive, flourish and contribute to the success of our nation. The war has put intolerable pressure on them at a time when the prevailing situation was already difficult. They feel that all the increasing cost pressures are being borne by the farming sector when they should be shared across the entire food chain. We must have a domestic market that allows that contribution to flourish.

Dame Angela Eagle (in the Chair): I call Jim Shannon.

9.42 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Dame Angela. It is unusual for me, although I am very pleased, to be called first. You almost knocked me off my stride there. May I first of all thank the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson)? He is a dear friend—he knows that—and I support all that he said in his introduction. He set the scene very well. We are all here today because we understand the importance of farming. For me and my constituents, it is critical. I live on a farm. I declare an interest as a farmer and a member of the Ulster Farmers' Union, so I thank the hon. Gentleman for securing this debate.

I do not have the time to work on the farm as I would like to. If not for my father's illness many years ago, I would probably have been a farmer. Unfortunately, at

that time it coincided with the purchase of the farm. My job on the farm—my mother still owns the farm that I live on—is to look after the buildings and maintain the structures and roads and so on. It is quite a job. On Saturday afternoon my job is to go about and make sure those tasks are done. Next week when I am off during recess I will have more time, and will be doing all those wee jobs at night-time as well. It is an absolute pleasure and privilege to live on a farm, so I am pleased to contribute to the debate on behalf of my farmers.

I am well placed, as others are in this Chamber, to highlight the needs of the farming community. I really am pleased to see the Minister in her place. She has an incredible understanding of the issue, and I know that when we speak to the Minister and ask her a question, we push at an open door because she always responds. I mean that genuinely and seriously, because every one of us appreciates that opportunity to contact the Minister about issues that are so important to us. I mostly contact the Minister about fishing, but I have occasion to ask about farming issues today.

Russia is the world's biggest exporter of wheat, producing around 18% of international exports, and Ukraine produces around 12% of the world's wheat. Ukraine also produces 17.5% of the world's supply of maize, as *Farmers Guide* recently outlined:

"The war in Ukraine has added another layer of uncertainty for British farmers after an already tumultuous couple of years. Recent weeks have sparked concern over the supply and spiralling cost of input and supplies, with the market changing on a day-to-day basis."

The hon. Gentleman referred to that: there is a change almost every week, a price increase and hike, which presents lots of problems.

Margaret Ferrier: Global food supply chains were already facing significant pressure before the outbreak of war in Ukraine. Today, inflation has hit an astronomical 9.4%. There have even been reports that food banks are struggling to maintain enough resources. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there needs to be swift action, to ensure that vulnerable people have access to affordable food?

Jim Shannon: As so often, the hon. Lady makes a very sensible and helpful point. I wholeheartedly agree, not because she says it, but because I can see the practical issues for food banks in my constituency. The week before last we had a collection at the Tesco store in Ards, where people were incredibly generous. That helps the food banks to sustain their coffers, cupboards and shelves, but they tell me they see incredible pressures they have never seen before—and there have been some difficult times over the past while.

The *Farmers Guide* also points out:

"the market changing on a day-to-day basis—making business planning for the future extremely difficult...Livestock farmers buying in feed will have been hit by the wheat price increases from around £220/tonne to nearly £300/tonne, while fertiliser prices have reacted very strongly, rising from £200-300/tonne a year ago to around £1,000/tonne."

That is something that farmers tell me. That is an increase of almost 400%, which is astronomical and leads to concerns about availability.

I spoke to a neighbour last Sunday on my walk at about 7 o'clock in the morning, which is always a nice time. I passed him in the lane and asked how he was

getting on. He told me he does not put as much fertiliser on the ground because it is too costly. The only way to compensate is to cut back and use less fertiliser. He told me they had been fortunate this year. The first cut was not a good one, but the second cut was equal to last year, because of the weather, which has been incredibly warm, but there have been showers of rain as well. Less fertiliser is a godsend in a way; it means that the second cut of silage, and probably the third, will be good with less fertiliser. Maybe the soil had lots of fertiliser in it; I guess that might be part of the reason.

The main thing is that there is an incredible problem for farmers, who are in a precarious state at present. One local man said,

"The price we get has risen."

That is the beef price, which is good at the minute. Lamb prices are not too bad, either. The hon. Member for City of Chester referred to poultry and eggs. Egg prices are under pressure; they are not matching the outgoings and are not sustainable. There is an onus on supermarkets to give a better price to egg producers. I am fortunate that I start every day with two eggs. Dame Angela, you are probably of the generation who remembers

"Go to work on an egg."

I go to work on two eggs every morning, and would do that during the day, as well. I say that because of the importance of the egg sector. I thank the hon. Gentleman for mentioning that.

That local man said,

"The price has risen but the money in our pocket has not."

One of the greatest farm economists, Mark Berrisford-Smith of HSBC, has suggested that we are now in a position reminiscent of 1973, with the OPEC crisis and the Yom Kippur war. In 1975, we saw up to 25% inflation resulting from our inability to deal with the quadrupling oil prices. There was some encouragement in the press yesterday—if it is correct—that the price of filling a car may fall by £10. I hope that is right, and the cost keeps on reducing. We need that help.

Our farmers are facing long-term problems, and now is not the time to pull back on support. Indeed, it is the time to step it up. We need to sustain and help our farmers at this present time. Our farmers are not able to fill the breach from Ukraine and Russia—it is impossible; the gap is too large—but we need to look at how to help them. To be able to fill the gap, they need support. We need to be raising new generations of farmers who are trained in the old ways and who also want to push for the new ways that enhance production and the environmental protections, providing the best of both worlds. I am a great believer in the need for farmers to protect the land and have environmental schemes in place. I know the Minister is as well. There is a balancing job to do between the two. There is land that perhaps should be in farming, and there are some concerns about some projects by some of the bigger charities, for instance the National Trust, who want to set land aside and not use it for farming. I do not want to be critical, but I make that point. That is sometimes not the right way to do it.

The impact of the Ukraine and Russia war has been large and it will continue. This House, this Minister, our Government and ourselves as MPs on behalf of our constituents must play our part in the short term, as well as the long term.

9.51 am

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Angela. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) on securing this debate and on his excellent opening speech. I join him in expressing solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

Last week, I met a group of farmers in my constituency of Wirral West, along with representatives of the National Farmers Union. I heard from them about the pressures that farmers are facing. We are in a time of severe economic pressure that has been exacerbated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. British farmers have been left exposed and vulnerable to the challenges of rising inflation. The cost of agricultural inputs such as fuel, feed, packaging, transport, labour and energy is increasing.

As the House of Commons Library has noted, the cost of feeding livestock has risen considerably in the past six months, with many farmers dependent on feed prices set on a global market. Feed prices for livestock were stable in the first half of 2021, but increased by 18% between August 2021 and April 2022. Energy input costs for farms increased by 34% between January and April this year. Farm motor fuel costs increased by 30% over the same period. All that means, of course, that the cost of producing food in the UK has increased considerably in recent months, and that affects the availability and affordability of food to consumers.

This period of unprecedented agricultural inflation coincides with the introduction of DEFRA's agricultural transition plan, under which direct payments, the old support payments to farmers in England under the common agricultural policy, are being reduced. Farmers have already experienced significant cuts to direct payments, with further to come this year.

The Government are in the process of rolling out new support schemes, but farmers have expressed concerns about the timescales for their implementation and whether they will provide farmers with enough support. The Public Accounts Committee has criticised the Department for what it calls its "blind optimism" about the introduction of the schemes and the insufficient detail about how they will make up for the ending of current approaches. Can the Minister tell us what action the Government will take, as a matter of urgency, to address those concerns?

The UK's food self-sufficiency has reduced significantly in recent years. In 1990, we produced 74% of our food; by 2000, that figure was 67%, and in 2021 it was down to 60%. The NFU is calling on the Government to commit to maintaining the UK's food production self-sufficiency at 60% and helping to create an environment for farm and food businesses to thrive and compete in the coming years.

The NFU points out that we cannot be a global leader in climate-friendly food if we allow our own production levels to drop. The UK is only 18% self-sufficient in fruit, 55% in fresh vegetables and 71% in potatoes. For both veg and potatoes, that figure has fallen by 16% in the past 20 years. While the nation is encouraged to be healthier and eat more fruit and veg, our domestic production of those products falls below our potential. What assessment have the Government made of the UK's declining food self-sufficiency?

In December last year, the Government published the "United Kingdom Food Security Report 2021", in which they concluded that

"Global food supply and availability has improved since 2010"

and was "expected to recover" from the problems caused by the covid-19 pandemic. Of course, that was before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, so can the Minister tell us what assessment the Government have made of the UK's food security in the light of that?

As the Minister will know, the UK food security report also listed several factors that threaten the stability and long-term sustainability of global food production, one of which was climate change. The report stated:

"Longer growing seasons and warmer temperatures may have some positive effects for particular crops and regions, but overall risk magnitude is assessed to increase from medium at present to high in future. Increased climate exposure (including heat stress, drought risk, and wetness-related risks) is modifying productive capacity and will continue to do so in future in line with the degrees of warming experienced."

Over the past few days, we have seen stark warnings in this regard, with record temperatures recorded across the UK, fields and buildings on fire, and emergency services facing unprecedented challenges. I hope the Minister and her colleagues will impress on the new leader of the Conservative party—and our new Prime Minister—the critical importance of addressing climate change as a matter of urgency. I have to say that the lack of concern put on this issue by the leadership candidates in recent days has been extremely worrying. The future Prime Minister bears a huge responsibility in this regard, not only for this generation but for future generations.

It is vital that we build resilience in farming and food production in England and across the UK, and I look forward to the Minister's response to the many important points raised by Members in this debate.

9.56 am

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Angela. I congratulate the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) on securing this important debate. Having spoken in other debates with him recently, I know just how passionate he is about UK agriculture and food production, and I thought that he conveyed that, and his understanding of the sector, very well.

It is also a real pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood), who eloquently emphasised how much the cost of imports has increased, and the different impacts that is having across different sectors of the agriculture industry. That is presenting a challenge not only to farmers but further down the line, through food inflation, for household budgets, which is pertinent to this debate.

Today's debate is very timely. Across the UK, over the decades, we have perhaps become a bit complacent when it comes to our food security and self-sufficiency. Members have already set out how the UK's self-sufficiency has declined. It is worth repeating that, at the moment, UK agriculture produces some 60% of domestic food by value, and some 45% is exported. We import some 46% of the food that we consume. That compares unfavourably to the situation back in 1984, when we

were 78% self-sufficient. The hon. Member for Wirral West detailed how that figure has declined over the ensuing decades.

I am willing to acknowledge that part of that reduction is a result of our changing dietary preferences and habits, and it is important to reflect that in the debate. We now enjoy a lot of foods that are not produced in the UK, or cannot easily be produced in the UK, and we want to consume them out of season. I may return to that at the end of my speech; it is a particular bugbear of mine.

It is worth pointing out that the self-sufficiency percentage is a general figure, which does not really tell us the story for different types of food produce. It would be remiss of me, as a Member of Parliament from Wales, not to point out that we produce more lamb in the UK than we consume. We also produce more milk than we consume, for that matter. Although we are still well below self-sufficiency in the fruit and veg sectors and the poultry sector, as has been mentioned, it is important to reflect that our self-sufficiency has increased somewhat in recent years even in those sectors.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has a massive impact on UK food production as well as global food production. We are interlinked: pressures on the global level are felt at the farm gate in Ceredigion, as well as in other parts of the UK. That is particularly challenging after two years of covid-19 and the disruption of the pandemic, not just for food producers but for the associated supply chains, and after a turbulent period before covid-19 for farm-gate prices in a whole range of sectors. We come to this debate at a time of unprecedented immediate pressures, having recently suffered another unprecedented shock to the global food system on the back of difficult and lean years before that. The UK food production industry is in a challenging and precarious situation.

I was struck by the definition of food security in the Government's food security report, which reflects the fact that it is a complex concept. It states that food security

"encompasses the state of global agriculture and markets on which the UK is reliant; the sources of raw materials and foodstuffs in the UK and abroad; the manufacturing, wholesale, and retail industries that ultimately bring food to shelves and plates, and their complex supply chains of inputs and logistics; and the systems of inspection that allow consumers to be confident their food is safe, authentic, and of a high standard."

I will not touch on all those aspects, although it is important to note them, but I will say that the shock that we are experiencing now, with the price of farm imports in particular, risks destabilising many of the other dimensions encompassed by food security.

The most pressing issues are import prices and the significant increase in the price of raw materials. We have already heard how the war in Ukraine has had a massive impact in that regard. That is reflected in the agricultural price index, which shows that in the 12 months to April, the price for agricultural imports increased by 28.4%. A further assessment by the independent consultant Andersons suggests that the most recent estimate of inflation in agriculture is 25.3%.

We recently had a debate in this Chamber on some of those challenges, but it is worth repeating that the rate of general inflation is running slightly below that of agriculture inflation. Agflation is an acute problem and I am sure that other hon. Members share my concern not only that that is putting immense pressure on our

farmers, but that it may well feed into further food inflation and pressures on household budgets down the line.

In my remaining time, I will focus on the way that price hikes in the immediate term pose a serious challenge to our production in the longer term. Having spoken to many farmers in Ceredigion, I fear that the true impact on the UK agricultural industry of Russia's invasion of Ukraine will not be truly felt until next year. As has been mentioned, a lot of that has to do with farmers having to plan their future feed and import fertilisers at the moment, many of which are on onward prices. Farmers are having to make difficult decisions that will have an impact on their productive capacity in forthcoming years.

Let us look at fuel and energy. The hon. Member for City of Chester mentioned the impact of the price of red diesel on farmers. Indeed, if we compare the average price per litre from January this year with the most recent average price from the end of June, it has increased by 25p. We know that Russia is a major supplier of oil and gas to the European market, which has seen an almost fourfold price increase since the invasion. That in turn is having an impact on fuel costs and, more specifically, fertilisers.

Other hon. Members present today were here for a previous debate in this Chamber in which we discussed the real challenges that increased fertiliser costs pose for farmers. I will not repeat myself, other than by noting that the increased cost of fertilisers is forcing farmers to make difficult decisions about their business models and practices. I acknowledge that the impact might be felt quite differently in different sectors of the agriculture industry—it might be different for certain arable farmers and livestock farmers.

It is also worth pointing out that, at least at the outset of the invasion, many arable farmers may well have been covered for their fertiliser requirements for this year, and may not have had to expose themselves to the price hikes that we saw thereafter. As I mentioned, however, farmers have to plan ahead, and I know that many—even in the arable sector—are looking ahead and thinking, "Do we need to carry over some of our fertiliser for this year and therefore use less in the current season, so that we can buffer ourselves a little bit for what promise to be very expensive prices next year?" It is a real headache for other sectors—livestock and beef in particular—and many farmers have told me that their fertiliser bills have increased from £200 to £700 per tonne before VAT. Of course, if we add VAT on top of that, it is an eye-watering sum.

The tragedy of the situation is that these price hikes have come after a turbulent period, with covid-19 and a decade of rather difficult times for farm-gate prices. Although prices have increased for some produce in the last few months—it is fair to say that dairy prices have increased significantly, and I am told that the lamb price is holding up fairly well, as is the price for beef—certain farmers will not have the reserves to shoulder and absorb a lot of these costs in the long term. I am worried that farmers and growers are having to adapt to higher costs and anticipate the impact of a prolonged period of turbulence, which they have to assume will be the case, by taking very difficult decisions regarding their farming practices, which in turn will have an alarming impact on UK food production.

[Ben Lake]

NFU Cymru recently conducted a survey of more than 700 farmers in Wales, and it found that 71% intend to reduce production in the next year. To break that down into different sectors, 54% of beef farmers said that they will reduce stock numbers in the next 12 months, which will result in an estimated 10% cut to the beef herd. Some 46% of sheep farmers also said that they will reduce their stock in the next 12 months, and 39% of arable farmers said that crop production levels will reduce over the next year. That is already happening, and those decisions will probably have been made in order to be implemented by next year. That is a significant drop in our productive capacity at a time when we already know that we are not self-sufficient at the levels that we would like to be.

As well as not having enough productive capacity to become more self-sufficient for our dietary needs, we will find ourselves even more vulnerable in the long term to the global agriculture market and any external shocks that happen there. The war in Ukraine has led to tonnes of grain, sunflower oil and other produce being blockaded at Black sea ports, which is already having an impact in the horn of Africa. It is said that Ukraine feeds approximately 400 million in the world. That pressure will not go away; indeed, there is a strong argument that the real impact will be felt next year, when the harvest has not been harvested and the grain cannot get out. This is a very serious issue, which will weigh heavily on import prices for our own farmers. If we are to become more exposed to and dependent on the global market for many of our staples, that will mean higher prices for the consumer.

Ultimately, this debate has brought to the fore the need for us to think again about how we increase our self-sufficiency in the UK for the food that we consume and, therefore, for our food security. A few things have been mentioned already, such as the establishment of a fertiliser price index in order to have greater transparency and to allow farmers to plan with greater confidence and avoid having to make difficult decisions about the use of fertiliser. I repeat the plea for us to look again at fertiliser plants, and at whether there is a need for the Government to intervene to acknowledge them as strategically important pieces of infrastructure.

Finally—this is a debate for another day, but it is one that we must have in the near future—we need to shift our food production to a more local and seasonal basis. That will not always be popular, but perhaps we have reached the point where we need to face up to the reality. Is it sensible that we can go into our local supermarket on Christmas eve and buy fresh strawberries? I think we have come to the point where we can no longer afford that illusion of sustainability. Perhaps the future is more local and more seasonal.

10.10 am

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Angela. I congratulate the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) on securing a really important and timely debate on the situation that our farmers are facing just now. This is a time of real pressure for people working in the agricultural industry and the food sector, for lots of reasons. The

hon. Member covered some themes that were repeated by other hon. Members: the cost of fertiliser, the cost of fuel, and farmers leaving the business. The theme progressed throughout the debate, and it would be well worth the Minister paying heed to the warnings that have been laid out very clearly in the Chamber. The Government fail to act to support farmers at their peril, given some of the issues that have come up.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who is a farmer himself, talked about the investment required by farmers. That is an experience that he has shared with me in conversations about his developments. Farmers have to make choices about investment, and quite often the money and reserves are not there for them to do so. There are ongoing costs. He talked about the importance of farming, which should be underlined: it is an important industry and an important business for people to be in. It supports us. He also talked about the need for investment in training and development, and for policies that take that forward. That is critical. We should look at farming as an essential career. That goes for all the nations of the UK: it should be considered as an essential industry and supported.

Another theme from the hon. Member for Strangford was the gap in world food production caused by the war. That is a pressure we must think about in relation to another recurring theme: food security. In her intervention, the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) talked about the need to think about vulnerable people's access to food, and she is absolutely correct. When we have these high-level discussions about what is happening, we forget that the issue affects people in houses and homes across our communities, who are now facing previously untold hardship—things that they have not had to face in their lifetimes. That is happening right now. It is all part of the cause and effect that is in place here.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) talked about changing dietary habits, and he is absolutely correct. That is a complex matter. We need to talk about what we must encourage people to do; about what kind of healthy eating and supply we must look at in future. Another theme was pressure for raw materials leading to longer-term impacts, which again need to be taken into consideration. There must be a longer-term plan for dealing with that. He talked about farmers making reductions and repeated the theme of farmers leaving the industry.

Thank goodness somebody—the hon. Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood)—raised the issue of climate change. It is an issue that we do not address enough in this Parliament—when I say “enough,” I am being very generous. It is another impact in the heady mix that we have to pay some attention to. We had record temperatures yesterday and houses burning as a result. This is something we are living with now, and hon. Members should be talking about it all the time. It is another impact that farmers are having to deal with; they are seeing changes to their environments, their farms and their livestock, with different ways of having to manage them. Again, that brings costs and puts pressures on the industry, including whether the farmers have the will to keeping working in it sometimes.

The hon. Member for Wirral West also talked about domestic food production declining—a theme I will come back to—rising prices for energy, feed and fuel;

and the significant cuts to support that have been imposed on farmers over the past decade or so of austerity. Those are all important themes.

The Scottish Government are aware and are acting where they can, but the UK Government have a duty to act to safeguard domestic food security by supporting farmers, producers and consumers. I repeat that the Minister should take this warning and speak to colleagues about abandoning the laissez-faire policy on trade deals and protecting domestic food production.

The hon. Member for City of Chester brought up the effect of labour shortages. It seems to have gone quiet but it is a real effect. It is a Brexit-induced problem. We have a mad rush for dodgy deals with New Zealand and Australia, which are going to impact farmers directly. It is not just my opinion that it will harm the farming and food sector; it is also the opinion of the National Farmers Union of Scotland, the National Farmers Union, trade experts, academics and the UK Government's own departmental advice about the deals. However, they are still going to impose it on farmers on this isle.

We have talked about the cost of fertiliser—which has trebled—the cost of feed and energy, and farmers selling off livestock and cutting production. As a consequence of Brexit, UK farmers are set to miss out on access to a proposed €1.5 billion emergency fund. The UK Government were warned before this crisis that their policies are undermining domestic production of food and forcing reliance on more food imports, and the New Zealand and Australia deals do not help that. As we have heard, UK food self-sufficiency is now below 60%. A couple of decades ago it was 80%. That is a red flashing warning light about what is happening. Food security must not be considered a thing of the past.

The UK Government must now correct their course and deliver a UK food security fund proportional to what UK farmers would have received as part of the EU, to be administered by the devolved Governments. Failure to do so in the face of denying financial powers for the Scottish Government to act, such as simple borrowing powers, only reinforces the glaring need for Scotland to have the full powers of independence in order to protect our own farmers and food sector where this place fails, and continues to fail. Unless there is a change in course, it will continue to fail farmers across the nations of the UK.

10.18 am

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Dame Angela. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) on not only securing this important debate but making an eloquent speech, which I agreed with entirely.

I will start by acknowledging my own family history with Ukraine. My paternal side is from Lviv and lived there for hundreds of years. I had cordial discussions with the Minister in the run-up to the debate, and I will take up the recommendation to read “East West Street” by Philippe Sands. Labour stands unshakably with Ukraine and our NATO allies in supporting Ukraine against an unprovoked and unjustified invasion by Russia. We have supported the Government's measures to provide greater military and aid assistance to Ukraine, but on

the subject of this debate—the effect of the war in Ukraine on UK farming and food production—we are somewhat critical.

Ukraine is a beautiful country, with some of the most productive agricultural land in Europe, and indeed the world. It is the breadbasket of Europe and its hard-working farmers produce much of the world's grain and sunflower oil. Ukraine and Russia, as significant producers of sunflower seeds, barley, wheat, maize, rapeseed and soybean, are collectively responsible for 29% of the world's wheat exports. The World Food Programme estimates that Ukraine grows enough food to feed 400 million people. This is not a short-term problem. The fact that there are Russian mines sitting in the fields of Ukraine will be with us for many years to come.

This debate is focused on the impact of the Russian war in Ukraine on food and farming in the UK. The UK's food supply chain has been under intense strain over the past months and years, from spiralling food price inflation to the fertiliser crisis and labour shortages. These shocks impact businesses, workers and people up and down the country, who are forced to choose between putting food in the fridge or money on the meter, with those on the lowest incomes hurting the most.

The impacts on the food system go far wider, as much of the developing world is plunged into food insecurity and the risk of famine. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization projects that the war in Ukraine will cause an increase in global food prices in 2022 of between 8% and 22%. The UK food sector has been raising its concerns over several months. The Food and Drink Federation has said that the invasion of Ukraine was likely to impact negatively on the trading ambitions of its businesses, and I feel that is somewhat understated. Food supply chains in the UK are already under intense strain, now exacerbated by war. Producers are struggling with a lack of availability of key ingredients, such as sunflower oil, which is used in many products on supermarket shelves. The price of alternatives is rising dramatically.

The impacts are stark and clear, and many experts have been warning of the situation we might face, yet the Government have been at best late, and at worst absent from this crisis. While tensions were mounting between Ukraine and Russia last autumn and analysts were warnings about what could be coming, the Government's food security report cited Ukraine as a country with a high market share of the global maize supply and said they did not expect any

“major changes...in world agricultural commodity markets and the top exporting countries of these commodities.”

Early in December, the US released intelligence of Russia's invasion plans. Later in December, the Government released their food security report, which said:

“Real wheat prices are expected to decline in the coming years based on large supplies being produced in the Black Sea region”.

Were the Government simply unaware of the potential for the situation to impact our food supply and global wheat prices, or were they just ignoring it? It is clear that there was a severe lack of planning going on in DEFRA. Labour called on the Government to reconvene the Food Resilience Industry Forum—something they eventually did and which we welcomed; we just wish it had happened sooner. The Government maintain that they do

“not expect significant direct impacts to UK food supply as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine”,

[Alex Sobel]

but the sector is seriously worried, as are consumers, who are facing rising prices. To no one's surprise, except perhaps the Government, food price inflation hit 6.8% in the year to May 2022 and has continued to rise—a point well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) and the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake).

The Government delayed their promised response to the national food strategy, citing the invasion of Ukraine as a reason. I understand they were facing a changing situation, but I reiterate that it was not an unexpected one. Are they suggesting that the necessary planning for possible impacts began only after the invasion was first declared in February this year and not when the first warnings were put out by reputable intelligence analysts? Perhaps if we had seen a proper White Paper from the Government when it was originally promised, there would have been a more robust and effective framework for dealing with the shocks that the sector is facing.

The war in Ukraine is placing significant pressure on British agriculture. This sector has suffered crisis after crisis in the past few years, from the pig backlog, which saw tens of thousands of healthy pigs culled on farms, to the botched roll-out of the environmental land management scheme. During these difficult times, when other nations in the UK and in mainland Europe stepped in to help, our Government have consistently refused to lend a hand to English farmers. The message is they are on their own and the market is the final arbiter. Some of them will go bust but, as the Government see it, that is the way things have to be. Now the conflict in Ukraine poses one of the biggest challenges yet. I would like to say that the Government have finally come to understand that their approach is the wrong one and they are willing to step up and provide meaningful support, to farmers and protect British food security. Sadly, they have been so far unwilling to intervene.

The Opposition take a different view, however, because intervention is not alien to us. Labour has routinely raised its concerns that many farms will be unable to cope with the war in Ukraine pushing up the price of agricultural inputs. The agricultural prices indices for inputs and outputs in the UK increased dramatically from the end of 2021 to the beginning of 2022, and the Ukrainian conflict has resulted in significant gas price increases throughout the world. At the start of 2021, growers were being charged 40p per therm, but prices have since surged as high as £8. The Lea Valley Growers Association has issued a warning that UK harvests of sweet peppers and cucumbers will halve this year after many glasshouse growers chose not to plant in the face of surging energy prices. Producers have warned that yields of other indoor crops, such as tomatoes and aubergines, will also be hit.

Fertiliser production is reliant on gas, and as the international gas price soars, so does the cost of fertiliser. In January 2021, the cost of ammonium nitrate was £200 per tonne. That figure now stands at £900 per tonne. That is simply unsustainable for many agricultural businesses. The Government's recently announced measures to address fertiliser inflation are too little, too late. CF Fertilisers' announcement that it will permanently close one of its factories in Ellesmere Port is yet another blow to the farming sector—another point eloquently made

by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester. After months of dither and delay, can the Minister set out the steps the Government are taking to help farmers access affordable energy and fertiliser, and how the Government intend to curb agricultural inflation?

At the same time as farmers are contending with sky-high inflation, they must deal with a shortage of seasonal workers. The shortage is, in part, a consequence of the war in Ukraine; in 2021, 67% of seasonal agricultural visas went to Ukrainians, while a further 11% were awarded to Russians and Belarusians. However, the blame for the worker shortage lies squarely with the Government. It was originally announced that there would be 30,000 horticultural seasonal worker visas this year, a figure that was then increased to 40,000, with 2,000 of those visas awarded to poultry workers—an increase that many farming bodies have said is too little, too late. The National Farmers Union has predicted that there will be demand for 70,000 seasonal worker visas this year. A farmer confidence survey conducted by the union in January found that 86% of respondents expected low or very low levels of worker availability.

The shortages have had enormous consequences for farmers and keep pushing up prices at the till, at a time when 7.3 million households are experiencing food poverty. Industry experts claim that the labour shortage on British farms has resulted in “catastrophic food waste” of home-grown fruit and vegetables. Many farmers face bankruptcy if they cannot access the labour they need to harvest the crops.

We are in this dire situation because the Government have once again stumbled their way into a crisis, refusing to listen to warnings from farmers, industry and the Opposition, who have been raising the alarm about worker shortages for months. Their refusal to listen has left the Government pursuing a failed post-Brexit approach to agricultural labour that will see food rotting in the fields while millions of households go hungry. Can the Minister say how she intends to help farmers struggling to find seasonal labour, and what plans the Department has to put an end to the shortage?

The war in Ukraine has further exposed Britain's flawed food system. Despite ample opportunities to take action, the Government have failed time and again to strengthen the system. I fear that the change in management in the Conservative party will not result in any real change, as its MPs have been more than happy to support Government inaction for months. Looking at the contenders left in the leadership race, we are likely to see even more zealous commitment to the market fundamentalism that is happy to let British agriculture go to the wall.

While the Conservatives may be unwilling to support British farmers and food producers, Labour will. On the shortage of seasonal workers, through our five-point plan to make Brexit work, Labour will deliver. We will sort out the poor deal that the Prime Minister negotiated and seek to find new, flexible labour mobility arrangements for those making short-term work trips. On inflation, Labour will support struggling agricultural and food production businesses to make, buy and sell more in Britain, investing in jobs and skills and using the power of public procurement. We will also look at using a windfall tax to support farmers and food businesses.

10.27 am

The Minister for Farming, Fisheries and Food (Victoria Prentis): Thank you very much for your sensible approach to the heat, Dame Angela. I am sure we all felt for the farmers who were harvesting yesterday, in extraordinarily hot conditions. I know that many of them will have harvested all night in order to have a slightly more comfortable time. I would like to reassure the hon. Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) that climate change is a very large part of the discussion about leadership in the Conservative party at the moment, and rightly so.

I, too, thank the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) for securing this important debate, and indeed colleagues across the House for their engagement. It is right to say at the outset that we all condemn the Russian state's outrageous attack on Ukraine, and that we remain absolutely committed to standing with the people of Ukraine as they defend their country and their democracy.

The Government are certainly not unaware of the situation in Ukraine. I have talked to the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) about his own family links; my daughter lived in Ukraine until December. We now have a Ukrainian woman living with us at home, and five Ukrainians living in a cottage on the farm. We were aware that war was coming, but I do not know that we were aware of all the consequences or how severe that war would be—a feeling that is probably global. I do not think any of us were expecting Russia to behave quite in the way that it has.

We are here today to discuss UK food security and the effect on farmers. As the agriculture Minister, and having had to travel a great deal in order to deal with the consequences of the war, I feel very strongly that we are fortunate in the UK, as we have a highly resilient food supply chain that is built on strong domestic production as well as imports through very stable trade routes. When I look around those international fora, I feel blessed with the food supply that we have in the UK. That is not at all to say that we are complacent; as the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) said, it is important, and our food security depends on not being complacent about this. We are not complacent, but we are very lucky.

Our food strategy sets a goal for the first time—a real win, which I am pleased about—that the level of food security in this country should be broadly where production is at the moment. Currently, 74% of what we can grow here we do grow here, and about 60% of what we eat altogether is grown here. That has been stable for about the past 20 years and it is important that we maintain that sort of level and always keep an eye on where our trading routes are and their stability. I could not agree more with hon. Members that the future should be more local and more seasonal—that is an important point.

In summary, our food import dependency on the eastern European region is low, and we do not expect any significant direct impact on overall supply as a result of the conflict in Ukraine. We are very much in touch with food and farming industry figures, who remain confident that our food supply chain remains stable.

However, there is, of course, the matter of increasing costs. The global spike in oil and gas prices has affected the prices of agricultural commodities, which are always

close to energy costs. Gas prices were rising as we emerged from the pandemic anyway, and the invasion of Ukraine has caused some additional turbulence in international commodity markets—for example, the global prices of wheat, maize and vegetable oil have all increased substantially since the start of the war.

Rising food prices are dependent on a combination of factors, including agrifood import prices, domestic agricultural prices—which are, as the hon. Member for Ceredigion noted, quite high in some cases, although the farmer is still struggling with rising input costs as well—and domestic labour and manufacturing costs. In the farming sector, increased costs are particularly affecting fertiliser, animal feed and fuel, and that is undoubtedly creating short-term pressures on cash flow for farmers. To help, this month we are bringing forward half of this year's basic payment scheme payment as an advance injection of cash to businesses. Subsidies will be paid in two instalments each year for the remainder of the agricultural transition period.

On the agricultural transition generally, unlike the NFU and Opposition Members I simply cannot justify the current BPS payments situation, whereby 50% of the payments go to the 10% of largest landowners. I remain convinced that there are fairer and better ways to support farmers. I reassure the House that the yearly £3.7 billion pot of money available to support farmers remains the same. Where we take from farmers in BPS payments—which I am afraid I cannot justify, and in the long term I am sure there are better ways to do it—we give back in other schemes. I am pleased that farmers are voting with their application forms: 52% of farmers are now involved in stewardship schemes of some kind, which pay well, and farmers are now applying to the sustainable farming incentive—the lowest tier of our new schemes—which was rolled out gently a couple of weeks ago, and significant numbers of applications are already being approved.

On fertiliser, we have issued statutory guidance to provide clarity to farmers on how they can use slurry and other manures during the autumn and winter. Although global fertiliser prices have risen, the UK has remained quite dynamic in sourcing products, and CF Fertilisers continues to produce ammonium nitrate at its plant in Billingham. We remain concerned about the Ince plant, and remain in touch with the hon. Members for City of Chester and for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders).

I reassure the House that we are working closely with the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board, the Agricultural Industries Confederation and the NFU on how best to establish fertiliser price transparency. I have a large follow-up roundtable on fertilisers tomorrow, as part of a long-term piece of work we are doing with the industry to see what more we can do and to assist the partial change—it is never going to be a complete solution—from chemical fertiliser to bio-fertiliser. We have also delayed the changes to the use of urea fertiliser until spring 2023 and introduced new slurry storage grants.

We know that feed is a substantial input cost. On 1 June we concluded the removal of section 232 tariffs, allowing us to remove the 25% tariff on imports of US maize, which is a key ingredient for animal feed. That went down well with the sector.

[Victoria Prentis]

I know that farmers need seasonal labour; we are the only sector with an immigration carve-out in that regard. An extra 10,000 visas were announced in the Government's food strategy, so this year we have 40,000 seasonal visas. I have been working with the contractors throughout the year and am aware that last year around 80% of our seasonal agricultural workforce came from Ukraine, Russia or Belarus. The operators who help us to source the workforce are confident that they will be able to find the workers they need for this season, and all the indications are that those visas are being taken up.

As well as farmers, we work closely with the food and drink manufacturing sector, through strong industry and cross-Government relationships. Despite the ongoing supply chain challenges in global inflation, our manufacturing sector has maintained a stable food supply. Some specific commodities, including sunflower oil and white fish, have been badly affected by the invasion of Ukraine. The Government are supporting the industry to manage those challenges.

We work closely with the Food Standards Agency to adopt a pragmatic approach to enforcing the labelling rules so that alternative oils can be used in place of sunflower oil in certain processed goods without requiring changes to labels. On white fish, we continue to engage with the seafood sector, including the fish and chip shop industry, to monitor impacts and encourage the adoption of alternative sources of supply other than Russia.

It is very important that we maintain our sanctions against Russia. We recognise that it is very difficult for some of our sectors. Our global partners are feeling a far greater impact from the war than we are. Russia is once again using food—or the lack of it—directly as a weapon of war. It is not just a weapon of war in Europe; it is a weapon that is firmly targeted at Africa, where there is already starvation caused directly by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the resultant increase of the global wheat price. There is now insufficient wheat for certain areas of Africa to have enough to eat.

We are engaging with like-minded partners through multilateral global forums, including the World Trade Organisation, the UN and the G7, to build important consensus on keeping markets—particularly the grain market—open to support global food security. I have worked closely with the Ukrainian Agriculture Minister, both at the UN global food summit and at various G7

meetings. I am pleased with one achievement we have been able to make ourselves directly—in fact, it was paid for by DEFRA—which is the establishment of a global grain sampling library. In itself, it will not stop Russia stealing grain, but it will have a chilling effect on those buying grain from Ukraine that is clearly stolen.

There is a great deal more work that the world needs to do and I reassure the House that as a Government we are determined to play our part in that work globally. We are aware of the pressures caused by the knock-on effects of this war. We continue to work in partnership with farmers and food producers to ensure that the UK is well equipped to respond to the global forces that continue to drive the supply and price issues that we are facing.

10.40 am

Christian Matheson: Thank you, Dame Angela, for calling me to speak again and for your stewardship of this debate. I also thank the Minister for her response and all hon. Members who have taken part. We have heard contributions from England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland—from all parts of the UK—but they have all had similar messages about the same types of issues that our farmers and food producers are facing.

I accept the gentle admonishment from my good friend the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) about not putting the climate crisis at the forefront of this debate. He is absolutely right about that. One of the potato farmers in my area tells me that when potatoes are growing and it gets too hot, they stop growing, so the current temperatures will affect this year's potato crop. As I say, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right and I thank him for that gentle kick up the backside.

The message from this debate is that we do not know how long this war will go on for and we do not know how long its effects will last, so we need to start planning now, because our farming communities are certainly planning now.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the effect of the war in Ukraine on UK farming and food production.

10.41 am

Sitting suspended.

Disability and Gender Inclusivity in the Media

11 am

Dame Angela Eagle (in the Chair): I will call Dr Lisa Cameron to move the motion and then call the Minister to respond. As is the convention in 30-minute debates, there will not be an opportunity for the Member in charge to make a winding-up speech.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered disability and gender inclusivity in the media.

It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Angela, in a debate on disability and gender inclusivity in the media, which is such an important issue. In this short debate, I plan first to look back at where we have come from. Then I shall look forward and refer to some of the progress that has been highlighted to me since I secured the debate. That progress comes from a number of media companies that are trying their best to strive and go forward.

To start, it is important to remind ourselves that the #MeToo and Time's Up movements have empowered women around the world to speak out against sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace. That has given hope to a new generation who are marching on a path towards equality. However, we must be cognisant of the fact that the report "Gender Inequality and Screenwriters", supported by the Authors Licensing and Collecting Society, has revealed an alarming set of statistics, such as the fact that only 16% of film writers in the UK are female. It has also been uncovered that only 14% of prime-time TV is female written. That consistent imbalance was observed over 10 years, and the evidence indeed demonstrated that those figures had flatlined during that period, with no signs of recent improvement in gender representation. We can see from the figures presented in the report that the glass ceiling is still firmly in place and the problem remains locked for so many women—so many talented people who should be contributing to industry.

For an example, we can look way back to the roots of patriarchal society and the '50s and '60s, when Sylvia Anderson was a female pioneer in television. As most of us will know, she co-created many groundbreaking children's shows and characters, from "Fireball XLS" and "Stingray" to "Thunderbirds" and the iconic Lady Penelope. Sylvia Anderson was described in the publicity material of their own production company, AP Films, as the driving force behind the puppet kingdom, and she devised the characters, co-wrote the scripts and the storylines, and often directed the filming herself at a time when there were so few women in such pivotal roles.

During Sylvia's lifetime, as a result of a patriarchal system, she found herself often omitted from the work and creations that she produced alongside her husband. To this day, those productions are still often referred to with no mention of co-creator Sylvia.

Gender inequality is not limited to writers, as many main creative roles in film production are held predominantly by men. Worldwide, women are still being denied their voice and their due recognition, so why, in 2022, are we still having this debate? Why should

this argument exist at all? It seems that, like Sylvia, women are still suffering the effects of gender inequality in respect of which intolerance of women's place is still a huge factor.

We are pleased to have Dee Anderson, Sylvia's daughter, with us here today. Dee is supporting the Time's Up campaign in order to promote gender inclusivity in the media and take forward a more inclusive and gender-balanced industry for the future. I congratulate her on all the work she is doing in that regard.

I want to look briefly at some progress that is being made. I have heard from a number of organisations, such as the BBC, which contacted me to let me know that it is driving forward a campaign called 50:20:12, which has as its targets 50% women, at least 20% people from an ethnic minority background and 12% disabled employees. The BBC is using the campaign to drive a senior leader index for each of its departments. This is so important. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group for disability, I have heard from so many people who have told me that they have no role models within the industries who are from their area and background, and have their characteristics. That can be extremely disheartening.

To see industry trying to drive forward inclusion and equality on our screens is like osmosis. We take this in every day of our lives, when we are watching television, live-streaming or looking at media. Those are the images we see, the people we hear from, the presenters who face the world on our behalf. It is so important that young people from every background and sector of society have those role models to aspire to and know that they can achieve their full potential.

Dame Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way and congratulate her on securing this debate. Does she agree that public service broadcasters have an important role to play when it comes to inclusivity, whether disability or gender? Will she join me in applauding the work of Channel 4, particularly ensuring that the Paralympics coverage in 2012 not only gave opportunities for people to reappraise or rethink their views on disability in front of the camera, but gave many people behind the camera the opportunity to establish careers, when they might have found that difficult before because of their disability?

Dr Cameron: Absolutely. I entirely commend the fantastic work that the right hon. Lady does on equality, right across Parliament. It is second to none; she is a force for good in showing leadership in those roles. She is absolutely right. I spoke to Channel 4 a number of years ago in my role as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on disability. They told me that, at the start, it was seen as a big risk to have so many hours of livestreaming of the Paralympic games. They were not sure how that would go with regard to audience participation and numbers. It has actually been overwhelmingly positive. People are so engaged and inspired by the Paralympians. They see first hand on their screens the achievements of so many people who have overcome adversity and challenged their disabilities, turning them to ability and potential. I congratulate Channel 4, who sent me information about the work they are doing, which I can mention alongside that which the right hon. Lady highlighted. That was a pivotal moment in disability representation.

[Dr Cameron]

Disability Rights UK contacted me with the following information:

“Disabled people make up a fifth of the population. There are disabled professionals in all walks of life—politicians, lawyers, academics, sports people, doctors, business owners—and disabled people working in every part of public life. But when we watch the news or read the media—social, print or digital—it is rare to see disabled people, and when we do, we are almost always speaking about individual disabilities or personal horror stories. A huge lack of representation means our stories are going unreported, talent is unrecognised...and negative attitudes towards disability are going unchallenged. We do not have enough of a percentage of a voice. A fifth of us are disabled but we are not a fifth of the news. Media often represents us as heroes or scroungers.”

Even when representation does happen, it can be stereotypical and quite depressing for the audience. It is important that people are engaged in employment in every sector, particularly in the media. We have to change the mindset, the attitudes, the representation, behind the scenes as well as in front, in order to make a long-term difference. Newsrooms rarely include disabled staff. Newspapers have columnists, but how many are disabled? How many programmes currently harness that talent? Those issues need to be collectively worked on and taken forward by Government policy, agencies, organisations and the whole sector in order to make sure that we can turn the situation around for those who feel unrepresented at the current time.

I understand that the *Daily Mirror* ran a week of features called “Disabled Britain: Doing It For Ourselves”, which was the first time that Disability Rights UK recalled a national paper allowing disabled people to tell their own stories in their own way. Most importantly, rather than focusing on individual impairments, it spoke strongly about a social model of disability, which posits that people are impaired by the lack of access in society and the inability to engage, rather than by their impairments alone, and that the public do not understand the social model of disability. There is still an “us and them” mindset when it comes to disability, but the truth is that—we can be quite candid about this—with our populations living much longer, many people who have not previously had disabilities will develop them in the future. Having a normalised representation in the media supports everybody, takes us all forward together, and reflects the society in which we live.

I will speak a bit about the work that the BBC is doing on the workforce, because one of the issues is the disability employment gap, which was mentioned specifically by Disability Rights UK. I know that the BBC has been very committed, and I have met its representatives to discuss the projects that it is working on and the launch of its disability passports. The BBC is trying to enable the movement of disabled talent right across the industry, alongside being a Disability Confident employer at leader level 3. Throughout my time in Parliament, I have been encouraging MPs to walk the talk in this regard and to make sure that we are signed up to being Disability Confident employers, in line with the Government’s programme. The BBC is really trying to change things behind the scenes and on screen, and it has formed a partnership with Netflix to develop and fund new, ambitious dramas featuring disabled creatives, with two productions already in development. We are keen to see them in the near future.

I turn now to Channel 4. As has been mentioned, it is the home of the Paralympics, “Born to Be Different”, “The Undateables” and “The Last Leg”, and it champions talent such as Rosie Jones, Billy Monger, Briony Williams, Ed Jackson and Ruben Reuter. The station has also cast people with disabilities in major formats, including “Big Brother”, “First Dates” and “The Great British Bake Off”, which we all love to watch, but which I could never emulate, because my cakes are always total flops—I have no chance of ever participating.

Channel 4 also makes “Hollyoaks” and “Googlebox”, and it is driving change. As the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Dame Maria Miller) mentioned, the 2020 Paralympic games reached 20 million viewers—a third of the UK population. The “Super. Human” marketing campaign reached 81% of the population. I have to say that I am not the most up to date with technology, but there was also a bespoke Paralympics hub on TikTok, which generated 4.1 million views. With the Beijing 2021 winter Paralympics, Channel 4 built further on its work, proudly announcing a 100% disabled line-up of world-class presenters. Progress is definitely being made.

I want to turn briefly to ITV, which was in contact with me, before asking the Minister for an update on how the Government can collectively work with the sector to harness disabled talent and move things forward in a positive way. ITV got in touch and spoke to me about its diversity acceleration plan, which commits to increasing representation of disabled people in senior editorial positions, ensuring that ITV better reflects the lives of disabled people on screen, improving diversity and career progression in TV production and improving opportunities for working on programmes or behind the scenes. ITV has 9.6% of disabled talent on screen to date, which it says is the highest proportion of all broadcasters in the report “The Fifth Cut: Diamond at 5”.

Progress is being made across the board. ITV also spoke to me about improvements it has made. Of course, we have heard some more historical examples, but ITV says it has 49.6% women representation on screen and off screen in production teams, and that, in the workforce, 52.6% of all colleagues and 49.2% of managers are women. It has also launched a menopause policy. It will support colleagues who are going through the menopause, ensure that they have adequate time, reduce stigma and ensure that the menopause does not adversely impact careers. ITV says that 48 women are in its 100 top earning roles, and it is committed to achieving a 50:50 gender balance.

This debate is important because we seek to represent those who have perhaps not had that representation in the past, and we want to make changes. As drivers of change in Parliament, we must work together across parties. Certainly, as chair of the APPG for disability, I am very keen to take this agenda forward with the industry—print, media and more modern types of screening—but also, as parliamentarians, we need to keep the momentum towards equality going.

I thank the right hon. Member for Basingstoke for coming to the debate and taking time out of her busy schedule. She is a champion in this field. I look forward to the Minister’s response.

11.17 am

The Minister of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Matt Warman): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on securing this important debate, because representation matters. It strengthens the media for it to be more representative of the people that it serves. As a white man who used to be a journalist, I am acutely conscious of the diversity, or lack of it, in some newsrooms. Diversity in the media influences society as well. One of the crucial points that the hon. Lady made is that the incidental presence of people with disabilities not talking solely about their disability on screen normalises something that should be completely normal. There has been progress on that issue, among many others, but it is important that the Government are realistic and say that there is more to do in this area. A huge amount of progress has been made, but there is no room for complacency.

Ofcom's 2021 report on news consumption showed that TV was the most used platform for news consumption. Nearly 80% of over-16s get their news from TV, which is ahead of the internet, and yet TV has many of the problems that she describes. TV needs to be representative of the country in which we live, and to offer opportunities for people from all backgrounds to contribute and achieve—so too, of course, does the rest of the media. Evidence indicates that there remains a huge number of barriers preventing access to the media sector for under-represented groups. Those from working-class backgrounds, women and disabled people are among the most greatly impacted. Initiatives such as “Time's Up” are hugely welcome, and it was welcomed by the Secretary of State at the time, but she also said at the time that there remained more for the industry to do to get to those shared goals.

To look first at gender representation and inclusion in the sector, it is a welcome development, of course, that three of our four main public service broadcasters are led by female executives: ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5. However, to look at that one metric would lay us open to reasonable charges of tokenism, and that is not enough. There is increased visibility of women on screen in sports media roles—sports commentary and punditry roles—that have traditionally been dominated by men. That is hugely welcome, and I am sure that the hon. Lady also welcomes the increased coverage of women's sports, which has seen the women's Euro tournament hosted in England and getting publicity that it would never have received a few years ago. Although that increased visibility is welcome, it does not add up to equality, and it remains the case that women are less well paid and less likely to advance to influential senior positions than their male counterparts. The Government are keen to work with the industry to change that rapidly.

According to Ofcom's five-year review of diversity in broadcasting, which was published last year, the representation of women in TV and radio workforces was close to or above 47% of the UK labour market, but the representation of women at senior levels falls to 42% for television and 43% for radio, which is close but not sufficient. Data covering the same period also shows that, for TV and radio, the proportion of women leaving the workforce was greater than those joining. Ofcom

found that broadcasters were focusing on entry level recruitment at the expense of retaining diverse staff and enabling them to progress.

Whether it is women leaving the workforce or the lack of older people in general on screen or behind the camera, there remains much to do. Those imbalanced pictures perpetuate harmful stereotypes, which is also seen in the online abuse of high-profile female figures, which further exacerbates the problem of retaining talent. I know that the hon. Lady has experienced that and has spoken powerfully about it. We witness it far too often in public life, in the media and elsewhere. The Online Safety Bill seeks to tackle some of that, but nobody in Government is naive enough to pretend that it will be a panacea.

On the representation and inclusion of disability in the media, the evidence presents a more concerning picture. Disabled people are the most under-represented group in television; the industry is significantly failing to meet the targets that it has set itself for representation in the workplace on and off screen. Of course, the setting of those targets is hugely welcome, but meeting them is what matters.

Ofcom's diversity report shows that the representation of disabled people in the TV and radio workforce in 2020-21 was less than half the UK benchmark of 19%, as the hon. Lady highlighted, and that even the highest-performing employers have a long way to go. At senior levels, disability representation failed to show any progress since Ofcom's first diversity in broadcasting report was published in 2017; in the case of radio, the situation had actually got worse. Ofcom again found that in television, more disabled people were leaving the industry than joining. Although we should welcome all those initiatives, they are still not sufficient.

As the hon. Lady said, the highlight has to be Channel 4's incredible coverage of the Paralympic games, and the broadcaster's brave decision to have the team that it put in place. It was a resounding success and, in many ways, made more progress than anyone predicted in advance.

The Creative Diversity Network, whose members include public service broadcasters and Sky, collects on and off screen diversity data through its project Diamond, which found that only 8.3% of onscreen contributions in general were made by disabled people compared with, as the hon. Lady said, nearly 20% of the population. That lack of representation results in limited visibility and inaccurate and sometimes damaging portrayals of disabilities. In the excellent report from Underlying Health Conditions and Jack Thorne, “Everyone Forgot About the Toilets”, we see a lack of provision for disabled people at almost every level. It is the same in many walks of society, but the media have an ambition to go further and lead the way. As I say, that ambition is welcome but meeting it is what matters.

There are a huge number of challenges to be met if there are to be real improvements in disability representation, whether that be attitude, awareness, knowledge or inclusive and accessible work environments. They all need to be addressed and the Government are keen to work with the industry to do that. The work of the APPG is also an important step that I am sure will make a real contribution.

Barriers to careers in the media and creative industries start early. The Secretary of State has spoken of her desire to see improved access across the sector, recognising

[Matt Warman]

that this is a systemic issue that requires sustained collaboration from everybody. We welcome the work being done by the industry: a number of organisations have launched their own individual strategies, some of which have been highlighted today.

Ofcom has an important part to play in holding broadcasters to account through its statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity in relation to employment in the broadcasting sector in particular. It has the power to ask broadcasters to provide information about their equal opportunities policies and the make-up of their workforce. Its work in this area is important for increasing transparency and accountability and ensuring that the industry has the available data to support the case for change and measure progress.

The Government are committed to supporting the sector to achieve those improvements. The national disability strategy sets out our ambition to improve the lives of millions of disabled people, and DCMS is working closely with its seven disability and access ambassadors, including Allan MacKillop—I think he is well known to the hon. Lady—whose work includes introducing confidential access and inclusion passports to support better inclusion of disabled people across all major broadcasters, and delivering the Elevate and Extend programmes, which provide entry and mid-level placements for deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people on BBC shows. The forthcoming creative industries sector vision will set out the Government's vision for addressing those barriers and making careers in the media and creative industries accessible to all.

Once again, I thank the hon. Lady for securing the debate. I genuinely commend her for her work on representing and championing those under-represented groups, particularly in the APPG. A huge amount more can be done, and the Government look forward to working with her and many others to pursue those important efforts.

Question put and agreed to.

11.27 am

Sitting suspended.

Anti-social Behaviour Awareness Week

[MR VIRENDRA SHARMA *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Mr Virendra Sharma (in the Chair): Before we start the debate, while the heat remains at this exceptional level, I am content for Members not to wear jackets or ties in Westminster Hall. Mr Speaker has announced similar arrangements for the Chamber. When the House returns in the autumn, Mr Speaker will expect Members to revert to wearing jackets, and strongly encourage male Members to wear ties, when speaking in the Chamber or Westminster Hall.

Jacob Young (Redcar) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Anti-social Behaviour Awareness Week.

It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. It is also my pleasure to host today's debate on an issue that affects every part of our nation, and touches every Member of this House, as can be seen from the cross-party participation today.

Recent YouGov research commissioned by Resolve, an organisation that deals with antisocial behaviour, found that over half of people—56%—believe that “more needs to be done”

to tackle antisocial behaviour in their community. It is a blight on our towns, cities and neighbourhoods. It causes terror, particularly for elderly and vulnerable residents, causes damage to our community facilities, undermining pride of place, and breeds a culture and perception of lawlessness, which ultimately ends in only one way.

This is my second ever Westminster Hall debate, and I picked this subject because antisocial behaviour is one of the most pressing issues in my inbox every week. I am grateful to Mr Speaker for granting the debate during Anti-social Behaviour Awareness Week. As my constituents can confirm, antisocial behaviour comes in many forms. One of the biggest problems that we face in Redcar and Cleveland is linked to off-road bikes. The motorcycles are often not roadworthy or registered, and the users are not wearing the protective gear necessary to prevent serious injury.

The problem is particularly prominent in the TS6 postcode area, around the High Farm Estate in Normanby and leading up to the Eston hills, where people on such bikes are destroying precious natural habitats on our hills. However, it is even more disturbing to learn from speaking to the children at Green Gates Primary School in Redcar that they see off-road motorbikes driving past at great speeds, often around school opening and closing times. We must also recognise the distraction that the sound of motorcycles can be for young people as they try to focus on their learning in school.

Another big issue often linked to the off-road bikes problem is the drugs trade and the ease with which criminals can avoid detection by using an off-road bike, as they know that, due to safety concerns, the police are unable to intervene and stop them. That laughable situation can see a yob on a bike mooning a police officer on the trunk road in Eston, and the police officer unable to do anything in that instant other than attempt to identify the individual.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for giving way and for securing this vital debate in this important week on antisocial behaviour awareness. I concur; I have a similar problem with off-road bikes in my constituency, in the Runcorn area, the Northwich area and certainly the Frodsham area. Weaver Vale Housing Trust is involved with various partnerships, and I know that Cheshire's fire service is involved—when it is not involved with the other things that you referred to, Mr Sharma. However the police are undoubtedly under-resourced. We need more neighbourhood policing, such as neighbourhood hubs, which certainly the Opposition would propose. Would the hon. Member concur?

Jacob Young: I absolutely agree with the hon. Member, which is why I am pleased that, in the Cleveland force area, we have increased the number of police officers by 200 since the 2019 election. I also agree with him on that focus on neighbourhood policing—a return to common-sense policing, which I hope to come back to later in my remarks.

As I was saying, those situations can leave my constituents baffled. I have many law-abiding constituents who just want to do everything they can to make our area a better place, and they cannot understand how a problem as ridiculous as this is able to continue.

Another element of antisocial behaviour that I wanted to touch on was the criminal damage and vandalism that we see in communities such as Grangetown and South Bank, and in areas of Redcar and Marske. It was fantastic to see local children from Zetland Primary School recently create a beautiful mural depicting our town on a once-graffitied railway bridge. That is a great example of a community-led approach to helping us improve our area. Sadly, the following day vandals once again graffitied that bridge, destroying all of the hard work the schoolchildren had put in. I am sure hon. Members can understand how disappointing that was for the young people, but I am sure it will not prevent them making a difference in the future.

In Cleveland, our local police and crime commissioner, Steve Turner, is also the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners' lead on neighbourhood policing and antisocial behaviour, which means we are in a unique position to learn from best practice in this area. Steve has been able to reduce reoffending rates among first-time offenders by a whopping 94% in parts of the force area, through the DIVERT programme, using resources such as the safer streets fund, which we are grateful to the Government for providing.

We cannot keep relying on one-off funding pots. We need the Government to set out their plans for further reducing this societal menace. For the first time since the establishment of PCCs in 2014, 100% of published police and crime plans now highlight preventing and tackling antisocial behaviour, which proves we are giving it the attention it now deserves.

We know that antisocial behaviour is not just a policing problem; it is a partnership problem. It is down to education providers in tackling those not in education, training or employment. It is the local authority failing to identify neglect and poor parenting. It is the local health authority and its strategies for tackling drug addiction and abuse in our communities. It is housing

associations that fail to act when confronted with problem families and individuals who know the system better than they do.

I congratulate the Minister on her appointment. Given I have her in front of me, there are a few issues that I feel the Government need to tackle. I appreciate not all of them may be within her remit. First, on sentencing, it cannot be right that the police spend hours of their time collecting evidence and processing paperwork to arrest an individual, to see them get only a slap on the wrist.

For repeat offenders of these crimes seemingly to face no escalation in penalty only leads to further harm in our communities. I refer to what I said earlier about antisocial behaviour breeding a culture of lawlessness. If they know that they can get away with it on their first try, their second try, their third try, perhaps on the fourth attempt the criminality begins to escalate. At that point, it is no longer a young lad flying around on an off-road bike. He might try to shoplift and ride off on his bike. Then it escalates and he mugs a woman in the street and flies off on his bike once again. To some extent, we have enabled that downward spiral to occur, as we have allowed a culture of lawlessness to take hold among some of those criminals.

To recognise the work that the Government have done so far, I mentioned the safer streets fund, and they have also introduced community behaviour orders. I say to the Minister that CBOs simply do not go far enough. They do not have enough teeth to act as an effective deterrent. Some officers tell me that they are not worth the paper they are written on. As well as beefing up CBOs, I would like to see the police feel equally empowered to use parenting orders more frequently, to place responsibility for looking after young people who are committing antisocial behaviour back on to the parents.

The police can only be in so many places at any one time. As I have mentioned, we are grateful in Cleveland for the extra 200 police officers we have gained since 2019, but it is fundamentally the responsibility of a parent to ensure that their child is not terrorising people in their area. That should also be linked to social housing, and there should be a duty on housing associations to seek to address problem tenants.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. An issue I see more and more, which I know others across the UK also see, is a rise in youth disorder. Constituents and businesses in Burnside in Rutherglen in my constituency are becoming increasingly frustrated with the antisocial behaviour. The local police have been excellent in doing what they can, but there are various barriers to tackling the problems. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that youth disorder presents its own set of difficulties, which perhaps need more investment when it comes to finding a solution?

Jacob Young: I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady. Let us not forget that at the end of every act of antisocial behaviour, there is always a victim—someone who is feeling harassment, alarm or distress at what has been done to them or their community. I continue to believe that the core principles of both our justice and policing systems should always put the victim first.

I will end on that point and allow other Members to come in, but before I do, I will give a quick statistic. A recent YouGov antisocial behaviour poll found that

[Jacob Young]

after witnessing or experiencing antisocial behaviour 57% of people did not report it to anyone. To speak directly to anyone watching this debate, the most important thing that they can do if they are witnessing or experiencing a form of antisocial behaviour is report it to the police or the local authority. From my personal experience, I know that sometimes it can feel that nothing is being done or that intervention is meaningless. However, my message is that the only way we can finally get a grip on the problem is by all of us working together to resolve it.

2.40 pm

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the hon. Member for Redcar (Jacob Young) on securing an important debate.

This week marks a year since the end of all lockdown restrictions. For most people who had been consigned to staying at home away from loved ones, it was a most welcome development. For the first time in what felt like eternity, people were able to gather, catch up with friends and reacquaint themselves with normal life. However, for some people, the ending of covid-19 restrictions has brought only misery, with a dramatic rise in reports of antisocial behaviour in my inbox. From across my constituency, I have received reports of graffiti, damage to rugby pitches, off-road biking, drinking, drug taking and threatening behaviour.

As we have moved into the summer months, things have got worse, not better. A few weeks ago, I held a meeting with market traders, shop owners, local councillors and the police in Blackwood in my constituency. I also attended a meeting in Newbridge, where I was told that antisocial behaviour was leaving people fearful for their safety. In both meetings, constituents were reluctant to report that behaviour, simply because of the amount of time they spent waiting on the phone having rung 101.

Antisocial behaviour accounted for one fifth of all crimes reported in May this year in my constituency, but I worry that that is not the full picture. Antisocial behaviour can often lie in a difficult place between a non-emergency crime and a time sensitive one. Many people are mindful not to place undue pressure on 999 lines, but are frustrated at being unable to quickly report antisocial behaviour.

A few weeks ago, I spoke in an Adjournment debate about the importance of having quick response times for 101 calls when illegal off-road biking is reported, as often perpetrators speed away before people can even make the call. I heard what the hon. Member for Redcar said about antisocial behaviour. Very often, we can be partisan on the issue, but I was pleased that the Policing Minister agreed to meet with me and several colleagues from across the House to discuss ways to combat off-road biking. It is an issue that affects anybody with a patch of green grass in their constituency and it is important to have a joined-up approach in how we tackle it.

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con): I want to point out to the hon. Gentleman, as someone representing an urban constituency, that off-road bikes cause a problem on our streets and roads. It is not necessarily a requirement to have a patch of grass.

Chris Evans: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is saying that he has no grass in his constituency, but I fully understand what he means. Like I said, I do not think there is a single constituency that is not affected by illegal off-road biking. My point was that we need to come together, cross-party, to tackle it. I am pleased that the Government have seen how important the issue is and have agreed to meet with me and several colleagues in the autumn. With the political situation as it is, I do not know who the new Policing Minister will be, but I look forward to meeting whoever they are once they are in post.

The inability to report these issues in a timely manner is leading to the under-reporting of these crimes. I have heard from many constituents that they have previously tried to report incidents, but the inability to get through has deterred them. As incidents are often reoccurring, many constituents continue to suffer in silence as their previous attempts to report crimes have been nothing short of hopeless. People can often go for years without seeing any permanent action being taken against perpetrators, as police and councils are often unaware of the true extent of the problem.

Another issue that has been raised is the intimidation being caused by antisocial behaviour, which makes people nervous to visit their high street. I have long been concerned, even before the lockdown, about the future of our high streets, due to the competition from the internet and the rise of business rates. They do not need people being intimidated to come to town centres; that could prove the death knell of so many of our high streets.

The fear of being approached and intimidated often leaves people too scared to leave their homes to interact with the community. One constituent described to me that they feel like they have become a prisoner in their own home, unsure of what they will face when they leave their house, having previously found strangers in their garden, and having their family members approached with a knife. That is no way to live. People deserve to feel safe in their communities and in their homes.

Safety is one of the main concerns raised by constituents. Gwent police have imposed dispersal orders, but they simply push the problem into other villages. For example, when an order was imposed on Newbridge recently, the neighbouring communities of Abercarn and Crosskeys saw a spike in instances of antisocial behaviour. What makes this worse is that many of the young people do not live in the locality and take advantage of cheap rail fares to travel into places such as Newbridge that have a train station, cause havoc, then leave. That makes it difficult to identify them.

Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con): It is not just rail. In the north-east of my constituency, we have very poor public transport of any kind. In terms of people committing antisocial behaviour, it is often not in their village, but a neighbouring village or somewhere fairly close by, so I would agree with the hon. Member's point.

Chris Evans: I thank the hon. Member for his point, which proves how important it is that we have a cross-party view on this, and that we get together and come up with some solutions. He is right: there are young people jumping on buses, jumping on trains, causing havoc, and then leaving.

Paul Howell: Or quad bikes.

Chris Evans: Bikes as well; I have mentioned them.

The pandemic undeniably caused a lot of financial hardship for businesses and many high streets, and things have only just returned to normal. Antisocial behaviour around these businesses now acts as another threat to their financial viability. Without proper action to tackle antisocial behaviour, I fear many businesses will struggle to survive.

As the hon. Member for Redcar said, victims are often elderly, and struggle with mobility or health issues, which already makes it harder for them to get out into the community. It also often makes dealing with systems such as 101 much harder, and they become more vulnerable, more isolated, and sadly experience the worst impacts of antisocial behaviour.

I have heard from constituents about the worry of being threatened by groups after reporting previous abuse to the police or to their housing associations. One constituent told me they once witnessed a neighbour being cornered and verbally abused after reporting instances of drinking and drug taking; they now fear for their own safety if they report an incident. Perpetrators are often young people, and there has long been a stigma around young people and antisocial behaviour, and a perception that they are only out to destroy and cause chaos.

Paul Howell: I do not know if the hon. Gentleman is aware of how serious this intimidation can be. In the last year, there was an incident in Wingate in my constituency, where a constituent waved at a quad biker. As a result of that, his house, his caravan and his car went up in flames. It is shocking the way that things can accelerate to such a degree. The need to get to the root cause, and to address this, is absolute, as the hon. Member says.

Chris Evans: I am sad to say to the hon. Member that that is something I have heard too, and I am sure that everyone receives accounts in their inbox of terrible incidents like that. Such incidents are occurring everywhere. I hope the hon. Member's constituent has found some peace, and that the perpetrators have been brought the justice—I genuinely hope that, and I hope he can pass that message on to his constituent.

The underlying causes of antisocial behaviour run much deeper than just young people. Over the past several years, youth services have been decimated, and only now are we trying to rebuild those vital services back up in our communities. It is crucial that young people have somewhere to channel their energy to avoid getting involved in antisocial behaviour. Our plan to tackle antisocial behaviour must include a plan to provide places for young people to go. As a sports fan who—I will admit—has written two books on boxing and football, I think that sports clubs have an important role to play in that. I hope that in future there will be a way of ensuring that young people interested in sport in school have such an outlet in the community.

The issue often spreads so much further than antisocial behaviour. We know, as the hon. Member for Redcar said, that what starts as lower-level crime can escalate into more serious crimes, leaving communities feeling unsafe. A plan is needed that addresses antisocial behaviour

from multiple angles. We need better support for young people to prevent them from turning to this behaviour. We need shorter waiting times on 101 services so that if incidents do occur, victims will not only be able to speak to someone quickly, but feel empowered to report it again. Everyone deserves to live in peace and go about their business as they wish. It is finally time that we—together as a Parliament—take meaningful action to combat the problem once and for all.

2.50 pm

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Jacob Young) for securing the debate. It is a great pleasure to see my hon. Friend the Minister in her place to respond to the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Redcar knows, as I do, that antisocial behaviour and the fear of it is of great concern to our constituents. It is like a cancer in our society that imprisons people in their homes, leading to them fearing venturing out, and causes part of our community to be perceived as a no-go area. That cannot be right in a civilised society.

I want to concentrate on a problem specific to Darlington: off-road bikes. From previous speeches, it seems that off-road bikes are a perennial problem across the country. Off-road and quad bikes are the vehicles of choice for those in my community who want to tear around our estates and parks, creating noise pollution, posing an intimidating danger to pedestrians and making life grim for those who live nearby. Parents are fearful of the danger to their children. Pedestrians are fearful of being knocked over, and the all-pervading drone of the engines make parts of our community inhospitable. We must do more to rid our communities of this problem.

I praise Durham Constabulary's Operation Endurance, which is focused on tackling this scourge and, I am pleased to say, has had an appreciable impact. Since February, section 59 warning signs have been erected to notify offenders of the new powers. Anyone seen riding an off-road bike, quad or 4x4 in Darlington will have their vehicle seized straightaway by Durham Constabulary. That has had an immediate effect. By 15 February, 24 fixed penalty notices, three speeding tickets and 18 barring notices had been issued. Three illegal quads and one illegal off-road bike had been seized, while two stolen mopeds were also recovered. Furthermore, one vehicle was seized and the driver was arrested for drug driving, while a further driver was reported for careless driving. These actions are working, removing the ability of offenders to offend and acting as a deterrent by demonstrating real consequences to those involved. Durham Constabulary, Darlington Borough Council and others are working closely to tackle the problem.

Paul Howell: On working together, one thing I see in Ferryhill, part of my Sedgefield constituency, is groups of young schoolchildren coming together as what are called ambassadors. They reach out to the community and raise issues. One of the big issues they have been raising lately is antisocial behaviour and the fact that low-levels of it are affecting Ferryhill town centre and the way that children are going from the primary school to the senior school. It is wonderful to see these sorts of community-led things starting to engage with the process. As the hon. Member knows, my constituency surrounds his.

Peter Gibson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and constituent for his valuable intervention extolling the virtues of working together. I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) to the proposal to bring forward an all-party parliamentary group on this issue. I encourage him to speak with his colleague the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins), who I have had extensive discussions on this particular topic with.

As the MP for Darlington, I have continued to share the powerful messaging from Durham Constabulary and Darlington Borough Council to ensure that everyone reports these incidents to the 101 service. I could say much more about the Labour police and crime commissioner's ability to improve response times on that service in County Durham, but I will not. It is vital that local communities play their part in tackling this scourge if enforcement is to be successful. I repeat my message that every sight and sound of off-road bikes should be reported, so that our police can gather the intelligence they need to eliminate this problem.

The problem, as we have heard, is not limited to Darlington. I would ask the Minister to respond to some simple, practical and sensible suggestions on how to tackle it. Compulsory insurance for off-road bikes and quad bikes would dissuade the casual user from illegal use of the bikes. Compulsory registration of off-road bikes would make the identification of these vehicles much easier for law enforcement. Mandating manufacturers to install immobilisers to these vehicles would also help to reduce theft and misuse by unauthorised riders. These suggestions have been raised in discussion with the Minister's predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse), and I do believe that the time has come for Home Office Ministers and Department for Transport Ministers to work more closely on a package of measures to target this issue.

One further point on off-road bikes is the question of what happens after the vehicle has been seized. Currently, the police recoup their recovery and storage charges for seized vehicles by auctioning them off. This leads to a ridiculous merry-go-round of offenders buying back the very same vehicles the police have seized. Our police forces need a ringfenced pot of money to enable them to pay the recovery and storage charges, crush these vehicles and get them off our streets. There are many other types of antisocial behaviour, but the essence of today's debate seems to have concentrated on off-road bikes, which are a scourge on all our communities.

Margaret Ferrier: Another issue I have seen in my constituency is graffiti. It upsets residents, who take a lot of pride in their community. Cambuslang Community Council has taken a great initiative in brightening up Cambuslang with some beautiful murals. Does the hon. Member think that cleaner, nicer surroundings that people can take pride in can deter graffiti, or is it something we will always see happening?

Peter Gibson: The hon. Member raises an important point. I think we can summarise this as the "broken window" theory. We all want to live in good, clean and smart communities. Graffiti is a symbol of decline in our urban environment. I think we should continue to double down on addressing it.

Darlington also faces illegal and unacceptable fly-tipping in our alleyways by fly-by-night operators, who will rock up in a Transit van or a flat-bed truck and take household rubbish away for a tenner, avoiding the inconvenience of contacting the council or taking a trip to the tip.

Paul Howell: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Peter Gibson: I will give way to my hon. Friend one last time.

Paul Howell: I thank my hon. Friend for his generosity. One of the biggest areas affected by the scourge of fly-tipping are the farms that surround Darlington. People take their rubbish and just dump it in the middle of a farm. It can be very serious for that farmer. It can block his access, destroy his crops and all sorts. I would encourage my hon. Friend to reference the rural, as well as urban, situation.

Peter Gibson: As my hon. Friend well knows, I have very little rurality in my constituency. My job is to represent the people of Darlington. As a constituent of mine, he knows the problems that Street Scene in Darlington faces in cleaning up our streets, but I commend his efforts in highlighting rural crime and the scourge on our farms. I have spent time on our streets with Street Scene—Darlington Borough Council's environmental services department—and seen at first hand the impact that this issue has on local residents and on the town as a whole.

Since 2019, the now Conservative-led Darlington Borough Council has been delivering for local people, and I want to take this opportunity to praise it for all of its hard work. The new administration has also been taking action on fly-tipping, listening to the concerns of residents and working hard to tackle this scourge, with increased prosecutions of those found to be fly-tipping, and with Street Scene responding more speedily to incidents and taking a more proactive approach to rooting out those responsible.

While our Government, council and constabularies are tackling antisocial behaviour, more could be done through cross-Government working to tackle some of these issues, and with ringfenced pots of money to support the steps taken. I know that the Minister is a sound and sensible woman of integrity, and that she will have listened closely to the debate. I would like to invite her to Darlington, to see at first hand the problems, actions and further solutions to our first-hand experience of antisocial behaviour.

3.1 pm

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I congratulate the hon. Member for Redcar (Jacob Young) on securing this important debate, which is timely and very pressing. My first job after university was working for the former Member for Redcar, Mo Mowlam, so I know his area a bit, and some of the challenges that he talked about were similarly challenging back then.

Anti-Social Behaviour Awareness Week is a good initiative. There are lots of groups that I could pay tribute to, but I will highlight ASB Help and Resolve in particular—two really good organisations that work year-round

to tackle this blight on our communities. Hon. Members who made contributions have spoken about the lack of a co-ordinated approach to tackling antisocial behaviour. The hon. Member for Redcar said that it was one of the most pressing issues in his inbox, and I think that is probably the same for all Members of Parliament, whether their constituencies are rural, urban or a mix of both. His call to return to a common-sense policing approach to antisocial behaviour is the right one.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) talked about all of the issues with off-road biking, as did others, and that is something that particularly affects people across the country. I did not know that he had written two books, but I do now—I will make sure that I read them. The hon. Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) talked about people feeling imprisoned in their homes, and had some good suggestions on off-road biking, which have been mentioned in this place many times before. There is a package of measures on off-road biking, and various Bills have been suggested by Members across the House, so there is agreement there and I hope the Minister is listening to those suggestions.

We are all aware of the real misery that antisocial behaviour causes. Before Christmas, in the autumn, I made trips across the country, in my role as shadow Policing Minister, to try to understand the scale and diversity of antisocial behaviour: how it affects different communities, the impact it has on them and what is being done about it. Those were eye-opening trips. Although each area was unique, everywhere I went it was clear that antisocial behaviour is not low-level crime; it is massively underestimated and massively under-prioritised in the way that policing is done in this country. It ruins lives, makes people feel unsafe and worried, and creates division in communities.

Peter Gibson: I would welcome the hon. Lady's suggestions and ideas as to what she, her party or any of us could do to encourage and improve the reporting of antisocial behaviour.

Sarah Jones: That is an important question. Several things are linked to the reporting. First, people do not believe that anything will be done. Sadly, that is partly because twice as many people as 10 years ago now perceive that they never see a police officer on the streets. People do not feel that it is worth reporting, because they do not think they will get a response.

Secondly, at a national level, the Government do not collect data on antisocial behaviour. There was a debate in this place a few months ago where a Conservative Member made the case for the Government to record antisocial behaviour nationally, because it is not part of the metric so everybody reports and records it differently. Everybody has different approaches—some people use some interventions and some people use others—and there is no consistency across the country. In answer to the hon. Member's question, people are loth to report it because they think that nothing will be done, and they do not see it as something that is prioritised at a national level.

Peter Gibson: I am truly enlightened by the hon. Lady's response to my intervention, and truly shocked that we do not have national statistics and that there is not a level playing field across the country to assess and deal with that. I wonder whether the Minister, when she

sums up, can address that problem and perhaps suggest what more we can do to drive forward that change, from which we would all benefit.

Sarah Jones: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. The Minister has obviously been in her position for only a short time, so we will all be gentle with her today, but there is a good conversation to be had about how we measure these things, which I will come to.

It is a hidden epidemic. Any constituent will say that antisocial behaviour is an important issue, but the stats do not bear that out. Polling by YouGov found that a third of the UK public had experienced an increase in antisocial behaviour in their area, with just 1% believing that the problem had decreased a lot.

Crime and its causes are complicated and we do not have time to go into all of them now. Antisocial behaviour tends to be localised—whether it is noise, fly-tipping or graffiti—and there is a correlation between antisocial behaviour hotspots and deprivation. The rolling away of some parts of public services has had an impact on the support that is given to people with mental health issues and on youth services, which we have talked about many times, and that has had a knock-on impact on the prevalence of antisocial behaviour. Where antisocial behaviour is rife, other crime follows. We know that it can be the starting point for real issues building up in communities.

Since the 2019 Government came to power, crime overall is up 18% and prosecutions are down 18%. Rates of arson are spiralling: incidents are up by 90,000 compared with 2019 but the charge rate is just 4.3%, which is down from 8.3% in 2015, and nearly 60% of investigations—more than 280,000 cases—are closed without a suspect being identified. Arson does huge damage to local communities. It ruins property, of course, and it ruins people's sense of safety and pride in their community, so the vicious cycle continues. When I was in the north-east, there was a particular issue with arson that local people were very concerned about.

On the sense that nothing will be done if these issues are reported, that is sadly now the case when it comes to some crimes. Recent figures on car theft, for example, show that just one in 100 thefts of cars resulted in a charge. If someone's car is stolen, and only one in 100 get a charge, the chances of them reporting antisocial behaviour and thinking that something could be done are quite low. Recent figures showed that in nearly half of neighbourhoods in the country, no burglaries had been solved by the police in the last three years at all, which is truly shocking and shames us, and speaks to some of the struggles that the police are having in doing the common-sense policing that we all want them to be doing.

In this context, the presence of neighbourhood police officers is very important. There are over 7,000 fewer neighbourhood officers on the frontline now than there were 12 years ago. There is only one neighbourhood officer for every 2,400 people in this country now, whereas 10 years ago there was one per 1,600 people. That does make a difference.

For the first time, the Government have introduced a new metric for measuring neighbourhood crime, which is a combination of four other crimes: vehicle-related theft, domestic burglary, theft from a person, and robbery of personal property. It is an interesting measure. The Government will say that neighbourhood crime has fallen

[Sarah Jones]

in the last year, but the metric does not include any level of antisocial behaviour and it does not include bike theft, criminal damage or arson, so it is not a clear and complete picture of what neighbourhood crime is. I ask the Minister to look at that issue in her new role.

We know that a third of 999 calls are now about mental health emergencies and the police just cannot cope; they are responding to mental health issues and not to the crimes that they should be investigating. They spend significant time dealing with other crises in the community, and the impact of noise, graffiti, fly-tipping, drug dealing and vandalism is felt more and more acutely.

Good work is being done in patches, and I am sure that all of us would pay tribute to the police and crime commissioners who are working hard to make a difference. When I was in Northumbria, I saw the rural crime network with police and crime commissioner Kim McGuinness, which seemed to be working really effectively. When I was in Cardiff, I learned of a reduction in antisocial behaviour through the Step into Sport programme; my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn mentioned the importance of sport earlier. In Merseyside, there is a youth diversion fund, which more than 6,500 young people engage with. These are pockets of good practice. Sadly, because the police simply do not have the resources to do what they want to do, they are only pockets and not the norm.

I hope that neighbourhood policing will be a real focus for the Minister. Last week, I had the pleasure of welcoming some police community support officers to Parliament to celebrate the 20 years since PCSOs were introduced. That was under the last Labour Government and Lord Blunkett, who was there to talk to them. Those PCSOs' insights were really interesting: they knew their patch inside out, they had built up relationships with local people, and they were able to intervene to de-escalate and tackle some of the issues of antisocial behaviour in a really effective way. Some of them told me stories of how they had dealt with kids who had been antisocial who then, later in life, came up to them in the street and told them how proud they were of what they had become, in part because they had a good relationship with a PCSO.

However, the number of PCSOs has been cut by nearly half since 2010. The peculiar thing about that is that it has not been a Government policy; it has just happened because of cuts to services. It was not deliberate. I ask the Minister to look at PCSOs and consider whether we need to restore their numbers. I think that we do, because they are the eyes and ears of the police.

As I have said, hard data is not collected properly. I have made a series of freedom of information requests across the country about how forces deal with antisocial behaviour. They all do it in different ways. The issue needs gripping at the centre, with some good measurements in place.

Peter Gibson: The hon. Lady makes an important point about the value of our PCSOs and the work they do in our community. In Darlington, we have seen 136 new officers recruited to Durham constabulary, and some of those new recruits to our police force were directly

recruited from among existing PCSOs. The skills, talents and abilities that those PCSOs learned in their job have not been lost to public service, as those PCSOs have gone on to work in the police.

Sarah Jones: That is a really interesting point. The same has happened with specials, but there is then a shortage of PCSOs and specials, because they go up to become officers. Alongside that, we have lost the experience of all the police who have been cut over the last 10 years. Although we have the new recruits coming in, some of whom are PCSOs and specials, the experience of local communities and the knowledge that the police have built up over many years has gone, and it will take some time to bring that back.

Labour has made commitments to put police back into neighbourhoods through police hubs. That way, there will be a space in every community where people can interact with the police, but with the infrastructure around them of local authorities, enforcement officers and youth services. Such neighbourhood prevention teams, as it were, could work collectively to try to crack down on some of the antisocial behaviour and its causes in the community. We think that would have a big impact on presence, problem solving and focus on antisocial behaviour. That is really needed, as are some of the measures hon. Members have mentioned, such as changing legislation around off-road biking and similar issues.

We also think that there should be a recruitment drive for special constables. I was with the south Wales special constables last night, who have won a Queen's award for volunteering. They give up their time for free and it is quite extraordinary how proud they are of the work that they do. Their numbers have also fallen by about 50% over the last 10 years, and it will be interesting to see whether the Minister has any thoughts yet on specials and whether those numbers need to increase.

There is much to be done. We talk about antisocial behaviour often in this place, particularly in Westminster Hall, where Members often feel the need to come and talk about it because it is such an issue. Sadly, we do not get the response from Government that we would like. I ask the Minister to think about PCSOs and specials, about measurements of antisocial behaviour and about how we grip the issue nationally and really understand it.

I also ask Conservative Members to think about these issues when they are considering who to vote for to be the next Prime Minister. The right hon. Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak) wrote in *The Daily Telegraph* yesterday that he would ringfence child exploitation teams from any future policing cuts. Does that mean he is planning future policing cuts? That is a question that hon. Members should ask him and others, because it is an important issue for the next Prime Minister.

The Home Office has a key leadership role to play, and I ask the Minister to make sure that is happening. Criminals cannot be given free rein. When low-level antisocial behaviour is not tackled, it leads to greater and more significant crime—drug running and all the other issues that have been mentioned. That is not good enough for our communities; they need more support and reassurance. I hope the Minister will take these issues seriously.

3.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amanda Solloway): May I begin by saying what a pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship, Mr. Sharma? I have only been in the role for a few days; anything that I fail to answer I will take away and respond to in writing. I will be delighted to pass on some of the questions about policing to the Minister for Policing, my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove).

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Jacob Young) on securing this incredibly important debate. He is always a forceful advocate for his constituents, as he demonstrated in his remarks, but on this occasion there is an added element of timeliness. As he and other Members referred to, the timing of this debate is particularly appropriate because it is Anti-social Behaviour Awareness Week.

Antisocial behaviour plagues the lives of victims. It has an adverse impact on the atmosphere and the environment of areas where it is rife. It ruins law-abiding citizens' enjoyment of public places. It is not, therefore, something that we can focus on for a week and then move on from; it must be a priority all year. This awareness week is, none the less, a vital opportunity to highlight the damage done and the misery caused by antisocial behaviour, and to bring together the various agencies that have a role in confronting them. I have been delighted to support the awareness week, and I have sent messages to launch the event that took place here in the Palace of Westminster and to the conference that is going on today.

Antisocial behaviour should never be dismissed as low level. It is a serious problem and the Government are serious about addressing it. That is why this week, the Home Office is launching a set of principles designed to galvanise and strengthen the response to antisocial behaviour. The principles will act as a kind of benchmark, setting clear expectations for local agencies and guiding their approach to issues, such as how they encourage reporting and delivering appropriate and effective interventions. Ultimately, we are trying to get real consistency in the understanding of and approach to antisocial behaviour across the country.

I realise that to some this may be familiar territory, but it is worth taking a moment to touch on the powers that can be used to tackle antisocial behaviour. The police, local authorities and other local agencies have a range of flexible tools and powers under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. There is a particular local dimension to the issue, which manifests itself in different ways in different locations, as has been mentioned. It is therefore for local areas to decide how best to deploy the powers available to them, depending on the specific circumstances. They are best placed to understand what is driving the behaviour in question and the impact that it is having, and to determine the most appropriate response.

To support local areas in making effective use of powers, the Home Office published statutory guidance, which sets out the importance of focusing on the needs of the victim and the local community, as well as ensuring that the relevant legal tests are met. The guidance was updated last month to include expedited public spaces protection orders, and further guidance on the

community trigger, referencing the role of health agencies and police and crime commissioners. As colleagues may be aware, the community trigger gives victims of persistent antisocial behaviour the ability to demand a formal case review. Further clarification has also been added to the guidance on community protection notices, and the role of restorative justice as an option in the community remedy section.

We need to ensure that local areas are making proper and effective use of these powers to tackle the underlying drivers of antisocial behaviour and protect victims and communities.

Margaret Ferrier: I welcome the Minister to her place and thank her for giving way. I think there is a link between the soaring cost of living and a rise in antisocial behaviour. As more people are pushed into poverty, mental health deteriorates and they become disillusioned. Does she agree that better resourcing and funding for drug and addiction services in communities is vital to addressing that crucial contributory factor to antisocial behaviour?

Amanda Solloway: The reasons why antisocial behaviour occurs are incredibly complex. The hon. Lady will know that I am a great advocate for mental health and how we support mental health issues in the community. That is why we continue to keep the issue under review through the Home Office-chaired antisocial behaviour strategic board, which brings together a range of partners and representatives from key agencies and other Departments.

The Government are providing significant funding to drive efforts to tackle antisocial behaviour. An important scheme in this space is the safer streets fund, which was established to help local areas put in place measures designed to prevent crime and improve safety. Earlier rounds of the fund had a secondary focus on tackling antisocial behaviour through initiatives such as improved street lighting, increased CCTV and training. We are now taking the emphasis on this problem a step further, with antisocial behaviour one of the primary crime and issue types to be targeted in the fourth and fifth rounds of the fund.

In addition, crime and antisocial behaviour form part of the prospectus for the £4.8 billion levelling-up fund. The Government are also funding diversionary interventions to help safeguard young people away from crime. We have invested £200 million over 10 years in the Youth Endowment Fund, a charity whose core mission is to fund interventions to identify what works in reducing and preventing serious violence. It was a great pleasure to listen to the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) talk about how interventions such as boxing and sport can help in these situations. I, too, will have a look at the book—I will be very pleased to look at it.

Most Members mentioned off-road biking. We know that the inappropriate use of off-road bikes can have a significant impact on individuals and communities. I listened very carefully to the suggestions by my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson), and I will look at those more fully. Reckless use of these vehicles can cause people to feel intimidated and fearful. Enforcement of road traffic law and decisions about how to deploy available resources are rightly the responsibility of chief officers.

[Amanda Solloway]

A suitably trained police driver may undertake a pursuit of a motorcyclist. The decision whether to undertake a pursuit is an operational one, taking account of risk and proportionality in each situation. It is worth noting, however, that the police have the power under section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2002 to seize vehicles, including off-road bikes, being used in an antisocial manner.

Peter Gibson: I am grateful to the Minister for highlighting section 59 notices, which, as she will have heard in my speech, are having an appreciable impact in Darlington. The specific problem my local force has is the cost of disposing of the vehicle, to stop the merry-go-round of seizing the vehicle and auctioning it to cover the cost of disposal, which ends up with the perpetrator getting their vehicle back and continuing to perpetrate the problem.

Amanda Solloway: I would appreciate a longer conversation and would, therefore, love to take up the offer of visiting my hon. Friend in Darlington. The police can also use the powers in the 2014 Act to deal with antisocial behaviour involving vehicles.

On the point about motorcycle noise outside schools, the Department for Transport is trialling noise camera technology to understand whether it can be used to automatically detect when vehicles are excessively noisy. The objective of that is to provide local authorities and police with effective enforcement tools capable of capturing sufficient evidence to support successful prosecutions of offenders. That will further enable local areas to enforce against vehicles that have been modified or driven in a way to create excessive noise.

In closing, I thank all hon. Members for their contributions to the debate. It is clear from speaking to constituents and others just how important this issue is. I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar said about how important it is to report these crimes. Antisocial behaviour matters a great deal to constituents and, therefore, to us as their representatives. It strikes at the heart of how decent, law-abiding citizens want their neighbourhoods and communities to feel. We will not tolerate a situation where people have to suffer because of the actions of a selfish minority. Antisocial behaviour is a blight. We are determined to tackle it wherever, whenever and however it rears its ugly head.

3.27 pm

Jacob Young: I thank everyone who participated in today's debate. It is a real pleasure to see the Minister in her place. When she is visiting Darlington, I invite her

to come along to Redcar and Cleveland, where there will be a lemon top waiting for her. I have heard the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones), speak before about my predecessor, Dr Marjorie Mowlam. It is right that we acknowledge the great impact that she had on Redcar and the country.

It has been distressing to hear some of the stories, including those from Wingate, where constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Paul Howell) were victims of arson, from Darlington, where fly-tipping blights communities, and from Newbridge high street, where businesses do not feel safe. I have said for some time that the problems we face on the high street include not only the fact that there are not as many shops any more—we have to do more to create spaces that people want to visit and make it easier for people to visit those spaces—but, crucially, the fact that people have to feel safe when they visit the high street. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) for mentioning that.

As I said at the start, this issue affects people across the country. We heard from the hon. Member for Islwyn in Wales and from the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) in Scotland—there is still time for the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) to burst through the doors and intervene. I am grateful to the new Minister for addressing some of the points raised. I know that, as the diligent Member of Parliament for her constituency of Derby North, she knows these issues all too well. I hope that, in her new position, she is able to resolve some of the sticking points that our local police forces face, as well work with other agencies to tackle underlying causes of antisocial behaviour.

Finally, I thank my constituents, who provided me with examples of antisocial behaviour that they witnessed, and the charities mentioned, such as ASB Help, Resolve and others, which do a lot of work in this field to make a difference every day. I also thank my local police officers and PCSOs, who do everything they can in incredibly difficult circumstances. I am very proud to represent Redcar and Cleveland and all my constituents who work so hard to make our area the best it can be. We are let down by a small minority with no respect, but that does not take away from the amazing work that some do in our communities day in, day out, and I pay tribute to them.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered anti-social behaviour awareness week.

3.30 pm

Sitting suspended.

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

4.2 pm

Mr Virendra Sharma (in the Chair): In the absence of Ian Liddell-Grainger, I have to suspend the sitting until 4.30 pm. I am sure the Minister and all hon. Members who have arrived can go and have a cup of coffee.

4.3 pm

Sitting suspended.

Children's Social Care Workforce

4.30 pm

Mr Virendra Sharma (in the Chair): Before I ask the mover to move the motion, we expect two votes around 5 o'clock. Once the votes are called, I will suspend the sitting for 25 minutes. If hon. Members come back early, we can start early, but that will be the procedure, so it is up to hon. Members to decide which way they want to go, making contributions now or waiting until later.

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the children's social care workforce.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I begin by stating why this issue matters. Social workers look after the most vulnerable children in our society. These are children for whom the national Government, local authorities and all of us here today have a responsibility. The state has a duty to ensure that these children get a good upbringing and the opportunity to do well in life. That brings me to the subject of the debate: the children's social care workforce, in particular the failure to recruit and retain enough social workers. I will look at three aspects in turn: why recruitment and retention matter, the current dire situation, and what needs to change.

Failing to recruit and, even more importantly, retain enough social workers is a real problem. It negatively impacts children across our country who most need extra support. That is why this issue matters. Failing to recruit and retain enough social workers can destroy any chance of social mobility for children in care for the rest of their lives. It often leaves children more vulnerable to being preyed on by grooming gangs or county lines gangs. I am sure many hon. Members here have had briefings from their local police force on how these evil gangs prey on vulnerable children—often those in care. That is not a fate that these children deserve. How the Government and society as a whole look after these children is a good judge of our values as a country. At the moment, the Government are failing. Charlotte Ramsden, the president of the Association of Directors of Children's Services, has said:

"It is important for children to have a consistency of social worker in their lives where possible, but this is increasingly difficult with more social workers leaving the profession".

To give these children the best life chances, the Government need a proper strategy not only to recruit social workers, but to retain them.

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful point about the stability that children need. The recent independent care review chaired by Josh MacAlister, which I am sure she is aware of, found that agency social workers contribute to the instability experienced by children, which she mentions, and cause a loss of over £100 million a year. I am sure she will agree that that money could be spent on the frontline to improve the life chances of these children. Does my hon. Friend agree that with the rates of agency work at a record high of 15.5%, the Minister needs to explain what the Government's strategy and policy is to tackle the overuse of agency staff?

Ms Rimmer: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend—in fact, that point is in my speech. When a child loses a social worker, the trust and relationship they developed no longer exists. These are children who have often experienced horrific trauma and abuse. I am sure that all Members in this room have dealt with constituency casework of this kind. It is these very children who are more vulnerable who are least trusting of adults. That is why consistency of social work is crucial to success in giving these children a good start in life. Of course, a change of social worker cannot always be prevented—a social worker could move home, or circumstances change for certain reasons—but there are many aspects that are well within Government control.

Secondly, the current situation is dire, and recruitment and retention are not good. Children's social worker shortages have reached a five-year high. In 2021, 3,630 social workers left a post at a local authority—a 16% increase on the previous year. Of those, 33% left after less than two years of service, and 36% left after serving between two to five years. Losing many social workers who are at a relatively early stage in their career is not sustainable. If the Government do not fix this issue, and fix it fast, more children will suffer the consequences. Of those who left, 77% left children's social care altogether, and 23% moved to agency roles. This is invaluable expertise that is being lost.

The Government tend to paint such departures as having been for personal financial reasons, but that is just out of touch. Social workers do not go into their line of work to get rich; they do it out of a duty of care to children. They have an incredibly difficult job, looking after our most vulnerable children. In a survey by the British Association of Social Workers, over half of social workers are seriously considering leaving due to unmanageable caseloads. I am sure that many here who are fortunate enough to count a social worker among their friends or family will know how stressful the job has become over the past five years. Resources are stretched thin, and caseloads are becoming increasingly unmanageable. It is a serious problem when seven out of 10 social workers feel they are unable to complete their work within contracted hours.

Social workers are unable to leave their job at the workplace. This puts additional stress and strain on a social worker's home life. There is little chance of a healthy work-life balance, and that has a knock-on effect on to the children. Social workers really care about the children they support—they want what is best for them. Yet, in a survey by Community Care, social workers themselves were clear that the increasing number and complexity of cases was impacting the quality of their work. That is bad for social workers, and it is even worse for the children they look after.

Local authorities are having to rely on agency workers at a rate of over 15%, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) mentioned. That is double the rate of agency workers who are used in adult social care. Each agency worker costs a local council at least an additional £26,000 per year. That money is going to the agencies, not the workers, which results in a loss of over £100 million per year that could be spent on frontline services, including social workers. The current strategy—or lack of strategy—needs to be addressed.

Thirdly, what can be done, and what recommendations should be made? The Conservative party manifesto promised that the Government would review the care system to make sure that all care placements and settings provided children and young adults with the support they needed. It is quite clear, after almost three years, that this has still not happened. I understand that the current news headlines are dominated by finding out who the next Prime Minister will be, but that does not mean that important issues such as this should be pushed to one side. The independent review of children's social care published its final report almost two months ago. The previous Minister, the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince), said he was working on a response; that has not been received. We are about to enter the summer recess without that response. The Government need to make progress on their promise—and quickly.

This is not a party political issue. It is an issue the Government should be working on cross-party, as we all want what is best for these children. However, each day, recruitment and retention remain a problem. More and more children are denied the opportunities and life chances they were promised. To help solve the problem, first and foremost we need an early career framework. Evidence shows that it is mostly social workers who had worked for less than five years who were leaving the profession. An early career framework could last five years, with plenty of training and opportunities provided.

Currently, the only real progression for social workers is to go into a management position, yet many want to remain on the frontline. As a country, we should seek to keep their expertise. We need career routes for the development of frontline social workers. We also need standardised pay and conditions, which need to be developed in a way that recognises expertise. Although social workers do not enter the profession to get rich, they should not be forced to go food banks. Social workers should be rewarded for their expertise and development.

Under the current system, local authorities compete against one another. That is bad for social workers and the children they look after. The models for teaching and healthcare professionals set out how standardised pay can be done, so why not look at these models? Finally, and perhaps more importantly, we should attract new social workers to the profession. We need a national recruitment and communications strategy. Being a social worker is an incredibly rewarding job. Social workers look after the most vulnerable children in our society, yet they are not receiving the respect they deserve for the value they add to our country. This fundamentally needs to change. Being a social worker is a difficult job, but a vital one for any civilised society and country. How we look after our most vulnerable children is how our society can be judged.

The importance of children's social workers to the country needs to be emphasised in a national recruitment strategy. The recruitment campaign needs to target not only those who may become social workers, but also the wider public. Often, as has been the case with countless TV shows, social workers are depicted as villains. The reality is that they look after those in need. A national strategy to promote the invaluable role that social workers play in our country is essential.

Although it is not the topic of this debate, it is worth remembering that profits in the children's residential home sector increased from £702 per child per week in

2016 to £910 per week in 2020. More importantly, the 10 largest providers of children's social care placements made more than £300 million in profits last year. Those profits are made off the back of children in care—that care is not always good, and is often far away from home. As profits are going up, the situation of children in care is not getting better. Social workers can be proud of their contribution to our country. It is time the country gave them something back.

I urge the Government to take on board the recommendations that I, and I am sure many colleagues, will make today. We all want what is best for these children. Now is time for the Government to act. I urge the Government to make this issue their No.1 priority.

4.44 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under you, Mr Sharma. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer) for introducing this crucial debate. I am saddened that Westminster Hall is not packed today. After 12 years, we must recognise that families are being failed, as are children, and our social work workforce is being set up to fail. We have around 80,000 children in social care—let us think about that number. If we do not change direction, in 10 years' time that will be 100,000 children. If we put in the changes needed, we could see that number fall.

The crime is that we know what has to be done. We have had the report of 1,001 critical days. We have had Josh MacAlister's report for the independent review of children's social care. Today is the day on which the Minister must commit to pivot the system in order to invest in our young people. We know the trauma that being in care brings to children and families. Our social workers work so hard and are so dedicated. It is one of the hardest jobs—keeping children safe, keeping families together and acting as a corporate parent—but they are fighting a fire that will not go out.

We all know the constituency cases: the desperate situation where social workers are trying to keep a family together, but they remove a child and we question whether that was the right decision. It is hard. Perhaps parents can no longer cope because their charge is at significant risk of harm to themselves or others because they are so traumatised. That is the daily experience that social workers have to deal with. It is not just the shared pressure they are under, because of the volume of unsafe case work—they have so much of it and do not have the resources they need—but the emotional stress of the job that takes its toll. That is why we need to look after our social workers and ensure that they have the support they need, because they want to break the cycles. They want to ensure that families are given that chance in life to stay together and have the support they need.

The independent review of children's social care was an important moment. I really do thank Josh MacAlister and his team for the work that they did. They had so many children, young people and families with lived experience, and care-experienced people, leading that work, which is crucial to setting the path for the future. As my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens South and Whiston said, we need proper support for people who are newly qualified, with the five-year early career

framework ensuring that people are working under supervision, with the opportunity learn, gain competencies, get knowledge and skills and focus on rebuilding families with the right interventions, which is a central part of Josh MacAlister's report. They should not make those really difficult decisions until they have that experience. He suggests working with family helpers, bringing together early help and a child in need of support.

There should a multidisciplinary team wrapped around that, as opposed to pulling the child in so many different directions. There should be consistency in support around the child. As that practitioner gains experience to become an expert practitioner, there is a career path for them to gain and use that knowledge, so that they can have those sensitive conversations and deal with challenging situations. They analyse all the information and their experience in order to make the right decisions on behalf of a child and their family, and to deal with the courts. An observation that my colleagues in York have made is that dealing with the courts is challenging for social workers. We need to ensure that there is good training for judges, who are often quite removed from the real experiences of those social workers or the children for whom they are advocating. We need to look at the court system as well. We must ensure that we provide good support.

I say to the Minister that, although there is much churn in his party at the moment, we have to invest in these people. We have got to ensure that they get decent pay and recognition for the work that they do, rewarding the skills that they have and doing such an important job. Josh MacAlister's report talks about a national pay framework, which is really important for the profession to stop the constant churn as social workers move to another authority because they pay that little bit more. That is destabilising the relationship with the child. The child should be central to all of this. We should ensure that there is a proper framework. In the NHS, we call it Agenda for Change and it is a good system of job evaluation that has lasted for 20 years, showing that it is sustainable as a mechanism for a pay and progression system.

I hope that the Minister looks at Agenda for Change and considers how it can be applied to social workers across the board, to ensure that caseloads are safe, which means that we need more capacity in the system. We need more social workers to carry out this crucial role and to get on top of the number of children who are at risk or who are presenting a need. If make an injection of funding, we can ensure that the eventual financial outcome will be far, far less. Fiscally it is a smart thing to do to invest at this point, because Josh MacAlister says in his report that it would mean that instead of having 100,000 children in care, that figure would go down to 50,000 children in care in 10 years' time, which is certainly something we should fight for.

I have to agree with Josh MacAlister when he refers in his report to the "broken market" around residential care. I do not know whether the Minister heard the "File on 4" programme on BBC Radio 4 about this issue, but it was truly shocking; if he has not heard it already, I recommend that he listens to it. The programme is about the experience that children have in residential care. Profiteering from vulnerable children? It is disgraceful that that happens. We have to consider how we bring that care closer to the child, closer to the family and ensure

[*Rachael Maskell*]

that they both get the support they need; rather than making money out of these vulnerable children, we should invest in them and their future.

We must also invest in our social workers, supporting them to achieve their very best and to keep them safe. That is what we want to see, wrapping around them a multi-disciplinary team, including mental health services, education and even services related to play. Instead of services fighting against each other, they should work together.

What came out of Josh McAlister's report was a view that every child or young person must be in a safe, stable and loving environment. That is not the experience of children today, but we must make it the ambition. We do not have time to waste; these are lives that are vulnerable right now.

Consequently, I trust that the Minister will take that report and will ensure that we get a response to it. I do not know what timescale the Minister is thinking of; perhaps he can tell us today, because these children cannot wait—and Labour Members certainly cannot wait either.

4.52 pm

Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer) for securing this important and timely debate.

The true measure of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable members, and there are surely no members of our society who are more vulnerable than the hundreds of thousands of young people currently in our social care system, too many of whom spend every day at risk of physical harm—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Virendra Sharma (in the Chair): Order.

4.52 pm

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

5.15 pm

On resuming—

Mr Virendra Sharma (in the Chair): The debate will now continue until 5.55 pm. I hope there are no Divisions before that. I call Mick Whitley.

Mick Whitley: The true measure of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable members. There are surely no members of our society more vulnerable than the hundreds of thousands of young people in our social care system, too many of whom spend every day at risk of physical harm and neglect and who are denied the most basic security, safety and affection that is every child's birth right. By that metric, our country—or more accurately, this Government—is guilty of grotesque moral failure. There are far too many young people falling through the cracks of a social care system that is breaking at the seams.

In recent years we have heard endless arguments about how to fix the crisis in children's social care. Countless debates have been tabled in Parliament, roundtables

convened and studies commissioned. However, the situation we face today is far worse than it ever has been. It is time for Conservative Members to recognise that the causes of the crisis are very simple. It is the direct and chilling consequence of 12 long years of cuts to frontline services that have left children's services in every corner of this country at breaking point.

In the first 10 years of this Tory Government, central Government funding for children's services was cut by almost a quarter in real terms. Spending on vital early intervention services almost halved nationally, and in some local authorities it has fallen by as much as 80%. The result is that we are reaching far too many young people in need far too late. The number of children being taken into care is soaring in deprived towns such as the one that I represent. It is young people in our most left-behind communities, such as in the north end of my constituency, who are suffering the most. For all this Government's talk on levelling up, spending on children's services has fallen three times faster in the north of England than in the south.

It is not just young people who are suffering. Social workers are truly our nation's unsung heroes. Their job requires a strength of character, bravery and compassion that I would struggle to muster. However, they are increasingly being forced to handle unmanageable workloads while surviving on pay that has stagnated for over a decade. The fact that growing numbers of social workers are being forced to return from a hard day's work supporting the most vulnerable children, only to line up for food banks to feed their own, should shame us all.

We should not be surprised that more social workers left the sector last year than at any point in the last five years, with more than one in three leaving after just two years of service. We should not be surprised that, increasingly, vulnerable children and their families are becoming accustomed to a revolving door of social workers, with little chance to establish the lasting and meaningful bonds that are so essential in getting them the support that they need. "The Case for Change" report has highlighted a desperate need to do more to recruit, retain and support a high-quality workforce. However, we have no hope of doing that unless we look urgently at restoring funding for children's services and ending the scourge of in-work poverty in that sector.

I would not be surprised if my pleas to the Minister fall on deaf ears. After all, my calls for renewed investment in services supporting the most vulnerable could hardly be more at odds with the programme of slash-and-burn economics being advocated by all of the country's prospective future leaders. If the Minister will not listen to me, then I hope he will heed the warnings of the Public Services Committee, which last year called for funding for children's services to be returned to 2010 levels. Perhaps the Minister will listen to Action for Children, who are so active on the frontline of the crisis and are demanding that the funding gap in the sector be addressed by 2025, with a clear link between funding and the level of needs in communities like my own.

If even that will not steer this Government to action, I hope that the desperate message that I received from social workers in my constituency will. They are telling me that we are standing on the brink of a catastrophe. Enough is enough.

5.19 pm

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer), who displayed her regular passion and insight during her opening speech on such a vital topic of recruitment and retention in the children's social care sector. We have spoken at length about the subject over many months on the train coming down to this place.

So far, we have had consensus from voices in this Chamber today—certainly from Labour—with hon. Members expressing their gratitude to those working in the sector. It is a vocational calling that offers a lifeline of support, providing that helping hand in times of crisis. In fact, I think my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) referred to that responsibility as corporate parents. It is ultimately about safeguarding 80,000 or so of the most vulnerable children.

Children's social work is personal to me. I have lived with a children's social worker for decades—quite literally. I have seen the joy on my wife's face when a child in care has secured a job, gone to university or got a training opportunity, when a kind-hearted local business has brought Christmas presents when there is no family to bring them, or when siblings have finally, after waiting a very long time—often far too long—secured a loving adoption in the safe and caring environment that has been referred to. I have also been witness to tragedy and heartache, from my wife helping a team to provide support to families in the immediate aftermath of the Manchester Arena terrorist atrocity to ensuring that the most vulnerable children are protected from the most inhumane individuals on planet Earth.

That professionalism, dedication, hours and sheer determination to get things done for children most in need humbles us all. I am not just referring to my wife, of course. Many thanks go to all the social workers in my local councils of Cheshire West and Chester and Halton and to all those working up and down the country.

To have a children's social care system that does right by children and families, we need a stable workforce. That clarion call has echoed across the Chamber today. The recent independent review of children's social care by Josh MacAlister recognised that:

“The greatest strength of the children's social care system lies in its workforce.”

However, social workers are just not getting the support that they need.

Across the country, and in both my local authorities, caseloads and case complexity seem to be ever increasing, making it hard for councils to recruit and, especially, retain experienced staff. Although both my local authorities have some brilliant social workers, the scale of deprivation found in parts of Halton, in my constituency, means very high and complex caseloads and that impacts on the council's ability to recruit and keep good, experienced social workers. That fact has been evidenced by Unison in its manifesto for social work. If we do not look after the wellbeing of social workers, we are not looking after the wellbeing of the children and families that need their support. Social care has a deep and profound impact on the lives of vulnerable children, but a system that cannot maintain a stable, supported workforce will ultimately fail. That is what we have seen—a crisis up and down the country.

It has got to the point where for every new social worker coming to work in Halton, there are two leaving. For every new one, two leave—that is a fact. It is completely and utterly unsustainable. Nationally, as referenced by my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens South and Whiston in the opening of the debate, a third of social workers left their roles after two years of service, with almost three quarters of those who resign leaving social work altogether. A lack of public understanding and appreciation of social work, unbearably high workloads, wages that have stayed low while costs increase—agency costs in particular—and a system that does not provide support, especially for early-career social workers, all contribute to a perfect storm. A depleted and dejected workforce—that is why three quarters of social workers are leaving altogether. The other quarter move on to agency roles, which make up an increasing proportion of social workers in our system. That is something the review called “inexcusably high”. In Halton, levels of agency workers have gone from between 7% and 12% pre-covid to up to 40% in some teams now.

Agency workers, as discussed in the Chamber today, are a less stable presence for the children and the families they support. They are more expensive and were the subject of a Competition and Markets Authority study last year that found that the largest private providers are making excessive profits—they are profiteering from the most vulnerable children. That should have no place in our public services. Improving children's social care means reducing the dependency on agency workers and ending this dog-eat-dog situation with councils competing against councils and the price going up.

My asks of the Minister, whom I welcome to his place—I am not sure how long he will last, but all the best—centre on Josh MacAlister's recommendations, and those of the British Association of Social Workers and Unison. What are the Government doing to ensure that we have a valued social care workforce able to meet the needs of those most vulnerable children and families who rely on it? What plan do the Government have to implement an effective recruitment and retention strategy for children's social care workers? How will the Minister ensure that social workers spend less time dealing with complicated bureaucracy and give more time with children and families? What will the Minister do about low levels of pay—without doubt—a lack of support for career progression and training, and the need better to expand and fund social care bursaries? An early-career framework was referenced, as well as in the review. Finally, what will the Minister do to tackle the overuse of agency social workers? The money of our taxpayers is literally draining off shore, out of this country, to companies that do not even pay a fair share of taxes for our public services.

In conclusion, the safety and welfare of all our children in need is paramount for any Government of any political persuasion. Children's social care has been woefully underfunded, with council finances hollowed out by 50% over the past 12 years—a political choice, which the new Prime Minister, when anointed on 5 September, will have to focus on urgently. A well-rewarded and valued workforce would focus on our most in-need children, and ensure that they live in a safe, loving, compassionate and caring environment, with opportunities in the future of their lives.

5.28 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair today, Mr Sharma.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer) on securing this important debate. She spoke powerfully about the crisis in children's social care: the difficulties of local authorities in recruiting and retaining sufficient numbers of social workers; the lifelong impact that the experiences of children who enter the care system can have if there is not that therapeutic, supportive and consistent intervention and support to help them address their challenges; the way that children are left vulnerable to exploitation; and the pressures on our social care workforce in terms of unmanageable caseloads. She spoke about the urgency of the need for a response to the independent review, the need for an early-career framework for the first five years of a social worker's career and the fact that we really need and want social workers to be able to make a lifelong commitment to work in the profession, to develop their skills and to be able to progress. She also spoke about the urgent need for an end to profiteering in the children's home and private foster agency sector.

We also heard from my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), who highlighted the work that social workers already do on a day-to-day basis, often battling in very difficult circumstances. She spoke about the need for a national pay framework to stabilise the workforce and stop different local authorities from competing with each other, and the parallels with the agenda for change in the NHS. She also spoke about the broken market in children's residential care. I will return to that later in my remarks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) spoke powerfully for social workers in his constituency, who say they are on the brink of a catastrophe if the crisis in children's care is not addressed, and about the urgency of the need for action.

Finally, we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury), who spoke powerfully of his wife's experience as a children's social worker—about the immensely rewarding difference that social workers can make in the life of a child, but also the challenges of working in the most difficult circumstances, and the way that social workers across the country stand ready when tragedy strikes and children find themselves in unimaginably difficult circumstances. He highlighted the wider context of deprivation bearing down on families, affecting the wellbeing of children and adding to the pressures in the social care system, which we must not forget in this debate. He mentioned the shocking statistic from one of his boroughs that for every one new social worker, two are leaving the profession—that illustrates the importance of the debate, and why we are talking about the crisis in the children's social care workforce.

The challenges that have been brought to the House by hon. Members from the north-west of England and from York are not unique to those parts of the country. The recently published independent review of children's social care, written by Josh MacAlister, concludes that our children's social care system is broken, and that a total reset is needed.

I pay tribute to everyone working in children's social care, who strive day in, day out to provide safety, support and stability to children who are in need, or

whose birth parents are unable to care for them. Their work is vital and it makes a huge difference. Social workers are highly skilled; they make carefully balanced decisions about what is in a child's best interests, in a context where the risks are often extremely high.

It is no exaggeration to say that their work can all too often be a matter of life and death, but the statistics on children's social workers tell a clear story of a workforce in crisis. In 2021, there was a turnover rate of 15%: the highest rate recorded in the past five years. In the same year, there was a vacancy rate of one in six, meaning that social workers across the country are stretched to the limit covering the workload of vacant posts. A third of those leaving social work left after less than two years of service and 36% after less than five years. Around 60% of children and family social care workers have been in service for less than five years.

The MacAlister review is damning. It describes a “lack of national direction about the purpose of children's social care”.

The review also highlights unacceptably high levels of agency staff, and observes that once a social worker moves to an agency

“they are more likely to move around, contributing to the instability children and families experience.”

Agency social workers are also much more expensive to local authorities, causing

“a loss of over £100 million per year”

that could be spent on children and families. The response from the Government to date has been utterly complacent. Half of all children's services departments across the country are rated inadequate or requiring improvement, yet there is no urgency from the Government: no national programme for improvement and support, no strategy to ensure that good practice from the best-performing local authorities is rolled out across all local authorities and simply no plan to address the crisis. There is also no plan to stop the grotesque profiteering by private providers of children's homes and foster agencies—the largest 20 of which made a staggering £300 million of profit last year.

Delivering effective children's social work requires a stable workforce embedded in the local community that they serve, with individual workloads that are manageable and a supportive and professional management culture. While there is such a crisis in the children's social care workforce, it is children in need and their families who suffer.

At the heart of the Government's failure is the erosion of early help and family support to stop families getting into the crisis situations that result in the removal of children into the care system. That is demonstrated no more starkly than by the 1,300 Sure Start centres that have closed across the country since 2010.

I welcome the Minister to his place, but I hope that he recognises the urgency of the issues facing children's care, and that a merry-go-round at the top of Government is the last thing that social workers, or the children and families they serve, need or deserve. I hope that he will set out today what he is doing to address the crisis in children's social care. How is he progressing the Government's response to the independent review? When does he anticipate the response being published?

What is the Minister doing to increase the urgency of the Government's response to the crisis? What representations is he making to the Treasury on children's social care funding? What representations is he making to the candidates in the Conservative leadership race, because I have heard no mention of children in that debate so far? When will he end profiteering in children's social care?

What is the Minister doing to ensure that dedicated social work practitioners and social care workers across the country are recognised and supported, and that local authorities are fully supported to address the crisis in recruitment and retention? How is he ensuring that as the Government respond to the independent review, they work closely with social workers and trade unions, as well as children, young people and their families, to ensure that reform can really deliver the total reset that is needed?

Labour will always put children first—we did so in government and we will do so again—but our children cannot afford any more dither and delay from the Government. We will hold the Government to account every single day on the framework of support they provide and the outcomes that they deliver for our most vulnerable children. I hope that the Minister will give us some comfort that there is urgency within the Government on this important agenda.

Mr Virendra Sharma (in the Chair): We intend to finish by 5.55 pm. I am sure that I do not need to remind the Minister, but he should allow the mover of the motion a couple of minutes to wind up, and give me about a minute to complete the sitting.

5.37 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Brendan Clarke-Smith): Of course, Mr Sharma, and may I say what an absolute pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship? I congratulate the hon. Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer) on securing this important debate on a subject that she is passionate about. I share that passion and I thank her for bringing her extensive knowledge of local government to the table as well.

I thank our children's social care workforce: the child and family social workers, our children's homes teams, our family support workers, and all those with whom they work. I pay tribute to every single person working in children's social care and striving to offer life-changing support to children and families day in, day out.

I am sure the hon. Member will be pleased to know that I will chair the first interim meeting of the national implementation board tomorrow, bringing together experts to deliver the kind of transformational change that we want to see in children's social care. I also met Josh MacAlister today to discuss our ambitions, so I am equally keen to progress this as quickly as possible. I hope that I can address the concerns of other hon. Members present; I believe we share a great deal of common ground on a number of issues.

Children's social care is central to our mission to level up the country and enable all children in the country to make the most of their abilities. I was in Worksop in Nottinghamshire on Monday where I had the opportunity to speak with social workers on the frontline. I want to capture the good news stories that are all too often

overshadowed by the tragedies. I saw the excellent services and dedicated professionals that the hon. Member has focused the debate on. I applaud her work on ensuring that we have the opportunity to talk about this vital workforce that we so value and am pleased to be doing so in my first Westminster Hall debate as a Minister, which I hope will not be my last.

As my predecessor, the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince), said on World Social Work Day in March, there are few professions that can claim to transform lives as much as child and family social workers. The Government are dedicated to ensuring that there is an excellent child and family social worker for everyone who needs one. That is why there are more child and family social workers than ever before: 32,500 such social workers were employed by local authorities in England in September 2021, which is the most recent data we have at a national level. That is 14% more than in 2017.

We invest over £50 million each year on recruiting and developing child and family social workers to ensure that the workforce continues to have the capacity, skills and knowledge to support and protect vulnerable children. We train an average of 800 new social workers annually through our fast-track programmes Frontline and Step Up To Social Work. The Frontline programme alone plays a fundamental role in our recruitment strategy, with approximately 3,000 new social workers due to graduate and enter the workforce by 2024 since the programme began in 2013. In addition, each year almost 3,000 newly qualified child and family social workers are supported through our assessed and supported year in employment, and around 750 social workers go through one of our leadership development programmes.

I am delighted that just last week we announced our new leadership programme, which will run from this August to July 2024, called social worker leadership pathways. It will provide consistent and high-quality leadership development throughout a social worker's career. That will run alongside the upon future leaders programme launched in 2020, which gives aspiring and new directors of children's services the skills they need to thrive in such a challenging and pivotal role. However, I absolutely recognise the challenges that colleagues have described today. I know that local authorities face increasing challenges with their workforce, and I am grateful to everyone who has brought those issues to the fore. As I say, we share a lot of common ground on the issues.

The Government recognised the need for children's social care reform in our manifesto, as has been rightly stated, and we announced our intention for an independent review of children's social care. As the review sets out, and as we have heard, social worker recruitment, retention and quality are not consistently at the levels they need to be across the country. Sadly, that inevitably has an impact on the outcomes for our most vulnerable children. That is why, in addition to continued investment in our programmes, we intend to publish our children's social care reform implementation strategy by the end of this year. As we develop the strategy, it is an absolute priority to work with the sector to ensure there are sufficient numbers of child and family social workers with the skills and knowledge to meet the needs of the families with whom they work. We are currently considering the recommendations from the independent review of children's social care and the national panel review.

Rachael Maskell: The independent review comes as a package and holds together as such. Is the Minister committing that the Government will accept the package and make the level of investment that the review calls for?

Brendan Clarke-Smith: I thank the hon. Member for her question. When we come to the implementation board, those are exactly the things we will discuss and I share the view that there is a lot of good stuff in that report, and I would like to see us do as much as possible. That will obviously come when the board meets, and those are things that we will discuss. I can promise that we will look seriously at all the recommendations that have been made there before making any decision. That is something that certainly want to put across as the Minister. It is a passion that I equally share, and I will do my best to make sure that we have the best reform possible based on the information and resources available to us.

Some of the ideas we are considering in the review include regional staff banks, national pay scales and memorandums of understanding to help to reduce the cost of agency social work, which I agree is a problem and something that needs to be addressed. As my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester set out on the day of publication of the independent review,

“Providing more decisive child protection relies on the knowledge and skills”—[*Official Report*, 23 May 2022; Vol. 715, c. 33]

of all those in the workforce, and in particular our child and family social workers. That is why we are keen to support the principle of the review’s proposed early career framework.

We intend to set out plans to refocus the support that social workers receive early on, when the Government publish their implementation strategy later this year. The plans will have a particular emphasis on child protection, given the challenging nature of that work. I am particularly delighted to share with the hon. Member for St Helens South and Whiston that yesterday I signed off £250,000 of improvement funding for St Helens and the Liverpool city region. That will go towards a staff bank pilot, with the ultimate aim of reducing the region’s reliance on agencies.

It is not right that social workers feel their work is undervalued and overlooked. It saddens me to think that those working to protect our most vulnerable children are stigmatised in such a way. Unfortunately, the public only hear about social workers when something goes terribly wrong. They do not hear about the hundreds of thousands of cases where children and parents are empowered and supported to create a better life. Those are the stories that we should hear continually, to remind us of the crucial role that social workers play in protecting the lives of vulnerable children.

Importantly, it is because most social workers do their jobs so well that we are able to overlook them in such a way. That is a national scandal, because dedicated social workers are essential to keeping children safe. It is impossible to quantify the number of children’s lives that social workers have saved, the number of families that they have helped or the harm that they have prevented. When children are in need, social workers work hard on their behalf to ensure that they receive the love and care they deserve. When families are in awful situations and

children are in danger, social workers help to make things better. When a family is able to stay together, a social worker is behind the scenes helping to make that happen. Throughout the pandemic, social workers have continued to meet families in person, helping to turn lives around. That is why the Government have invested heavily in training and support for child and family social workers, and will continue to do so.

The quality of a work environment is key to recruitment and retention, including effective professional supervision, wider support and case work levels. Our programme seeks to address a number of those points directly. We are supporting the recruitment of social workers through our investment in initial education and our fast-track programmes. Our investment in continued professional development programmes has a leadership focus, precisely because there is such a strong relationship between leadership, retention and quality.

There is great practice out there, with local authorities driving down agency rates and stabilising their workforces. We see the fruits of everyone’s labour in the number of child and family social workers increasing every year, up 14% from the number in 2017 to 32,500 in 2021. Average case load numbers have fallen from 17.8% in 2017 to 16.3% in 2021, something that we continue to build on.

We recognise that that may not be the picture that some local authorities are seeing on the ground. We are working closely with local authorities, using central programmes and funding to respond to their needs. Informed by the recommendations in “The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care” and the national panel review, we are aiming to stabilise and strengthen children’s social care as we transition out of the pandemic. We want the best possible outcomes for children and young people and to provide a strong foundation for longer term reform.

In addition to our £50 million investment every year in social worker initial education and professional development programmes, the Government have set up a brand-new regulator just for social workers. It is called Social Work England and has been running since 2019. Social Work England’s role as a specialist regulator for social workers is a fundamental part of our reforms to improve the quality of social work practice. Social Work England ensures that people who have a social worker receive the best possible support whenever they might need it in life. Its regulatory framework allows the organisation to adapt to emerging opportunities, challenges and best practice.

We introduced clear post-qualifying standards in 2017 to strengthen the social care system and improve social work practice and safeguarding across the country. They set out the knowledge and skills expected of child and family social workers. We remain committed to assessment and accreditation as key elements of improving children’s social care. We also continue to engage and collaborate with stakeholders and subject experts as we develop the long-term future of post-qualification training and development for child and family social workers.

This year, local authorities have access to more than £54 billion in core spending power to deliver their services, including those for children and young people. That is £3.7 billion more than in 2021–22. It is right that councils should be able to make spending decisions based on their local needs.

Mike Amesbury: The Conservative-led Local Government Association has recently published figures about the funding pressure. Of course, that was based on a settlement, with inflation around 2%. We are looking at a shortfall of around £3.4 billion for local government, and 60% of local council finances and budgets go on social care. The system is broken; the current situation is not sustainable.

Brendan Clarke-Smith: I thank the hon. Member for his point, and I agree there are considerable pressures on local authorities. The hon. Member for St Helens South and Whiston mentioned agency rates earlier, and the spiralling cost of those. What the Government believe—and I have spoken with the LGA about this—is that the early intervention in some of the things that we are looking at putting in place, and this implementation, will help us to cut some of those costs. I fully recognise that there are significant challenges at the moment, but I hope that what we are doing will drive down some of those costs for local authorities and allow us to provide them with the support that I accept local authorities certainly need.

Rachael Maskell: On a similar theme, there has been a real increase in demand for services. Many of the figures the Minister gave predate the pandemic, and after the pandemic we have seen a real spike in demand for children's services. How is the Minister compensating that with the investment in local authorities?

Brendan Clarke-Smith: Coming out of the pandemic, we face significant challenges in the workforce across the country, not just in the social care sector. Regarding funding, as I said, that is why the implementation board will be so important, because these are the things that we really need to focus on. I can assure the hon.

Member that this is something that I do take seriously, and we will look at the points she raised as part of this review.

I am enormously grateful for the time we have had today, and to the hon. Member for St Helens South and Whiston for bringing this debate. This is a subject I share a passion for, and I hope the steps we have taken underline the importance of this and our commitment to getting this implementation done. I hope the pace at which we move towards that goal reflects the importance of the issue.

5.52 pm

Ms Rimmer: I regret that I did not recognise that the Minister is new today; that is how fresh it was to me. I am pleased to see him in his position, and I hope that he stays there, because I know that he has shared a passion for this subject for some time, but please look at the outcomes in local government of the decisions that the Government are making. As my hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury) said, 60% of the spend of local government is on social care. Cuts in local government are cuts to children and adults' social care, so please look at the outcomes. Caseloads are increasing—

Mr Virendra Sharma (in the Chair): Order. Thank you very much, everybody.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the children's social care workforce.

5.53 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 20 July 2022

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

Coronavirus-related Spend

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kwasi Kwarteng): I am tabling this statement for the benefit of hon. Members to bring to their attention spend under the Industrial Development Act 1982. In addition to the obligation to report on spend under the Industrial Development Act annually, the Coronavirus Act 2020 created a new quarterly reporting requirement for spend which has been designated as coronavirus-related under the Coronavirus Act. This statement fulfils that purpose.

The statement also includes a report of the movement in contingent liability during the quarter. Hon. Members will wish to note that measures such as local authority grants, the coronavirus job retention scheme and self-employed income support scheme, and tax measures such as the suspension of business rates are not provided under the Industrial Development Act 1982 and hence are not included below.

This report covers the first quarter of 2022, from 1 January to 31 March 2022, in accordance with the Coronavirus Act.

The written ministerial statement covering the fourth quarter of 2021 was published on 29 June 2022.

This is the final quarterly report on coronavirus expenditure under the Industrial Development Act 1982. This is in line with the reporting requirements under Section 75 of the Coronavirus Act 2020.

Spend under the Coronavirus Act 2020

Under the Coronavirus Act 2020, there is a requirement to lay before Parliament details of the amount of assistance designated as coronavirus-related provided in each relevant quarter. In the period from 1 January to 31 March 2022, the following expenditures were incurred:

Actual expenditure of assistance provided by Her Majesty's Government from 1 January to 31 March 2022	£277,208,581
Actual expenditure of assistance provided by Her Majesty's Government from 25 March 2020	£4,102,510,707

Expenditure by Department

Actual expenditure of assistance from 1 January to 31 March 2022 provided by:

Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy	£237,216,907
Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs	£6,075
Department for Transport	£39,991,674

Contingent liability under the Coronavirus Act 2020

Contingent liability of assistance provided by the Secretary of State from 1 January to 31 March 2022	£9,228,141,179
All contingent liability of assistance provided by the Secretary of State from 25 March 2020	£83,769,317,646

[HCWS252]

Contingent Liability: Recovery Loan Scheme

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kwasi Kwarteng): I am tabling this statement for the benefit of hon. and right hon. Members to bring to their attention the details of the extension to the Recovery Loan Scheme (RLS).

RLS is facilitated by the Government-owned British Business Bank and delivered through its delivery partners. Under the extension, lenders will offer facilities of up to £2 million to support businesses that would otherwise be unable to access the finance they need, or would only be able to do so at a higher rate of interest. There will be a £6 billion cap on the aggregate value of loans provided through the scheme for the first two years.

The extension covers the period from 1 August 2022 to 30 June 2024. Under the extension, the following changes will come into force:

The maximum amount of external finance available will be £2 million per business in Great Britain; for businesses in scope of the Northern Ireland Protocol, the maximum amount will be £1 million per business.

The requirement for businesses to certify that they have been affected by the covid-19 pandemic will no longer apply. To lend through the scheme, lenders will be required to certify that they would not have been able to offer a facility to the business on their normal commercial terms, or that they would have only been able to do so at a higher interest rate.

Personal guarantees will be permitted, but not required, for facilities under £250,000—as has been the case to date for facilities above £250,000. This brings the scheme in line with standard commercial practice in business lending. Principal private residences may not be used as security under any circumstances.

Otherwise, scheme parameters are unchanged. As previously:

The minimum facility size will be £25,001 for loans and overdrafts and £1,000 for asset and invoice finance.

Businesses will be required to meet the costs of interest payments and any fees from the outset.

Businesses who have made use of the previous coronavirus loan schemes will be able to access the scheme.

Given the above, the maximum contingent liability for lending up to the £6 billion cap on the scheme is £4.2 billion.

I will be laying a Departmental Minute today containing a description of the liability undertaken.

[HCWS240]

Departmental Update

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kwasi Kwarteng): BEIS has been committed to improving the business environment and delivering upon the pillars of the plan for growth. We have a plan to secure more domestic energy, support people with the cost of living now, grow the economy and raise

wages by reindustrialising our industrial heartlands and unleashing innovation, and accelerate great British science. At the same time, we recognise the power of the private sector and have taken steps to boost enterprise by making the UK the best place in the world to start, grow and invest in a business.

We have seen a significant increase in the global wholesale price of gas as a result of covid-19 aftershocks coupled with Putin's illegal war in Ukraine, which has led to pressure on business and family budgets.

Tackling the cost of living to help families keep more of their own money:

Raising the national minimum wage and national living wage, giving a full-time worker a £1,000 a year pay rise. Uprating the national living wage has provided a pay-rise for about 2.5 million UK workers. This included the largest ever uplift of a £1,000 a year pay rise for full time workers aged 23 and over.

Helping now with the cost of living by ensuring families receive at least £400 of their electricity bills this winter. Our energy bills support scheme grant payment will take £400 off family electricity bills.

Increasing support this winter with at least £250 additional support for most vulnerable. The warm home discount (£150), winter fuel payments (between £100 and £300) and cold weather payments (£25/week), which ensure that the most vulnerable can heat their homes over the colder months.

Protecting the energy price cap, insulating families from the significant increase in wholesale gas prices. The energy price cap also currently shields 22 million consumers from being overcharged by suppliers. The cap will remain in place until at least the end of this year, ensuring consumers pay a fair price for their energy.

Shielding the public from rip-offs and boosting competition. Draft legislation will be published this autumn to give the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) enhanced powers to tackle bad business practices, including making it illegal to pay someone to write or host a fake review and making it easier for consumers to opt out of subscriptions.

Pioneering British science to cure cancers and develop technologies so people have better lives:

Establishing the Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA) to improve people's lives through state-of-the-art technologies. ARIA will support high-risk, high-reward research and projects which support transformative change, including securing £800 million (by 2025/26) at the spending review, agreeing key principles with devolved authorities and setting out ARIA's independence.

Securing biggest ever research and development budget. We have secured £39.8 billion of R&D investment supporting our commitment to ensure total R&D investment reaches 2.4% of GDP by 2027.

Strengthening the UK vaccine ecosystem to ensure resilience against covid-19 and other future health emergencies. The Vaccine Taskforce has already invested over £395 million in UK manufacturing infrastructure and skills. We have ambitious plans to invest more alongside industry to secure our domestic vaccine resilience. Areas of focus include mRNA capability and investments which will strengthen the resilience of the UK's vaccine supply chains.

Developing cures for disease, diagnostics and other life-saving research. With DHSC we are committing up to £200 million to healthcare research, diagnostics and manufacturing, building on our world leading covid-19 vaccination programme.

Setting out our visions for the UK to be a global hub for innovation by 2035. We will do this by working with private business, reforming our existing R&D institutions and supporting seven technology families from quantum computing to artificial intelligence.

Building a world-leading UK space sector. We have published the national space strategy backed by £1.75 billion and aligned civil and defence policy for the first time. Through our part owned OneWeb satellite system, we have seen the launch of multiple waves of UK satellites. We also invested £20 million in

specialised technology to support the James Webb telescope launch, marking a significant step in space discovery and our understanding of the universe.

Boosting British manufacturing and reindustrialising our former heartlands to drive long-term growth:

Delivered two gigafactories, bringing back manufacturing to Britain. We have announced funding for two major gigafactories in the UK using the automotive transformation fund. Envision AESC based in Sunderland and Britishvolt in Blyth, Northumberland, will have a total capacity of over 40GWh, create over 3,500 direct jobs, as well as 1,000s more in the supply chain and will see over £2 billion of private sector investment in the region. We have also helped secure Ford's investment of £230 million in production of electric vehicle components at Halewood.

New support for energy intensive industry to protect it for the future. We have announced a three-year extension to EII compensation scheme in the British energy security strategy and more than doubling the budget. This goes alongside our consultation on "other" energy support measures to reduce electricity prices to improve competitiveness for these industries.

Commenced the National Security and Investment Act protecting British industry from hostile activity. This gives the Government greater powers to protect our national security by screening and, if necessary, intervening in investments and other acquisitions of control over sensitive entities and assets in the UK economy.

Taken significant steps to begin to compensate postmasters who have suffered as a result of the appalling Horizon IT failings. This has included announcing that Government will provide funding for interim compensation payments of up to £100k ahead of full funding for eligible postmasters whose Horizon-related convictions have been quashed. We have also announced £19.5 million interim compensation for the "GLO" group of postmasters who exposed the Horizon scandal—to be followed as soon as possible by final compensation.

Securing Britain's energy to ensure more cleaner, cheaper energy is generated in this country:

Accelerating domestic energy independence through the British energy security strategy (BESS). The BESS and the Energy Security Bill includes support for household energy affordability and efficiency, new and ambitious commitments on nuclear and renewable energy, and setting out the role of the North sea in our low-carbon transition, including delivering our £1 billion commitment to carbon capture and storage clusters by 2030.

Largest-ever renewable energy auction providing 11 GW of great British electricity, with wind power coming in cheaper than ever. Earlier this month, we secured a record 11 GW of renewable energy through the biggest contracts for difference round yet—enough to power around 12 million homes.

Rebuilding Britain's proud nuclear sector. We have passed the Nuclear Energy (Financing) Act 2022, which will unblock obstacles and cut costs. We are also investing in the sector through the £120 million Future Nuclear fund, £100 million for Sizewell C (in addition to driving forward negotiations), £120 million to develop small modular reactors. We have also established Great British Nuclear, a landmark moment in Britain's nuclear history, to ensure we deliver multiple new projects this decade.

Securing strong domestic oil and gas extraction. We have given the UK's oil and gas sector clarity about the role hydrocarbons will play in our energy need with an upcoming new licencing round, backed by the North sea transition deal we will ensure jobs are protected and technologies developed.

Kickstarted UK hydrogen industry with capital and revenue support as well as world-leading legislative framework. Over the last year, we published our hydrogen strategy and investor roadmap and launched a net zero hydrogen fund worth up to £240 million to nurture the UK's world leading hydrogen economy. The Energy Security Bill also provides a legislative framework for our hydrogen business models.

Denying Britain's enemies access to funding by ending Putin's revenue streams. We also committed to end the use of Russian oil and coal power by the end of 2022 and are working with allies to support then away from use of expensive fossil fuels.

Backing other renewable technologies to build stronger domestic supply chain. We have provided a £60 million boost for floating offshore wind projects, supported entrepreneurs to find innovative ways to reduce expensive fossil fuel dependence through the energy entrepreneurs fund, and ringfenced £20 million per year for tidal stream electricity.

Worked with our colleagues across Government to deliver the UNFCCC COP26 summit in Glasgow in November 2021 to move 90% of the global economy to net zero. This followed the publication of our heat and buildings and net zero strategies, which laid out a clear path to decarbonise all sectors of the UK economy and achieve net zero by 2050. The summit was attended by 120 world leaders and over 40,000 registered participants. The resulting Glasgow climate pact increases the likelihood of delivering the Paris commitment 1.5 degree scenario.

Since publishing the “The Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution” in November 2020, we have landed £22 billion of inward investment into home-grown clean technologies, and estimate to have created around 68,000 green jobs.

[HCWS254]

Office for Nuclear Regulation Post-Implementation Review: Publication

The Minister for Energy, Clean Growth and Climate Change (Greg Hands): Together with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Baroness Stedman-Scott), I am today laying in Parliament the post-implementation review of Part 3 of the Energy Act 2013. The review was commissioned in March 2021 by the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kwasi Kwarteng), as required by Section 118 of the EA 2013—the Act that established the Office for Nuclear Regulation, the UK’s independent nuclear regulator. The review concluded in March 2022, and the full report has now been laid in Parliament. The full report, alongside the summary report and the joint Government response, will be published on www.gov.uk.

The review was led by an independent reviewer, supported by a dedicated review team from across the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Department for Work and Pensions, as the Departments responsible for the policy and sponsorship of the ONR. Evidence was collected from documentary reviews, extensive discussion with the ONR and interviews with external stakeholders. I would like to thank all of those who contributed to the review.

The review found that the objectives of Part 3 of the EA 2013 are being met: the ONR is effectively delivering its regulatory purposes, enabling the safe and secure use and storage of nuclear materials at civil nuclear sites. The review noted that the ONR is seen domestically and internationally as a strong example of principles-based regulation and is respected for its technical ability and regulatory performance.

Having a strong and effective independent regulator is essential to ensuring that civil nuclear facilities and activities are safely and securely operated at all times. This includes robust regulation of the UK’s nuclear legacy, current generating fleet, new nuclear, transport of civil nuclear and radioactive materials, and civil nuclear safeguards.

There are 14 recommendations and 29 suggestions within the review. These support the Government’s strategic priorities, notably our commitment in the British energy security strategy to work with the nuclear regulators

to understand the potential for any streamlining or removal of duplication from consenting and licensing. More generally, the recommendations support the ongoing improvement of the regulator’s approach to innovation, proportionality and consistency, and efficiency.

The Government and the ONR welcome the report. The findings will help to ensure the ONR remains a modern, transparent regulator delivering trusted outcomes and value. The findings are aligned with the Government’s public sector reform agenda, supporting effective relationships between public bodies and Government Departments in the interests of the citizens they serve.

An implementation plan has been agreed between DWP, BEIS, and the ONR. BEIS will complete a formal review of progress to be completed and published within 24 months of the review’s publication.

[HCWS241]

TREASURY

Finance Bill 2022-23: Draft Legislation and Tax Documents

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Lucy Frazer):

In line with the tax policy making framework, the Government are publishing draft legislation ahead of potential inclusion in Finance Bill 2022-23. This allows for technical consultation and provides taxpayers with predictability over future tax policy changes. Alongside this, the Government are making announcements in a small number of technical areas of tax policy to support the operation of the tax system. Draft legislation is being published to seek stakeholder views at this stage. The final contents of Finance Bill 2022-23 will be a decision for the Chancellor at the next Budget. The Government are also publishing a number of tax-related consultations and summaries of responses to consultations which have already been conducted.

Publication of draft legislation

The Government are publishing draft legislation and associated documents, further to previous announcements, including at Budget or in “Tax Administration and Maintenance: Autumn 2021” [CP 577], published on 30 November 2021:

R&D tax relief reforms: The Government are publishing draft legislation which will amend the definition of qualifying expenditure to include data and cloud costs. These changes will ensure the reliefs support modern innovation. The draft legislation will also refocus the reliefs towards research & development (R&D) in the UK and implement measures to improve compliance. The Government will limit overseas spending on subcontracted R&D and externally provided workers, with some limited exceptions. These changes will ensure the reliefs provide better targeted support for innovation in the UK.

OECD pillar 2 reforms: The Government are publishing draft legislation and a summary of responses to the consultation on the implementation of pillar 2 in the UK. This builds on the historic agreement of 137 countries to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD’s) two pillar solution to the tax challenges of a globalised and digital economy. Pillar 2 will ensure that multinational enterprises pay a minimum 15% rate of tax in each jurisdiction that they operate in.

Air passenger duty reform: The Government are publishing draft legislation which will implement reform to air passenger duty (APD), as announced at autumn Budget 2021. These reforms

aim to bolster UK air connectivity through a 50% cut in domestic APD and further align the tax with UK environmental objectives by adding a new ultra-long-haul distance band.

Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme: The Government are publishing draft legislation which introduces new and temporary reliefs from the annual tax on enveloped dwellings (ATED) and 15% rate of stamp duty land tax (SDLT) where a corporate entity makes a dwelling available to Ukrainian refugees under the homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme, as announced in a written ministerial statement on 31 March 2022. The payments individuals, community groups and businesses receive under this scheme will be exempt from either income tax or corporation tax. Therefore, it will ensure that those wishing to offer accommodation do not face any unfair obstacles or immediate tax burdens.

Pensions: Relief relating to net payment arrangements—The Government are publishing draft legislation which will provide the basis for HMRC to make top-up payments directly to low-earning individuals saving in pension schemes using a net pay arrangement from 2024-25 onwards, as announced at autumn Budget 2021. These top-ups will help to better align outcomes with equivalent savers saving into pension schemes using relief at source.

Improving the administration of insurance premium tax (IPT): The Government are publishing draft legislation to improve the administration of IPT, as announced at tax administration and maintenance day 2021 (TAM Day 2021). This measure will provide HMRC with powers to make a statutory instrument to move insurance premium tax forms from secondary legislation into a public notice.

Collective money purchase pension scheme: As announced in a written ministerial statement on 21 February 2022, the Government always intended that certain payments made instead of a pension from a collective money purchase pension scheme in the process of winding up should not attract pensions tax charges. However, there are instances where the current legislation may not achieve the intended outcome. This draft legislation clarifies the tax legislation to ensure that a collective money purchase pension scheme that is in the process of winding up can make certain types of payments without attracting pension tax charges.

Relief on disposals of joint interests in land: The Government are publishing draft legislation to make changes to the legislation for capital gains tax roll-over relief and private residence relief to ensure that limited liability partnerships and Scottish partnerships which hold title to land are included, as announced at TAM Day 2021.

Transfer pricing documentation: Master File / Local File: As announced at TAM Day 2021, the Government are publishing draft legislation which will make it a requirement for large multinational businesses operating in the UK to keep and retain transfer pricing documentation in a prescribed and standardised format, set out in the OECD's transfer pricing guidelines, giving businesses certainty on the appropriate format and documentation they need to keep.

Tax conditionality: licenses in Scotland and Northern Ireland: As announced at TAM Day 2021, this draft legislation will make licence renewal applications in Scotland and Northern Ireland for taxi and scrap metal licences conditional on completing a tax check with HMRC to ensure the applicant is appropriately registered for tax. This change applies for licence renewals from April 2023 and extends the approach already in place for licences issued in England and Wales.

Aggregates levy reform: As announced at TAM Day 2021, the Government are publishing draft legislation to make changes to aggregates levy exemptions, by replacing four exemptions for by-product aggregate arising from specific types of construction with one broader, more general exemption. It will also restrict an exemption so that aggregate extracted on a construction site specifically for construction use is taxed in the same way as other construction aggregate.

Government are also publishing draft legislation and associated documents in the following areas which have not been previously announced:

Soft drinks industry levy (SDIL): concentrates mixed with sugar when dispensed: The Government are publishing draft legislation which closes a minor loophole and will ensure that all

soft drinks meeting the SDIL sugar content condition that are dispensed from fountain machines are within the scope of the levy.

Further tax provisions in connection with the dormant assets scheme: The dormant assets scheme is being expanded to include eligible assets from the pensions, insurance, investment and wealth management, and securities sectors. The Government have therefore published draft legislation to ensure that payments from an authorised reclaim fund are treated for the purposes of income tax as if they were from the pension asset that was initially transferred. It also ensures that where an asset has been transferred to an authorised reclaim fund and its owner was alive at the time of transfer but subsequently dies before the asset has been reclaimed, the owner will be treated for inheritance tax purposes as still owning the original asset.

Taxation of lump sum exit scheme payments: As announced in the lump sum exit scheme (LSES) consultation response, this draft legislation provides clarity that LSES payments will be treated as capital in nature and will be subject to capital gains tax, or corporation tax in the case of incorporated entities.

Chargeable gains: Separating spouses and civil partners: The Government are publishing draft legislation which provides that the transfer of assets between spouses and civil partners that are separating are made on a no gain/no loss for up to three full tax years after the parties cease to live together. This follows on from a recommendation by the Office of Tax Simplification.

Changes to the qualifying asset holding companies rules: The Government are publishing draft legislation which intends to make limited changes to its qualifying asset holding companies regime, which went live in April 2022. These changes will ensure that the regime is available to a broader range of investment structures, consistent with the original policy rationale and subject to safeguards. It is intended that the existing anti-fragmentation rule in paragraph 4 of schedule 2, Finance Act 2022 will be extended with effect from today so that it also applies where interests are held through one or more QAHCs as well as directly in the company concerned.

Approval regime for aerodromes not customs and excise designated: The Government are publishing draft legislation which makes an amendment to establish an approval regime for aerodromes that handle international flights, and which are not customs and excise designated airports. This will facilitate a fairer system which will strengthen both aerodrome operator accountability and border control provisions.

The Government are also announcing the following measure which will take immediate effect from today and publishing draft legislation:

Double taxation relief: time limit for claims: Legislation will be introduced to restrict certain claims for double taxation relief. No extended time limit claims will be allowed in relation to amounts calculated by reference to the foreign nominal rate of tax, unless the relevant accounting period is under enquiry, or there has been an actual adjustment of UK or foreign tax within the last six years. This change will only affect certain double taxation relief claims in relation to distributions received by UK companies in previous years and will protect tax revenue in respect of such distributions.

All draft legislation is accompanied by a tax information and impact note (TIIN), an explanatory note (EN) and, where applicable, a summary of consultation responses document.

Other publications

The Government are also publishing the following consultations:

Improving the data HMRC collects: Under the current system, HMRC collects data from taxpayers and employers via tax returns to administer the tax system and inform Government decision making. The Government are consulting on a number of options for additional data for HMRC to collect, use, and safely share across Government, and how this can be done in a way that minimises any extra burden for customers. This will help ensure

the information the Government hold is more accurate, bring direct benefits to businesses and taxpayers, provide better insights for policymaking and support Government aim to build a trusted, modern tax administration system.

Digitalising Business Rates: Connecting business rates and tax data: The way that the business rates system currently operates makes it difficult for the Government to precisely target support when responding to the needs of businesses. Digitalising Business Rates (DBR) aims to join together business rates data held across different parts of Government—billing authorities, the VOA and HMRC—with tax data. By bringing together businesses' property data and tax information in one place, the Government will be better able to design and apply reliefs to support businesses that are most in need, rather than having to rely on property information in isolation. This consultation lays out and seeks views on options for the policy and IT design for the DBR project.

The Government are also publishing summaries of responses to the following discussion documents and consultations:

“Preventing and collecting international tax debt”

“Helping Taxpayers Get Offshore Tax Right”

“IFRS 17 (new international accounting standard for insurance contracts)”

“ITSA registration for the self-employed and landlords”

“OECD Model Rules for Digital Platforms (MRDP)”

All publications can be found on the gov.uk website. The Government's tax consultation tracker has also been updated.

Update on previously announced policy

At autumn Budget 2021, the Government plans for alcohol duty reform were announced and a consultation on the detail of those planned reforms was published. The consultation closed on 30 January 2022. The Government are considering the feedback received and will respond in the autumn.

[HCWS256]

Contingent Liability: UK Infrastructure Bank

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr Simon Clarke): It is normal practice when a Government Department proposes to undertake a contingent liability in excess of £300,000, and for which there is no statutory authority, for the Minister concerned:

To present a departmental minute to Parliament, giving particulars of the liability created and explaining the circumstances; and

To refrain from incurring the liability until 14 parliamentary sitting days after the issue of the minute, except in cases of special urgency.

I am writing to notify Parliament of a contingent liability that the Treasury intends to create related to the final stage of the establishment of the UK Infrastructure Bank as a publicly owned company with operational independence.

As set out in the UKIB policy design document published at Budget 2021, in UKIB's framework document and most recently in UKIB's strategic plan published last month, the ambition is for UKIB to offer sovereign equivalent guarantees to support and enable private and public investment in infrastructure, with core objectives to help tackle climate change and support regional and local economic growth.

UKIB will be able to deploy these guarantees flexibly up to an overall limit of £10 billion, which is capped at £2.5 billion in any given year.

UKIB will manage its capital position through its economic capital framework with an appropriate buffer, as well as through the institution's wider liquidity and operational risk management. The Government's expectation is that the default position is for UKIB to meet any calls on its guarantees from its existing funded financial capacity.

To maximise the impact of UKIB's guarantees and promote crowding in of private investment, it is important to allow UKIB to rely on the UK Government's credit rating. To ensure UKIB can utilise this credit rating, HMT intends to provide backing to UKIB such that rating agencies would consider it to have a sovereign credit rating. This backing will create a new contingent liability from HMT to UKIB.

UK Government Investments contingent liability central capability has been consulted as part of establishing the structure of the new scheme.

UKIB will report to Parliament through its annual reports and accounts on any guarantees entered into, providing details on the amount of actual or contingent liabilities.

Authority for any expenditure required under this liability will be sought through the normal procedure.

A departmental minute has been laid in the House of Commons providing detail on this contingent liability.

[HCWS255]

DEFENCE

Service Complaints Ombudsman's 2021 Service Complaints System Report: Formal Response

The Minister for Defence People and Veterans (Leo Docherty): I am pleased to place in the Library of the House today the Ministry of Defence's (MOD) formal response to the service complaints ombudsman for the armed force's annual report for 2021 on the fairness, effectiveness and efficiency of the service complaints system.

The ombudsman's report assessed the service complaints system and the work of her office in 2021. The response sets out the MOD'S comments and approach to each of the ombudsman's recommendations and includes a summary of our position on recommendations that remain open from previous annual reports.

The MOD values the strong independent oversight that the ombudsman brings to the service complaints system, and remains committed to having a system in which our personnel can have confidence.

The attachment can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2022-07-20/HCWS251/>.

[HCWS251]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Independent Review of Destination Management Organisations: Government Response

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Nigel Huddleston): The Government are today publishing their formal response to the independent review of Destination Management

Organisations (DMO) which was undertaken by Nick de Bois (Chair of the VisitEngland Advisory Board) and published in September 2021. The DMO review was commissioned in March 2021 by the then Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Oliver Dowden), and myself as the current Minister for Sport, Tourism, Heritage and Civil Society.

The DMO review is an important component of the UK Government's post-covid tourism recovery plan, which can be summarised as securing a swift recovery to pre-pandemic tourism volumes and visitor expenditure before building back better towards a more productive, innovative, resilient, sustainable and inclusive visitor economy, with the benefits of tourism spread across every nation and region of the UK.

England's DMOs have an important role to play both in the recovery of the sector from covid-19 and achieving the Government's Levelling Up objectives. Their role is not only to market and promote England's unique, amazing and varied visitor offer, but also to work with local businesses as they recover, to attract new investment, and to help England deliver a more sustainable, data-driven, resilient and accessible industry. For this to happen, DMOs need to be at their best, and we need to address long-running concerns about the structure, funding models and fragmentation of England's DMO landscape.

Mr de Bois was given the task of surveying the DMO landscape in England—tourism being a devolved responsibility within the UK. He was asked to evaluate the current system, with a view to making recommendations on whether there may be a more efficient and effective model for supporting English tourism at a local and regional level and delivering the government's policy agenda.

Mr de Bois submitted his report last summer, and we published it in September 2021. This response addresses Mr de Bois' recommendations and outlines the actions that are going to be taken forward in the current spending review. The DMO review made 12 recommendations in total, six of which are directed at the Government, four at DMOs themselves, and one each for local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) and local authorities. I am pleased to say that we will be accepting the majority of his recommendations.

A new accreditation system will be introduced over the 2022-23 financial year, with VisitEngland receiving new funding for implementation. By creating a new 'national portfolio' of accredited, high-performing Local Visitor Economy Partnerships we will reduce fragmentation and bring coherence to the current DMO landscape. It will make it clearer to public and private actors who to engage with in order to support the regional visitor economy—as well as to prospective visitors looking for information about English destinations. We are proposing to change the name of DMOs to Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs), to capture the wider strategic focus on the visitor economy and the breadth of activity and relationships they will establish to support the local visitor economy.

The Government also commit to a pilot of Mr de Bois' recommendation of a tiering model including multi-year core funding in a region of England. That will give one top tier LVEP, or collection of LVEPs—known as a Destination Development Partnership—a firm foundation to engage in a wide range of destination

management type activities as well as prompt increased private sector investment. The response sets out the criteria upon which the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and VisitEngland will decide where the pilot is run.

A targeted pilot will ensure we support those areas with most potential to develop their visitor economies, help achieve the Government's Levelling Up objectives and align with the devolution commitments set out in the Levelling Up White Paper. A pilot will allow the Government to collect evidence to understand how effective the proposed model can be, and to support any future funding considerations.

Up to £4.05 million—£1.35 million per year—has been allocated towards the DMO review implementation. The ambition is for a successful pilot to enable roll out of the multi-year funding nationally, however this is subject to future spending rounds and therefore, not guaranteed.

I will place a copy of the Government response in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS243]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Reservoir Safety: Reforming the Safety Regime and Modernising Legislation for England

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): Reservoirs play a vital role in safeguarding our water supply, by storing water that falls in the wetter part of the year, to ensure continuity of supply when it is dry. But storing large volumes of water is not without risk—in August 2019 parts of the spillway at Toddbrook reservoir collapsed following significant heavy rainfall and around 1,500 local people were temporarily evacuated while the reservoir was made safe. More than 17,000 were potentially at risk of flooding from the reservoir dam being breached. Fortunately, incidents such as this are very rare. We have a strong record of reservoir safety and compliance with our safety regulations is good.

We cannot however be complacent. The number of reservoirs in England is growing by an average of 15 to 20 per year, adding resource pressures for already stretched panels of engineers. Reservoir assets are ageing, which increases risks where investment is limited. In addition, the more extreme periods of drier and wetter weather expected as a result of climate change will place increasing stresses on reservoir infrastructure.

Following Toddbrook, Professor David Balmforth's independent review considered whether the regulation of reservoirs, which protects more than 2.2 million households and properties in England, remains effective and robust in securing the ongoing safety of this critical infrastructure. The review identified common examples of poor practice in the work of reservoir safety engineers and concluded that the Reservoirs Act 1975 does not effectively support modern, risk-based safety practices. It recommended:

- a new risk/hazard based safety regime, where safety requirements are proportionate to risks;
- improving safety management practice by reservoir owners;
- improving inspection and supervision by reservoir engineers; and
- strengthening the regulator's role.

I am therefore confirming today that the Government have accepted Professor Balmforth's recommendations and will carry out reform of the reservoir safety regime and modernisation of the Reservoirs Act 1975. DEFRA and the regulator—the Environment Agency—will commence a programme of work now, with a view to consultation in 2023-24. Once the consultation has concluded, the Government will then work to develop legislative proposals. The Government would then legislate when parliamentary time allows.

The Government considers that the review has made a strong case for improving safety practice, strengthening roles and responsibilities for owners, engineers, and the regulator, and for modernising the legal framework.

The following principles will be applied to shape and guide the reforms. We will aim to:

Reduce risk to life as low as reasonably practical.

Take early action to address risks where possible.

Fairly apportion costs for risk management with reservoir owners.

Take a proportionate, risk-based and customer-friendly approach.

The Government have been considering whether small raised reservoirs, which are between 10,000m³ and 25,000m³ in volume and are currently unregulated, should be brought under the scope of the Reservoirs Act 1975. We are minded that, subject to a consultation, such reservoirs should be regulated in future and will develop proposals as part of the reform of the safety regime. Research suggests that there are around 500 small raised reservoirs which pose risks for local communities if the structures were to fail. At least five incidents a year occur where emergency measures are needed to prevent dams and embankments from breaching or failing which indicates a strong need to regulate such reservoirs to ensure public safety. During 2022-23 the Environment Agency plans to introduce a free registration scheme for owners of small raised reservoirs, which will collect data about these reservoirs and help inform a proportionate approach to regulation.

The reform programme will be taken forward collaboratively, with owners and engineers being involved in shaping the details. It will include:

Reforms that can be done through existing powers, secondary legislation, guidance, training and codes of practice during 2022-23 and 2023-24, including:

improving enforcement options and flexibility using civil sanctions; introducing review of engineers' reports by the Environment Agency;

developing proposals for a proportionate charging scheme to improve recovery of regulatory costs; and

introducing a free registration scheme for owners of small raised reservoirs during 2022-23.

Preparing for modernising the Reservoirs Act 1975 with a view to consulting on proposals during 2023-24, including:

developing a new risk/hazard classification and how it could operate;

developing proposals to make the future supply of reservoir engineers more sustainable;

developing proposals for regulating small raised reservoirs within the new safety regime, for consultation.

This will build on actions that have already been taken to strengthen reservoir safety, for example:

a ministerial direction in April 2021 requiring reservoir owners to prepare on site emergency flood plans for all their large raised reservoirs. Owners were given a year to do this and the Environment Agency report that 94% of registered reservoirs now have plans certified by reservoir engineers;

guidance issued to reservoir owners about having inspection information packs for their reservoirs;

guidance developed in collaboration with engineers and issued by the Environment Agency to improve spillway inspection and management; and

the Institution of Civil Engineers, at my request, is carrying out research to improve the future supply of engineers.

The reform programme will be spread over several years so that changes can be managed alongside ongoing reservoir safety management in a proportionate and reasonable way. The Welsh Government and the other UK Administrations will be kept informed and involved with the development of the safety regime because the Reservoirs Act covers England and Wales, and reservoir engineers work across the UK. The Reservoirs Act 1975 as amended by the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 will remain in force until legislative changes are made.

The Government's planned actions in response to individual recommendations in the review are summarised in Table 1 below.

Our reforms will bring the reservoir safety regime for England into line with other high risk sectors such as the nuclear industry and rail. It will lead to a modernised safety regime that protects the lives and livelihoods of those living downstream of reservoirs, while preserving the important role of these crucial assets in safeguarding our water supply in a changing climate.

Table 1 Summary of Reservoir Safety Review Recommendations and Actions

Consultation on proposed reforms is anticipated in 2023-24.	
Short Description of Recommendation	Proposed Actions for 2022-23 and 2023-24
1. Divide "high risk" reservoirs into three hazard classes: (a) More frequent inspection to be required for high hazard. (b) Thresholds between classes to be determined by EA in consultation. (c) Government should review threshold for high risk designation.	Accept in principle and prepare for consultation by researching and developing an improved hazard classification. DEFRA lead
2. Strengthen EA regulation: (a) EA to raise awareness of duties and responsibilities. (b) EA to support owners in developing their Capacity. (c) EA to charge for regulation—and incentivise good behaviours. (d) EA to adjudicate disputes between engineers and owners.	Accept and begin to develop business case and options for introducing a proportionate charging scheme. EA lead
3. Introduce Reservoir Safety Management Plans (RSMPs) reflecting class: (a) Owners should prepare RSMPs reflecting hazard class. (b) RSMPs should be kept as prescribed form of record. (c) Supervising engineer to review and certify annually. (d) Owners to ensure competent staff—certified for higher hazard class. EA to produce guidance.	Accept in principle and prepare for consultation, by developing proposals for prescribed, risk-based RSMPs. DEFRA and EA joint lead
4. Strengthen Supervising Engineer (SE) role: (a) SEs to engage in surveillance, review records, check RSMP delivery. (b) SEs to certify compliance with RSMP and approve RSMP for next year.	Accept principle of improved SE practice and develop guidance and training. EA lead

Table 1 Summary of Reservoir Safety Review Recommendations and Actions

Consultation on proposed reforms is anticipated in 2023-24.	
Short Description of Recommendation	Proposed Actions for 2022-23 and 2023-24
5. <i>Strengthen Inspecting Engineer (IE) role:</i> (a) IEs to identify potential failure modes as part of inspections. (b) IEs to require precautionary interim measures quickly if concerned. (c) IEs to produce risk assessment for higher hazard classes. (d) Clear timescales to be attached to MIOS. (e) Precautionary measures to be ALARP⁽¹⁾ if they compromise operation.	Accept and begin to develop improved good practice guidance for IEs. EA lead
6. <i>Improve management of Measures in the Interest of Safety (MIOS):</i> (a) MIOS to be clearly indicated in IE reports. (b) Owner to appoint construction engineer for MIOS within 14 days. (c) Urgent MIOS to be completed asap and by specified completion date. (d) Certification issued on completion of MIOS to provide details. (e) RSMP amendments to be specified with required dates.	Accept and begin to develop improved good practice guidance for MIOS. EA lead
7. <i>Improve supply of future panel engineers:</i> (Especially in light of small number of current engineers and ageing profile.)	Accept and continue existing work to explore options for implementing with Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE). DEFRA lead
8. <i>Support career progression for panel engineers:</i> (a) Revise designation of panels to introduce more responsibility tiers. (b) ICE to provide more support with training, mentoring, guidance.	Accept in principle and plan how to take forward following advice from ICE. DEFRA lead
9. <i>Better knowledge sharing and learning for panel engineers:</i> (a) EA to provide more access to learning for engineers. (b) EA to ensure lessons from incidents are more comprehensive. (c) EA to introduce reporting of near misses and anonymous reporting. (d) EA to update guidance for SEs, IEs and for risk assessments.	Accept and begin developing guidance and other best practice sharing mechanisms. DEFRA and EA joint lead
10. <i>Introduce risk assessments and manage reservoirs so risk is reduced to 'ALARP':</i> (a) Owners to manage risks to ALARP based on a risk assessment. (b) Risk assessment to be based on good practice—and informs RSMP. (c) MIOS should ensure risks are both tolerable and ALARP. (d) If risk cannot be reduced to tolerable levels, decommission.	Accept in principle and prepare for consultation by developing proposals for risk assessments. DEFRA lead
11. <i>Strengthen EA duties and powers:</i> (a) EA and Defra to produce—commission a code of practice. (b) Expand EA duties to allow them to assure owners duties are fulfilled. (c) Expand EA duties to allow them to assure SE and IE reports and RSMPs. (d) Expand EA powers to challenge SE and IE reports, RSMPs (etc). (e) Expand EA duties to spot check owners' activities.	Accept in principle and begin EA quality assurance of panel engineer's work. DEFRA and EA joint lead
12. <i>Strengthen EA enforcement:</i> (a) Full recovery of enforcement costs. (b) Expand EA powers to include fines. (c) Strengthen independence of EA regulator from role as operator.	Accept in principle and plan for consultation and implementation. Develop business case and options for EA civil sanctions. DEFRA and EA joint lead.

Table 1 Summary of Reservoir Safety Review Recommendations and Actions

Consultation on proposed reforms is anticipated in 2023-24.	
Short Description of Recommendation	Proposed Actions for 2022-23 and 2023-24
13. <i>Climate change research:</i> (a) current and (b) future programme of research	Accept and include in R&D programme. EA lead
14. <i>Publication of data and transparency reports by</i> (a) EA and (b) Owners	Accept principle of data publication—EA to develop proposals. EA lead
15. <i>Review and update legislation and regulations</i> (includes concern that current legislation is outdated and inflexible for modern H&S practices)	Accept, engage with stakeholders, and develop programme of reform. DEFRA lead

[HCWS246]

Improving Water Quality and Tackling Nutrient Pollution

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): Improving water quality is a Government priority. We are the first Government to take such substantial steps to restore our water environment, from setting in motion the largest water company infrastructure project ever to reduce discharges from storm overflows, to seeing the largest fines in history placed on water companies. We have provided new funding to the Environment Agency to increase farm inspections to at least 4,000 inspections a year by 2023, and we are launching future farming schemes that will reward farmers and land managers for actions to reduce run-off, such as introducing cover crops and buffering rivers. This is reinforced by our proposed Environment Act 2021 targets to reduce the key sources of river pollution.

We are today launching a further package to tackle nutrient pollution, which is a significant problem for our freshwater habitats and estuaries. Increased levels of nutrients (especially nitrogen and phosphorus) can speed up the growth of certain plants, disrupting natural processes and devastating wildlife.

While we have taken substantial steps, this is taking time to make an impact on the ground and we must go further. At present some 27 catchments, and several of our internationally important water bodies and protected sites, are in unfavourable status due to nutrient pollution. In accordance with complex and bureaucratic EU-derived domestic legislation and case law, local planning authorities can only approve a plan or a project if they are certain it will have no negative effect on the site's integrity. Natural England, in its statutory role as an adviser on the natural environment, has advised a total of 74 local planning authorities on the nutrient impacts of new plans and projects on protected sites where those protected sites are in unfavourable condition due to excess nutrients. They have issued tools and guidance on an approach called "nutrient neutrality" to mitigate the impact of nutrient pollution so that development can go ahead. However, there is still a gap in the ability of LPAs and developers to find mitigation quickly and effectively.

In order to drive down pollution from all development in the relevant catchments, we will be tabling an amendment to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill. This will place a new statutory duty on water and sewerage companies

in England to upgrade wastewater treatment works to the highest technically achievable limits by 2030 in nutrient neutrality areas. Water companies will be required to undertake these upgrades in a way that tackles the dominant nutrient(s) causing pollution at a protected site. We are also using feedback from the recent “call for evidence” to water companies to identify where these upgrades could be accelerated and delivered sooner. Our proposed Environment Act target to tackle wastewater pollution across the country will still see upgrades brought in elsewhere, on a slightly longer timeframe.

In the meantime, we know the impact of new housing is a small proportion of overall nutrient pollution, but mitigation requirements have a significant impact on overall house building. This amendment will improve water quality and in doing so will support house building to continue in areas affected by nutrient pollution. We want these improvements to be factored in for the purposes of a habitats regulation assessment.

Wastewater treatment upgrades will reduce a significant source of nutrient pollution, helping to recover these crucial habitats, which will thereby reduce the level of mitigation required by individual developers when legislation comes into force.

Supporting mitigation

Building on our initial package of support announced in March 2022, I will issue a ministerial direction to support Natural England to establish a nutrient mitigation scheme.

Natural England will develop the scheme, working with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. DEFRA and DLUHC will provide funding to pump prime the scheme: this is intended to front-load investment in mitigation projects, including wetland and woodland creation. This will then be recouped through a simple payment mechanism where developers can purchase “nutrient credits” which will discharge the requirements to provide mitigation. Natural England will accredit mitigation delivered through the nutrient mitigation scheme, enabling LPAs to grant planning permission for developments which have secured the necessary nutrient credits. Wetlands and woodlands will also provide biodiversity enhancements to areas and promote public access to nature across England helping to deliver on our levelling up missions for pride in place and wellbeing.

Natural England will deliver the scheme by establishing an “accelerator unit”, with the support of DEFRA, DLUHC, the Environment Agency and Homes England. The previous announcement of £100,000 funding from DLUHC for affected areas will help support delivery of the scheme. We will open the scheme to all developers while ensuring that small and medium enterprises are prioritised, given the difficulties they can face in securing mitigations due to access to funds and skills. This scheme will not be a requirement but an option to discharge mitigation requirements more efficiently. We recognise that there are a number of private markets and local planning authority-led nutrient mitigation schemes that are already being established. Natural England will be working closely with these providers to ensure they do not crowd out private markets, and will ensure that the national scheme dovetails with these markets and provides additional support as needed. We

will announce further details in the autumn when the scheme will launch, and in the meantime, Natural England will be in touch with local authorities and developers.

Our amendment will support the delivery of the tens of thousands of homes currently in the planning system, by significantly reducing the cost of mitigation requirements. The mitigation scheme will make delivering those requirements much easier for developers.

Longer term, we continue to progress proposals to reform the habitats regulations so that impacts on protected sites are tackled up front, focusing on what is best for bringing sites back into favourable status. Recovering our protected sites is critical to meeting the Government’s ambitious environment commitments, including our apex target to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030. Through this work we can improve water quality, biodiversity and our wider environment while also enabling sustainable development.

Planning

We understand the concerns that some local planning authorities have around the impact of nutrient neutrality on their ability to demonstrate they have a sufficient and deliverable housing land supply.

We will make clear in planning guidance that judgments on deliverability of sites should take account of strategic mitigation schemes and the accelerated timescale for the Natural England’s mitigation schemes and immediate benefits on mitigation burdens once legislation requiring water treatment upgrades comes into force. DLUHC will revise planning guidance over the summer to reflect that sites affected by nutrient pollution forming part of housing land supply calculations are capable of being considered deliverable for the purposes of housing land supply calculations, subject to relevant evidence to demonstrate deliverability. It will be for decision takers to make judgements about impacts on delivery timescales for individual schemes in line with the national planning policy framework.

The roll-out of advice in relation to nutrient pollution to additional catchments in March, and for those already caught by the issue, resulted in a number of planning permissions having been granted prior to the nutrient neutrality issue being raised, but where a post-permission approval is still required (reserved matters approval or discharges of conditions). I am aware of views that the habitats regulations assessment provisions do not apply to subsequent stages of outline approval, and while we know the following will be disappointing to the developers whose sites are affected, it is important to ensure there is clarity on how the assessment provisions should operate.

The habitats regulations assessment provisions apply to any consent, permission, or other authorisation, this may include post-permission approvals; reserved matters or discharges of conditions. It may be that habitats regulation assessment is required in situations including but not limited to:

where the environmental circumstances have materially changed as a matter of fact and degree (including where nutrient load or the conservation status of habitat site is now unfavourable) so that development that previously was lawfully screened out at the permission stage cannot now be screened out; or

development that previously was lawfully screened in but judged to pass an appropriate assessment cannot now do so because the mitigation (if any) secured is not adequate to enable the competent authority to be convinced of no adverse effect on integrity of the habitats site.

DLUHC will therefore also update the planning practice guidance on the application of the habitats regulations assessment in this regard, and consider any further additional revisions as necessary over the summer.

[HCWS258]

**United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020
(Exclusions from Market Access Principles:
Single-Use Plastics)**

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): This statement is made in accordance with section 10(11) of the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020. The United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 (Exclusions from Market Access Principles: Single-Use Plastics) Regulations 2022 create an exclusion from the market access principles in Part 1 of the UKIM Act for legislation so far as it prohibits or restricts the supply of single-use plastic straws, drink stirrers, stemmed cotton buds, plates, cutlery, chopsticks, balloon sticks and expanded and extruded polystyrene food and drinks containers, including cups.

This exclusion was requested by the Scottish Government through the resources and waste common framework, in line with the process for considering UKIM Act exclusions in common framework areas¹. Under the Act, the Secretary of State is required to seek consent from the Scottish Ministers, the Welsh Ministers and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland. If that consent is not given within one month, the regulations may be made without consent.

Welsh Ministers and Scottish Ministers have consented to the making of these regulations and consent has been sought from the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland. As this legislation is of a cross-cutting nature, the consent request requires referral to the Northern Ireland Executive as per Northern Ireland's ministerial code. This has not been possible because of the ongoing absence of a First and Deputy First Minister in Northern Ireland, meaning the Executive cannot meet. My officials have, however, continued to engage at official level with the relevant Northern Ireland Departments in the development of this legislation and there has been engagement with the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Edwin Poots MLA, and the Minister for the Economy, Gordon Lyons MLA, who have raised no objections to the approach.

In line with section 10(7) of the UKIM Act, I have considered the importance of facilitating the access to the market within Great Britain of qualifying Northern Ireland goods. The supply of the items covered by this exclusion is banned in Scotland, and the UK Government and the Welsh Government have consulted on banning the supply of these items in England and in Wales in so far as it is not already banned there. The relevant EU directive (Article 5 of the Single-Use Plastic Directive) under Annex II of the NI protocol, once implemented in Northern Ireland, will have equivalent effect to the proposed and existing legislation in Scotland, England and Wales. As such, I do not consider there is a need to make additional or separate provision to maintain access to the market within Great Britain for these single-use plastic items.

I therefore intend to proceed with making the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 (Exclusions from Market Access Principles: Single-Use Plastics) Regulations 2022. I welcome the commitments and shared ambition across the UK to continue to work together to reduce plastic waste and tackle plastic pollution across the UK.

¹ www.gov.uk/government/publications/process-for-considering-ukim-act-exclusions-in-common-framework-areas

[HCWS250]

**FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND
DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**

FCDO Services Ministerial Targets 2022-23

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Vicky Ford): My noble Friend the Minister for South and Central Asia, North Africa, United Nations and the Commonwealth (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon), has made the following written ministerial statement:

FCDO Services operates as a trading fund of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). I have set the following performance targets for 2022-2023:

An in-year surplus in excess of 0.0% before interest, tax and dividend;

Achievement of the return on capital employed (ROCE) of at least 6.5% (weighted average);

A productivity ratio of at least 82%, measuring actual billable hours versus available billable hours;

An in-year customer satisfaction rating average of at least 82;

An average Civil Service People Survey "Your Say" score for 'Employee Engagement' of at least 61%; and

An average Civil Service People Survey "Your Say" score for "My Manager" of at least 65%. FCDO Services will report to Parliament on its success against these targets through its annual report and accounts for 2022-2023.

FCDO Services is a trading fund of the FCDO. It provides a range of integrated, secure services worldwide to the FCDO and other UK Government Departments, supporting the delivery of Government agendas. Services include protective security, estates and construction, cloud computing, communications and monitoring, logistics, translation and interpreting. This is combined with a portfolio of global maintenance work. FCDO Services also manages the UK National Authority for Counter Eavesdropping (UK NACE), helping protect UK assets from physical, electronic and cyber-attack.

[HCWS242]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration and Border Control

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): Today will see the publication of two documents supporting the Home Office's strategy for the future border: "An Independent review of Border Force" (CP 700) and the "New Plan for Immigration: Legal Migration and Border Control" strategy statement (CP 706). These documents have been laid before both Houses today and will be made available on gov.uk.

The strategy statement sets out our ambition for transformational change for everyone using our systems and crossing the UK border. We will deliver a fully end-to-end digital customer experience which will bring benefits to all.

This is an ambitious plan in which we will continue to deliver a world-leading legal migration and border system. The plans we have set out in this strategy statement are essential for a streamlined, digital system which responds to customer needs and enhances the security of the UK. Our flagship permission to travel scheme will mean that it is easier for our friends to come to and contribute to the UK, but harder for those not using legal means to come here. We will be more easily able to tackle problems upstream and know more about those who use the system to come here.

I would like to thank Alexander Downer for his work in conducting the BF review and all those who have been involved. The recommendations in this report are our commitment to a package of reforms for Border Force so it can continue to respond to emerging threats, keep our border secure, and ease the passage of legitimate travellers and goods across our border in a world that is very different from when Border Force was formed a decade ago.

The publication of the strategy and report on the BF review is a pivotal step in achieving the vision for the future of the border which will increase public confidence that we are improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the UK border and making it more secure to tackle future challenges.

[HCWS257]

Changes to Immigration Rules

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kevin Foster): My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is today laying before the House a statement of changes in immigration rules.

The changes reflect amendments to the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme to allow children who are not applying with, or to join, their parent or legal guardian in the UK to qualify for a visa.

As the Government announced on 22 June 2022, these changes are designed to ensure, where a Ukrainian parent or legal guardian confirms it is their child's best interests for the child to come to the UK without them, there is a route for them.

In these cases, the sponsor will need to give a greater commitment to support the child for three years or until the child turns 18 (so long as the sponsorship lasts at least six months), whichever is soonest. The local authority will conduct safeguarding checks and pre-approval of the sponsor before the visa application can be made, and there will need to be parental consent which, in line with the Ukrainian Government's requirements, will need to be certified by an authority approved by the Ukrainian Government.

There have already been applications from children travelling without their parents. These applications were on hold while the Government carefully worked through the challenges around allowing children to travel without a parent. On 15 July the Home Office published a concession to the immigration rules to allow these cases to be prioritised once they have the necessary approval from the local authority.

We have also introduced an additional safeguarding requirement to ensure if a sponsor is not approved by the local authority under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, they cannot sponsor the same or another child under this scheme or the Ukraine family scheme.

The Homes for Ukraine scheme will be opened to new child applicants applying without their parents or legal guardians on 10 August.

[HCWS248]

Interception of Communications Code of Practice

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Priti Patel): The Investigatory Powers Act 2016 provides a regulatory framework for the use of a number of covert investigatory powers, to ensure that the powers are used by public authorities in a lawful way in order to, for example, gather vital information on those who are suspected of the most serious crimes, including terrorism. The Act provides the necessary safeguards to protect individual privacy and our democratic freedoms while enabling our law enforcement and security agencies to protect the UK from serious harm.

The Act is accompanied by a set of codes of practice. These codes provide guidance for law enforcement agencies, the UK intelligence community and public authorities who exercise such powers. It sets out how the powers in primary legislation should be exercised. Under paragraph 5 of schedule 7 to the Investigatory Powers Act 2016, the Secretary of State may from time to time revise the whole or part of a code.

I intend to launch a public consultation on amending the interception of communications code of practice to reflect HMG's position on cloud service providers and the enterprise services they provide to customers, and the circumstances in which an intercepting authority should serve a warrant on either the cloud service provider or the enterprise customer.

I must be clear that the intention to amend the code is subject to the outcome of the consultation and we will consider any representations made as a result of the consultation. Further details will be published in the consultation response.

The public consultation will run between 20 July and 14 September, and my officials are also in the process of seeking input from the independent Investigatory Powers Commissioner, who oversees and monitors the operation of the legislation.

A copy of this consultation will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and also made available on gov.uk.

[HCWS249]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Israel Trade Negotiation

The Secretary of State for International Trade (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): On Wednesday 20 July 2022, the Department for International Trade launched negotiations for a new, upgraded free trade agreement with Israel.

In line with our commitments to scrutiny and transparency, the Department for International Trade has published, and placed in the Libraries of both Houses, more information on these negotiations. This includes:

The United Kingdom's strategic case for a UK-Israel free trade agreement (FTA)

Our objectives for the negotiations

A summary of the United Kingdom's public consultation on trade with Israel

A scoping assessment, providing a preliminary economic assessment of the impact of the agreement.

The United Kingdom's negotiating objectives for the upgraded agreement, published today, were informed by our call for input, which requested views from consumers, businesses, and other interested stakeholders across the United Kingdom on their priorities for enhancing our existing trading relationship with Israel.

These negotiations follow our signing of the UK-Israel trade and partnership agreement on 18 February 2019.

A new and enhanced trade agreement with Israel is a key part of the United Kingdom's strategy to secure advanced modern agreements with new international partners, and upgrade existing continuity agreements in order to better suit the UK economy.

Israel is an important trading partner for the United Kingdom, with trade worth £5 billion in 2021 despite the disruptions of the coronavirus pandemic to global trade. As two of the most innovative and dynamic economies in the world—both in the top 15 of the global innovation index—we know that the opportunities of the future will come from sectors in which we both excel, such as technology, research and development, digital and data.

Our existing agreement, which forms the basis of our current trading relationship, is outdated and not designed for a digital age. Originally signed in 1995 between Israel and the EU, it was developed before smartphones, artificial intelligence and the internet transformed our economies. While it allows tariff-free trade on 99% of UK goods exports by value, it currently contains scant provision for the United Kingdom's thriving services sector. We intend to change this by putting services at the heart of a modern new agreement, which better benefits the UK economy. Upgrading our trade deal with Israel will help unlock a stronger, more advanced partnership. A new agreement could make it cheaper and easier for innovative UK services and tech companies to trade with Israel, benefiting sectors including finance, accountancy and legal. The new deal will play to our strengths, reflecting the realities of trading in the 21st century and allowing us to take advantage of future innovations.

Around 6,600 businesses from all four corners of the United Kingdom exported their goods to Israel in 2020. Of these firms, 5,600 were small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The United Kingdom's SMEs could be amongst the biggest winners from a new agreement with Israel, as we seek to make it easier to do business and focus on trade barriers that may have deterred them from previously entering this exciting marketplace.

The Government are determined that any agreement must work for consumers, producers, investors, and businesses alike. We remain committed to upholding our

high environmental, labour, public health, food safety and animal welfare standards, alongside protecting the national health service.

The Government will continue to update and engage with key stakeholders, including Parliament and the devolved Administrations, throughout our negotiations with Israel.

[HCWS247]

JUSTICE

Call for Evidence Response on SLAPPs

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Dominic Raab): Today the Government are publishing their response to their Call for Evidence on SLAPPs—strategic lawsuits against public participation.

SLAPPs are a growing form of aggressive litigation which seek to intimidate, silence and harass an opponent via improper use of the judicial system. The invasion of Ukraine has heightened concerns around the way foreign actors may be misusing the UK legal system to fund litigation against free speech in our country.

For this reason, I published a call for evidence on 17 March 2022 inviting views on potential measures for legislative, procedural and regulatory reform. We also ran stakeholder engagement roundtables in early May, inviting evidence from legal and media professionals, civil society organisations and academics, to develop a robust policy base for reform. The call for evidence closed on 19 May and received 120 responses, all of which have been individually analysed and assessed.

The evidence received throughout this process has been invaluable in exposing the extent of this problem and the measures necessary to effectively combat it.

To that end, we will legislate at the earliest opportunity to enable clearer identification of SLAPPs and introduce an early dismissal process, supported by a formal costs protection scheme. SLAPPs claims that would be subject to an early dismissal mechanism would have to satisfy a three-part test, requiring a court to be satisfied:

that a case relates to a public interest issue, for example investigating financial misconduct by a company or individual; that it has some features of an abuse of process, for example sending a very large number of highly aggressive letters on a trivial matter; and that it is without sufficient evidence of merit.

I do not rule out further reform, as SLAPPs are an evolving issue affecting different areas of domestic law, as well as jurisdictions around the world. Our approach must continue to develop in a way that counters the ever-expanding threats that SLAPPs present. At the same time, while we must protect the right to freedom of expression, we will also ensure that the right balance is struck between that and the right to reputation and privacy.

These reforms sit alongside our proposals for a Bill of Rights that will reinforce freedom of speech and freedom of expression. These reforms alongside the Bill of Rights represent an opportunity to put President Putin and his cronies on notice. We will not allow our courts to be abused to censor those brave enough to call out corruption. We will protect our free press, which is there precisely to hold the powerful to account. We will defend freedom of speech—the liberty that guards all our other freedoms

in this country. Our reforms will further strengthen free speech so that those with blood on their hands and those with dirty money in their bank accounts are no longer free to hide in the shadows.

The response to the call for evidence is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/strategic-lawsuits-against-public-participation-slapps> and a copy will be placed in the House Library.

[HCWS244]

TRANSPORT

Draft Renewable Transport Fuels Obligations (Amendment) Order 2022

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Trudy Harrison): I have today published the draft statutory instrument the Renewable Transport Fuels Obligations (Amendment) Order 2022 and accompanying explanatory memorandum.

Renewable transport fuels already make a substantial contribution towards meeting UK carbon budgets and will continue to play an important role in meeting the UK's increasingly ambitious future carbon reduction targets. In 2019, the use of renewable fuel supplied under the RTFO saved approximately 5.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions, equivalent to taking 2.5 million cars off the road.

This statutory instrument amends the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation Order 2007 (SI 2007/3072). The statutory instrument will help further increase the supply of renewable transport fuels by increasing the flexibility when determining eligibility of hydrogen and other renewable fuels of non-biological origin when produced from renewable energy. It also encourages the efficient use of biomethane as a transport fuel and the development of carbon capture and storage technology.

The statutory instrument is published in accordance with the procedure required by schedule 8 to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 and agreed with Parliament. This is because it includes amendments to the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligations Order 2007, parts of which were previously amended by SIs made under section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972. The statutory instrument is being published in draft at least 28 days before being laid for affirmative debate.

The Department consulted on these proposals between March and April 2021 in the paper "Targeting net zero—Next steps for the Renewable Transport Fuels Obligation". The Government response to that consultation and associated cost benefit analysis are available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/amending-the-renewable-transport-fuels-obligation-rtfo-to-increase-carbon-savings-on-land-air-and-at-sea>.

[HCWS245]

WORK AND PENSIONS

DWP Estate

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Julie Marson): This Government are committed to helping people back into work, and to support this cross-Government effort, the Department for Work and Pensions has invested in the temporary

expansion of its jobcentre network. This has enabled us to deliver for claimants, including through our comprehensive, multibillion-pound Plan for Jobs.

Plan for Jobs has delivered for claimants over the last two years through kickstart, sector-based work academies, job entry targeted support (JETS), Restart and the expansion of our youth hubs. Together, these programmes have helped people get into work and upskill, no matter where they live or the stage of their career.

Recently, our Way To Work scheme achieved the target of getting 500,000 people into work. Since January 31, over 520,000 intensive work search universal credit and jobseekers allowance claimants moved into work during the campaign as we mobilised our workforce and brought employers into jobcentres to see the talent on offer. Latest figures, up to June, show a record high of 29.6 million people are now on payroll in the UK.

Thanks to our Plan for Jobs and the Government's responsive labour market policy throughout the pandemic, the unemployment level is at a near record low. The Department's approach "Any Job, Better Job, Career" means work coaches are building on the strength of the labour market with a new focus on progression, helping claimants into better jobs and ensuring they are on a career path that is right for them.

We outlined on 17 March the Department's strategy which will, over the next 10 years, reshape how, where and when it delivers its back of house services. Over the 10-year period the Department will transition to an estate that is smaller, greener, and better, making DWP more efficient for customers and our employees. By having a smaller footprint, this helps us to be greener. This type of bold modernisation can support efficiencies, create value for money, reduce fraud and error, build resilience and sustainability, and achieve improved customer outcomes and experience. As announced on 17 March, we took advantage of lease breaks in 2023 to improve the future delivery of DWP back of house services.

As part of this 10-year programme, we are now providing an update on another strand of this work, focusing on changes to some of our front of house sites, taking advantage of the lease breaks once again and leaving older lower-quality buildings whilst optimising opportunities presented from some of the temporary jobcentres opened during the pandemic.

We will do this in four ways:

- consolidate services in some locations where there is another nearby which offers better accommodation for customers and staff;
- look to close older and poorer premises and permanently relocate to the new temporary Jobcentre, making it an established site;
- co-locate with key partners;
- and in some cases, secure new premises.

The location of the new sites will be as close as possible to the existing offices in order to maintain physical presence in areas and minimise the impact on customers, while providing an improved office environment for customers and staff. This is not about reducing headcount or services offered, and we expect no jobs to be lost.

Details of some of these further site moves have been announced today. Letters are being sent to each MP with an affected site in their constituency explaining what it means for their local jobcentre and their constituents.

[HCWS253]

Petitions

Wednesday 20 July 2022

PRESENTED PETITIONS

Petitions presented to the House but not read on the Floor

Bus services in Footdee (Fittie)

The Petition of residents of the constituency of Aberdeen North,

Declares that First Bus have abandoned the people of Footdee (Fittie) with changes to bus services 13 and 15; isolated them from the rest of the city; cut off the only bus service to Aberdeen Beach, negatively impacting the population of Aberdeen as a whole.

The Petitioners therefore request the House of Commons to call upon First Bus to reinstate the bus service to Footdee (Fittie), Aberdeen.

And the Petitioners remain etc. —[Presented by Kirsty Blackman.]

[P002762]

Schools Bill

The petition of residents of the constituency of Bristol East,

Declares that the petitioners reject the imposition of an expensive, disproportionate, invasive and ill-judged registration and monitoring system for home educated children, which undermines the long-standing statutory recognition of the primacy of parents in determining the education of their children.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons remove parts 3 and 4 of the Schools Bill and urges the Government urgently to conduct proper independent research into the outcome of home educated children and further, that the Government provide tangible support for home educating families including in the provision of access to examinations.

And the petitioners remain, etc. —[Presented by Kerry McCarthy.]

[P002761]

The petition of residents of the constituency of South West Wiltshire,

Declares that the petitioners reject the imposition of an expensive, disproportionate, invasive and ill-judged registration and monitoring system for home educated children, which undermines the long-standing statutory recognition of the primacy of parents in determining the education of their children.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons remove parts 3 and 4 of the Schools Bill and urges the Government urgently to conduct proper independent research into the outcomes of home educating families including in the provision of access to examinations.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

—[Presented by Dr Andrew Murrison.]

[P002763]

OBSERVATIONS

TREASURY

Barclays Muswell Hill branch

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the Barclays Muswell Hill branch must not be closed; further that petitioners are extremely disappointed that Barclays has announced the closure of their Muswell Hill branch in June 2022; further that millions of people still rely on cash and petitioners believe that the relentless programme of bank closures only widens inequality by accelerating the move towards a cashless society; and further that Barclays should reconsider and consider the social impact of their proposed closure.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to consider the concerns of the petitioners and take immediate action to ensure that the Barclays Muswell Hill branch is not closed down.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Catherine West, *Official Report*, 9 June 2022; Vol. 715, c. 1046.]

[P002735]

Observations from the Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Richard Fuller):

The Government thank the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West, for submitting the petition on behalf of her constituents regarding the closure of the Barclays Muswell Hill branch.

The Government are sorry to hear of her constituents' disappointment at the planned closure of the branch. The way consumers interact with their banking is changing. In 2020, 83% of UK adults used contactless payments, 72% used online banking and 54% used mobile banking, according to UK Finance. Government cannot reverse the changes in the market and in customer behaviour; nor can they determine firms' commercial strategies in response to those changes. Having the flexibility to respond to changes in the market is what makes the UK's financial services sector one of the most competitive and productive in the world, and the Government want to protect that.

As with other banking service providers, Barclays will need to balance customer interests, market competition, and other commercial factors when considering its strategy. Although the Government can understand constituents' dissatisfaction, decisions on opening and closing branches are taken by the management team of each bank on a commercial basis. The Government hope that the hon. Member can appreciate that it would be inappropriate for the Government to intervene in these decisions.

However, the Government also firmly believe that the impact of branch closures should be understood, considered, and mitigated where possible so that all customers, wherever they live, continue to have appropriate access to banking services.

As the hon. Member may know, the largest banks and building societies have been signed up to the Access to Banking Standard since 2017, which commits them to ensure that customers are well informed about branch closures, the bank's reasons for closure and options for continued access to banking services. Guidance from the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) also sets out its expectation of firms when they are deciding to reduce their physical branches or the number of free-to-use ATMs. Firms are expected to carefully consider the

impact of a planned closure on their customers' everyday banking and cash access needs and consider possible alternative access arrangements. This will ensure the implementation of closure decisions is done in a way that treats customers fairly.

In the customer information pack that Barclays has published for the Muswell Hill Branch closure, customers are pointed to the nearby free-to-use ATMs at the nearby Nationwide Building Society and Halifax branches less than a mile away, as well as alternative Barclays branches in Crouch End (1.5 miles away) and Noel Park (2 miles away).

The hon. Member may be interested to know that the FCA is currently consulting on requirements for more detailed analysis on how firms assess the impact on customers when they plan to close a branch, remove or convert an ATM or reduce the services they provide. These proposals include extending communications to other groups such as local charities and councils to understand the wider impact from changes to services. The consultation closes on 26 July. More information can be found on the FCA's website:

<https://www.fca.org.uk/publications/guidance-consultations/gc22-2-branch-atm-closures-conversions-updated-guidance-firms>

Alternatively, Barclays customers can access everyday banking services via telephone banking, through digital means such as mobile or online banking and via the Post Office. The Post Office Banking Framework allows 99% of personal banking and 95% of business customers to deposit cheques, check their balance and withdraw and deposit cash at 11,500 Post Office branches across the UK. The nearest Post Office branches to the Muswell Hill Barclays branch are in Muswell Hill (0.1 miles away) and East Finchley (1.1 miles away).

The Government have also made commitments to protect access to cash in recognition that cash remains an important part of daily life for millions of people across the UK, particularly those in vulnerable groups. Last year, the Government consulted on legislative proposals for ensuring the UK's cash system is sustainable for the long term. Following this, in the Queen's Speech in May 2022 the Government announced that they will introduce legislation to protect access to cash as part of the Financial Services and Markets Bill. The Bill will establish the FCA as the lead regulator for access to cash with responsibility to ensure that people can continue to access cash withdrawal and deposit facilities, and associated monitoring, supervision and enforcement powers over banks and building societies designated by HM Treasury.

Following the Government's commitment to legislate, firms are working together through the Cash Action Group to develop new initiatives to provide shared services. As part of this, any community facing the closure of a key cash service will have its needs independently assessed by LINK. In circumstances where LINK considers that a community requires additional cash services, it will be responsible for ensuring a suitable shared solution for all cash users in that community. Communities will also be able to request a review of their community's needs by LINK from the summer of 2022 onwards. Further information on the assessment process is available on the LINK website:

<https://www.link.co.uk/initiatives/bank-branch-closures/>.

In light of the significant steps taken by industry to improve co-ordinated efforts by firms, the Government's intention is for the Financial Services and Markets Bill to enable HM Treasury to designate industry co-ordination arrangements for FCA oversight.

Ministerial Correction

Wednesday 20 July 2022

CABINET OFFICE

Ministers' Severance Pay

The following is an extract from the urgent question on 11 July 2022.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is disingenuous of the Opposition to reference my alleged severance pay, as I made it clear almost immediately after resigning that I would not be taking such money?

Mrs Wheeler: Indeed, and I thank my right hon. Friend for confirming that she has already talked to the permanent secretary of the Cabinet Office and that she will not be receiving the payment.

[Official Report, 11 July 2022, Vol. 718, c. 22.]

Letter of correction from the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs Wheeler).

An error has been identified in my response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan).

The correct response should have been:

Mrs Wheeler: Indeed, and I thank my right hon. Friend for confirming that she has already talked to the permanent secretary of the **Department for Education** and that she will not be **accepting** the payment.

ORAL ANSWERS

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No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons*,

**not later than
Wednesday 27 July 2022**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

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