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**HOUSE OF COMMONS**  
**OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY**  
**DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Monday 24 October 2022**

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# HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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## OFFICIAL REPORT

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

FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF  
HIS MAJESTY KING CHARLES III

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 721

EIGHTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2022-2023

### House of Commons

*Monday 24 October 2022*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

#### PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

### Oral Answers to Questions

#### EDUCATION

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Students: Cost of Living

1. **Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help support students with the cost of living. [901767]

**The Secretary of State for Education (Kit Malthouse):** My Department continues to work with the Office for Students to ensure that universities support students in hardship by drawing on the £261 million student premium.

**Cat Smith:** I have been hearing from students from the University of Lancaster and the University of Cumbria, and I share the concerns of the organisation MillionPlus, whose report “Learning with the lights off” highlights the difficulties that around 300,000 students are facing. Has the Secretary of State seen the report, and will he meet me and representatives of MillionPlus to discuss how the report’s recommendations on bringing immediate grant support to students could be implemented by his Government?

**Kit Malthouse:** I am afraid that I have not yet seen the report, but I will ask my team to dig it out and give it a look over. If the hon. Lady has specific issues that she wants to raise, I will be more than happy to meet her. Alongside the significant funding that we are putting into the student premium to deal with hardship in the student body, many students who are not living in halls of residence or other tied accommodation will benefit from the wider cost of living package that the Government have put together.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): They will no doubt be relieved on the grounds of the rate of interest they are required to pay on their student loans, won’t they?

**Kit Malthouse:** I know that the rate of interest on student loans is a matter of great interest to my right hon. Friend and his constituents. The switch from maintenance grants to loans that are effectively contingent upon income has been a success, in that we have seen during this period a significant increase in the likelihood of 18-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds going into higher education, but of course we constantly keep these things under review.

**Mr Speaker:** We now come to the shadow Minister, Matt Western.

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): I have been speaking to a lot of students in recent weeks and they are obviously anxious about the cost of living. While student maintenance loans have increased by just 2.3% on average, inflation has rocketed to more than 10%, accommodation costs are up 5%, food costs are up 14.5% and transport costs are up by 10.6%, hitting commuter students particularly hard. The result is that students are facing an average funding gap of £439 per month and dropping out, while the Government are facing a credibility gap in this sector. Can the Secretary of State tell us what students are supposed to do?

**Kit Malthouse:** As I outlined previously, £261 million is available in this academic year to support disadvantaged students who need additional help. We have been working

closely with the Office for Students to make sure that universities support those who are in hardship. It is worth pointing out that students will also benefit from reductions to their energy costs if they are buying from a domestic supplier, through the energy cost support package that we are putting in place. We have, as the hon. Gentleman said, continued to increase support for living costs over the last few years. He will know, however, that we keep these things under review constantly and an announcement on the uplift for this year will be forthcoming shortly.

**Mr Speaker:** Question 2 has been withdrawn, so we now come to question 3.

### STEM Teachers in Disadvantaged Areas

3. **Mrs Sheryll Murray** (South East Cornwall) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to attract science, technology, engineering and mathematics teachers to work in disadvantaged areas. [901769]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Jonathan Gullis):** As someone who was a teacher for nearly nine years in disadvantaged areas in London and Birmingham, may I say that teaching is one of the most rewarding jobs you can have? In 2020-21 there was an increase of more than 4,400 full-time teachers in state-funded schools in England. This has resulted in the largest qualified teacher stock since the school workforce census began in 2011. We know that there is more to be done in some areas, which is why early career maths, physics, chemistry and computing teachers working in eligible schools with disadvantaged pupil cohorts can now claim our tax-free levelling up premium.

**Mrs Murray:** One of the key disadvantages we have in Cornwall is the relatively high cost of housing. Cornwall is beautiful and people want to live there, but what more can the Department do to encourage teachers to come to Cornwall and not to other places with cheaper housing?

**Jonathan Gullis:** My hon. Friend will understand only too well, as a former resident of Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke, that, like Cornwall, it too is a place of outstanding beauty. This Government are committed to ensuring that affordable housing is delivered, and since 2010 more than 9,000 homes have been delivered in Cornwall. In August 2021 we announced £1 billion of funding from our affordable homes programme, which will be used to deliver more than 17,000 affordable homes across the south-west. I am pleased to say that Cornwall is also an education investment area and has 26 schools that are eligible for the levelling up premium, including Liskeard School and Community College in my hon. Friend's constituency, and specialist teachers in certain subjects in those schools can claim up to £3,000 tax free annually. Finally, in March 2022—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. It is not a full lesson we are putting out, just a good answer.

**Dame Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): Disadvantage knows no boundaries and, likewise, we have huge challenges in our schools in Hackney. The Government promised that the starting salary for teachers would be £30,000. How close are the Government to reaching that manifesto commitment?

**Jonathan Gullis:** I am delighted to tell the hon. Lady that, at the next independent pay review, I have asked for this Government's manifesto commitment to a £30,000 a year starting salary to be honoured for 2023-24.

**Mr Speaker:** Question 4 has been withdrawn.

### Vocational Alternatives to A-levels

5. **Jack Brereton** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure that students have access to high-quality vocational alternatives to A-levels. [901771]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Andrea Jenkyns):** We are reforming technical education to ensure that all post-16 students have access to technical options that support progression and meet employers' needs. We have introduced T-levels, a new high-quality programme designed with employers that will give learners the knowledge and experience needed for skilled employment and further study, including higher education or higher apprenticeships. We are also reviewing existing qualifications that sit alongside A-levels and T-levels to ensure they are high quality and lead to good outcomes for students.

**Jack Brereton:** We have some fantastic creative and manufacturing industries in Stoke-on-Trent, but many of these industries say to me that they often struggle to fill certain vacancies. Will my hon. Friend look at what more we can do to help to incentivise vocational skills to get our economy growing?

**Andrea Jenkyns:** I know this is of great importance to my hon. Friend. Many different sectors face skills needs and challenges, which is why we are investing in skills through T-levels, apprenticeships, skills boot camps and free courses for jobs, giving people of all ages the opportunity to obtain the skills that industries like and that support economic growth.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): There is potentially a huge number of good green jobs for young people to go into, such as retrofitting homes, installing heat pumps and restoring wetlands, but many young people do not know these jobs exist, let alone the pathways to get into them. What are the Government doing to open their eyes to these opportunities?

**Andrea Jenkyns:** I thank the hon. Lady for her important question. I am proud of the Government's record of investing in green jobs through T-levels, apprenticeships, higher technical qualifications and boot camps. Never before have there been so many opportunities to engage with green industries. We are also working closely with these industries to make sure they are at the heart of what we do.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister, Toby Perkins.

**Mr Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): The most popular high-quality vocational qualifications currently offered at level 3 are BTECs. Last week, the Education Committee heard evidence about the 6,500 level 3 students and 7,500 level 2 students whose results were delayed this year. The right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) rightly criticised the failure to reveal the number of

students affected at the time and all the uncertainty that caused. When did the Minister first know how many students had not received their results? Why did she not insist that the number be made public?

**Andrea Jenkyns:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, I am a strong proponent of BTECs, having been a BTEC girl myself. The Department informed us, and we acted on that straightaway. I will have to get back to him with the exact date. Looking at the whole landscape, I assure him that it has been simplified and that, most importantly, these courses lead to good outcomes for students, ensuring they have a bright future.

**Mr Speaker:** Question 6 has been withdrawn.

### Educational Underachievement of Black Children

7. **Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Whether he is taking steps to tackle educational underachievement of black children.

[901773]

**The Secretary of State for Education (Kit Malthouse):** We are focused on raising educational standards for all pupils, irrespective of their ethnicity.

**Ms Abbott:** The Government will be aware that, although many ethnic minority groups have narrowed the gap with white pupils, and in some cases overtaken them, some groups continue to underachieve, particularly black Caribbean boys. At a time when there are so many skills shortages, what is the Secretary of State doing to ensure all our pupils achieve their potential?

**Kit Malthouse:** I am pleased to say that the right hon. Lady is right and a number of minority groups now outperform the average, not least the largest group of the black community, those who would identify themselves as black African, who outperform the average in a number of ways. She is right, however, that there is underperformance by a number of black Caribbean pupils, mainly boys, and I certainly undertake to her to try to investigate why. However, I am sure she would agree that although external factors such as disadvantage can influence educational outcomes, the standard of the school and of the teaching that those pupils receive can often overcome many of those barriers. If she has not already done so, I urge her to visit the Michaela Community School in Wembley, which I visited two weeks ago and which is seeing extraordinary results from a very mixed and diverse community, in a very challenged part of London.

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

**Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): One key reason for underachievement—of all pupils, including pupils from different ethnic minorities—is the absence of children from school. At the start of term this September, there was just 93.5% attendance in all schools, which means that children lost up to an estimated 17.6 million hours of learning. At the start of school term, we would expect to see higher rates of attendance, of about 98%. I know that the Department has appointed 13 attendance advisers, but we have 1.7 million absent children and

100,000-plus so-called “ghost children”. What is my right hon. Friend doing to get those children back into school, so that the 1.7 million persistently absent children are safely returned to the classroom?

**Kit Malthouse:** The Chairman of the Select Committee is absolutely right to push hard on this issue because it is vital to the future of not only those children, but their families. He is right that following the pandemic we have seen a reduction in attendance. One silver lining coming out of the pandemic was the fact that we now have real-time attendance data for a majority of schools—we are working to complete that for all—which allows us to focus in our efforts on driving attendance in those schools. Given my previous job at the Home Office, I am particularly keen that police, schools and local education authorities should work closely together to make sure that those children who are not at school and are not findable at home are found somewhere out in the community and brought back.

**Mr Speaker:** You are meant to work through the Chair, Secretary of State. If you could do so, it would be very helpful, because at least then I could hear you as well.

### Cost of Living: Additional Support for School Pupils and HE Students

8. **Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in the devolved Administrations on the potential merits of providing additional support for school pupils and higher education students in the context of increases in the cost of living.

[901775]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Andrea Jenkyns):** In September 2022, the Secretary of State for Education held introductory meetings with his counterparts in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. That produced wide-ranging discussions, including on cost of living issues. Education is devolved, so additional support in this regard would be the responsibility of the devolved Governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

**Deidre Brock:** The Government’s lead adviser on food issues, Henry Dimbleby, has condemned the Minister’s response to the national food strategy, warning that it could mean more children go hungry. Just yesterday, the headteacher of a multi-academy trust reported that children are breaking down and crying because of hunger. In Scotland, all children in primary 1 to 5 receive free school meals and from 14 November all eligible children up to the age of 16 will be receiving the Scottish child payment of £25 per week. As this cost of living crisis deepens, when will this Government match the actions of the Scottish Government to support children in most need?

**Andrea Jenkyns:** We have provided £1.9 million of funding in free school meals and more than £2 billion in pupil premium. We are there to support disadvantaged students, which is why we are reforming education to give them a good start in life. Perhaps the hon. Lady and her counterparts in the devolved nations could learn from what we are doing here in England.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the SNP spokesperson, Carol Monaghan.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): But of course £1.9 million is not even going to touch the scale of the problem that we have here. Recent research from PwC found that for every pound invested in free school meals there was a return of £1.71 in savings to the state. Given that many families have moved beyond “just about managing” into “just about surviving”, when will this Government match the Scottish Government’s commitment to universal free school meals for primary children and the transformational Scottish child payment?

**Michael Gove** (Surrey Heath) (Con): That was our idea.

**Andrea Jenkyns:** As the former Education Secretary rightly says, it was our idea.

Let us look at the funding that we are giving Scotland. The devolved Administrations are well funded to deliver their devolved responsibilities. They have had block grant funding of an average of £41 billion a year. The Government have also extended free school meals to more children than any other Government over the past half a century. We remain committed to supporting the most disadvantaged children.

#### **EBacc Subjects and Modern Foreign Languages at GCSE**

9. **Mr Robin Walker** (Worcester) (Con): If he will take steps to encourage the take up of EBacc subjects and modern foreign languages at GCSE level. [901777]

**The Minister for Schools and Childhood (Kelly Tolhurst):** The Government remain committed to improving uptake of Ebacc subjects, specifically languages. Building on our modern foreign language pedagogy pilot, we will establish a national network of language hubs from autumn 2023. We are also expanding the successful Mandarin excellence programme, as well as exploring an Arabic language programme.

**Mr Walker:** The Ebacc pioneered by my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) has been highly successful in driving uptake of mathematics, sciences and humanities, but there is much further to go in reaching our targets in modern foreign languages. What progress have Ministers made on the development of an Arabic language programme for schools and on ensuring that more pupils have the chance to study world languages?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** My hon. Friend raises an important question about the availability of more world languages, which are important for our young people because the United Kingdom operates in a global market. I can confirm that we are exploring an Arabic language programme, which will aim to build on the existing infrastructure of Arabic teaching. Our language hubs programme will also increase support for home, heritage and community languages.

#### **Teacher Recruitment and Retention**

11. **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to improve the recruitment and retention of teachers. [901779]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Jonathan Gullis):** The Department is committed to attracting and retaining the highly skilled teachers we need by investing £181 million in this year’s recruitment cycle, including training bursaries and scholarships worth up to £29,000. We are also delivering 500,000 training opportunities, reforming teacher training and delivering on this Government’s manifesto commitment of £30,000-a-year starting salaries.

**Jeff Smith:** That sounds very rosy, but teacher vacancies have gone up 240% since 2011. According to the latest National Education Union poll, 44% of England’s state school teachers plan to quit by 2027—22% of them in the next two years. Things are particularly difficult because experienced teachers—who may have 20 years’ experience—are leaving the profession. What steps is the Minister taking to address pay, stress and an unmanageable workload, which are driving the most experienced teachers out of the profession?

**Jonathan Gullis:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that great question, because being a teacher is so important and positive, and it is a shame that he used his opportunity to be a bit negative about the profession. As we try to recruit and retain staff, we need people to talk up what a great profession this is to work in. [Interruption.] I am being shouted down by Opposition Members, but there is not a single year of teaching among them—I have nine years’ experience and I get shouted down for simply being someone who worked on the shop floor. The lessons should be learned from the past.

However, let me tell the hon. Gentleman what we are doing. We are making sure that we have the £30,000-a-year starting salary, which is amazingly competitive with the private sector. We are going to have the £181 million in scholarships and grants, including £29,000 in physics, for example. And we are going to make sure that we tackle retention and workload through the Department’s workload toolkit, which has so far reduced workload on average by about five hours.

**Stephen Morgan** (Portsmouth South) (Lab): Wow! This Government have no ambition for our children’s futures: soaring numbers of council schools are in deficit, the attainment gap is at a decade high and the Schools Bill has been ripped up. However, the recruitment and retention of secondary school teachers—not just Prime Ministers—is in crisis. Estimates based on DFE data suggest that the Government are set to fall 34 percentage points below their recruitment target. Will the Minister explain what specific action he will take to stop the rot and fix his own Government’s failure on this issue?

**Jonathan Gullis:** I am glad the hon. Gentleman has been let out of detention by the Standards Commissioner for the very naughty letter he sent only recently regarding me. However, let me be very clear that the hon. Gentleman is making a point—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Let me just say that we want better taste in the House. The Minister is no longer on the Back Benches, so his rhetoric needs to be that of a Minister. I know he has that standing and capability. Come on, Minister!

**Jonathan Gullis:** Mr Speaker, I am making the point very clearly. The hon. Gentleman has an opportunity to stand at the Dispatch Box and talk up the teaching professions, talk up our schools, and talk up our reforms since 2010-11, which have seen the attainment gap narrowed—that was until, of course, the global pandemic, which has affected every single sector of our economy. Sadly, things have not gone in a way that we would have liked, but we are putting in the effort through the national tutoring programme, the £1.3 billion recovery premium, and the £650 million catch-up premium. That is an awful lot of money going into the system. We are also making sure that teachers are of a high quality, and, most importantly, that they have high-quality mentoring, an initial teaching training round and an early career framework, which give them the support that they need.

#### College-Employer Collaboration

12. **James Grundy** (Leigh) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to facilitate collaboration between colleges and employers. [901780]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Andrea Jenkyns):** Local skills improvement plans place employers at the heart of local school systems, facilitating more dynamic working arrangements between employers and training providers to make technical education more responsive to employers' needs in the area. All areas in England now have a designated employer representative body in place to lead on devising their plans.

**James Grundy:** Does my hon. Friend agree that institutions such as Wigan and Leigh College which work with employers to create bespoke qualifications that lead directly into in-demand work are an excellent blueprint for other educational institutions to follow?

**Andrea Jenkyns:** I know that my hon. Friend is a real advocate for colleges in his area and I thank him for his question. Local skills improvement plans will forge stronger and more dynamic partnerships between employers and providers that will enable training to be more responsive to local skills needs. The relationship between Wigan and Leigh College and local employers aligns closely with the aims of this improved collaboration. It is a great example of how stakeholders can work together to meet local skills needs and help people to get good jobs. I would be delighted to visit my hon. Friend's constituency to see its great work in progress.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I do not know whether the Minister was able to go to the Association of Colleges reception recently, but it was a very good way of meeting all the college leaders. Does she agree that there must be more joined-up thinking and activity between colleges, schools and universities? We were talking about green skills. There seems to be no

curriculum at 16 that meshes with that at 18 and 21. I ask her please to talk to colleges and get something moving.

**Andrea Jenkyns:** I was at a reception for our Love Our Colleges campaign. I am a true advocate on this matter and one thing I am passionate about is the parity of esteem between vocational and technical qualifications and academic qualifications. I ask Members please to put their trust in us as a Government, because we are fully behind all sectors and we are continuing a dialogue between colleges, schools and universities. As I have said, there have never been more options open to young people, and I am completely proud of our record in government.

**Mr Speaker:** Questions 13 and 14 have been withdrawn.

#### Freedom of Speech in Universities

15. **Andrew Lewer** (Northampton South) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to protect freedom of speech in universities. [901783]

**The Secretary of State for Education (Kit Malthouse):** This Government are committed to the protection of freedom of speech and academic freedom in universities. The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill will strengthen existing freedom of speech duties and introduce clear consequences for breaches as well as a duty on universities and colleges to promote the importance of freedom of speech and academic freedom.

**Andrew Lewer:** How my right hon. Friend and his team address the concerns of many that mandating university students and staff to complete training in contested theory such as unconscious bias, like the Radcliffe Department of Medicine's implicit bias course or the University of Kent's Expect Respect course, is worrisome, especially given recent data from the King's College "The state of free speech" report on the increasing reluctance of students to engage in challenging debate.

**Kit Malthouse:** I know my hon. Friend recognises that universities and colleges are independent organisations. None the less, I share his concerns that where opinions, beliefs or theories that are contested are presented, they should not be presented to young minds alone. The context in which they are created, and indeed the arguments for and against, should be presented to young people. Indeed, it is the duty of those who are tasked with the education of young minds to give the widest possible sense of perspective on all these issues.

#### Computer Numerical Control Operation: Training

16. **Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Whether he is taking steps with Cabinet colleagues to ensure greater access in education to training in computer numerical control operation. [901784]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Andrea Jenkyns):** We are investing in programmes that support science, technology and digital skills so that learners of all ages—including my young son, who is up in the Public Gallery supporting mummy today—are equipped to fulfil careers in the likes of computer

numerical control operation. We are delivering on that objective through our skills reform programme, which is putting employers at the heart of our skills system.

**Andrew Selous:** We need around 1 million more engineers in this country, and among those we need computer numerical control operators, who can earn around £50,000 on the shopfloor. I have engineering businesses in my constituency that are desperate for them. Can we please get on top of ensuring that we have a talent pipeline so that people are well paid and those engineering businesses can flourish?

**Andrea Jenkyns:** I understand that things are uncertain, as my hon. Friend's two colleges are merging at the moment, but the level 3 engineering technician apprenticeships provide CNC content and there are more than 140 providers of that training, including three with national coverage. I would also like to look at our T-levels to ensure that we have some of that content in there too.

### Rising Costs: Support for Schools

17. **Charlotte Nichols** (Warrington North) (Lab): What plans he has to help support schools with rising costs. [901785]

**The Secretary of State for Education (Kit Malthouse):** The Government are committed to supporting schools. That is why we are investing significantly in education, with a £4 billion increase in the core schools budget this financial year, which will help schools facing the challenges of inflation brought about by global events.

**Charlotte Nichols:** Schools across my constituency face extraordinary financial pressures, particularly in special educational needs settings where costs per pupil are higher, and in older schools where the Government's failure to invest in the schools estate means higher costs for heating and repairs. With inflation running out of control, which is an effective 10% cut in real terms to this year's budgets, senior management teams are desperately worried that they will not be able to balance the books, especially with higher demand for things such as breakfast clubs as parents feel the pinch. Can the Secretary of State please inform us what representations he has made to the Treasury to address the crisis in education funding?

**Kit Malthouse:** Notwithstanding the significant increase in the schools budget last year, we are monitoring the impact of those global inflationary forces on schools across the whole country. We are in constant conversation with leadership, unions and headteachers about their finances. Perhaps the hon. Lady does not know this, but we acted immediately when it became clear that schools would be severely impacted by the rise in energy costs, to ensure that they were included in the energy bill relief scheme. We continue to have dynamic conversations with Treasury colleagues on the importance of school funding.

### School Budgets and Costs to Parents

18. **Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): What recent assessment his Department has made of the impact of inflation on (a) school budgets and (b) the cost to parents associated with school. [901786]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Jonathan Gullis):** The Department is working closely with stakeholders to monitor cost pressures on schools. Our generous 2021 spending review package is supporting schools with a £4 billion increase to core schools funding in this financial year alone and we are protecting schools through the energy bill relief scheme, although schools and trusts remain responsible for setting their own budgets. The Government are also assisting families directly: as well as the energy price guarantee for households, we are providing more than £37 billion to help households in the greatest need, thanks to our new Prime Minister.

**Bambos Charalambous:** Data from a National Association of Headteachers survey shows that 90% of schools expect to run out of money by the end of the next school year. I have spoken to headteachers who say that while school debt is escalating, demands on schools continue to increase, and the energy crisis is only one element of the funding crisis in education. Can the Minister tell me how the Government expect schools in my constituency to deliver standards and provide additional support when they cannot afford to survive?

**Jonathan Gullis:** As I said in my earlier answer, we have £7 billion until 2024-25 through the spending review. There is the £5 billion in catch-up to maintain standards and ensure that disadvantaged pupils in particular get high-quality support, particularly in tutoring, so that they can catch up on their lost learning, because we know the pandemic had a detrimental impact. There is also the Education (Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms) Act 2021, which was introduced by a Labour Member, which the Government adopted and sent out as guidance to make sure that the overall cost of uniform comes down. We are taking this all very seriously, and I am more than happy to meet the hon. Gentleman and headteachers in his local area to hear from them directly and see what other support we can give.

### School Places: Pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

21. **Ian Levy** (Blyth Valley) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to increase the number of school places for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities. [901789]

**The Minister for Schools and Childhood (Kelly Tolhurst):** We are making a transformational investment to support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, investing £2.6 billion between 2022 and 2025. That investment will deliver new places and improve existing provision for children and young people with SEND or those who require alternative provision, as well as establishing up to 60 new special and AP free schools.

**Ian Levy:** Over the last few months, I have been working closely with schools in some of the most deprived areas of Blyth Valley. Although schools are doing an amazing job, there is a need for increased special educational needs provision to support the most vulnerable young people. While a new special educational needs school is to be built in Blyth Valley, progress is slow, and I feel

that more could be done to address the situation. Will my hon. Friend please meet me to see how we can progress this matter?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I share my hon. Friend's commitment to improving special educational needs provision in Northumberland, particularly in his constituency. The Department is working closely with stakeholders to develop a sustainable solution. The opening of the new free special school has encountered several challenges, but we expect to deliver the school places in the 2023 academic year. As part of our investment in school places for children and young people with SEND, Northumberland is receiving £3.7 million from the fund between 2022 and 2024. I will happily meet my hon. Friend to discuss the matter.

**Kim Leadbeater (Batley and Spen) (Lab):** I recently held a roundtable of headteachers in my constituency. We talked for almost two hours but, sadly, very little of the conversation was about teaching. Instead, we discussed serious issues around recruitment and retention of staff; inadequate funding and severe pressures on budgets; online safety; mental health—theirs and the children's—and SEND pressures. What are the Government doing to ensure that all schools have the resources they need to provide pupils with special educational needs and disabilities with the support they need while also being able to maintain high-quality teaching and manage the huge range of other pressures that they face?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** As I mentioned, we are investing £2.6 billion over the next three years in new spaces for SEND and alternative provision. We have also implemented £1.4 billion in high-needs provision capital allocations for local authorities, and £9.1 billion—an increase of 13%—in high-needs funding. The hon. Lady will know that we launched the Green Paper on SEND and AP back in March. We are currently looking at the responses and we hope to respond by the end of the year.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister.

**Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab):** I welcome the Minister to her place. She inherits the Government's SEND review, which has caused widespread concern among parents of children with SEND that the Government are seeking simply to reduce expenditure and erode the rights of parents and children to access the support they need. As the Chancellor trawls for departmental cuts to pay for the Government's reckless economic experiment, can the Minister confirm that the SEND review will not be used as an excuse to erode further the resources that children with special educational needs and disabilities rely on?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I can confirm that the SEND and AP Green Paper—the SEND review—was not and is not an opportunity for us to reduce the support that children with special educational needs require in this country. As I have already outlined, we have increased our high-needs funding by 13% to £9.1 billion, and we have also designed a package to support the delivery of any of our reforms. That is a £70 million programme that will test and refine measures in order to ensure that

children get the support and education they need, and that parents feel that they have a choice in the matter and are well supported.

### Topical Questions

T1. [901794] **Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP):** If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Education (Kit Malthouse):** This week we are celebrating National Care Leavers Week. As we celebrate the many success stories, we must also keep working to identify and stamp out any and all abuse. I was therefore shocked and saddened as I started to read the report of the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse last week. The scale of abuse and exploitation suffered is horrifying. The courage of those who came forward will help improve services to protect children. The inquiry was established by the Government seven years ago. Since then we have taken action to make sure that children are better protected, and I am determined to continue to improve children's social care so that every child has a safe and loving childhood. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will make a statement on the matter shortly.

**Patricia Gibson:** There have been four Secretaries of State for Education in the last year, and nine out of 10 schools in England say that they will run out of money this year. The dogs in the street know that the Government are so unstable as to be unfit for purpose. Does today's Secretary of State for Education agree with me and the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) that the new Prime Minister will face an “ungovernable” and “riven” Tory party and that a general election is the only answer, otherwise things will go from very bad to much worse?

**Mr Speaker:** What does that have to do with education? I do not think it has anything to do with education, so let us go to Elliot Colburn.

T2. [901795] **Elliot Colburn (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con):** Carshalton and Wallington parents are still coming to my surgeries in huge numbers because the Lib Dem-run Sutton Council is refusing their child an education, health and care plan or is issuing an inappropriate one. Department for Education data shows that it is the highest rejecter of children across the country, with nearly half of all children being rejected for an EHCP. Can my hon. Friend update me on the progress of the SEND review, so that no child is left fighting for an education?

**The Minister for Schools and Childhood (Kelly Tolhurst):** I am sorry to hear of the issues that my hon. Friend's constituents have been having and the distress that that is causing for those families. In March, the Government published the SEND and alternative provision Green Paper, which sets out a number of the proposals, including on the education, health and care plans. Those proposals aim to improve the experience and outcomes for those with SEND. The consultation has closed and we plan to publish an improvement plan later in the year.

**Mr Speaker:** We now come to shadow Secretary of State, Bridget Phillipson.

**Bridget Phillipson** (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): I begin by welcoming the fourth Education Secretary in the last four months to his place. For the time being, he has the best job in Government. In May, internal Department documents described some school buildings as a “risk to life”. After the Conservatives crashed our economy, does he believe that there should be further cuts to school capital budgets?

**Kit Malthouse:** I thank the hon. Lady for her welcome. She is absolutely right that this is the best job in Whitehall and, indeed, the most important Department, given that we hold the future of the country literally in our hands. She is right that the comprehensive survey of school premises that the Department undertook revealed some alarming problems, and we are working closely with local education authorities, multi-academy trusts and others to try to rectify those. She will know that we have invested significant amounts of money in the school rebuilding programme. We continue to have conversations with the Treasury about how we may be able to do more.

**Bridget Phillipson:** As a result of the Conservatives crashing our economy, school leaders are now warning that they will be forced to cut back on equipment, sport and the very staff who enable all our children to achieve and thrive. Last month, I set out Labour’s fully funded, fully costed commitments to end tax breaks for private schools and to invest in breakfast clubs for every child in every primary school in England. If the Secretary of State genuinely believes in delivering a great state education for all our children, why does he not adopt Labour’s plans?

**Kit Malthouse:** As the hon. Lady will know, we already have breakfast clubs in a number of schools across the country, which are targeted at where they are most needed. Our approach to such issues is to do exactly that: to look for vulnerabilities and the areas that require assistance and then to target funding accordingly. At the start of our hopefully long relationship across the Dispatch Box, I hope that as well as doing her job of challenging the Government to do ever better, she will recognise some of the significant achievements in education over the last decade, not least the fact that 87% of our schools are now good or outstanding and that we stand at our highest ever level in the international league tables for literacy.

T7. [901800] **Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): Despite years of extensive planning and hard work, the leadership team at Brackenfield SEND School in my constituency continue to be frustrated in their efforts to secure post-16 designation for the school. That means that students leave at the end of year 11 without the opportunity to undertake further education to prepare them for adulthood. Will my hon. Friend urgently investigate that matter with Derbyshire County Council to ensure that post-16 education is commissioned at Brackenfield without further delay?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** I do sympathise with Brackenfield School’s predicament. Supporting children and young people with SEND to live fulfilling lives is of paramount

importance. The local authority is responsible for deciding on the age range at a maintained school, but I share my hon. Friend’s concerns, and I will investigate what is going on.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the SNP spokesperson.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): The head of the Russell Group has said that the window for the UK to associate to Horizon Europe is “closing fast” and that

“failure to move forward with UK association would be bad news for research.”

What assurance can the Secretary of State give researchers that funding is imminent and that research will be protected at all costs?

**Kit Malthouse:** Mr Speaker, as I am sure you will have heard from other Ministers, we recognise that science and technology is critical to our future economy, and much of that originates from research within universities and other research bodies. We have made a huge commitment financially to research across the whole of the UK, and that will persist. We are dead keen to join the Horizon programme, but the hon. Member’s question is better directed at our European friends.

T8. [901801] **Alicia Kearns** (Rutland and Melton) (Con): When I visit schools in my constituency, it is often—quite rightly—to discuss climate change, and I am so proud of the passionate and smart young people across Rutland, Melton, the Vale and Harborough villages. However, I am concerned by the anti-dairy, anti-meat and, frankly, anti-farmer narrative I am starting to see, where students and children of farmers feel they are being silenced and cannot speak out in support of their families, who feed our country.

**Kit Malthouse:** As a rural Member myself, I am very alarmed to hear my hon. Friend’s stories. She is right that we should be encouraging schools to educate children about where food comes from, and indeed about the very high standards that UK farmers have produced, not least in animal husbandry, but I have to say that there is a way to intrigue children and make them curious about some of the challenges to climate change brought about by farming. I read recently about an additive made from seaweed that we can add to dairy cows’ feed that reduces the amount of methane they produce. I gather it is in operation very effectively in Australia and being looked at in this country.

T3. [901796] **Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): About 20,000 primary school children in 76 primary schools in Trafford benefit from the primary schools sport premium. This is especially important after covid, which we know has had a more detrimental impact on the physical agility and participation of the poorest children. Will the Government commit to extending that premium beyond this academic year?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Jonathan Gullis):** The hon. Lady knows that I am a huge admirer and fan of hers, which she may not put on any election leaflets. I can tell her that the PE and sport premium is very important to me, especially after the fantastic victory by the Lionesses. They really set the



tone with the great work of making sure that sport, particularly football, is more accessible no matter people's gender, race or anything else, so it is so important that we get this right. I am fully committed to working with the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to get that premium, and I am more than happy to meet the hon. Lady to discuss it further.

**Damian Hinds** (East Hampshire) (Con): At the end of the first full T-levels cycle, can I commend colleges, including Alton College in my constituency, for their work with employers? What more can be done by Ministers across Government to encourage more employers to come forward and offer industry placements to invest in the talent pipeline, both for their own good and for the good of our entire economy and society?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Andrea Jenkyns)**: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question, and I also thank his college. Colleges and sixth forms have been doing amazing work in rolling out T-levels. It is amazing, and I will just give an example before I go on to his question—

**Mr Speaker**: Order. This is topicals.

**Andrea Jenkyns**: Topicals—all right. On results day, I visited a local college, and it was amazing—I wish I could bottle that enthusiasm—but my right hon. Friend is right that the key is working with local businesses and industries, which is why the whole programme was designed with them in mind.

T5. [901798] **Munira Wilson** (Twickenham) (LD): One school leader told me last week that one of his schools is preparing to offer evening meals to children whose families are struggling to put one on the table every evening, yet with nine out of 10 schools predicting a deficit by next September, few can afford to be so generous. The Chancellor of the Exchequer—assuming it is the same person next week—warns of efficiency savings to come, so will the Education Secretary be advising staff cuts, turning off the heating or letting pupils go hungry?

**Kit Malthouse**: As I said earlier, we recognise that schools are under significant pressure, as is most of society, and we must work together to try to get through it in good shape. We will obviously be making representations to Treasury colleagues as we move towards a statement on Friday, and indeed beyond, about what those pressures are, so that the Chancellor and new Prime Minister—hooray—can make choices within a priority framework that reflects the priorities of the Government.

**Michael Gove** (Surrey Heath) (Con): Ministers will be aware that at the weekend it was reported that the school in England that has recorded the best Progress 8 score, and the best measure of how much value is added during time in the classroom, is Michaela Community School in Wembley. Michaela is a free school. It encourages students to study EBacc subjects, and it is Ofsted outstanding. The Labour party opposed the creation of free schools, opposed the EBacc, and wanted to abolish Ofsted. What lessons can we learn from that?

**Kit Malthouse**: My right hon. Friend puts his finger on the point exactly. He will be pleased to know that only 10 days ago I visited Michaela school to see exactly what goes on, having heard an awful lot about it and indeed having watched the moving documentary about the work done there. I confess to being rather alarmed by the aggression that that school attracts from the wider educational establishment, particularly on social media. Although the head of that school is obviously very outspoken, she is outspoken because it seems she has a cause. It was gratifying at the weekend to see that in the Progress 8 scores she proved that she was right.

**Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Despite my private Member's Bill, Education (Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms), becoming law to reduce the cost of school uniforms, far too many schools have their heads in the sand, with logos upon logos, emblems upon emblems, and they are not responding to the requirements of the law. What will Ministers do about that?

**Jonathan Gullis**: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the passage of his Bill, which is an important piece of legislation. Guidance is clear: schools should be considerate when wanting their own branding, and ensure that it is done in a fair and sustainable way for households. If the hon. Gentleman has any examples or wishes to meet to discuss the issue further so that guidance can be given to schools, I would be more than happy to arrange that.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Why are adoption figures continuing to fall?

**Kelly Tolhurst**: This past year adoptions have gone up, but it is on a lower trajectory. One potential reason for that is that in 2013 a court ruling confirmed that adoption orders should be made only when there is no alternative provision. That has led to an increase in special guardianships. We will obviously keep the issue under review. The time that it is taking for children to be adopted has reduced, and we want to ensure that no child remains in care any longer than they need to be, and that we find supportive parents for them.

**Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): Off-rolling is a hidden crisis happening in some of our schools, with black schoolboys being disproportionately affected by the practice, and many being given only a few formal hours of teaching, if any at all. We should be outraged at that, given the attainment gap and the disproportionate numbers of black children who are being excluded from school. What action is the Secretary of State taking to tackle the crisis of off-rolling, and will he ensure that all schools that engage in that practice are recording the numbers affected, including their ethnicity, age and gender?

**Jonathan Gullis**: Off-rolling is totally unacceptable, and no school should be doing that or using it as a method. Where there are unruly children, we must also balance that carefully by ensuring that headteachers have the power to remove them from the classroom, because their impact has a detrimental impact on the

other 29 in the class. I am more than happy to meet the hon. Lady to look at any examples she can provide, so that we can call out schools and school leaders who are using that tactic inappropriately. The Department is monitoring the issue and taking it seriously.

**Saqib Bhatti** (Meriden) (Con): Arden is one of the most successful schools in my constituency and the country, despite the majority of its buildings having been built pre-1958 and it accommodating three times as many pupils as was originally intended. Will my hon. Friend meet me to discuss Arden's proposal for investment through the school rebuilding programme so that we can support it to be the best that it can be?

**Jonathan Gullis**: My hon. Friend is a doughty champion for the constituency of Meriden and indeed for the school rebuilding programme. He will understand that I cannot comment as the bid is in and the Department must go through a process, but I am more than happy to arrange a meeting for him with my noble Friend Baroness Barran, who is the Minister responsible for this portfolio area.

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): Why has the Secretary of State dropped the Schools Bill?

**Kit Malthouse**: As the right hon. Member will know, the legislative timetable is under review—or it was, under the previous Prime Minister. We wait for the opinion of the new Prime Minister as to his priorities in the months to come. We will have to wait and see what we has to say.

**Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): As I hope the House knows, I am a passionate supporter of the power and creativity of engineering and its ability to address the most serious challenges that we face globally. Will my hon. Friend agree to look at the curriculum for opportunities to improve the teaching and understanding of engineering?

**Jonathan Gullis**: My hon. Friend will know that in March 2022 the Department introduced the “engineers teach physics” programme to help recruit high-quality engineers into our workforce. Because of the pilot's success, the programme has been extended across the country for the 2023-24 recruitment cycle. I am more than happy to see how much more we can do to ensure that science, technology, engineering and maths are driven through the heart of the curriculum, alongside EBacc, which is vital to helping to educate everyone.

**Dame Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I am sure that the Secretary of State is as concerned as I am about the number of children attending school who are hungry. Has he made any representations to the Department for Work and Pensions about raising the £7,400 household income eligibility threshold for free school meals?

**Kit Malthouse**: As the right hon. Member would expect, we are in constant conversation with not just the DWP but the Treasury about the impact of the global fight against inflation that so many families face. It would be wrong for me to front-run what may be announced on Friday, but she can be assured that we

constantly put in front of colleagues the pressures on families putting kids into schools as well as those on schools.

**Siobhan Baillie** (Stroud) (Con): Even the drama in this place does not match the daily drama of the childcare juggle, so we must listen to millions of mums and dads who are asking for affordable and flexible childcare options in a system that is effectively not fit for purpose. Will my right hon. Friend reassure parents and early years educators that the Department is looking at that closely? Will he work with me and the think-tank Onward to bring about reforms?

**Kit Malthouse**: My hon. Friend is quite right that the childcare system—not through anything other than an accident of increasing numbers of ministerial initiatives—has become complicated to the extent that there is not enough availability and it is not affordable or flexible enough. For example, some of the payment mechanisms are complex, not least tax-free childcare, so we have not seen the take-up that we expected when that was introduced. We are reviewing the entire process from end to end. She can be assured that we are looking not just to tinker, but, hopefully—with the blessing of the new Prime Minister—at something that will really provide a reformed system to give her and other parents exactly what they are looking for.

**Florence Eshalomi** (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): On Friday, I received an email from the acting headteacher of Reay Primary School in my constituency. She said that

“many of our children are hungry. Our cook is providing as much as she can but the children want more. This tells me that the children must be missing out on food at home. We are going to provide bread”

but the school needs more money.

I have listened to the Secretary of State answer many questions about the cost of living crisis that parents face, but parents and teachers cannot wait. What more can he do to address this now?

**Mr Speaker**: Order. Can I say to the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi) that this is topical and other people want to get in? We are going to go over the time now. We have got to help each other.

**Jonathan Gullis**: The hon. Lady will understand—she is a fantastic champion for her constituents—that the current global economic state is very serious. Inflation is not unique to this country. For example, it is at 17% in Holland and 10.9% in Germany. We are very aware of the pressures on households, which is why the £4 billion front-loading in the spending review has been so important, with the additional funding for the national tutoring programme, the recovery premium and the catch-up premium, the £2.5 billion for the pupil premium and the free school meals programme.

**Mr Robin Walker** (Worcester) (Con): Fairer funding has been a manifesto commitment for our party on many occasions. I campaigned for it from the Back Benches and tried to deliver it from the Front Bench. Whatever the timing of legislation, can the Secretary of State confirm that a direct national funding formula is a legislative priority for his Department?

**Kit Malthouse:** I can confirm that work is well under way on exactly that.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The independent review of children's social care highlighted the cost of the failure of residential care settings—both the financial cost and, most importantly, the cost to children of failed care. What steps is the Secretary of State taking to improve that care and to ensure that we move from a marketised system to a regional system, as suggested?

**Kelly Tolhurst:** As the hon. Lady is aware, we are currently evaluating the three reports issued earlier this year, in particular the independent review of children's social care. I have been working flat out since I was appointed to this role to make sure we are able to bring forward a response to it with an implementation plan to ensure that all young people in our care system are looked after, but also that there are answers and options to move forward.

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Children from all over the country, quite a few of whom are in my constituency, are being home educated by parents

who, unfortunately, cannot themselves read or write. What are we going to do to ensure we value the education and life chances of every single child, and do not leave home educated children behind?

**Kit Malthouse:** It is absolutely the right of parents to decide to educate their children at home should they so wish, but as a society we have a duty to make sure they get exactly the kind of education that everybody else is getting. My hon. Friend has championed the issue in many other forums, particularly as it affects his constituency, and I would be happy to hear his ideas on how we may go further.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Has the Secretary of State looked at the full potential for education of technology to improve performance in schools? Other countries are using it in more sophisticated ways, so has he looked at it?

**Jonathan Gullis:** We want the education sector to have access to best-in-class technology, but schools need reliable internet to deploy it. That is why we are spending £232 million to improve school internet connectivity by 2025.

## Members Sworn or Affirmed

3.32 pm

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I now invite remaining Members to swear the Oath or make the solemn Affirmation to His Majesty. We will suspend at about 3.45 pm before resuming our substantive business at approximately 3.50 pm. Let us now begin. I invite Members who have not yet sworn or affirmed to do so.

*Members present took and subscribed the Oath, or made and subscribed the Affirmation.*

## Great British Railways

3.50 pm

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to make a statement on the future of Great British Railways.

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Kevin Foster):** The case for rail modernisation is now stronger than when Keith Williams set out the plan for rail in 2021. Covid-19, recent macroeconomic events, industrial relations and financial challenges have increased the need for it. The railways are not meeting customers' needs, with delays, unreliability and uncertainty exacerbated by the rail strikes. When people look at the rail sector, we need them to see a system that stands for reliability and sustainability, so it is clear that we have to change.

This Government will therefore deliver the most ambitious changes to our railways in a generation, and will deliver for the people who matter: our passengers, customers and taxpayers. Although we will not be introducing rail reform legislation during the current Session, due to limits on parliamentary time, we are committed to introducing the legislation necessary to create a guiding mind, Great British Railways, as soon as possible.

As many Members are aware, a competition was run to identify the location for the Great British Railways headquarters. I welcome the support of colleagues for the six shortlisted towns and cities, and I note that the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) has been vocal in her support for York to be the winner. I hope to be able to announce the successful location shortly—subject to other events outside the Chamber. Ahead of the legislation, we will continue to work with the Great British Railways transition team and the wider sector to push ahead with our ambitious modernisation programme to deliver real benefits for customers.

Reforming our railways means more reliable trains, faster journey times—in all, a modern, future-facing rail industry; a sector with an unswerving focus on meeting the needs of its customers, creating a simpler, better railway for communities across Britain. There will be a GBR at the heart of our rail network, with its headquarters located in one of our great railway communities. The details will be confirmed shortly, but our commitment to deliver is unchanged.

**Rachael Maskell:** I am grateful to you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question.

Following the publication for the House of the Williams-Shapps review, the Government announced in the Queen's Speech on 10 May 2022:

“Legislation will be introduced to modernise rail services and improve reliability for passengers”.

As part of this process, the then Transport Secretary launched a high-profile competition for the location of the headquarters outside London. Forty-two locations bid and six were shortlisted, including York, as part of the levelling-up agenda. Each location shortlisted hosted a ministerial visit over the summer of 2022, involving public sector, rail industry and community stakeholders. In parallel, the public participated in a public vote over their preferred destination. All this was at significant

cost to local authorities. Last Wednesday, the Secretary of State shelved her plans for this Session. No written or oral statement has been made to the House until today.

Let me therefore ask the following questions. Why did the Secretary of State not have the courtesy to announce her U-turn on Great British Railways to the House? If the relocation of the new headquarters is to proceed, what will the process be, and if not, given that hundreds of thousands of pounds have been spent by local authorities, how will the Secretary of State compensate shortlisted authorities? What was the result of the public vote? What are the reasons for shelving the plans for the future of Great British Railways in the current Session? How, in the interim, will the Secretary of State address the failure issues across the rail network that Great British Railways was to resolve, including contract failure on the west coast main line and elsewhere? What discussions has she had with the trade unions on abandoning her plans, and on the implications for the workforce across the rail sector? Is she now abandoning Williams-Shapps, levelling up, and any semblance of government? The Great British public deserve better.

**Kevin Foster:** I think it is worth pointing out that the comments referred to were made to a Select Committee of this House, the Transport Committee, and that the Secretary of State was therefore giving information in her role as Transport Secretary and keeping Members up to date. As I touched on in my initial answer, there will be a Great British Railways HQ located in one of our great railway communities. I am sorry to disappoint people, but I will not be announcing from the Dispatch Box today where that will be, but it is something that we are committed to doing. It has been inspiring to see the excitement about the competition; it shows what rail can bring to local communities. Certainly there will be a successful bidder, so to speak, and they will be announced in the not-too-distant future.

Yes, the Secretary of State has met the general secretaries of the leading trade unions involved in the rail sector, but that was not to discuss abandoning the plan, because we have not abandoned the plan. We are still taking forward a range of work to reform and modernise our railways, and there is plenty we can do, even in the absence of a Bill in the third Session. I am confident that Great British Railways will make a difference to our rail network. It would be tempting, in these interesting circumstances in which I come to the Dispatch Box, to make a raft of pledges on things I would quite like to do with the railways, but we are certainly conscious that we need to reform and move forward, and that is something that most people across the sector realise. There might be slightly different views about exactly how to go about that, but I am keen to see it taken forward to make the difference for our customers and communities, who deserve a rail network that delivers for them.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Chair of the Select Committee, Huw Merriman.

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): It was in the Transport Committee that the Secretary of State gave us this news about Great British Railways. I understand the concern about her not coming to the Dispatch Box to do so, but surely everybody supports the concept of a Select Committee getting fresh information from those

who come before it. The Secretary of State also told us that the guiding mind of Great British Railways can still be advanced without legislation, because there is a lot that can be brought forward and very few parts of it need legislation. Can the Minister set out some of the ideas that would see the guiding mind being brought forward, notwithstanding the fact that the legislation would be slightly lagging behind?

**Kevin Foster:** The Chair of the Transport Committee is absolutely right to highlight the role that his Committee can play as a group of experienced, and in some cases expert, Members who can analyse issues and question Ministers on their performance. It is appropriate to use a Select Committee as a place to engage and discuss where Government's thinking is going. What can be achieved without legislation includes workforce reform, delivering local partnerships, bringing forward a more long-term strategy for rail and reforming how we use ticketing. I think we all recognise that post-pandemic far fewer people are buying season tickets compared with on-the-day tickets, and we are looking at the changes that may flow from that changing pattern. There is still plenty that we can be cracking on with and delivering at the initial stage of reform without having primary legislation as part of it.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister, Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi.

**Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): As usual, this Government are in chaos of their own making. We would not be standing here today if they were capable of making commitments and sticking to them. They are stopping a project in its tracks despite millions of pounds of taxpayers' money already having been spent. They are asking towns and cities to invest precious time and money in their headquarters bids but completely mothballing the relevant legislation in any transport Bill within this parliamentary Session. They are showing a serious lack of ambition and long-term vision and leaving the whole of the rail industry in the lurch.

I asked the rail Minister about this very issue in the last Transport questions but was effectively fobbed off. We should not be surprised at that, considering the mess they have made of our railways. Last week 55 services on the TransPennine Express were cancelled in just one day, and two of our northern Mayors could not travel to Liverpool for a press briefing on train cancellations because of train cancellations. Avanti West Coast has slashed more than 220,000 seats per week, but despite this, one of the Transport Secretary's first acts was to ensure that a lucrative contract extension was in place. As usual, the Tories are rewarding failure. People across our country are paying the price for a system that the Conservative party has already admitted must change but refuses to say how or when. The Conservatives promised at their party conference, with a straight face, to get Britain moving, yet all we have seen is stoppages, strikes and the managed decline of our railways, and now they are abandoning their flagship policy as a direct result of their aimless and distracted party. They are a shambolic Government with no plan and no ideas.

Will the Minister clarify the future of Great British Railways? Has it been stopped in its tracks? When will his Department get a grip on the railways and deliver a proper service for passengers across our country?

**Kevin Foster:** Luckily, I have already answered the hon. Gentleman's first question. We have certainly not brought Great British Railways to a halt. Again, we said the location of its headquarters will be announced shortly. This has not been stopped, abandoned or any of the other things we are hearing from the Labour party. We are very clear that we want to look forward to a rail network that is seeing massive, almost unprecedented investment, and in which customers can look forward to better facilities and better services that deliver for their communities. I leave it to the hon. Gentleman to look back wistfully at British Rail.

**Andrew Jones** (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): It is clear we have a very busy legislative programme, but that does not necessarily mean we have to stop things like fares reform, network efficiency, flexible ticketing or encouraging more people back on to our railways. Those things do not need legislation; they just need progression. This time will allow my hon. Friend to ensure a significant role for the private sector in rail reform and, of course, to further consider the merits of York as the location of the headquarters of Great British Railways.

**Kevin Foster:** I could not have put it better myself. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that there is a range of things we can take forward, not least fares reform and innovative practices such as last year's rail sale. There is plenty of work that can still be done, and we will certainly be getting on with it.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the SNP spokesperson, Gavin Newlands.

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): The rail industry and GBR are in stasis, and there is little evidence of progress coming from the Department for Transport. Six months ago, the previous Secretary of State promised we "would not be disappointed" with the legislation to create GBR, but I am feeling distinctly underwhelmed. The Williams review promised that GBR will

"take a whole-system view, allowing it to make choices and decisions more effectively. It will enable the railways to be run as a public service".

That vision lies in tatters for now. We know that long-term thinking and planning are key, but instead we have a piecemeal, stop-start process that will take years, if not decades, to achieve real change in a key part of our national infrastructure.

When can we expect anybody, GBR or otherwise, to take a whole-system view of rail in this country? With ScotRail back in public ownership, there is one part of the UK where the railways are run as a public service. Will the Minister use the transport mini-Bill to devolve Network Rail to Scotland, to ensure that a fully integrated and fully publicly owned railway can be run somewhere in the UK?

**Kevin Foster:** I can understand why not having an integrated rail network across Great Britain is a particular priority for the Scottish National party. It clearly is a priority for this UK Government. We will not be looking to devolve responsibility for rail infrastructure, not least because the SNP's main idea at the moment seems to be stopping the trains for passport control at the border.

On the wider pitch, we are determined to make a difference with our railways. We are seeing real innovation, and I am sure the hon. Gentleman will have looked at, for example, the experience of Lumo trains from Edinburgh to London. Lumo is an open-access operator that is pulling traffic away from air and on to rail, which is exactly what we want to see. We will get on with the many reforms we can make without primary legislation, but one of them will not be creating a disjointed rail network.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): When will the Government and railway companies come forward with proposals for an improved pattern of services that attracts many more fare-paying passengers? We need to get the deficit down very quickly and the best way of doing so is by getting more people paying fares willingly.

**Kevin Foster:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Clearly, demand patterns have changed dramatically during the pandemic. For example, a lot fewer people are commuting into London at 7 am to 9 am and then leaving between 5 pm and 7 pm, or they are doing that three or four days a week rather than five, so there is a need to look at how we can adapt. We are giving slightly more flexibility to some operating companies, and looking at how we use our ticketing and, in particular, our ticket pricing. The rail sale was a great way of getting a lot of people on to trains that might otherwise have been relatively quiet, producing new revenue to the railways. In addition, as I said in response to the SNP spokesperson, Lumo is targeting traffic that goes by air to get it on tracks.

**Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): My constituents would really struggle to describe British railways as "great", because their lives are made a misery by Avanti and TransPennine, which continually cancel trains, leading to their missing job interviews, school and education. Today, a commute that should have taken me two and a half hours took me almost five—I only just made it in time for Education questions. May I ask the Minister why on earth his Government extended the contract with Avanti? Frankly, my constituents do not understand why.

**Kevin Foster:** We made it clear when we extended the contract for only six months that it was a probationary period, to allow Avanti to implement the recovery plan that it has and is intending to bring forward in December. We will judge whether to extend its contract any further based on how that goes.

**John Penrose** (Weston-super-Mare) (Con): The rail Minister is right to talk about the need for rail reform, but may I urge him to use the couple of months of extra time that he has won by postponing legislation to revisit some core conclusions of the Williams-Shapps review, which are out of date because they are based on work done before the pandemic? He has mentioned the changes in customer demand and we need to rethink some crucial things, particularly the role of Great British Railways as the fat controller and a central planner rather than a genuine slimline system operator.

**Kevin Foster:** I am keen that GBR adapts to the changes we have seen since the pandemic, but we are seeing this across the whole industry and in the discussions

the train operating companies want to have with Government. We will certainly use any time we have to ensure that our proposals make a difference and have the most positive impact for customers and communities.

**Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): My constituents were recently informed by Southeastern of huge timetable changes, with the result that they will have to make significant amendments to their commutes. Southeastern did that with no public consultation, despite being a publicly owned franchise. Will the Minister ensure that Southeastern goes back to consult, so that rail users have their voices heard before such significant changes are made?

**Kevin Foster:** I am aware that Southeastern is taking feedback on its proposals. It is important that it engages with communities and, in particular, with their representatives in this House. Given the number of changes that have had to be made in the past couple of years, there is more flexibility for operators, including those that are publicly owned, to react to emerging patterns of demand. However, I understand that Southeastern will be listening and looking at the feedback it gets on its proposed changes.

**Michael Gove** (Surrey Heath) (Con): The Minister has been brilliantly clear that the creation of GBR will play a significant part in levelling up transport connectivity in the north and midlands, but he also knows that it is vital to ensure that London and the home counties are better connected. Travel times from my constituency, and particularly from Camberley, Frimley and Bagshot, to London have not improved since the age of Queen Victoria. Will he put a Stephenson's Rocket up the fundament of those bureaucrats who have been standing in the way of the progress my constituents require?

**Kevin Foster:** Presumably it would be more like putting an electrified Michael on the case as well. Demands have changed, particularly in London and the south-east. We are seeing the results of investment, particularly that which my right hon. Friend was instrumental in helping to secure during his time in the Cabinet, for example, with the opening of Bond Street station to passengers this morning. People are starting to see major improvements in London and the south-east, but I accept that they will also look to what is happening on their local line and I will be happy to discuss with him what could be done on the one he cites.

**Sarah Olney** (Richmond Park) (LD): The setting up of Great British Railways was meant to include ticketing and pricing, and the cost of commuting continues to weigh heavily on my constituents, particularly during the cost of living crisis. Furthermore, if we want to encourage people on to the trains and out of their cars, it is key that we make trains affordable. The Department for Transport has said that it will not put up regulated rail fares by 12.3%, in line with July's retail prices index, but will the Minister commit to freezing rail fares next January, to help with the cost of living crisis and the fight against climate change?

**Kevin Foster:** It is worth saying that there are a range of fares available on our railways, particularly in London and the south-east, where people use pay as you go and

contactless bank cards. We have said that we will not take the normal approach—which also existed during the coalition—of using the RPI figure to set fares next year, and a fair rise has been delayed. We look forward to introducing plans that strike a balance between a railway that is affordable for not only the taxpayer but customers and communities.

**Jack Brereton** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): The pandemic and the reckless strike actions we have seen have caused significant disruption to our rail services. Does my hon. Friend agree that the focus should now be on restoring services and maximising investment in improving stations—for example, by reopening the stations at Meir and Trentham in my constituency?

**Kevin Foster:** I am always pleased at the Dispatch Box to hear colleagues argue passionately for the reinstatement and further expansion of parts of our rail network. It has also been good to engage with Members on both sides of the House on the Restoring Your Railways project, and our goal is to get services restored. A lot of passengers are coming back on to the railways, and we are keen to see that, but people must have the confidence to come back, and that is where industrial action is so damaging. We are looking to restore many services, but we also have to take account of the fact that patterns of demand have changed, particularly in relation to commuting between 7 am and 9 am and between 5 pm and 7 pm, given the changes in the wider economy.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): As the birthplace of British railways, Newcastle has bid to be the home of GBR, so will the Minister tell us what we would win if we were to win? The last Prime Minister, or perhaps she is still the Prime Minister—I am not sure, because I cannot keep up with Tory chaos; anyway, it was a recent Prime Minister—committed to the implementation in full of Northern Powerhouse Rail, so will the Minister also tell us whether that commitment will outlast the transport Bill?

**Kevin Foster:** The NPR statement from the Prime Minister was very welcome, and it was welcomed on both sides of the House. The winning community will be very much the headquarters of the UK's railways, and I very much look forward to announcing—subject to some of the things that have been alluded to—the successful town or city in the near future.

**Nick Fletcher** (Don Valley) (Con): In the spring and early summer this year I spent many days campaigning and collecting signatures for a petition for Doncaster—the greatest railway town in the country—to become the home of the Great British Railways headquarters. Will the Minister confirm that my boot leather was not wasted and that Doncaster is still very much in the running?

**Kevin Foster:** I am glad to hear of the effort my hon. Friend put in. I can see a couple of colleagues in the Chamber who will agree with his views about Doncaster, and others who might suggest other communities instead. As I have said, there will be a winner and there will be a headquarters for Great British Railways, and I genuinely hope to be the person to announce that fairly soon.

**Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): I am sure we would all agree that failure should not be rewarded with promotion or long contract extensions. I hope we would also agree that Great British Railways will never be truly great without the considerable investment needed in infrastructure across our rail network. Will the Minister take this opportunity to clarify the Government's progress on the Network Rail enhancements pipeline, given that a report published today noted that there had been no progress on one third of all the projects since the plan was published for 2019-24?

**Kevin Foster:** The updated rail network enhancements pipeline will be published in due course—shortly might be another way of putting it. But I look at the investment that we are putting into our railways and see £96 billion in the integrated rail plan. I look at the fact that the first major mainline in this country since the Victorian era is under construction now and is on its way to Birmingham, then Crewe and then Manchester. That level of investment in our railways is unprecedented in most of our lifetimes, and it is very welcome.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I declare a very personal interest in this matter, Mr Speaker. In the past three days, I have tried to make four journeys between Manchester, Edinburgh and London. Two were more than half an hour late, three were cancelled and one was then uncancelled when the driver of the preceding cancelled train turned up after all and was able to drive my train. However, I say to the Minister, because he has talked about ticketing and pricing, that there is a particular issue where different companies serve the same destinations and charge different and non-interchangeable prices. Can that be addressed ahead of legislation?

**Kevin Foster:** The hon. Lady makes a fair point about making sure that ticket prices are able to be clearly understood by customers and consumers and that they are fair overall. However, open access operators, for example Lumo from Edinburgh, provide a different pricing plan which is of benefit to customers. It is something that we are keen to see simplified and an area on which we look to work.

**Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): Bedford residents are sick and tired of waiting for a detailed decision on East West Rail. Some are finding it difficult to sell blighted homes. Others are living under the spectre of their homes being demolished if plans in their current form go ahead through Bedford. Shockingly, we are still waiting for a response to the consultation that ended a year and a half ago, in which time there have been three rail Ministers. Will the Minister put an end to this chaos and confirm when the plans will be published?

**Kevin Foster:** I thank the hon. Member for raising East West Rail, a major investment we are making in improving connectivity across our country, driving economic growth and revitalising rail lines, some of which have some of the least used stations in the whole country, which will soon become much more vibrant hubs for their local community. We look forward to confirming further details on stages 2 and 3, in particular between Bedford and Cambridge, in the near future.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): It seems to my constituents that improving efficiency involves cutting trains altogether; they cannot be late if they do not run. I have lost three peak-time train services on the Sidcup line that serves New Eltham and Mottingham and two peak-time train services in the morning at Eltham and Falconwood on the Bexleyheath line and at Kidbrooke. The Minister says that Southeastern is listening, but the reason it is not, as Southeastern told the scrutiny panel at Greenwich Council last week, is that it sought and got permission from the Department for Transport to make these cuts without consultation. Will the Minister go away and ensure that there is proper consultation and that we run train services that people actually want?

**Kevin Foster:** I thank the hon. Member for his points. As he will be aware, the process for changing timetables has been altered over the past couple of years, again, because of the radically changing demand during the pandemic. As traffic returns, we can see that it is not returning in a uniform way across the whole network. A quick look at some of the rail usage statistics would show that. But we do expect Southeastern to be responsive to the feedback that it is getting, although I take on board the fact that, particularly at peak times in London, there have been shifts in public demand.

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab): The former Transport Secretary was very keen to try to steal Labour's clothes with the announcement of Great British Railways, no doubt mindful that the overwhelming majority of voters support nationalisation. Sadly, his version of Great British Railways was not the real deal. I am sure that my hon. Friend on the Front Bench will be more than happy to take the Minister or his successor through Labour's White Paper, "GB Rail: Labour's plan for a nationally integrated publicly owned railway". Would the Minister like to take up the offer?

**Kevin Foster:** It is extremely kind of the hon. Gentleman to offer to take me through a Labour party policy document. However, I would rather stick with the plan for rail that is the Government's policy—the one that we will continue to take forward. My focus will always be, not on dogma, but on whether customers and communities are being served. Considering the way Labour Members try to portray British Rail as a panacea of customer services, I suggest they look back on some of the old news reports about how it used to operate.

**Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): The long-awaited transport Bill, which has now been abandoned despite having been in the Queen's Speech just months ago, was not just going to deliver Great British Railways, but address a whole range of pressing and long-overdue transport problems in this country: the menace of pavement parking, regulating e-scooters and so on. Is not the reason for this chaos that we do not have, and have not had for some months, a functioning Government? Would it not be more democratic and better if there was a general election and we had a Government with a mandate that was united to address the pressing problems the country faces?

**Kevin Foster:** It is interesting to hear the right hon. Gentleman say he wants to see the legislative timetable accelerated and, in the same breath, that he wants to dissolve Parliament. We will get on with the job and leave the politicking to others.



**Dame Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Minister says he is getting on with the job, so can he please get on with the job for passengers facing daily misery in Hull? TransPennine Express cancels dozens of services every day, causing real problems for commuters. It is also responsible for the toilets at Hull station, but cannot even manage to keep those clean and maintained. Can he ensure that TransPennine honours its contractual obligations and, if it cannot, that he terminates its contract?

**Kevin Foster:** Certainly we will be keen to ensure TransPennine is not just offering a bog-standard service to the right hon. Lady's constituents. If the company is not honouring its contract, we will certainly be happy to pick that up with it and ensure that it does.

**Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): I declare an interest, as a big supporter of the Doncaster bid, but I share the frustration of many across local government who have committed time and money in good faith to a process that so far has not delivered an outcome. Given that uncertainty, and the need to confirm the Government's intentions for Northern Powerhouse Rail, which the Minister mentioned a moment ago, does he agree that there is an urgent requirement for the Secretary of State or a senior member of the Government to come to the House and provide clarity about the Government's intentions in this particular area?

**Kevin Foster:** I have already made clear that we will—hopefully I will—look to make an announcement around the result of the headquarters competition for Great British Railways. I take on board the points made by a number of hon. Members about wishing to have a decision on which of our great railway communities will host that HQ. On the second point about Northern Powerhouse Rail, the hon. Gentleman will have heard the commitment. We are keen to engage with the region and key stakeholders, including Members of Parliament representing the communities, about how we turn the vision into a hard plan for delivery.

## Doncaster Sheffield Airport

4.23 pm

**Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if she will make a statement on the imminent closure of Doncaster Sheffield airport.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Katherine Fletcher):** Following the strategic review of the airport announced in July this year, the Government are incredibly disappointed that Peel Group has taken the difficult decision to announce the potential closure of Doncaster Sheffield airport. While it was a commercial decision made by the owners of the airport, I fully appreciate the impact it has had not only on passengers who use the airport, including the constituents represented by many hon. Members in the South Yorkshire region, but on those businesses, organisations and people who work at the airport and within the supply chain.

As I know from growing up underneath the flightpath of Manchester airport, regional airports are key in serving our local communities, supporting thousands of jobs in the regions and acting as a key gateway to international opportunities. That is why during the pandemic the Government supported airports through schemes such as the airport and ground operations support scheme, through which Doncaster Sheffield airport was able to access grant funding.

I need to be clear that, while the UK Government support airports, they do not own or operate them. However, devolved Administrations, local and combined authorities are frequently shareholders in airports that serve their communities, as is the case with Manchester Airports Group, Birmingham airport, London Luton airport and, most recently, Teesside International. The UK aviation market operates predominantly in the private sector. Airports invest in their infrastructure to attract airlines and passengers. We will continue to support all parties to seek a commercial or local solution.

Since the announcement by Peel Group on the airport's future on 13 July, the Government have been actively working with local stakeholders to encourage a future for aviation at the site. My hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) and the Department for Transport have met Peel, and I understand that the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority and Doncaster Council have been working during the review to explore options for a locally led solution. The local authorities have now written to Peel Group to pass on the details of those who are interested in potential options to invest in the airport, and I understand that Peel has begun to engage with those parties.

The aviation Minister, Baroness Vere, met Peel on 19 October and strongly encouraged it to look seriously at any commercial interest. She has also been proactively encouraging Peel Group to strongly consider the local and combined authorities' offers of bridging support if it requires extra time to take forward any discussions with investors.

The Government remain engaged and we look forward to seeing further progress. The House has today highlighted the importance of Doncaster, and I will convey the strength of feeling among Members present to Baroness Vere as she continues her work. I call on Peel Group to

[*Katherine Fletcher*]

continue to work with stakeholders to find a commercial solution or to minimise the impact of its review of the airport.

**Stephanie Peacock:** Doncaster Sheffield airport is an important regional economic asset with thousands of jobs dependent on it. Despite Peel Group's announcement of its closure, local leaders have made every effort to work with the group and press the Government to secure the airport's future. The South Yorkshire Mayor made Peel Group an offer of public money to keep the airport running, and local leaders have helped to find three potential investors who are seriously interested in keeping the airport operational, but those efforts have met resistance at every turn. Having already run the airport down, Peel Group is still refusing to confirm whether it is willing to suspend its closure, or whether it is even in a position to sell Doncaster Sheffield Airport Ltd.

Meanwhile, the Secretary of State, who could not even be bothered to turn up today, will not engage with interested parties and is refusing to invoke powers such as those in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 to protect the airport. She refused three times on the Floor of the House to meet local leaders and is yet to respond to a petition signed by more than 125,000 people, despite assurances from the outgoing Prime Minister that the Secretary of State would address the issue "immediately" and "protect the airport". Actions speak louder than words. Having created a climate of uncertainty, neither Peel Group nor the Government are using the powers and influence they have to explore every option to ensure the airport's future. That is not good enough—for workers, for businesses, or for all of us who rely on the emergency services stationed at the airport.

I thank Doncaster Council, the South Yorkshire Mayor, my right hon. Friends the Members for Doncaster Central (Dame Rosie Winterton) and for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), and my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh). Local leaders want the Government to work with us rather than taking a hands-off approach. Potential investors in the airport need certainty in the next 24 hours. It is imperative that Ministers step up, take action and use their powers to do everything they can to save Doncaster Sheffield airport.

**Katherine Fletcher:** The hon. Lady speaks with passion and partisanship in not mentioning my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher). I think she is a little late to the party; even a cursory glance at my hon. Friend's social media feed will show that he is on day 105 of his campaign to save Doncaster airport. He has met a series of different parties, and it is slightly beneath the hon. Lady not to recognise his efforts to protect his local community.

Baroness Vere, the aviation Minister, met Peel on 19 October, and it assures her that it is open to meeting potential investors. The Secretary of State has met Peel twice. The implication that we are not doing everything to find a solution for regional airports, which we recognise are incredibly important, is not correct.

I am sure that the Civil Contingencies Act will come up in other questions, so let me allude to it briefly. The Civil Contingencies Act is for absolute emergencies only. Even one of the operators at the airport has written to

the Prime Minister to explain that it can still find contingency efforts elsewhere, so the threshold for the last Labour Government's legislation has nowhere near been met.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I call the Chair of the Transport Committee, Huw Merriman.

**Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con):** This issue also came up in the Transport Committee session with the Secretary of State. We asked her whether there would be any intervention. She made it clear that it would not be financial, but that all technical assistance would be offered in the hope that there would be a solution similar to that for Teesside International Airport, where the Mayor of the Tees Valley found a solution.

**Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab):** You've got to be joking!

**Huw Merriman:** I ask the Minister, notwithstanding the disrespect from the sidelines, whether she can provide more detail about what that technical assistance could be for those of us in the Chamber who do not think it is a laughing matter.

**Katherine Fletcher:** I thank the Chair of the Select Committee for the question. As I do not have the aviation portfolio, I will not commit from the Dispatch Box to things that are not exactly accurate; I will ask Baroness Vere to write to him with the specifics of the technical assistance. I do know that there have repeated meetings at a number of levels. When it comes to regional airports, he makes a good point. As I outlined in my opening remarks, in Manchester, Liverpool and the Tees Valley, among others, local authorities are investing to support a commercial solution. That option is available to the South Yorkshire mayoral combined authority and to Doncaster Council in this case.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I call the shadow Secretary of State, Louise Haigh.

**Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab):** I like the Minister very much and I wish her well in her ministerial duties, but she is not the aviation Minister; the Secretary of State should be here to answer this urgent question. A critical regional airport is days away from closure and she cannot be bothered to turn up. What message does it send to the people of South Yorkshire, 125,000 of whom signed a petition to keep the airport open, that she will not attend the Chamber and cannot even attend meetings with South Yorkshire MPs and leaders to discuss how we can protect Doncaster Sheffield airport? The Government have repeatedly refused to meet the Mayor of South Yorkshire and other regional leaders to discuss what options are open. It is truly a slap in the face to the hundreds of people whose jobs currently hang in the balance.

When the right hon. Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss)—the Prime Minister for the next few hours at least—came to Yorkshire, she gave a commitment on behalf of the Government to protect Doncaster Sheffield airport. That commitment must outlast her Government, not least because this airport is of strategic significance: it has one of the longest runways in Britain, it is the base for the National Police Air Service, and it is a home to national coastguard operations.

Thanks to the leadership of the Mayor of South Yorkshire, credible investors have been identified, but it is obvious that the Peel Group never had any intention of negotiating in good faith, so it is not an option for Doncaster Council or the Mayor to purchase shares in the airport, given that the Peel Group is refusing to sell. It is willing to let the airport close, to let infrastructure be degraded and to remove any chance of its being reopened in future.

The case for action from the Government is crystal clear. The use of emergency powers under the Civil Contingencies Act is the only possible measure to keep the airport running. Potential investors have made it clear that the Secretary of State's refusal to use those powers is creating far greater uncertainty and instability, and is making purchase at any point in future even more unlikely. Can the Minister outline precisely why the Secretary of State has refused to consider the use of the Act? That decision is political, so it is beholden on her to explain to the people of South Yorkshire why she refuses to use it. If she continues to refuse, will the Minister lay out what powers exist anywhere else that could keep the airport running?

As we await the third Prime Minister in seven weeks, there is less than a week left to save the airport. If the Government do not take the action that the people of South Yorkshire desperately need them to take, the people will conclude that this is final proof that the Tories' levelling-up agenda is dead.

**Katherine Fletcher:** The message to the people of South Yorkshire is that they have an incredibly strong local champion in my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher), who has been working tirelessly to make it happen from day one. The previous aviation Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts), who is present, has already met the combined authority. The hon. Lady asks where the power lies; it lies with the Labour mayoral combined authority—the local council. *[Interruption.]* Well, let me address the Civil Contingencies Act: it was introduced by the Blair Government. When the Minister brought it to the House, it was envisioned that it would be used in only the most serious circumstances and

“would be used rarely, if ever”.—*[Official Report, 19 January 2004; Vol. 416, c. 1109.]*

No Government have used it in 18 years. The Opposition—*[Interruption.]* The Labour party bringing in a law that was not serious; that would astonish me! What you are doing is trying to find a piece of politicking, instead of sitting down—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, it is my first go, Madam Deputy Speaker. You are—*[HON. MEMBERS: “You’re doing it again!”]* The hon. Lady will forgive me, as it is my first go. *[Interruption.]* What we need is for the Peel Group to sit down with the commercial people, and that is what it promised to do when it sat down with the aviation Minister on 19 October.

**Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con):** I believe that this urgent question has been raised today to take away from the Adjournment debate on this subject tonight. The Opposition have actually shown an interest in this issue for the very first time. We have a combined authority that has been sadly lacking for over three years, and the people will learn the truth tonight about that. There are Opposition Members who have only shown any interest

in the last fortnight. Certain Members on the Labour Benches, who have thousands of likes on their Facebook account, pin their books to their page rather than share the petition to save our airport, and they should sit there in disgrace. Does the Minister agree with me that, if the combined authority had done its job properly, we would not be in this position now?

**Katherine Fletcher:** I think my hon. Friend gives a wonderful preview of tonight's Adjournment debate, and I look forward to it greatly.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I call the SNP spokesperson.

**Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP):** I warned many times, while the attention was disproportionately on the Heathrows and the Gatwicks of the world, about how the perilous position of regional airports—their recovery from covid has been far slower—was being ignored. The closure of Doncaster Sheffield is a blow to vital regional connectivity. What is—and, indeed where is—the Government's strategy for regional connectivity? Regional connectivity is not just about flights to London, which the current public service obligation legislation solely supports, and such flights are always the first to go when slots are needed for more lucrative routes. Direct regional links with European and global destinations have to be the priority.

I have also said many times that retail is a much higher proportion of regional airports' revenues, but we have seen VAT-free shopping at the point of sale abolished. It was to be replaced by a less generous VAT reclaim scheme, but that has also been abandoned. I ask that this issue is looked at again. At the very least the Government must look at arrivals duty-free, which has cross-party support. Will they do so?

Finally, what plans does the Minister or her colleagues have to meet people from the regional airports, including Glasgow in my constituency, to find out and act on what they need, rather than what Greater London wants?

**Katherine Fletcher:** The hon. Gentleman may be able to guess from my accent that London is not always at the forefront of my mind when making decisions. As he well knows, Doncaster airport does not have any domestic internal flights, and airlines will set those up primarily from the perspective of commerciality. I agree with him about the importance of regional connectivity. On how communities can best work together to engage with what airports want and how regional connectivity work, I refer him to models mentioned previously in which other airports have a mixture of private and local engagement that really grounds operations within them. On the position on VAT, I am afraid that I will have to write to him rather than commit a snafu at the Dispatch Box.

**Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con):** The Minister mentioned the Civil Contingencies Act earlier. She knows—indeed, the whole House knows—that it is a very specific piece of legislation that is intended only to be invoked in the face of a military assault, a terrorist attack or an unprecedented threat to the life of the nation. It is frivolous for the Opposition to call for it in this way, and they know that were it to be invoked by her or any other Minister, it would be subject to judicial review

[*Michael Gove*]

and struck down in the courts. Can she remind us of anywhere else that a mayoral combined authority has constructively acquired an airport, and might the person who did so be a Conservative who is more interested in delivering for people than in posturing on the Floor of this House?

**Katherine Fletcher:** It is important to commend hugely the work that has been happening at Doncaster airport with the National Police Air Service fixed wing, as well as 2Excel Aviation, the commercial company that in no small part is a preventive for oil spills and provides other important environmental protections. Not only is my right hon. Friend correct about the scale of intervention under the Civil Contingencies Act, but 2Excel has confirmation that it can meet its contracts and determinations in a different way with contingency plans, even further lowering that. I thank Members for their service, but this is not the nature of the emergency for which the Act was set up by a previous Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in 2004.

**Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): I declare an interest as the first South Yorkshire mayor. For four years I dealt with the complexities of the airport, and I am trying to be constructive and help the Minister out. She said a moment ago that powers were invested in the mayor, and I would be grateful if she could say a little more to clarify what she thinks those powers are, as I think there is some confusion about that. More generally, I know she understands that there is huge concern about the potential closure of Doncaster Sheffield airport, and the impact that that would have not just on Doncaster but across our region. There is cross-party agreement about the importance of trying to keep the airport open, and also an acknowledgement that time is running very short. This is an important matter and I appeal to the Minister: we need to sit down and have a proper meeting that brings together MPs from both sides of the House, all of whom want the airport to stay open. I cannot understand why the Secretary of State and the Minister will not meet us. That would be the right thing to do and, even at this late stage, I hope that on a cross-party basis, including the hon. Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) and Conservative Members—I could not have been clearer about that—we can sit down and work together, and see what can be done to keep the airport open.

**Katherine Fletcher:** In terms of what a mayor acting in the interests of his local community could do, perhaps the hon. Gentleman would permit me to ask Ben Houchen to set something out for him, rather than have me talk about it. As I pointed out, there has been a series of meetings with the previous aviation Minister and the current Minister. They have met Peel Group and local businesses affected, and they continue to do so. Any cross-party offer is welcome, and perhaps the hon. Gentleman could have a word with local leaders to engage them over a longer period of time than they have been engaged.

**Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): I declare my interest as the previous aviation Minister—that has just been referred to. Once the political bluster is over we are all

on the same page, and we all have an undoubted understanding of the value of regional airports for areas such as Doncaster and Sheffield. Does the Minister agree that although the Government can bring people together and facilitate conversations, they are not in the business of owning and running airports? Local authorities sometimes are, however, and coming up with a credible commercial solution for how the airport can be bought and operated is something that must be locally led.

**Katherine Fletcher:** I thank my hon. Friend for the expertise that he brought to his previous portfolio. I would not dare to gainsay him, and yes, he is quite correct.

**Dame Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): This is an issue not just for South Yorkshire but for my subregion of Hull and the Humber. Will the Minister reflect on the fact that emergency services are based at that airport, including as we have heard the National Police Air Service? If that is to be disrupted in any way, that might well meet the threshold of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, so will she look at the issue again?

**Katherine Fletcher:** The right hon. Lady will be pleased to know that when the aviation Minister met Peel on 19 October she raised that very issue, and she has its assurance that it will work through to ensure that there is no potential disruption to the NPAS or 2Excel, should no commercial solution be available. It was also happy to commit absolutely to meeting anyone with commercial interests, and to engage with interested parties to find a commercial solution.

**Lia Nici** (Great Grimsby) (Con): As has been said, Doncaster Sheffield airport has strategic importance as a regional airport, not only for South Yorkshire but for the Humber area and Lincolnshire. South Humber is one of the fastest growing industrial areas in the country, and we must ensure that we protect Doncaster airport. Does the Minister agree that devolved administrations exist to ensure that they think strategically when working with business? They should ensure that they help those areas with huge amounts of development and growth, as Doncaster Sheffield airport has had, and that they work strategically, and not in the last few dying minutes when commercial decisions have already been made?

**Katherine Fletcher:** My hon. Friend is a lady of foresight and vision. I could not agree with her more.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Many of my constituents really value Doncaster Sheffield airport and want to keep it open. I hope that, putting aside party politics, the Minister will congratulate Oliver Coppard, the Mayor of South Yorkshire, on the efforts he has made on a constructive, cross-party basis to engage with Peel and other potential investors to try to keep the airport open.

The Minister referred to my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) as being partisan. Does she not accept that it looks partisan indeed when Ministers are prepared to meet Government Members but not Opposition Members? Will she correct that and have a joint meeting?

**Katherine Fletcher:** I would love to meet hon. Members on both sides of the House, but I do not hold the aviation portfolio; perhaps the hon. Member slightly misunderstood me. I know that the aviation Minister has met a number of different representatives and I am happy to pass on the request. On working together, Peel has committed to meet anybody who can move forward with a medium-term, viable commercial strategy. I encourage both parties to do so.

**Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con):** The loss of Doncaster airport would be devastating across the South Yorkshire region, including in my constituency of Rother Valley, but this is not the first time that Peel Group has done this. In the Tees Valley, it did exactly the same thing, but the Mayor there stepped in to save the airport. Will the Minister outline what different powers the Mayor of Tees Valley has from those of the Mayor of South Yorkshire? If the Mayor of South Yorkshire cannot step up to the plate, he should step down.

**Katherine Fletcher:** I do not want to mislead my hon. Friend, who makes an extremely good point. I will write to him and get him the proper answer.

**Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab):** I am bamboozled by Government Members' comments. Our smaller, regional airports are in deep trouble, and Peel will not do anyone any favours at Doncaster or anywhere else. However, it did do a great deal with the Tees Valley Mayor. It got him to part with tens of millions of pounds for the loss-making Teesside International Airport a few years ago. Since then, the Mayor has had to prop it up with tens of millions of pounds more of public money, and the losses continue today as he fails to deliver on his changing forecasts for making it profitable. I invite the Minister to look at the numbers—it is losing millions every year. How will Ministers ensure that regional airports such as Doncaster and Teesside can have a sustainable future without the need for further subsidies?

**Katherine Fletcher:** I am genuinely confused about what the hon. Member wants the Department for Transport to do. Either he wants a solution for Doncaster airport to survive or he does not want that because it will require further investment from a local authority. What Government Members know much better than Opposition Members is how to generate economic growth. Policies such as the recently announced investment zones that are currently under examination, which could include Teesside airport, are the type of thing that attract businesses and drive investment in local communities.

**Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con):** As the Conservative candidate for Don Valley in 2017, I know how important the airport is to the people of the constituency. I invite the Minister to join me in praising my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) for, two years later, doing rather better than I did, and for fighting an incredibly tenacious campaign on behalf of his constituents. He has been on the case for more than 100 days, contrary to some of the Johnny-come-latelys on the Opposition Benches and, contrary to what the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) said, he has been shut out by the Mayor of South Yorkshire, Oliver Coppard. Will the Minister praise my hon. Friend

for his tireless efforts and ensure that she listens to tonight's Adjournment debate in which he will set out everything that he has been doing?

**Katherine Fletcher:** Not only will I be listening to the Adjournment debate, but I have the joy and honour of responding to it. I should imagine that once we have concluded today's urgent question and tonight's Adjournment debate, the day 105 update from my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) will be an absolute bumper edition.

**Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab):** The Minister and I share one thing in common: our birthplace is the city of Manchester. Peel has a considerable presence in Greater Manchester and Merseyside, and in Cheshire where my seat is. What leverage have the Minister and the Secretary of State used to ensure that Peel is effectively around the table to help our good colleagues in the likes of Doncaster? It really would make sense for this place to be at its best and to work together right across the piece with all parliamentarians and stop the partisanship.

**Katherine Fletcher:** It is always good to have two Wythenshawe people having a bit of a chat across the Dispatch Box. I agree that we are better in this place when we work together and are not partisan. On the exact details of the meetings and engagements with Peel, I will probably have to write to the hon. Gentleman because that is within the aviation Minister's responsibilities. I note, however, that Peel services his constituents in Cheshire within the Liverpool Airport framework. There is a positive sign for the future if that can be replicated elsewhere.

**Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op):** It is disappointing that the Minister seems to have no jurisdiction over the matter concerned for the urgent question. In light of the fact that this is a really urgent issue, may I also say that she needs to get all stakeholders around one table now to resolve it? It will have a significant impact on the local economy and across Yorkshire, including in York. Most importantly, the Government need a regional airport strategy to address the issues we are seeing across the country.

**Katherine Fletcher:** I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I encourage her to go back to the South Yorkshire Mayor. There is, I think, an opportunity for a locally led review, with the convening power of the South Yorkshire Mayor. I am sure that colleagues across the piece would be happy to engage with that.

**Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab):** Some of the contributions have been disappointingly and shockingly partisan. As I think the Minister recognises, the South Yorkshire Mayor, with Doncaster Council and others on both sides of the House, is doing everything possible to keep alive the hope of an airport in the region, pressing for an alternative operator with some success. However, there is concern about Peel winding down key services such as air traffic control or the fire service, or removing specialist infrastructure like navigational beacons, making the sort of commercial solution that the Minister talks about far less viable. Will she contact the aviation Minister—it is a shame that neither the Secretary of State nor the aviation Minister can be here—to urge

[Paul Blomfield]

Peel not to run down the airport in the way it seems to be doing? Peel has form in switching use of airport sites to more profitable activities, having benefited from public funds that have enhanced their value.

**Katherine Fletcher:** I am very happy to write to the hon. Gentleman on the details of where the airport is in terms of any wind-down. I can reassure him that the aviation Minister—unfortunately, she cannot speak in this place because she serves in the other place; that is why she is not here today—has assured me that she has spoken to Peel and that it is open to ensuring every service is maintained during the transition period. However, I do not have the details to hand, so I will have to write to him.

**Mr Toby Perkins** (Chesterfield) (Lab): The tens of thousands of people who signed the petition and the hundreds of people whose jobs are hanging by a thread will be watching these proceedings with their heads in their hands. A political blame game is emanating, rather than any sense that we have a Government ministerial team attempting to actually save the airport. It is not the Minister's fault that she does not hold this portfolio, but it is the Transport Secretary's fault that they are not here. They should be able to answer questions on this. I cannot imagine another city the size of Sheffield in all of western Europe that does not have an airport. Will the Minister pass on to the Transport Secretary the fury of the people of South Yorkshire and the north midlands that this has been so loosely dealt with, and start getting hold of this issue? It is impossible to negotiate with a company that has no interest in selling and wants to hold on to it for alternative purposes.

**Katherine Fletcher:** I hear the passion with which the hon. Member speaks for people, and I understand why people want regional airports. I gently point out that my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) has been pushing this issue for weeks and weeks, so the implication that nothing has happened or that people have only just been heard is not true or fair. The Secretary of State has met Peel twice. Aviation Ministers past and present have been engaging, but ultimately, we

are talking about a commercial business in this instance and the Government do not own the airport. We cannot compel commercial businesses, but we can encourage, suggest and get people around the table, and we will continue to do so.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for her answers. She mentioned the important strategic position of Doncaster airport—as did all Members on both sides of the Chamber—and she mentioned the changing scene for small airports. Connectivity has also been mentioned, and that is very important. In Northern Ireland, we have had to fight for our airline staff. I have written to the Minister responsible for air travel about this issue: in the past few weeks, the removal of bodies such as Aer Lingus from UK operations from Belfast City airport to Heathrow means job losses and has an impact on connectivity. What steps can Ministers take—I am ever mindful that the Minister is not directly responsible for this, but I would appreciate her passing it on—to secure regional connectivity in all parts and regions of the United Kingdom?

**Katherine Fletcher:** Belfast City airport is, I believe, the George Best international airport, and as a committed Manchester United fan, it would be an honour to fly into it. I am happy to write to the hon. Member with those answers when that is possible.

**Olivia Blake** (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab): To be honest, I am disappointed with some of the comments that have been made across the House. It is on us all to work together to find a solution to this situation. Investors have cited Government inaction as a core reason why they might not be confident in investing. What do the Government think about that? Do they agree that Government action or inaction will have consequences for whether the airport will stay open?

**Katherine Fletcher:** Government action, the action of local authorities and the action of local leaders are important. I would be happy to hear of any specific actions that the hon. Lady would like us to take to help two commercial businesses in a negotiation. If she wants to pass that to me, I will make sure that the aviation Minister is aware of it.

## Points of Order

4.57 pm

**Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Aaron Bell) said that the Mayor of South Yorkshire had shut the hon. Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) out of negotiations. For the record, I understand that the hon. Member for Don Valley has not called the Mayor once and that the negotiation meetings are non-political. The hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme appears not to be in his place, but he may well have misled the House inadvertently, so will he correct the record?

**Nick Fletcher** (Don Valley) (Con): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have met Oliver Coppard on a weekly basis but have not been part of any working groups. Throughout the past three months, I have continually asked to become part of these working groups but have been shut out of them. I have been part of other groups with other MPs who have been there, and have been told that meetings have been held without me. That was questioned right at the beginning.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** The hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) was referring to a remark made by another Member of Parliament, the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Aaron Bell), and I am sure that that will be fed back in case any correction needs to be made. We have heard the view of the hon. Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) as well. It is quite important that we do not just continue the debate at this point, because we need to move on to the statement from the Home Secretary.

## Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse: Final Report

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Before I call the Home Secretary to make this statement, I remind hon. Members that they should not refer to any specific cases currently before the courts and that they should exercise caution with respect to any specific cases that might subsequently come before the courts, in order not to prejudice those proceedings.

4.59 pm

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Grant Shapps):**

With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse. Last Thursday, the inquiry's report was published. It concludes seven years of investigation into institutional failure across England and Wales to protect and safeguard children from child sexual abuse.

I want to thank the chair of the inquiry, Professor Alexis Jay, and her whole team for their fearless dedication and commitment in uncovering generations of horrendous societal, professional and institutional failings. I have written to Professor Jay and offered to meet her in the coming weeks to discuss her findings.

Above all, I want to extend my profound gratitude to the thousands of victims and survivors who have come forward to share their testimonies and experiences with the inquiry. That took immense courage. We will honour that courage by keeping their voices front and centre in everything we do and in overseeing a radical improvement in how this crime is dealt with and prevented. The whole House will be deeply moved by the reasons that victims and survivors gave for wanting to share their stories. They wanted their experiences to be acknowledged, to be listened to and to be taken seriously; they wanted to protect other children from suffering as they have suffered. Yet they also wanted not to be defined by this experience and to find, as one survivor put it, "life after abuse". Madam Deputy Speaker, they are heroic.

Nothing—nothing—is more wicked than hurting a child, and there is no worse dereliction of duty than failing to protect a child. The report reveals horrific abuse of children. It makes for devastating and distressing reading. It finds that organisations have put their reputations ahead of protecting vulnerable children—either turning a blind eye or actively covering up abuse. That is inexcusable.

I am a father of three children and this report has made for very difficult reading. I cannot imagine the pain that victims have been through. Madam Deputy Speaker, I say this on behalf of the Government and all Governments who came before: to all the victims who have suffered this horrendous abuse, I am truly sorry.

The inquiry heard from more than 7,300 victims and survivors. It investigated abuse over not only the last seven years but several decades. The report makes a wide range of recommendations, including greater accountability, increased reporting, better redress for victims, an increased focus on bringing the perpetrators of these abhorrent acts to justice, and a stronger voice from Government on this issue. The Government will take all these recommendations, and the insights provided by brave survivors, seriously.

[Grant Shapps]

Getting this right will mean everyone redoubling their efforts and working more closely together—all of Government, the police, the health and care system, local authorities, schools, and all other interested parties. I will convene meetings with Ministers across Whitehall to drive that change. Our new child protection ministerial group, set up following the care review, will champion children's safety at every level and provide the leadership to oversee reforms across children's social and care services. Several Government Departments have been core participants in the inquiry, and we have been working to respond in real time to recommendations already made during the course of the inquiry.

The actions that we have taken include the Government's tackling child sexual abuse strategy, published in January last year; driving initiatives to increase reporting of this too often hidden crime, including awareness raising campaigns, and to improve the confidence and capabilities of frontline professionals to identify and respond to child sexual abuse; ensuring that education and safeguarding professionals are better equipped and supported in identifying harmful sexual behaviours and protecting children from peer-on-peer abuse and harm; targeting offenders by investing in the National Crime Agency, GCHQ and new technology, and by giving the police stronger powers; and providing better support to victims—committing to a new Victims Bill and increased funding for specialised support services.

The conclusion of the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse marks the end of a vital period of reflection and learning, but it also marks the start of the next chapter in how society confronts and defeats this evil. Nothing must be allowed to get in the way, be it inertia, misplaced cultural sensitivities, indifference, self-interest or cowardice from those whose job it is to protect children. In fact, it is the job of every adult to do all they can to protect children. Anything less is a profound moral failing, not to mention a professional and institutional failing. Walking by on the other side is never acceptable. Would-be abusers need to know that they will be caught and punished. Victims need to know that it is never their fault and that they will be heard and protected.

I have laid a copy of the inquiry's report before Parliament. It is only right that the Government will now take time to carefully consider its findings and recommendations in full. We will respond comprehensively and in line with the inquiry's deadline, but let me make this promise now: I will use all available levers to protect our children and right the wrongs exposed by the inquiry's findings, I will do all in my power to improve how law enforcement and the criminal justice system respond to child sexual abuse, and I will work with ministerial colleagues and across party lines to hold organisations to account, bring perpetrators to justice and support victims and survivors with compassion and total care.

Where we can act more quickly, we will. That is why we have already announced that through the support for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse fund, we are allocating £4.5 million over three years to seven organisations to support victims and survivors. The fund is only the start in addressing the inquiry's recommendations, but it is another step towards ensuring

that we provide vital support for children and young people who have experienced sexual abuse, for adult survivors and for parents and carers of victims. It is just one part of the more than £60 million a year that the Home Office is investing in tackling this crime.

Child sexual abuse is a terrible but preventable crime—and we must prevent it. We will do so with the inquiry's recommendations in front of us and with the words of heroic survivors ringing in our ears. I commend this statement to the House.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I call the shadow Home Secretary.

5.7 pm

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I welcome the new Home Secretary to his post and thank him for the advance copy of his statement. I join him in paying tribute to the victims and survivors who pressed for the inquiry and who have shown great bravery and strength in telling their stories and speaking out to seek justice, to seek truth and to seek protection for others. I thank the inquiry team for their work.

This is a deeply serious report about one of the worst imaginable crimes, the sexual abuse and exploitation of children—the violence, pain and terror that they have described; the degradation, the violation and the consequences that they have felt throughout their lives; and the deep failure of the institutions and people in power who were supposed to protect them. It was a failure to listen, a failure to believe and a failure to act on the part of institutions that, through generations, were found to have protected their own reputation rather than protecting children and to have put deference to authority above the basic duty of care to children, whom they badly let down. I and my party join the Home Secretary and the Government in their deep apology towards those who were so badly let down by state institutions that should have kept them safe. We are truly sorry.

The inquiry recommends major changes in child protection and in support for victims. The Home Secretary has rightly committed himself to overseeing a radical improvement in the way in which this crime is dealt with and prevented, and that is welcome, but I have stood at this Dispatch Box and heard similar promises before. The Home Secretary's response today is not strong enough and does not go far enough, because this is not just a historic inquiry; the report makes clear that child sexual abuse is endemic and increasing. There are children at risk today, and there are basic child protection issues that are getting worse and require action now, in advance of the Government's full response to the inquiry.

First, the report refers to “the explosion in online-facilitated child sexual abuse”, including grooming and the online streaming of the rape of babies and children. The Home Secretary did not really mention online harms, and, as he will know, the Online Safety Bill has been repeatedly delayed. Can he confirm that it will definitely complete its remaining stages next week and that its progress to the House of Lords will be accelerated, because this is urgent? Can he also confirm that the National Crime Agency will not have to make the 20% staff cuts that his predecessors asked it to draw up?



Secondly, the report says that “significant reductions in funding of public services” after 2010, when referrals were rising, are one of the key factors that have had “a deleterious impact on responses to child sexual abuse.”

Does the Home Secretary accept that that damage was done, and is he acting now to ensure that child protection services do not have to pay the price of his party’s mini-Budget when the public spending announcements are made next week?

Thirdly, everyone has been expecting the inquiry to recommend a mandatory duty to report child sexual abuse, and Labour has been calling for that since 2014. May I urge the Home Secretary to announce that he will support it straight away, and send a strong signal to those across the sector? Fourthly, he referred to the criminal justice system. As he will know, the charge rate for child sexual abuse has dropped from 32% in 2015 to 12% last year. Will he take urgent action to prosecute dangerous criminals, because that has been getting worse?

Fifthly, the Home Secretary’s own Department has responsibility for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, but just last week the independent inspectorate found that they were being placed in unsuitable hotels whose staff had not even been subject to Disclosure and Barring Service checks. According to reports over the weekend, hundreds of asylum-seeking children have disappeared. When his own Department is failing in the most basic child protection and safeguarding, the Home Secretary will understand that his words today are not enough. What action has he taken since he saw those reports over the weekend?

I know the Home Secretary will say that he is new in his post, but he will understand that that is part of the concern. This report is too important to get lost in all the political changes that have been taking place and all the confusion within Government. I therefore ask the Home Secretary to answer my five urgent questions now, and to recognise that we owe it to the thousands of victims and survivors who have spoken out, but also to the millions of children in the current generation who are still at risk of abuse, to ensure that this inquiry leaves a lasting legacy to protect our children.

**Grant Shapps:** I thank the right hon. Lady for her response to my statement. I repeat the message in the statement that I want to work across parties to do all we can to protect victims and, indeed, drive down this appalling crime.

The right hon. Lady raised a number of specific points, and I will, if I may, respond to her in writing, because I will then be able to give a more detailed response. However, one or two things did catch my eye as she was speaking. In particular, it is worth saying to Members who have not had a chance to read the report that 2 million pages of evidence were presented, and that there have been 107 recommendations and Thursday’s report contains a further 20. We have already started to implement many of those recommendations. I listed some in my statement so I will not backtrack, but, as I have said, I intend to respond to all this in full and within the inquiry’s own deadline, and as I have also said, I will try to expedite as many responses as I can. In particular, the right hon. Lady called for mandatory reporting; I noted that comment, and I will look at all those individual areas.

On prosecutions, the picture is a bit more complicated than has been presented in the right hon. Lady’s response. For example, the number of convictions for indecent image offences has increased by 39% in the past year alone. However, I accept that overall there is still a huge task to be done in the Online Safety Bill, which contains some very important clauses. I have not yet caught up with the Bill managers, but I know that it is progressing quickly and I want to see that happen. The figures are staggering, with 103,000 child sex offences recorded by the police in the last year alone. Much of this has gone online, and the right hon. Lady is right to pinpoint the measures in the Online Safety Bill as being extremely important.

As the right hon. Lady knows, I take a great deal of interest in the issue of asylum, including refugees—we have some living in our house, in fact—and I want to ensure that we do everything we can. I know that the Minister for Security, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), has made inquiries in the past few days on the priorities with regard to asylum-seeking children. With that, it will probably be most helpful to the right hon. Lady and to the House if I write to her in detail on all her points, and I will be happy to put that letter in the Library of the House.

**Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con):** When I set up this inquiry, I said that I thought the public would be shocked at the extent of child sexual abuse that was taking place in our country. I would like to thank Professor Alexis Jay, the other members of the inquiry panel and all of their team for their hard work in producing this report. I particularly want to echo the comments of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) in thanking all those who came forward to give evidence, which will not have been easy for them.

This report has shone a light on the horrific violence against children that has been taking place in the past and that also, sadly, takes place today. The Government now have an opportunity, on the back of this inquiry report, to make changes that will make a real difference, so I urge my right hon. Friend to ensure that all parts of Government take this report and treat it with utter seriousness, particularly the recommendation on mandatory reporting.

**Grant Shapps:** I thank my right hon. Friend for all that she did in setting up the inquiry. This has involved seven years, 725 witnesses, 20 reports across 15 investigations, 24 research reports and, as I mentioned, the processing of 2 million pages of evidence. It is extremely important that we take all this information and ensure that we act on it, and I give an undertaking from the Dispatch Box today to honour the spirit in which she set up the inquiry in the first place.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I call the Scottish National party spokesperson, Stuart C. McDonald.

**Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP):** I, too, welcome the Home Secretary to his place and, like him, I want to thank the members of the inquiry and their staff for their incredibly thorough and painstaking work over many years. Like everybody else, I think the most important thing is to

[*Stuart C. McDonald*]

pay tribute to all the survivors who participated courageously in recounting their own horrific experiences. They did so seeking acknowledgement and accountability, but also in the hope that children in future would be protected from the same dreadful ordeal. As the Home Secretary says, it is now incumbent on all of us to work constructively to make those aspirations a reality.

Obviously there is a lot to consider, and while it is good to be able to question the Home Secretary on the report today, I think many of us would appreciate the opportunity for a full debate in this Chamber in due course, or at least regular updates on the progress being made on implementing the report's recommendations. Most of the recommendations are focused on England and Wales, but as the report notes, this is a global crisis and a similar inquiry is ongoing in Scotland.

I want to highlight the growing concerns outlined in the report about how child sexual exploitation is being facilitated by modern slavery and trafficking. There has been a lot of concerning chatter in recent weeks from the Home Office about the future of modern slavery laws. Given that sexual exploitation is the second most common reason for children being referred into the national referral mechanism, will the Home Secretary acknowledge the importance of modern slavery laws in protecting children from abuse and commit to making those laws work better, rather than tearing them up completely?

I echo what the shadow Home Secretary said about the recent worrying reports of asylum-seeking children going missing from hotels on the Home Secretary's watch. We are now talking three figures, so will the Home Secretary say a little more about what is being done to look into why that is happening and how it can be stopped? What progress has been made on rolling out the use of independent child trafficking guardians? Finally, given the time constraints and the fact that we understand the Online Safety Bill will return to the House next week, what discussions is he having with colleagues about the implications of this report for that Bill, including in relation to age verification?

**Grant Shapps:** I know work is being done. I think there was a report five years ago and there are separate, ongoing reports in Scotland, with many cross-cutting themes. The hon. Gentleman rightly asks about modern slavery laws, many of which we have my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) to thank for. I reassure him that any changes made for the specific purpose of ensuring that potential loopholes are closed will not have an impact on the main purpose, just as he describes.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for reminding us that the Online Safety Bill will return very shortly. I am ensuring that its findings, many of which were in the interim report, will be covered in the Online Safety Bill. I will return to him in writing on his comments about asylum seekers in hotels.

**Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con):** I welcome my right hon. Friend to his place. He will know that his role comes with huge responsibilities, especially for protecting children, which is why I welcome his statement and the comments of the shadow Home Secretary. I welcome

this excellent final report, of course, and I thank Professor Alexis Jay, the victims and survivors, and Professor Jay's entire team for producing it.

The Disclosure and Barring Service is referenced some 84 times in the report. In 2020, when I led a commission into child sexual abuse and exploitation, we discovered a number of issues relating to the DBS, particularly the ability of convicted child sexual abusers to avoid detection by simply changing their name. This loophole has still not been closed by the Government, so I urge my right hon. Friend to work with his colleagues in the Ministry of Justice to close it as quickly as possible.

**Grant Shapps:** My right hon. Friend has occupied my post and is very knowledgeable about this subject. There are concerns about the DBS, and I asked the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Mims Davies), to look into this urgently. That work is already under way, so I will report back to the House.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I call the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, Dame Diana Johnson.

**Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab):** I, too, pay tribute to all the victims and survivors who gave testimony to the inquiry, and to the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) for establishing it in the first place. We can all agree that victims and survivors have waited far too long for this inquiry and for robust action to be taken against child sexual abuse. We must not waste any more time. Will the Home Secretary commit to bringing forward, in this Session, any legislative changes that are needed, particularly on mandatory reporting?

**Grant Shapps:** The right hon. Lady has expertise in this area, so I thank her for her point. As I said, I want to act as quickly as possible. She will appreciate that this report was seven years and £184 million in the making, so there is an awful lot of information for us to look at and consider, and we will come back to the House with our response. I would rather go through that process systematically, to ensure we get it right, than make a promise from the Dispatch Box that I do not know I will be able to fulfil. I reassure her and all Members that I will be doing it with the utmost speed and determination.

**Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con):** I welcome my right hon. Friend to his place and commend him for his response to this report, as well as thanking my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) for establishing the inquiry in the first place.

The victims' stories make horrific reading. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will be aware that, when it comes to the detection and tackling of child sexual abuse and exploitation, a critical role is played by children's social workers, the overwhelming majority of whom do outstanding work in the most difficult circumstances, but we can do more to support them. Will he work with the Secretary of State for Education to look once more at Martin Narey's report on how we can improve social workers' education, and to see whether more resource can be devoted to ensuring that the work

of Frontline, the organisation that brings the brightest and the best from higher education into social work, can be expanded?

**Grant Shapps:** My right hon. Friend makes an excellent point. The report is difficult reading, as we see when we start to read some of the testimony, and he is absolutely right on that. I also agree with him on the need to pay tribute to the vast majority of frontline workers and social workers who do an extraordinary job. He is probably familiar with the independent Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse, which was funded by the Home Office and set up in 2016, and which has been helping to provide and strengthen the ability of professionals to identify sexual abuse. To answer his question directly, I will undertake to work with the Secretary of State for Education and pull together Secretaries of State and Ministers from across the Government to make sure that we work on this issue and stamp out the sexual abuse of youngsters.

**Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I, too, congratulate the right hon. Member for Maidenhead on having the courage and determination to establish this inquiry, at a time when, I recall, it was not popular everywhere. When I worked in this field in the late 1980s, one thing that struck me was that we tended to put more emphasis on finding the evidence to prosecute the perpetrator than we did on the damage experienced by the victim; I appreciate that this is sometimes a difficult balance to strike. In that context, may I ask the Home Secretary to think about the problems that victims face today as they try to negotiate the myriad services when seeking help? There is a lot of faith now in the child house model, which is, in essence, an all-in-one service that tries to make it easier for victims. Will he do what he can to make sure that that model is properly resourced, so that we are not treating the needs of the victim as being in second place to the prosecution of the perpetrator?

**Grant Shapps:** The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. One problem with tackling child sexual abuse is that it can happen in so many different settings and environments that it is difficult to have one central location always to deal with it. But what we can do is provide the services, expertise and some of the different initiatives I referred to in my comments to help bring that support. I absolutely agree with him and I am determined to do that, on behalf of all the children who have been abused and to prevent further abuse in future.

**Laura Farris** (Newbury) (Con): I, too, pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) for establishing the inquiry, and to Professor Jay for her report. I know something about how difficult and painstaking the evidence-gathering exercise was, because I was a barrister on the inquiry for a year in 2017. From Dolphin Square to the Catholic Church, from young offenders institutes to residential schools, the findings of the inquiry reveal the extent of prolonged child abuse, often in places where children were meant to be kept safe. Repeatedly it was found that if they complained about it, they were accused of lying or were even blamed for it happening in the first place.

There are multiple lessons from the report, but I would like to ask my right hon. Friend about the specific findings in relation to sexual predators—paedophiles—who travel overseas to abuse children. The report finds that civil

orders restricting foreign travel are often underused and ineffective, because they only prohibit travel to a named country, which means that the perpetrator can circumvent that restriction by taking a different route. Will he say what the Home Office is doing to tighten up the restrictions in that area specifically?

**Grant Shapps:** First, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for her work in 2017—these cannot have been easy pieces of legal work to do. She is right to say that it is never the fault of the victims and we need to make sure that the response from officialdom is never to disbelieve and never to blame the victim either. She raises an important point about the narrow scope of those civil orders. We will certainly be undertaking to look at those and how they could operate much more efficiently.

**Helen Morgan** (North Shropshire) (LD): On behalf of the Liberal Democrat party I echo colleagues on both sides of the House in praising the bravery of the victims. We recognise the lasting physical, emotional and psychological damage done to them, and our thoughts are with them. The Liberal Democrats endorse all the inquiry's recommendations and call for them to be implemented urgently, but will the Minister commit to act specifically on the long-term Liberal Democrat call, which is a recommendation in the report as well, to sponsor a meaningful public campaign to make children more confident about reporting incidents?

**Grant Shapps:** One thing that has happened since the Savile case and the publicity that my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead brought to this issue by calling the inquiry in the first place is that a lot more people are coming forward, and that is a good thing. Specific pieces of work, including some that I have referenced, are already under way to make sure that children know that those routes to reporting are there, but I am sure there is still more to be done, and I will take a close look at what more can be achieved.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I declare an interest as the chairman of a safeguarding board. As one of the six MPs who harangued the then Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), to set up the inquiry, I absolutely commend the huge amount of work that Alexis Jay and her team have undertaken and the bravery of the survivors who came forward with their testimonies.

I completely agree with all the comments the Home Secretary has just made. The trouble is that they were all included in the Government's first child sexual exploitation strategy, which I published back in 2011. What has changed? Despite the continued call for a change in culture, the problem is getting worse, with criminals using technology to find even more ghastly ways of abusing children.

On two of the recommendations, what does the Secretary of State think the role of a child protection authority would be, and how would it interact with the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre? Does he think it was a good idea to roll CEOP into the National Crime Agency, rather than keep its independence?

The Secretary of State mentioned the need to have a cross-governmental response, so does he agree with the recommendation to create something that many of us

[Tim Loughton]

have wanted for many years—a Cabinet-level Minister for children, looking after that 20% of the population and particularly the most vulnerable children, who are what this report is all about?

**Grant Shapps:** My hon. Friend may not remember this, but we first met when he was shadow Children's Minister, and I and the whole House know of his extraordinary work campaigning on these issues over many years. I have heard what he has to say, and I hope he will forgive me—three or four days into the job—for not having all the answers for him, but I will certainly undertake to write to him with them. I would just say that, although he is right that some of these issues were emerging in 2011, vastly more information and data are now coming forward, particularly as a result of the publicity that the inquiry has brought to this issue.

My hon. Friend asked me some very specific questions about CEOP and about whether there should be a Minister, or even a Cabinet Minister, for children. That is one of the recommendations in the report, and I will respond to it in the House within the report's timelines or even sooner. We all, in a sense, have to be Ministers for children; we should all care about this issue as we look after children in different ways, and the whole of society has that responsibility as well. However, I will certainly come back to my hon. Friend on his inquiries.

**Florence Eshalomi** (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Home Secretary to his post. For anyone who has picked up this report, the findings are very difficult. You do not need to be a parent to be disturbed by some of the testimony. One issue that I have spoken a lot about in the House is young women who are sexually abused and assaulted by criminals as a result of child criminal exploitation. Some of them face the same horrific treatment as some of the victims we are talking about. They are victims and we should believe them, but they are never believed, because they are involved in crime. The Home Secretary referenced the victims Bill, and when it finally comes forward I urge him to look at the issue of child criminal exploitation and of young boys and girls being sexually assaulted by gang members who know they will get away with it because those young people are viewed as criminals.

**Grant Shapps:** The hon. Lady is right, and this plays into the wider issues of gang traffickers as well, because they know that they can be in an exploitative situation and do exploit, in particular, girls but also all children. She refers to the victims Bill, which was published in May in draft format. The whole point of that is for it to have pre-legislative scrutiny. I know that many organisations and many colleagues across the House have been involved in that, which will mean, I think, that we come forward with legislation that is in a better place to tackle many of the issues that she and others in this House have raised.

**Miriam Cates** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and the commitments that he has made to looking at the recommendations of the review. The problem is that child sexual exploitation and abuse are getting worse in this country. In 2020, the Internet Watch Foundation

found 153,000 images of child sexual abuse online and reported a 77% increase in self-generated images of sexual abuse. I welcome his commitment to the Online Safety Bill, but the truth is that it is the proliferation of online pornography, which is increasingly extreme in nature, that is driving up demand for child sexual exploitation. In fact, the word "teen" is one of the most commonly searched terms on PornHub. When will the Government acknowledge that online pornography is an enormous public health issue, child protection issue and criminal justice issue that is driving much of the child sexual exploitation that we see today?

**Grant Shapps:** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend. She mentioned some figures. The ones that really stuck out for me were that, in 2021 alone, global technology companies reported more than 29 million suspected instances of child sexual abuse material on their platforms. To be clear, that is just social media platforms; that is not the whole of the internet. There are 85 million files, including images of videos of child sexual abuse. She is absolutely right about the scale of the problem. As she will know, the Online Safety Bill contains clauses to deal with some of this. I think she is referencing two parts of this: the strictly illegal aspects—the Home Office clauses; and the wider issues that the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is taking forward in the Bill. That Bill is active and in front of the House, and she is right to highlight the necessity of its completing its passage.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): This is the most disturbing of reports—probably one of the most disturbing things that any Member could read. We know that 80,000 children are in care; that is due to increase by 25% over the next decade without intervention. We know, too, that children in the care sector are at greater risk of child sexual exploitation. How will the Secretary of State be working with the independent review on children's services in the care setting? Moreover, will he work with the Education Secretary to bring an immediate end to the use of unregulated care settings?

**Grant Shapps:** I can tell the hon. Lady that we are setting up a cross-Government group to specifically work on the issues that she has raised, and that will include my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): I welcome the statement from the new Home Secretary and also welcome him to his place. I also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) on starting this process in the first place. Child sexual abuse is not new; it has been going on since time immemorial. Young children are abused in families, in institutions by gangs, and by paedophiles who groom them online and then abuse them. Those of us who have had a long political career have witnessed some of the inquiries that have gone on, and we know the sad reality is that the people who do such things are thoroughly evil and need to be brought to justice. Although it is good news that more people are coming forward to report historical child sexual abuse, we need to ensure that those currently experiencing it are enabled to report what is going on and are believed, and that action is taken. Will my right hon. Friend undertake to do that as a matter of utmost priority?

**Grant Shapps:** Absolutely, I will undertake to do that as a matter of priority. The National Crime Agency, GCHQ and a whole network of undercover officers and others work constantly on tackling organised exploitative crime through a programme. One thing that has struck me in my first few days in this office is the number of warrants that I have to sign off dealing with gangs who are exploiting children. My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the scale of the issue, and our determination to stamp it out and work with our partners in enforcement agencies knows no bounds.

**Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab):** As one of the Members representing a part of the London Borough of Lambeth, with my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi) sitting next to me, I pay tribute to all the victims and survivors of abuse suffered by children and young people in the care of Lambeth Council. It is a shameful period in the history of our borough. I also pay tribute to those whose lives were cut short as a result of the harm and trauma they suffered, and who are not here to see and read the vindication of their experiences as set out in the final ICSA report. It is a responsibility of us all to ensure that such shame can never again come to our communities, but we delude ourselves if we tell each other that children are safe everywhere in the UK today. We face a situation where 16 and 17-year-olds are routinely placed in unregulated accommodation, putting them at risk of abuse and exploitation; 222 vulnerable asylum-seeking children have gone missing from Home Office-procured accommodation and half of all local authority children's services departments are currently rated inadequate or requiring improvement, so they cannot possibly be doing the best job of protecting the children in their care. What urgent work will the Home Secretary be doing on a cross-departmental basis to ensure that horrors such as those exposed by this report can never happen again?

**Grant Shapps:** I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for calling out what has happened in Lambeth and elsewhere; I have nothing to add to her words where that is concerned. A number of hon. Members have raised issues concerning unaccompanied children, particularly those seeking asylum. The accommodation care means that they should be moved within 15 days, but I think that needs to be done quicker, if at all possible. We have also set up a programme of paying local authorities, increasing placement offers to councils by £6,000 to accommodate every child. She asks about cross-Government work—I should possibly add cross-party work—and that is under way, led by my the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Mims Davies). I will be taking a personal interest in the matter all the way through and convening meetings with other Secretaries of State to tackle the problem from every possible angle.

**David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con):** In the 20 years that I led on child protection work in local government, we saw repeated attempts to restructure the systems in place for child protection. However, a common thread that seemed to run through every example of failure was a lack of really good information-sharing. Even today, while councils are the lead agencies on child protection, they are reliant on other organisations—the police, the NHS, especially schools and sometimes, in the case of asylum-seeking children,

Border Force—to bring evidence to their attention so that early intervention can take place. Will my right hon. Friend give some consideration to making some of those safeguarding partners statutory partners in the safeguarding process, so that they can be held accountable for their actions in the same way that local authorities, police and the national health service are?

**Grant Shapps:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. This morning, I was at Hertfordshire Constabulary, looking at the impressive database it has for when people are booked into custody cells. I was surprised to learn on questioning, however, that if somebody had been brought in because they were suspected of abusing somebody, including a child, that data is not necessarily or automatically shared by all 43 forces across the country. That is just within the police, let alone the crossover he mentions with other statutory bodies, local authorities, care organisations and others. The big thing that strikes me in my first few days in this job is that working together with those statutory partners to bring the information together, so that it can be flagged up as and where necessary, must be an important part of the solution. We live in the 21st century and that should be possible to do. I take his comments on board and promise that I will be spending a considerable amount of time looking at how we can improve the situation.

**Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab):** I, too, welcome the Home Secretary to his place, but I share the frustrations of colleagues across the House. The Online Safety Bill has been delayed yet again due to the chaos at the heart of this Government—five years we have been waiting for that legislation. The victims Bill, which has been promised since 2015 and has appeared in four Queen's Speeches, still has not been brought forward. The child abuse strategy was published 18 months ago, as the Home Secretary said, but which of its commitments have been implemented? The shadow Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), stated that warm words are no longer enough; we need action, so what direct action will the Home Secretary take to stop the paralysis of government?

**Grant Shapps:** I am not sure that question was put quite in the spirit of the cross-party way that we are trying to approach this issue. I set out in quite some detail a number of things that have already happened. The hon. Lady refers to the Government's tackling child sexual abuse strategy, which was published last January. A number of the actions have already been undertaken, including initiatives on awareness-raising campaigns, which has already been mentioned; the capability of frontline professionals; identifying and responding to sexual abuse; better education for professionals; protecting people from peer-on-peer abuse and harm; the National Crime Agency, which I have already met and discussed the issue with, and GCHQ using new technologies; and strengthening police power—not, I should say, something that the Labour party has always voted for. We are already legislating with the Online Safety Bill, and the victims Bill is already out in draft. I have to say that we are moving pretty fast considering that the full report only came out on Thursday.

**Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con):** Child sexual abuse has plagued Rotherham for decades. The Alexis Jay report found that over 1,500 girls in my constituency

[*Alexander Stafford*]

and across Rotherham were raped in a period of 10 to 15 years. One of the reasons why so many children were victims of these paedophiles and evil people was that the authorities turned a blind eye and did not report what they saw, so I welcome the IICSA report's recommendation of mandatory reporting of crimes. Will the Home Secretary tell us when that law will be introduced and what sorts of punishments will be given out to those who enable paedophiles by ignoring victims?

**Grant Shapps:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I think I am right in saying that it was Professor Jay who carried out the work on the report on Rotherham. She was very clear that things such as cultural sensitivities and political sensitivities were all too often barriers to dealing properly with systemic sexual abuse. My hon. Friend asks specifically about things such as mandatory reporting. As I mentioned, I will come back to that within the time guideline in the report, or earlier if I can.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I welcome the Secretary of State to his place and wish him well. I commend the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) for her initiative, and I thank all those who made contributions and statements to the independent inquiry. One in six girls and one in 20 boys suffers sexual abuse before they reach the age of 16. I would have assumed that that statistic was for a third-world country, but unfortunately it is not; I was shocked to discover that it describes the country we live in—this nation. It makes my heart ache in my chest to think of the robbery of innocence, which we have all referred to. How do we start to address that horrific fact? What steps will the Secretary of State take to address it in every corner of the United Kingdom, along with all the devolved Administrations?

**Grant Shapps:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about the scale of the problem, which may surprise people who have not been involved in the subject before when they read the report. Some 7.5% of adults in England and Wales are estimated to have been sexually abused before they were 16—approximately 5% of boys and 15% of girls. That equates to probably over 3 million people in this country. To answer the hon. Gentleman's specific question, I do not think that there is one single thing that can be done to solve that. As I mentioned, the problem of sexual abuse happens in so many different settings, so we have to act simultaneously on all fronts. This seven-year report—brilliantly commissioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead,

as many colleagues have mentioned—is just the start. We now need to make sure that we enact all the recommendations.

**Mrs Flick Drummond** (Meon Valley) (Con): The report says that the internet is magnifying child sexual abuse and grooming, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Miriam Cates) said, has massively increased since the inquiry began under my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May). Can my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary assure me that the Online Safety Bill is strong and unequivocal, and will be put into law as soon as possible? It does seem to be taking an inordinate amount of time for it to go through both Houses.

**Grant Shapps:** I will certainly be working closely with the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to make sure that happens. My hon. Friend is right about the scale of it, but we should not lose sight of the work that our agencies are doing—for example, the National Crime Agency estimates that it makes 800 arrests or voluntary attendances and carries out 1,000 safeguards each month because of industry reporting. I appreciate that that is not enough—we need to ensure that every case is being reported—but the agencies are working and will have increased the amount of work being done over the period that the report has been under way. She is absolutely right about the need to speed up the Bill.

**Robbie Moore** (Keighley) (Con): I, too, thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) for getting the inquiry under way. Its recommendations will be rightly considered by the Government in the coming months, but we must not forget the victims and their families, who are at the report's heart. Not long ago, the previous Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel), came to Keighley to meet victims and survivors, because unfortunately, child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation have haunted our community in Keighley and across the Bradford district for far too long. As we look at the recommendations, does the Home Secretary agree that the voices of victims and survivors should be at the heart of that, so we do not forget that those voices are important?

**Grant Shapps:** Absolutely, yes. On behalf of the 7,300 victims and survivors who came forward in the course of the report, we owe them a duty to do exactly what my hon. Friend has suggested.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I thank the Home Secretary for his statement.

## Point of Order

5.52 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. For clarity—it is important for us to have the right timings—the shorter version of the agenda for today refers to a Westminster Hall debate on human rights legislation reform starting at 6 pm, but in the other version for the same day, it says that the debate starts at 6.30 pm. Can she tell us which is right?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** It is at 6 o'clock.

## Out-of-Turn Supplementary Estimates 2022-23

*[Relevant Documents: Written evidence to the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee: Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy 2022-23 Out of Turn Estimate Memorandum and Tables, reported to the House on 20 October 2022; Written evidence to the Treasury Committee, HM Treasury 2022-23 Out of Turn Estimate Memorandum and Tables, reported to the House on 19 October 2022.]*

5.53 pm

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Andrew Griffith):** I beg to move,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2023—

(1) for expenditure by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy:

- (a) further resources, not exceeding £60,176,000,000, be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 794 of Session 2022-23, and
- (b) a further sum, not exceeding £60,176,000,000, be granted to His Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament; and

(2) for expenditure by HM Treasury:

- (a) further resources, not exceeding £11,175,000,000, be authorised for use for capital purposes as set out in HC 794 of Session 2022-23, and
- (b) a further sum, not exceeding £11,175,000,000, be granted to His Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.

This motion provides for an out-of-turn supplementary estimate for the urgent expenditure of two Departments—the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and His Majesty's Treasury. The supplementary estimate provides the resources and cash to allow the Government to help to reduce energy bill rises this winter. It also provides capital funding for the Bank of England in support of its operations as a result of a long-standing indemnity.

I will briefly explain what the two departmental requests cover. First, the House is well aware of the cost of living increases caused by Putin's war in Ukraine and the consequential impact on fuel bills from Europe's reliance on Russian gas. Families were worried about energy bills, which some independent forecasts said could be £6,000 a year. This is a compassionate Conservative Government who will always be on the side of the most vulnerable, which is why we acted quickly and decisively to address concerns about paying for heating this winter. We did that through the establishment of the energy price guarantee scheme to cap the unit price that consumers pay for electricity and gas. That means that a household consuming the average amount of energy will pay no more than the equivalent of £2,500 a year. Many, of course, will pay far less.

In addition, the Government have protected businesses with the energy bill relief scheme. Those combined measures will provide households and businesses with confidence and certainty this winter, up to the end of March next year. It was right to act fast and to prioritise a simple option that ensures that nobody is left out.

**Munira Wilson** (Twickenham) (LD): The second package for businesses also extends to public services. Two primary schools in my constituency have been in touch, because their energy bills have gone up fivefold from £30,000 to £150,000 a year. Undoubtedly, the package put forward will help them a bit, but I am getting feedback from schools that six months is not enough to plan ahead, particularly when their budgets for next year have already been set. They are having to make terribly difficult decisions about laying off teaching assistants and cutting school trips and extracurricular activities. Will the Minister consider at least a year-long package of support for schools and other public services?

**Andrew Griffith:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right that the package extends to not just businesses but schools, hospitals, the public sector and charities—the important third sector. She articulates well the concern of her local schools; of course, it is important to have as much time and certainty as possible to plan. I am sure that the Minister for Climate, who is next to me, and the Secretary of State for Education will have heard her points.

The House will note that both these energy schemes are expensive. Indeed, they were the largest single element of the plans to which the gilt market reacted in previous weeks. Rather than an indefinite and open-ended liability, therefore, the Government will launch a Treasury-led review on how to support households and businesses after April 2023.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): Can the Minister give the House some idea of how sensitive the putative cost of £60 billion until March is to the actual prices of gas and electricity? Is there a possibility that, with lower prices, it might be considerably less?

**Andrew Griffith:** I defer to my right hon. Friend on all matters economic, but he is absolutely right that the Government had to act and come forward with an estimate, and that global gas and energy prices are volatile. We are proceeding on the basis of a particular set of assumptions, but if those things change, of course we will return to the House with an update.

The second departmental request relates to capital funding for the Bank of England. Since 2009, the asset purchase facility, a subsidiary entity of the Bank of England, has been a policy tool of the independent Monetary Policy Committee. The APF supported the MPC's objective of stimulating the economy to try to keep inflation at its 2% target. By far the largest element of the APF was so-called quantitative easing, under which the Bank of England has purchased to date a total of £856 billion-worth of gilts and corporate bonds. The Treasury rightly indemnifies the APF and the Bank against any losses from those authorised operations.

In 2012, the Bank and the Treasury agreed that it would be prudent for cash management purposes that any excess cash in the APF would be transferred to HMT at the end of each quarter and that if there were a deficit, the cash would be transferred in the other direction. To date, the APF has regularly transferred cash to the Treasury. In February, however, the MPC announced that it would start unwinding QE, initially by not reinvesting redemption proceeds. Further, on 21 September, the MPC announced its decision to unwind £80 billion of

its stock of gilts acquired under QE over a 12-month period, including through a programme of active gilts sales that are due to start soon.

Accompanied by the recent rise in the Bank rate, that means that the overall net position has altered from one of receiving cash over the past 10 years to having to pay out under the indemnity. The outflows requested today are therefore the counterpart of previous receipts in the life cycle of the scheme. The eventual size of the net payments to or from His Majesty's Treasury should not be used as a measure of the success of asset purchases or of the impact of the schemes on the public purse as a whole. The schemes should instead be judged by the degree to which they meet their objectives for monetary policy and financial stability. I should point out to the House that the value of these payments is difficult to predict. Future market prices and the Bank rate will impact on the amounts required, and the Bank of England MPC decision on sales may itself change over time. Any adjustment in the payments, either up or down, will be reflected in the Treasury's usual requests in future main or supplementary estimates in the normal way.

Given all that, this is an important motion for the continuation of Government business, and I commend it to the House.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I call the shadow Minister.

6 pm

**James Murray** (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op): Today's debate is unusual in terms of parliamentary process. The last time that supplementary estimates were considered out of turn was in October 2008, when an estimate was presented to give the Treasury funding to meet costs during the financial crisis. This is no small matter. These out-of-turn estimates will increase overall spending by £71.4 billion, and I would like to briefly raise certain points on behalf of the Opposition so that they are put on record and the Minister has a chance to respond.

First, the largest component of these estimates is the £60 billion that the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy is seeking through its resource annually managed expenditure budget. This funding is due to be split almost equally on implementing a per unit price cap for domestic energy users and a per unit price cap for non-domestic energy users. The Opposition have been calling on the Government since August to implement an energy price freeze, so we are glad that support for businesses and families with energy bills is finally being implemented.

Of course, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) set out a week ago, the passage of this energy support package through Parliament has been typical of the Tories' hallmark chaos. During the debate on the legislation for this energy support, he pointed out that the now outgoing Prime Minister had gone

“on and on about her decisive action of a two-year guarantee”, and he reminded us that she had

“even derided the Opposition's approach of a six-month freeze”.—  
[*Official Report*, 17 October 2022; Vol. 720, c. 441.]

That was before U-turning and following our lead by implementing a six-month package. However, despite the U-turns, the Government's approach differs in crucial



respects from ours. Our plan was for a real freeze, whereas the Government's approach still sees a rise, and of course the Government have refused to use a windfall tax on oil and gas producers' excess profits to help fund this financial support.

Moving on, the second component of these estimates comprises just over £11 billion of capital annually managed expenditure to fund payments to the Bank of England's asset purchase facility under the terms of its indemnity by the Treasury, as the Minister set out. This part of the debate is particularly laden with financial terminology, but I will make my point to the Minister as simply as I can. The Bank of England has used quantitative easing to support the economy through lending to households and businesses. This has been carried out by buying Government bonds or other financial assets from private investors through the vehicle known as the asset purchase facility. The asset purchase facility borrows the money to buy these bonds from the Bank and pays the Bank rate—the headline rate set by the Monetary Policy Committee—on that loan. It can therefore make profits or losses, as we have heard, depending on the difference between the Bank rate and the return on the assets it holds.

The Treasury has indemnified the asset purchase facility against any losses it incurs, and of course it receives any running profits. A crucial determinant of whether the Treasury—the public purse—receives profits or losses is therefore the Bank rate. No one is denying that, since the scheme's inception, it has been expected that, after receiving profits during years of the Bank rate being set low, at some point the Treasury would need to pay out on its indemnity of losses as, for instance, the Bank rate was expected to rise. However, if people thought the public finances were likely to pay for those losses in a relatively stable and orderly fashion, it seems extremely unlikely that the Government would have needed to make the payment by way of an out-of-turn estimate—the first such emergency payment in 14 years.

As the House of Commons Library put it in its briefing, published on Friday, the speed and scale of this cash flow appears to have been unexpected. In the briefing, the House of Commons Library acknowledged that it has been known for a long time that the Treasury would eventually need to make cash payments to the asset purchase facility, but:

“Despite that, the scale and speed of the impact leading to cash flowing from HM Treasury to APF may have been unexpected by HM Treasury, leading to this out-of-turn Estimate. It is also not clear how much of the impact may have been caused by events after the publication of the Main Estimate, for instance the hit to the gilt markets after the publication of the Government's Growth Plan in September 2022.”

The implication is very clear: this payment to the Bank of England is being made urgently and unexpectedly—the first such out-of-turn payment in 14 years—and it comes straight after the kamikaze mini-Budget. What we are seeing is yet more of the damage done by the Conservatives. The £11 billion bill before us today is a brutal reminder that the Tories created this economic crisis and that working people are paying the price.

6.5 pm

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): I am glad the Minister agreed that the £60 billion for the energy scheme will of course adjust according to market prices,

and let us hope that the current downward trend in some of the gas prices is continued. We need a mild winter and other bits of good fortune, otherwise we could be back facing even bigger bills. I am sure we are all appreciative of the fact that the new Chancellor wishes to review the scheme after March, because this is a very expensive scheme and there may be better ways of doing it to contain the expenditure.

I hope, for example, that consideration will be given, where price controls are still being offered to consumers, to limiting the amount of subsidised fuel any household can buy to a reasonable amount for a normal household, so that those who are in richer households and making much bigger demands on the fuel system would pay for the additional fuel they need—if they are lucky enough to have a heated swimming pool, or whatever it is—and would pay the full price on the extra fuel that such luxuries require. That is offered as a hopeful idea of how one can start to grapple with the very high costs of this scheme without in any way undermining the crucial guarantee to all those who are struggling with their bills already and want this kind of security.

I also have some concerns about the Bank of England estimate. It is quite true that, from Chancellor Darling onwards, quantitative easing decisions have always been jointly taken by Chancellors of the Exchequer and Governors of the Bank of England. One of the main reasons why they have always been joint decisions is that the Bank of England always understandably insisted on a complete capital guarantee against losses on the bonds, because it was envisaging buying so many bonds that they became very big for the Bank of England balance sheet, and it wanted to be reassured that the Treasury and taxpayers stood behind the system in case of losses.

To the extent that this supplementary estimate is to make good losses on bonds that the Bank of England is selling, I have these questions. First, why does the Bank of England think it must sell bonds at this juncture, when the United Kingdom bond market, the American bond market and lots of other bond markets around the world are particularly depressed by the need for a counter-inflation strategy based on high interest rates? We are crystallising a loss that, as I understand it, the Treasury then has to pay for, whereas if we have an unrealised loss, no payments are of course needed until eventual redemption, and very often the redemption value of the bond is considerably higher than today's price in the market. I cannot quite understand why the Bank needs to sell these bonds now, and as this has always been a joint policy in which Chancellors have been very heavily involved and have heard Bank of England advice—Chancellors had to sign it off because the taxpayer is at risk, not the Bank of England itself—I hope this will be carefully re-examined.

To those who say that we do need to be selling bonds as well as putting up interest rates to curb inflation, I would say they should be careful not to overdo it. If the Bank really does feel it has to tighten even more, it can do so by a further rise in interest rates; it does not have to do so by selling bonds. Very directly, as we see tonight, the sale of these bonds can realise a loss and then can trigger a cash requirement on taxpayers and the Treasury at an extremely bad time for such a cash requirement. I think all of us have much better priorities than paying for bonds that are underwater, when we see

[John Redwood]

the current state of the economy and the need to route more money to individuals and companies in the right ways, to see off a longer and deeper downturn and provide some balance in the public accounts. I ask the Minister and Chancellor to think again, and to talk again to the Governor of the Bank of England about their joint responsibility. They must ask whether this is really the right time to be crystalising losses, resulting in unspecified amounts of money that will have to be paid.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I call the SNP spokesperson, Alison Thewliss.

6.10 pm

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): It is odd to be agreeing on the spending of such phenomenal amounts of money in a near-empty Chamber. It would perhaps be sensible for the House to scrutinise such matters slightly more than this, but I am sure that those of us here will do our best.

These are incredibly significant changes compared with the main estimates passed by this House just in July, and the sums of money going to the energy support package and the asset purchase facility are eye-watering. I would be interested to hear from the Minister about the relationship between the money for the asset purchase facility, and the disastrous impact of the mini-Budget, because it strikes me that all this is coming at the worst possible time. Ordinary taxpayers have been left paying the price for the UK Government's reckless mini-Budget, with Government bonds incurring a loss for the first time since 2009. The Office for National Statistics projected the loss to taxpayers just last month at £156 million, and even with the changes that the UK Government have made since the mini-Budget and its reversal, there has been significant damage to the UK's fiscal outlook.

What is the relationship between the intervention that the Bank of England had to make during the past couple of weeks and the interventions being paid for in these estimates? Last week, in a letter to MPs on the Treasury Committee, the Bank of England's Deputy Governor for Financial Stability noted:

"There has been a particular increase in volatility in the UK markets... The five largest daily moves in the 30-year inflation-linked gilt, in data that dates back to 2000, have all been since the 23 September".

That was, of course, the day of the mini-Budget, which has had a significant and long-lasting impact on the credibility of the UK Government and their ability to manage the economy. What further discussions have Ministers had with the Bank of England? The Bank was clear to the Treasury Committee that it did not have a full briefing ahead of the mini-Budget, and it told the Committee:

"Had they asked us what the market reaction would be, we would have interacted with them."

Such interaction by the Government with experts who would have told them that their decisions were not particularly wise seems to be lacking. If there is anything to be said for the new Government, perhaps they will consult experts and listen to them more than those who are leaving the Government fairly soon.

On the energy support package, I have a lot of concern for my constituents—both businesses and individuals—come April. People who run businesses have been in touch with me. They want to know what will happen with the business support scheme come April, because as yet there has been no clarity on that from the UK Government. There has also been little clarity about what will happen for individuals. This had been talked about as a two-year support package, which gave people a sense of relief, and a sense that even if prices are higher, at least they know they will be slightly more secure. The measures that have been introduced have ripped up that guarantee entirely, and people are incredibly worried about it.

Let me give an example from my Friday surgery at Toryglen community base. Toryglen is one of the community hubs that we all depend on in our constituencies. It runs various events, is a hub for many different things, and has a nursery as part of its building. Its gas bill has gone from £9,700 a year to £62,273.36—*[Interruption.]* I see the Minister raising his eyebrows at that, but that is the increase. There is no way that any organisation, whether a company or a charitable organisation such as Toryglen community base, can afford that. I implore Ministers to listen to people in those circumstances, because they have to sign those contracts. If they do not, it will cost them more than the £62,000 they have been quoted. There is no alternative for them, and they do not know what will happen come April. It is irresponsible for Ministers not to give clarity to organisations in such circumstances.

The energy provider helpfully gave Toryglen community base a printout, which it passed on to me, stating that the bill is a 539% increase. Nobody can meet that. Businesses will fold and charities will not be able to provide the services that we all depend on, and I want to know the UK Government's answer to that point. Toryglen community base was also given a quote for the following year, 2024, of £50,287.59. It is not as if prices are falling to any significant extent, and even if it survives the coming year, the bill quoted for the year afterwards is still huge, yet the energy price guarantee for businesses finishes in April. The Minister must explain what will happen to such businesses. We appreciate the cost of measures such as these, which we see in these estimates, but there will be a cost to society more broadly if all those businesses fold, charities cease to exist, and ordinary people in their homes cannot afford to put on the heating, turn on the lights and use the power on which they depend.

Thought must be given to customers who are off the gas grid and rely on heating oil. It costs more than £1,000 to fill an oil tank, often with a £500 minimum order requirement. The UK Government's £100 of support is nowhere near adequate. Families cannot afford this. In Scotland nearly 130,000 homes rely on alternative fuels such as oil for heating their homes, and they need to know what will be coming later in the year and have certainty so that they can fill up their tanks. People are putting things on credit cards and getting into more and more debt, because they cannot afford this. There must also be some further indication about how vulnerable non-domestic customers will be identified. Again, there is little clarity on that from the UK Government. I hope there will be more, but there is not as things stand.

The eye-watering sums of money that we are talking about sound far away from people who just need an extra couple of hundred pounds to fill up a fuel tank or pay their bills. We should not, however, forget about the very real impact on businesses, charities and individuals of these huge sums of money, and of the money that we will be paying back for years because of the shambolic way the UK Government dealt with this issue. People have not voted for the chaos that there will be for many years to come or the prospect of further austerity as a result of the UK Government's poor choices, and should not be expected to pay for it. In particular, people in Scotland are facing a higher toll in many ways, due to the cost of fuel in rural areas and unfair grid charging in Scotland. Again, the UK Government have not done anything to deal with that, and they have not decoupled the price of gas from the price of renewables. These are not choices that Scotland has made. Scotland would make different choices if we were independent, and we would ensure that nobody in Scotland went to bed cold and hungry.

6.18 pm

**The Minister for Climate (Graham Stuart):** I thank all Members who have spoken in this wide-ranging debate. The hon. Member for Ealing North (James Murray) spoke for His Majesty's Opposition, and I say to him that the decision on the timing of this provision was made by the Monetary Policy Committee as part of the Bank of England. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood) made, as usual, the most perspicacious observations, not least about the importance of grappling with the high cost to the public purse of these interventions. As the Financial Secretary to the Treasury said, he was right to say that this very much depends on prices, and one hopes that we will see the costs coming in lower than in the estimate before the House.

The hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) talked about the impact of prices on businesses and other organisations in her constituency. She is right that these are significant prices. They are the result of global prices. She will be aware that the EU is in a similar position and is looking at how best to break the link between gas prices and electricity prices. She will doubtless support the elements of the Energy Prices Bill that look to decouple those prices and do everything they can to hold prices down.

The hon. Lady will also observe that the world-leading contracts for difference scheme brought in by the Government and now widely mimicked by others has provided the capital certainty to make renewables in this country investible, thus leading to the transformation of our offshore wind. Renewables have gone from, I think, a pitiful 6.8% of electricity provision when Labour left power in 2010 to more than 40% today. Contracts for difference, brought forward by the Government, have not only contributed to that, but right now we are seeing tens of millions of pounds being paid back into the pot because of their structure, thus reducing costs that businesses and consumers would otherwise see.

**Alison Thewliss:** I appreciate the points that the Minister is making about contracts for difference, but does he not agree that the grid charging regime penalises generators of offshore and onshore wind in Scotland, making it more expensive for them to generate electricity than a power station in the south-east of England?

**Graham Stuart:** Grid charges need to reflect the costs involved. As the hon. Lady will be aware, we are reviewing and looking at how best to deal with the grid going forward, because the grid is fundamental to everything we want to do in this space. There is room for change, but I am not sure that I necessarily agree with her. I will wait for others more expert than me to come forward with recommendations for ministerial decision on how best to structure that. Removing price signals from the system would not be beneficial. We need price signals in there; that is right and proper.

The hon. Lady mentioned heating oil. I represent a rural constituency with many consumers on heating oil. The Government looked carefully and shared information showing that from September 2021 to September 2022, heating oil costs increased by average of about 147%. We also looked at what has happened to gas prices after the effect of the EPG, and they have increased by 130%. That is why the £100 covers that. The numbers are there—we can see what the average family spends and what the increase has been, so we can make the comparison.

Given the party that the hon. Lady represents, I understand that she will always say that we should do more. That is one thing, but what she cannot say—or she should not, and I appeal to her not to do so—is that it is not fair between those on the gas grid and those on heating oil. Some might want to do more overall, but I believe, and I think our numbers show, that we are creating something equitable between the two. It is important that people who are often in isolated rural areas and can feel hard done by are not told that they are being unfairly treated compared with others. They are not. Even if it suits a political purpose, it is important that politicians do not make such allegations unless there is a basis for them, because then they would be not serving those people well but misleading them. I know that she in particular would never want to do that.

Energy is an essential and unavoidable expense for households and businesses. The economic fallout from the pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine has led to unprecedented rises in energy prices. The Government will provide crucial support to families and businesses with their energy costs over the winter period.

**Munira Wilson** *rose*—

**Graham Stuart:** I will give way to the hon. Lady.

**Munira Wilson:** I thank the Minister for giving way. I have finally won—he would not give way last week when I had an amendment to discuss on communal heating networks.

The Minister made a strong political point about fairness. Last week, I said that people on communal heating networks living in particular in blocks of flats in my constituency and across London and the country have faced heating price rises of more than 500%, yet the support package they were offered was not equivalent to that of other households, so there was a fundamental unfairness. Everybody is subject to the six-month review, so will the Minister guarantee from the Dispatch Box that when the Government review the package for other households, communal heat networks will get the equivalent support that they were promised all along? They were offered only six months.

**Graham Stuart:** I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. It is great that she mentions particular difficult cases with such passion. She will recognise that moving at speed to try to create something comparable for everyone, as we did, is challenging and complex. The purpose of the review is absolutely to look across the piece. We will continue to monitor the prices that people have to put up with, whether they are off grid or on communal heating networks, and we will also look to ensure that any future intervention is done in a way that is as fair and well informed as possible.

Through the energy price guarantee scheme, we are capping the price that consumers will pay for their electricity and gas bills, reducing the average household bill by about a third this winter and saving a typical household about £700. The scheme will run from October to March 2023. That is in addition to the £400 energy discount provided by the Government for all households through the energy bills support scheme. Support will be provided to non-domestic energy customers including businesses, charities, schools and hospitals through the energy bill relief scheme. That will provide a discount on non-domestic energy bills to protect against the significantly inflated wholesale gas and electricity prices that have affected non-domestic customers. That scheme will operate from October to March 2023 and provide an equivalent level of support to the domestic scheme.

The schemes, taken together, will provide essential support to families and businesses to see them through the winter. Looking beyond April, the Government cannot continue to be exposed to the volatility of wholesale gas and electricity prices. That would be unsustainable for both the taxpayer and the public finances. That is why the Government are committed to reviewing both the energy price guarantee scheme and the energy bill relief scheme to consider how we may support households and businesses over the longer term from April 2023.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2023—

(1) for expenditure by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy:

- (a) further resources, not exceeding £60,176,000,000, be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 794 of Session 2022-23, and
- (b) a further sum, not exceeding £60,176,000,000, be granted to His Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament; and

(2) for expenditure by HM Treasury:

- (a) further resources, not exceeding £11,175,000,000, be authorised for use for capital purposes as set out in HC 794 of Session 2022-23, and
- (b) a further sum, not exceeding £11,175,000,000, be granted to His Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.

*Ordered,* That a Bill be brought in upon the foregoing Resolution relating to Out-of-Turn Supplementary Estimates, 2022-23;

That the Chairman of Ways and Means, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Edward Argar, Andrew Griffith, Richard Fuller and Felicity Buchan bring in the Bill.

#### SUPPLY AND APPROPRIATION (ADJUSTMENTS) BILL

*Presentation and First Reading, and remaining stages*

Andrew Griffith accordingly presented a Bill to authorise the use of resources for the year ending with 31 March 2023; to authorise the issue of sums out of the Consolidated Fund for that year; and to appropriate the supply authorised by this Act for that year.

*Bill read the First time; to be printed (Bill 170).*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Order, 19 October, and Standing Order No. 56),* That the Bill be now read a Second time.

*Question agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a Second time.*

*Question put forthwith,* That the Bill be now read the Third time.

*Question agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.*

#### STAMP DUTY LAND TAX (REDUCTION): BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

*Ordered,*

That the following provisions shall apply to the proceedings on the Motion for Resolution ‘Stamp duty land tax (reduction)’ and to proceedings on any Bill brought in upon the Resolution:

##### *Timetable*

(1)(a) Proceedings on the Motion for Resolution ‘Stamp duty land tax (reduction)’, proceedings on presentation and first reading of any Bill brought in upon the Resolution, proceedings on Second Reading and in Committee of the whole House, any proceedings on Consideration and proceedings on Third Reading shall be taken in two days in accordance with this Order.

(b) Proceedings on the Motion for the Resolution and proceedings on Second Reading shall be taken at today’s sitting and shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.

(c) Proceedings in Committee of the whole House, any proceedings on Consideration and proceedings on Third Reading shall be taken on the second day and shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion two hours after the commencement of proceedings in Committee of the whole House.

(d) This paragraph shall have effect notwithstanding the practice of the House as to the intervals between stages of a Bill brought in upon Ways and Means Resolutions.

##### *Timing of proceedings and Questions to be put*

(2) When the proceedings on the Motion for the Resolution have been concluded and the Bill has been read the first time and ordered to be printed, the Order for the Second Reading of the Bill shall be read.

(3)(a) When the Bill has been read a second time it shall, despite Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of bills not subject to a programme order), stand committed to a Committee of the whole House without any Question being put.

(b) When the Order of the Day is read for the House to resolve itself into a Committee on the Bill, the Speaker shall leave the chair without putting any Question and the House shall resolve itself into a Committee forthwith, whether or not notice of an Instruction has been given.

(4)(a) On the conclusion of proceedings in Committee of the whole House, the Chair shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question.

- (b) If the Bill is reported with amendments, the House shall proceed to consider the Bill as amended without any Question being put.

(5) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph (1), the Chair or Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions in the same order as they would fall to be put if this Order did not apply:

- (a) any Question already proposed from the chair;
- (b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed;
- (c) the Question on any amendment, new Clause or new Schedule selected by the Chair or Speaker for separate decision;
- (d) the Question on any amendment moved or Motion made by a Minister of the Crown;
- (e) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded; and shall not put any other questions, other than the question on any motion described in paragraph (12)(a) of this Order.

(6) On a Motion made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chair or Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(7) If two or more Questions would fall to be put under paragraph (5)(d) on successive amendments moved or Motions made by a Minister of the Crown, the Chair or Speaker shall instead put a single Question in relation to those amendments or Motions.

(8) If two or more Questions would fall to be put under paragraph (5)(e) in relation to successive provisions of the Bill, the Chair shall instead put a single Question in relation to those provisions, except that the Question shall be put separately on any Clause or Schedule to the Bill which a Minister of the Crown has signified an intention to leave out.

#### *Other proceedings*

(9) Provision may be made for the taking and bringing to a conclusion of any other proceedings on the Bill.

#### *Miscellaneous*

(10) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to any proceedings to which this Order applies.

(11) Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee) shall not apply in relation to any proceedings to which this Order applies.

(12)(a) No Motion shall be made, except by a Minister of the Crown, to alter the order in which any proceedings on the Motion for the Resolution or the Bill are taken, to recommit the Bill or to vary or supplement the provisions of this Order.

- (b) No notice shall be required of such a Motion.
- (c) Such a motion may be considered forthwith without any Question being put; and any proceedings interrupted for that purpose shall be suspended accordingly.
- (d) The Question on such a Motion shall be put forthwith; and any proceedings suspended under sub-paragraph (c) shall thereupon be resumed.
- (e) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on such a Motion.

(13)(a) No dilatory Motion shall be made in relation to proceedings to which this Order applies except by a Minister of the Crown.

- (b) The Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

(14)(a) The start of any debate under Standing Order No. 24 (Emergency debates) to be held on a day on which the Bill has been set down to be taken as an Order of the Day shall be postponed until the conclusion of any proceedings on that day to which this Order applies.

- (b) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply in respect of any such debate.

(15) Proceedings to which this Order applies shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(16)(a) Any private business which has been set down for consideration at a time falling after the commencement of proceedings on this Order or on the Bill on a day on which the Bill has been set down to be taken as an Order of the Day shall, instead of being considered as provided by Standing Orders or by any Order of the House, be considered at the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill on that day.

- (b) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to the private business so far as necessary for the purpose of securing that the business may be considered for a period of three hours.—  
(*Richard Fuller.*)

# Ways and Means

## Stamp Duty Land Tax (Reduction)

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I inform the House that I have selected amendment (a) in the name of Tim Farron.

6.29 pm

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Richard Fuller):** I beg to move,

That—

(1) Part 4 of the Finance Act 2003 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 55(1B) (amount of stamp duty land tax chargeable: general), for Table A substitute—

“TABLE A: RESIDENTIAL

<i>Part of relevant consideration</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
So much as does not exceed £250,000	0%
So much as exceeds £250,000 but does not exceed £925,000	5%
So much as exceeds £925,000 but does not exceed £1,500,000	10%
The remainder (if any)	12%”

(3) In Schedule 4ZA (higher rates of stamp duty land tax for additional dwellings etc), for the Table A in section 55(1B) mentioned in paragraph 1(2) substitute—

“TABLE A: RESIDENTIAL

<i>Part of relevant consideration</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
So much as does not exceed £250,000	3%
So much as exceeds £250,000 but does not exceed £925,000	8%
So much as exceeds £925,000 but does not exceed £1,500,000	13%
The remainder (if any)	15%”

(4) In Schedule 5 (amount of SDLT chargeable in respect of rent), in paragraph 2(3), for Table A substitute—

“TABLE A: RESIDENTIAL

<i>Rate bands</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
£0 to £250,000	0%
Over £250,000	1%”

(5) In Schedule 6ZA (relief for first-time buyers)—

(a) in paragraph 1(3), for “£500,000” substitute “£625,000”, and

(b) for the Table A in section 55(1B) mentioned in paragraph 4 substitute—

“TABLE A: RESIDENTIAL

<i>Part of relevant consideration</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
So much as does not exceed £425,000	0%
Any remainder (so far as not exceeding £625,000)	5%”

(6) The amendments made by this Resolution have effect in relation to land transactions the effective date of which falls on or after 23 September 2022.

And it is declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

The former Chancellor of the Exchequer announced cuts to stamp duty land tax on 23 September, with a motion moved following debate on the economic statement to implement that on a temporary basis. This resolution now confirms the House’s agreement to that motion, allowing the Government to introduce a full Bill to implement the changes permanently. The Government’s changes to stamp duty increased the nil-rate threshold for all purchases of residential property in England and Northern Ireland from £125,000 to £250,000. For first-time buyers, the nil-rate threshold has increased from £300,000 to £425,000, with the maximum property price for which first time buyers’ relief can be claimed increased from £500,000 to £625,000.

This resolution is simply a procedural requirement. It is needed to allow the Government to introduce a Bill amending stamp duty land tax legislation. We will come on to the substance of the Bill on Second Reading in just a moment. Furthermore, there will be an opportunity to discuss the line-by-line detail of the Bill in Committee at a later point.

6.30 pm

**Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD):** I beg to move amendment (a), Leave out paragraph 3.

I appreciate the contribution from the Minister. The amendment, which is supported by right hon. and hon. Friends, concerns a particular element of the proposal which is of great concern not just to me but to many Members on both sides of the House and from different parts of the country. It is, I expect, the unintended consequence of the proposal on communities already suffering under the weight of excessive second home ownership and the explosion of Airbnbs eating up the long-term rented market. There is obviously a debate to be had, which we will have next, about the proposal itself, the stamp duty cut, for which there are arguments that I fully understand. What I am concerned about is that the cut will apply to all properties, including to people buying their second, third, 22nd or 23rd home. My concern is not because I am consumed by the politics of envy, but because I am consumed with concern for my community and many others like it.

Since the pandemic, we have seen the explosion of a problem that was already difficult to start with: the rising proportion of second homes in communities such as mine. The former Chancellor and soon to be new Prime Minister—I congratulate him—my constituency neighbour, the right hon. Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak), made an error at the beginning of the pandemic when he created the temporary stamp duty holiday. The immediate result was that in the first few months of the pandemic 80% of all house sales in my constituency, and in communities like it, were in the second home market. I hope and assume that was not the intention of the former Chancellor and soon-to-be Prime Minister, but that was the consequence. Furthermore, we saw a 32% increase in the number of holiday lets during the pandemic, up from a huge number to start

off with in the lakes and the dales. That is the collapse of the long-term private rented market into the Airbnb market.

I will be trying, by various means, to get the Government to bring in new categories of planning use to control excessive second home ownership and the collapse of the long-term private rented sector into the Airbnb sector. My aim today is to stop the Government making it any worse. If my amendment is not agreed to, the Government's proposal in the next debate will be to do some good things, but also to accidentally do some bad things. That bad thing will be to add fuel to the fire of the explosion of excessive second home ownership in places such as the lakes and the dales, Cornwall, Northumberland, the Peak district and every other part of our country of a similar kind.

What an explosion of second home ownership of this kind means is that our communities are robbed of their full-time population. We see people forced out, unable to find or afford a home where they can raise their family. We then see footfall and demand for local services, such as the local pub, the local post office, bus services and local schools, massively reduced as a consequence. We see schools closed and communities hollowed out. Not only is it awful, upsetting and utterly regrettable to see families forced out of the places they were raised—I deal with these cases, case by case, and see people in extreme housing need because our existing housing stock has been gobbled up by second homes and holiday lets—but we also see a material impact on our economy and the consequences for our workforce.

At the moment, Morecambe Bay hospitals have 25% of all beds blocked. Why? Because social care is in crisis. Why? Because there is nowhere available for anybody who works in social care to be able to live in our communities. I can tell the Minister that 63% of all hospitality and tourism businesses in the lakes last year had to operate below capacity. Why? Because they could not find the staff. Why? Because there is nowhere for those people to live.

A housing crisis that already existed before the pandemic has become a catastrophe, in part because of an error made by the right hon. Member for Richmond (Yorks) at the beginning of the pandemic. He created a stamp duty holiday that created that boom. My amendment gives the Government the ability to do good without accidentally doing terrific harm to areas such as the lakes and the dales. It is an opportunity for the Government to prove that they do not take rural communities for granted. I hope that the Minister will hear what I have to say and act accordingly.

6.36 pm

**James Murray** (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op): The last time we debated a stamp duty cut in this House was summer 2020. During that debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden) made it clear that we do not oppose the principle of additional support for homeowners and buyers, and action to stimulate the housing market. The same principle applies today. At the time, however, my hon. Friend rightly questioned why the Government's plans include such significant support for second home owners, landlords and holiday home buyers. Why have the Government today designed a scheme that gives so much help to second home owners?

We estimate that the Bill means subsidising second home owners to the tune of £300 million a year. That is not only a very significant amount of public money, but an amount that will be paid out each and every year. How can the Government justify that spending?

What is more, any benefit that the stamp duty changes may have for first-time buyers, or for the housing market in general, will pale into insignificance when compared with the havoc that the Government's kamikaze mini-Budget unleashed on our economy. The Conservatives' recklessness has seen more than 40% of available mortgages withdrawn from the market. It has seen lenders begin to price in interest rates of over 6% for two-year, fixed-rate deals. It has led to families facing their mortgage repayments increasing by £500 a month.

Despite the inevitable U-turns on all but a few measures, the damage has been done. No matter how much the Conservatives shuffle the personalities in Downing Street, as the shadow Chancellor, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves), put it a week ago:

"People will be paying a Tory mortgage premium for years to come".—[*Official Report*, 17 October 2022; Vol. 720, c. 398.]

So we come to the fundamental question behind this resolution: whether spending public money on this stamp duty cut is the right priority in the midst of an economic crisis that the Conservatives have thrust upon us.

Under Labour, all our proposals are fully funded. Our approach is governed by clear fiscal rules and value for money is at the heart of how we would manage the public finances. Our approach to the economy will be even more important than ever, given the damage that the Tories have caused and the mess they have made. In truth, we still do not know just how big that mess will prove to be. As we stand here today, we still have not seen the forecasts from the Office for Budget Responsibility in relation to the damage that the Tories have caused.

The easy thing for the Opposition to do would be simply to vote for the stamp duty cut today, but that would not be right or responsible. At a time when our economy is reeling from the long-term damage that the Conservatives have done, when current and future homebuyers are facing spiralling and prohibitive mortgage costs, and when we are still flying in the dark as the Tories refuse to publish the OBR forecasts, it is not the time to spend £1.7 billion a year on this tax cut. We will be opposing the Government's plans.

6.39 pm

**Richard Fuller:** I listened with interest to the shadow spokesperson, the hon. Member for Ealing North (James Murray), who seemed to be using up all his greatest hits of criticism ahead of Second Reading, so I am not sure what he will say when we come to that. We always look forward to hearing Labour Members talk to us about the economy—they did such a good job with it last time they were in power.

Let me turn, more constructively, to the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron). His concerns come from a good place. I have had the privilege of listening to him, on the Front and Back Benches, talk about this issue and the impact on his constituents. I know that he comes from a good place and not, as he said, from the politics of envy.

**Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): As the Minister will know, there is a lot of concern on the Government Benches about the proposal's impact on second homes and holiday lets, and there will be a lot of sympathy for the amendment from the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron). Last week, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury gave me an assurance that the Treasury was looking at this issue. Will the Minister reaffirm that the Treasury understands that this is an issue and that we will look at how we can address it as the Bill progresses through the House?

**Richard Fuller:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He echoes some of the points made by the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale about the broad range of opportunities to address the issue, because there are such wide-ranging effects. The purpose of the amendment, however, is to create a separate schedule of rates in the stamp duty land tax system for those purchasing an additional property. That would mean that the purchase of additional property would not be included in the scope of the resolution or the ensuing Bill.

The Government already have higher rates for additional dwellings, which were introduced in 2016 and which apply a 3% surcharge to the standard residential rates of stamp duty. That surcharge will continue to apply. This means that, although the Government's changes to stamp duty will ensure that around 43% of transactions will pay no stamp duty land tax, none of those will be purchases of second homes or investments in buy-to-let properties. The Government have taken meaningful action to support local communities on second homes. I assure my hon. Friend that we will continue to look at that.

**Selaine Saxby** (North Devon) (Con): I reiterate the concerns raised by my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double). Would it be possible to meet the Treasury team as the Bill progresses to ensure that coastal communities such as mine in North Devon do not continue to be blighted by the march of second homes?

**Richard Fuller:** I am always happy to engage with colleagues across the House. As I was saying, the Government have taken meaningful action on a range of issues, most recently through the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, which will introduce a council tax second homes premium.

**Tim Farron:** I am grateful to the Minister for the tone of his response, but I am disappointed that it looks as though he will not accept my amendment, not least because it lays the ground to take seriously the points made by the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) about proactively tackling excessive second-home ownership and holiday lets. We need to do something now at least to not make the situation worse, and I fear that, unamended, the Minister's proposals will make things worse. We have been trying to amend the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill in Committee so that there are measures that can control, through planning, the number of second homes and holiday lets in communities such as mine, but we have had no success so far. Will he meet me and others who are concerned to look at how we can table amendments and make proposals through the Treasury that would make a material difference to communities such as mine?

**Richard Fuller:** As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby), I am very happy to engage with the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale about this issue, but I say again that there are multiple ways in which we can deal with these issues through different aspects of Government. I hope that he will take this up with other Departments as well, and I urge him to withdraw his amendment.

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*The House divided: Ayes 165, Noes 293.*

## Division No. 68]

[6.44 pm

### AYES

Ali, Rushanara	Green, Kate
Ali, Tahir	Green, Sarah
Amesbury, Mike	Greenwood, Lillian
Anderson, Fleur	Greenwood, Margaret
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Griffith, Dame Nia
Ashworth, rh Jonathan	Haigh, Louise
Barker, Paula	Hamilton, Fabian
Begum, Apsana	Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
Benn, rh Hilary	Harris, Carolyn
Blake, Olivia	Hayes, Helen
Blomfield, Paul	Healey, rh John
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Hendrick, Sir Mark
Brown, Ms Lyn	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Hollern, Kate
Bryant, Chris	Hopkins, Rachel
Burgon, Richard	Howarth, rh Sir George
Byrne, Ian	Huq, Dr Rupa
Byrne, rh Liam	Hussain, Imran
Cadbury, Ruth	Jardine, Christine
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Jarvis, Dan
Carden, Dan	Johnson, Kim
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Jones, Darren
Chamberlain, Wendy	Jones, Gerald
Charalambous, Bambos	Jones, Ruth
Clark, Feryal	Jones, Sarah
Cooper, Daisy	Kane, Mike
Creasy, Stella	Kendall, Liz
Cryer, John	Khan, Afzal
Cummins, Judith	Kinnock, Stephen
Cunningham, Alex	Lammy, rh Mr David
David, Wayne	Lavery, Ian
Davies, Geraint	Leadbeater, Kim
Davies-Jones, Alex	Lewis, Clive
De Cordova, Marsha	Lightwood, Simon
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Dodds, Anneliese	Lucas, Caroline
Dowd, Peter	Lynch, Holly
Duffield, Rosie	Madders, Justin
Eagle, Dame Angela	Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Eagle, Maria	Mahmood, Shabana
Eastwood, Colum	Malhotra, Seema
Efford, Clive	Maskell, Rachael
Elliott, Julie	McCabe, Steve
Elmore, Chris	McCarthy, Kerry
Eshalomi, Florence	McDonald, Andy
Esterson, Bill	McDonnell, rh John
Evans, Chris	McFadden, rh Mr Pat
Farron, Tim	McMorris, Anna
Farry, Stephen	Mearns, Ian
Foord, Richard	Miliband, rh Edward
Fovargue, Yvonne	Moran, Layla
Foxcroft, Vicky	Morden, Jessica
Furniss, Gill	Morgan, Helen
Gardiner, Barry	Morgan, Stephen
Gill, Preet Kaur	Morris, Grahame
	Murray, Ian
	Murray, James



Nandy, Lisa  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Norris, Alex  
 Olney, Sarah  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Kate  
 Owatemi, Taiwo  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Mr Toby  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Reed, Steve  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Sobel, Alex

Stevens, Jo  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sultana, Zarah  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tarry, Sam  
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twist, Liz  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Matt  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitley, Mick  
 Whittome, Nadia  
 Wilson, Munira  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zeichner, Daniel

#### **Tellers for the Ayes:**

**Mary Glendon and  
 Colleen Fletcher**

#### **NOES**

Afolami, Bim  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aiken, Nickie  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Anderson, Lee  
 Anderson, Stuart  
 Andrew, rh Stuart  
 Ansell, Caroline  
 Argar, rh Edward  
 Atherton, Sarah  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Gareth  
 Bailey, Shaun  
 Baillie, Siobhan  
 Baker, Duncan  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Bell, Aaron  
 Benton, Scott  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, rh Sir Jake  
 Bhatti, Saqib  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Bowie, Andrew  
 Bradley, Ben  
 Brereton, Jack  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Bristow, Paul  
 Britcliffe, Sara  
 Browne, Anthony  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buchan, Felicity  
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert  
 Burghart, Alex  
 Butler, Rob  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Carter, Andy  
 Cartlidge, James  
 Cash, Sir William

Cates, Miriam  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Chope, Sir Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon  
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan  
 Clarkson, Chris  
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse  
 Colburn, Elliot  
 Collins, Damian  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Courts, Robert  
 Coutinho, Claire  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Crosbie, Virginia  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Daly, James  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Gareth  
 Davies, Dr James  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davison, Dehenna  
 Dines, Miss Sarah  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Docherty, Leo  
 Donelan, rh Michelle  
 Double, Steve  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick  
 Duddridge, Sir James  
 Duguid, David  
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain  
 Dunne, rh Philip  
 Eastwood, Mark  
 Edwards, Ruth  
 Ellis, rh Michael  
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie  
 Eustice, rh George

Evans, Dr Luke  
 Evennett, rh Sir David  
 Everitt, Ben  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fell, Simon  
 Firth, Anna  
 Fletcher, Katherine  
 Fletcher, Mark  
 Fletcher, Nick  
 Ford, rh Vicky  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Frazer, rh Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike  
 French, Mr Louie  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Fysh, Mr Marcus  
 Gale, rh Sir Roger  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
 Gibb, rh Nick  
 Gibson, Peter  
 Gideon, Jo  
 Glen, John  
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, James  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Griffith, Andrew  
 Grundy, James  
 Gullis, Jonathan  
 Hall, Luke  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hancock, rh Matt  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hart, Sally-Ann  
 Hart, rh Simon  
 Hayes, rh Sir John  
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
 Heappey, rh James  
 Heaton-Harris, rh Chris  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Henry, Darren  
 Higginbotham, Antony  
 Hinds, rh Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Holden, Mr Richard  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Adam  
 Holmes, Paul  
 Howell, John  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hudson, Dr Neil  
 Hughes, Eddie  
 Hunt, Jane  
 Hunt, Tom  
 Jack, rh Mr Alister  
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
 Jenkinson, Mark  
 Jenrick, rh Robert  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Johnston, David  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David

Jones, Fay  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Jupp, Simon  
 Kearns, Alicia  
 Keegan, Gillian  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kniveton, Kate  
 Kruger, Danny  
 Lamont, John  
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea  
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
 Levy, Ian  
 Lewer, Andrew  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Loder, Chris  
 Longhi, Marco  
 Lopez, Julia  
 Lord, Mr Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Maclean, Rachel  
 Mak, Alan  
 Malthouse, rh Kit  
 Mangnall, Anthony  
 Mann, Scott  
 Marson, Julie  
 May, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Mayhew, Jerome  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCartney, Jason  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McPartland, rh Stephen  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Millar, Robin  
 Miller, rh Dame Maria  
 Milling, rh Amanda  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
 Moore, Damien  
 Moore, Robbie  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Morrissey, Joy  
 Mortimer, Jill  
 Mullan, Dr Kieran  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Neill, Sir Robert  
 Nici, Lia  
 Nokes, rh Caroline  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Penning, rh Sir Mike  
 Philp, rh Chris  
 Poulter, Dr Dan  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Raab, rh Dominic  
 Randall, Tom  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob  
 Richards, Nicola  
 Richardson, Angela

Roberts, Rob  
Robertson, Mr Laurence  
Robinson, Mary  
Ross, Douglas  
Rowley, Lee  
Russell, Dean  
Rutley, David  
Sambrook, Gary  
Saxby, Selaine  
Seely, Bob  
Selous, Andrew  
Shannon, Jim  
Simmonds, David  
Skidmore, rh Chris  
Smith, rh Chloe  
Smith, Greg  
Smith, Henry  
Smith, rh Julian  
Smith, Royston  
Solloway, Amanda  
Spencer, Dr Ben  
Spencer, rh Mark  
Stafford, Alexander  
Stephenson, rh Andrew  
Stevenson, Jane  
Stevenson, John  
Stewart, rh Bob  
Stewart, Iain  
Streeter, Sir Gary  
Stride, rh Mel  
Stuart, rh Graham  
Sturdy, Julian  
Sunderland, James  
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond

Syms, Sir Robert  
Thomas, Derek  
Throup, Maggie  
Timpson, Edward  
Tolhurst, Kelly  
Tomlinson, Justin  
Tomlinson, Michael  
Tracey, Craig  
Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie  
Trott, Laura  
Tugendhat, rh Tom  
Vickers, Matt  
Villiers, rh Theresa  
Walker, Sir Charles  
Walker, Mr Robin  
Warman, Matt  
Watling, Giles  
Webb, Suzanne  
Whately, Helen  
Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
Whittingdale, rh Sir John  
Wiggin, Sir Bill  
Wild, James  
Williams, Craig  
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin  
Wilson, rh Sammy  
Wood, Mike  
Wragg, Mr William  
Young, Jacob  
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**

**Wendy Morton and  
Craig Whittaker**

Coutinho, Claire  
Crabb, rh Stephen  
Crosbie, Virginia  
Crouch, Tracey  
Daly, James  
Davies, David T. C.  
Davies, Gareth  
Davies, Dr James  
Davies, Mims  
Davison, Dehenna  
Dines, Miss Sarah  
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
Docherty, Leo  
Donelan, rh Michelle  
Double, Steve  
Doyle-Price, Jackie  
Drummond, Mrs Flick  
Duddridge, Sir James  
Duguid, David  
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain  
Dunne, rh Philip  
Eastwood, Mark  
Edwards, Ruth  
Ellis, rh Michael  
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie  
Eustice, rh George  
Evans, Dr Luke  
Evennett, rh Sir David  
Everitt, Ben  
Fabricant, Michael  
Fell, Simon  
Firth, Anna  
Fletcher, Katherine  
Fletcher, Mark  
Fletcher, Nick  
Ford, rh Vicky  
Foster, Kevin  
Francois, rh Mr Mark  
Frazer, rh Lucy  
Freeman, George  
Freer, Mike  
French, Mr Louie  
Fuller, Richard  
Fysh, Mr Marcus  
Gale, rh Sir Roger  
Garnier, Mark  
Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
Gibb, rh Nick  
Gibson, Peter  
Gideon, Jo  
Glen, John  
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert  
Graham, Richard  
Grant, Mrs Helen  
Gray, James  
Grayling, rh Chris  
Green, Chris  
Green, rh Damian  
Griffith, Andrew  
Grundy, James  
Gullis, Jonathan  
Hall, Luke  
Hammond, Stephen  
Hancock, rh Matt  
Hands, rh Greg  
Harper, rh Mr Mark  
Harris, Rebecca  
Hart, Sally-Ann  
Hart, rh Simon  
Hayes, rh Sir John  
Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
Heappey, rh James

Heaton-Harris, rh Chris  
Henderson, Gordon  
Henry, Darren  
Higginbotham, Antony  
Hinds, rh Damian  
Hoare, Simon  
Holden, Mr Richard  
Hollinrake, Kevin  
Hollobone, Mr Philip  
Holloway, Adam  
Holmes, Paul  
Howell, John  
Huddleston, Nigel  
Hudson, Dr Neil  
Hughes, Eddie  
Hunt, Jane  
Hunt, Tom  
Jack, rh Mr Alister  
Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
Jenkinson, Mark  
Johnson, Dr Caroline  
Johnson, Gareth  
Johnston, David  
Jones, Andrew  
Jones, rh Mr David  
Jones, Fay  
Jones, Mr Marcus  
Jupp, Simon  
Kearns, Alicia  
Keegan, Gillian  
Kniveton, Kate  
Kruger, Danny  
Lamont, John  
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea  
Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
Levy, Ian  
Lewer, Andrew  
Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
Loder, Chris  
Longhi, Marco  
Lopez, Julia  
Lord, Mr Jonathan  
Loughton, Tim  
Mackinlay, Craig  
Mak, Alan  
Malthouse, rh Kit  
Mangnall, Anthony  
Mann, Scott  
Marson, Julie  
May, rh Mrs Theresa  
Mayhew, Jerome  
Maynard, Paul  
McCartney, Jason  
McCartney, Karl  
McPartland, rh Stephen  
Menzies, Mark  
Merriman, Huw  
Metcalfe, Stephen  
Millar, Robin  
Miller, rh Dame Maria  
Milling, rh Amanda  
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
Moore, Damien  
Moore, Robbie  
Mordaunt, rh Penny  
Morris, Anne Marie  
Morris, David  
Morris, James  
Morrisey, Joy  
Mortimer, Jill

*Question accordingly negated.*

*Main Question put.*

*The House divided: Ayes 290, Noes 167.*

**Division No. 69]**

**[6.58 pm**

**AYES**

Afolami, Bim  
Afriyie, Adam  
Aiken, Nickie  
Aldous, Peter  
Allan, Lucy  
Anderson, Lee  
Anderson, Stuart  
Andrew, rh Stuart  
Ansell, Caroline  
Argar, rh Edward  
Atherton, Sarah  
Atkins, Victoria  
Bacon, Gareth  
Bailey, Shaun  
Baillie, Siobhan  
Baker, Duncan  
Baldwin, Harriett  
Baron, Mr John  
Bell, Aaron  
Benton, Scott  
Berry, rh Sir Jake  
Bhatti, Saqib  
Blackman, Bob  
Blunt, Crispin  
Bottomley, Sir Peter  
Bowie, Andrew  
Bradley, Ben  
Brereton, Jack  
Bridgen, Andrew

Brine, Steve  
Bristow, Paul  
Britcliffe, Sara  
Browne, Anthony  
Bruce, Fiona  
Buchan, Felicity  
Buckland, rh Sir Robert  
Burghart, Alex  
Butler, Rob  
Cairns, rh Alun  
Carter, Andy  
Cartlidge, James  
Cash, Sir William  
Cates, Miriam  
Caulfield, Maria  
Chalk, Alex  
Chishti, Rehman  
Chope, Sir Christopher  
Churchill, Jo  
Clark, rh Greg  
Clarke, rh Mr Simon  
Clarke-Smith, Brendan  
Clarkson, Chris  
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse  
Colburn, Elliot  
Collins, Damian  
Costa, Alberto  
Courts, Robert

Mullan, Dr Kieran  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Neill, Sir Robert  
 Nici, Lia  
 Nokes, rh Caroline  
 O'Brien, Neil  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Penning, rh Sir Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Philp, rh Chris  
 Poulter, Dr Dan  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Raab, rh Dominic  
 Randall, Tom  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob  
 Richards, Nicola  
 Richardson, Angela  
 Roberts, Rob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Ross, Douglas  
 Rowley, Lee  
 Russell, Dean  
 Rutley, David  
 Sambrook, Gary  
 Saxby, Selaine  
 Seely, Bob  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Simmonds, David  
 Skidmore, rh Chris  
 Smith, rh Chloe  
 Smith, Greg  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, rh Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Spencer, Dr Ben  
 Spencer, rh Mark

Stafford, Alexander  
 Stephenson, rh Andrew  
 Stevenson, Jane  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, rh Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Streeter, Sir Gary  
 Stuart, rh Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunderland, James  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Syms, Sir Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Timpson, Edward  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie  
 Trott, Laura  
 Tugendhat, rh Tom  
 Vickers, Matt  
 Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Walker, Sir Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watling, Giles  
 Webb, Suzanne  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John  
 Wiggin, Sir Bill  
 Wild, James  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin  
 Wilson, rh Sammy  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Young, Jacob  
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Wendy Morton and**  
**Craig Whittaker**

#### NOES

Ali, Rushanara  
 Ali, Tahir  
 Amesbury, Mike  
 Anderson, Fleur  
 Antoniazzi, Tonia  
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan  
 Barker, Paula  
 Begum, Apsana  
 Benn, rh Hilary  
 Betts, Mr Clive  
 Blake, Olivia  
 Blomfield, Paul  
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
 Brown, Ms Lyn  
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
 Bryant, Chris  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Byrne, Ian  
 Byrne, rh Liam  
 Cadbury, Ruth  
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
 Carden, Dan  
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair

Chamberlain, Wendy  
 Charalambous, Bambos  
 Clark, Feryal  
 Cooper, Daisy  
 Creasy, Stella  
 Cruddas, Jon  
 Cryer, John  
 Cummins, Judith  
 Cunningham, Alex  
 David, Wayne  
 Davies, Geraint  
 Davies-Jones, Alex  
 De Cordova, Marsha  
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Dodds, Anneliese  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Duffield, Rosie  
 Eagle, Dame Angela  
 Eagle, Maria  
 Eastwood, Colum  
 Efford, Clive  
 Elliott, Julie  
 Elmore, Chris

Eshalomi, Florence  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Evans, Chris  
 Farron, Tim  
 Farry, Stephen  
 Foord, Richard  
 Fovargue, Yvonne  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 Gill, Preet Kaur  
 Green, Kate  
 Green, Sarah  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Griffith, Dame Nia  
 Haigh, Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendrick, Sir Mark  
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hollern, Kate  
 Hopkins, Rachel  
 Howarth, rh Sir George  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Jardine, Christine  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Johnson, Kim  
 Jones, Darren  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan  
 Jones, Ruth  
 Jones, Sarah  
 Kane, Mike  
 Kendall, Liz  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Lammy, rh Mr David  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Leadbeater, Kim  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lightwood, Simon  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lynch, Holly  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McMorrin, Anna  
 Mearns, Ian

Miliband, rh Edward  
 Moran, Layla  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morgan, Helen  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Murray, Ian  
 Murray, James  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Norris, Alex  
 Olney, Sarah  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Kate  
 Owatemi, Taiwo  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Mr Toby  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Reed, Steve  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Stone, Jamie  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sultana, Zarah  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tarry, Sam  
 Thomas, Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twist, Liz  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Matt  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitley, Mick  
 Whittome, Nadia  
 Wilson, Munira  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Mary Glindon and**  
**Colleen Fletcher**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That—

(1) Part 4 of the Finance Act 2003 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 55(1B) (amount of stamp duty land tax chargeable: general), for Table A substitute—

"TABLE A: RESIDENTIAL"

<i>Part of relevant consideration</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
So much as does not exceed £250,000	0%
So much as exceeds £250,000 but does not exceed £925,000	5%
So much as exceeds £925,000 but does not exceed £1,500,000	10%
The remainder (if any)	12%"

(3) In Schedule 4ZA (higher rates of stamp duty land tax for additional dwellings etc), for the Table A in section 55(1B) mentioned in paragraph 1(2) substitute—

"TABLE A: RESIDENTIAL"

<i>Part of relevant consideration</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
So much as does not exceed £250,000	3%
So much as exceeds £250,000 but does not exceed £925,000	8%
So much as exceeds £925,000 but does not exceed £1,500,000	13%
The remainder (if any)	15%"

(4) In Schedule 5 (amount of SDLT chargeable in respect of rent), in paragraph 2(3), for Table A substitute—

"TABLE A: RESIDENTIAL"

<i>Rate bands</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
£0 to £250,000	0%
Over £250,000	1%"

(5) In Schedule 6ZA (relief for first-time buyers)—

(a) in paragraph 1(3), for "£500,000" substitute "£625,000", and

(b) for the Table A in section 55(1B) mentioned in paragraph 4 substitute—

"TABLE A: RESIDENTIAL"

<i>Part of relevant consideration</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
So much as does not exceed £425,000	0%
Any remainder (so far as not exceeding £625,000)	5%"

(6) The amendments made by this Resolution have effect in relation to land transactions the effective date of which falls on or after 23 September 2022.

And it is declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

*Ordered*, That a Bill be brought in on the foregoing Resolution:

That the Chairman of Ways and Means, the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Edward Argar, Richard Fuller, Andrew Griffith and Felicity Buchan introduce the Bill.

#### STAMP DUTY LAND TAX (REDUCTION) BILL

Richard Fuller accordingly presented a Bill to reduce the amount of stamp duty land tax chargeable on the acquisition of residential property.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time now, and to be printed (Bill 171) with explanatory notes (Bill 171-EN).*

## Stamp Duty Land Tax (Reduction) Bill

### *Second Reading*

7.11 pm

**The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Felicity Buchan):** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

We face challenging times, and challenging decisions need to be made, but one thing on which I hope we can all agree is that home ownership must remain within reach, and we must support the property market where we can. To do that, we are making good our promise to ensure that hard work is rewarded and people can keep more of their hard-earned money when they buy a home.

The property industry plays a hugely important role in our economy. It is crucial to our growth prospects, and it supports hundreds of thousands of jobs and businesses. Home ownership remains one of the surest ways to give people a stake in the success of our economy, and we know that stamp duty really affects people's decisions on whether to buy a property. The Bill confirms a significant reduction in the cost of moving home and getting on the housing ladder, which will allow more people to buy and to move each year. It will also mean more business for painters, decorators, moving companies, plumbers, electricians, and all the industries that are reliant on a healthy housing market. More transactions each year will mean that more people can move more easily to find work, and that will boost labour mobility at a time when people do not need barriers to changing jobs.

Like many Members on both sides of the House, I grew up in a country where home ownership was a dream, but an achievable one. It is only right that we give those who are now seeking to climb on to the housing ladder a helping hand, so that this dream does not slip out of reach. Since 2010, we have helped more than 800,000 households to purchase homes through Government-backed schemes such as Help to Buy and Right to Buy, and we have made sure that stamp duty land tax works for those who wish to get on to and up the property ladder.

First, in April 2016, we introduced the higher rates of stamp duty for those purchasing additional properties, which form part of the Government's commitment to first-time buyers. These rates are 3% above standard residential stamp duty rates. The following year, in the 2017 autumn Budget, we introduced first-time buyer relief to permanently increase the price at which first-time buyers start paying stamp duty. The Government are proud that nearly 700,000 purchases have benefited from this relief since its introduction. Because of our action, the annual number of first-time buyers is at a 20-year high.

However, this is not just about how we help people purchase within the existing stock of housing; we are also boosting investment in home building and affordable housing. In 2019-20, nearly 243,000 net additional dwellings were delivered—the largest number in almost 20 years—and the Government are on track to meet their commitment to deliver 1 million additional homes during the current Parliament. In the 2021 spending review, we also announced £11.5 billion for the affordable homes programme to

build 180,000 more of the affordable, quality homes that the country needs, including tens of thousands for social rent.

The Government's cuts in stamp duty land tax were implemented on 23 September with immediate effect, and we have introduced the Bill to confirm that change. Stamp duty applies to purchases of property or land in England and Northern Ireland, with land transaction taxes devolved to Scotland and Wales. Devolved Administrations will receive Barnett consequential for that change, in the usual way. The Bill will increase the nil rate threshold, which is the level at which stamp duty starts to apply. It will double the threshold at which people start paying stamp duty from £125,000 to £250,000, saving a family purchasing an averagely priced home £2,500.

As I mentioned a moment ago, in 2017 the Government introduced first-time buyer relief, which applied a higher nil rate threshold for purchasers who had never previously owned a property as part of our commitment to supporting first-time buyers. The Bill will expand the generosity of that relief to ensure that those purchasing their first home pay no stamp duty on purchases up to £425,000, up from £300,000. The maximum purchase value for which first-time buyers can claim the relief has also been increased, from £500,000 to £625,000.

These cuts in stamp duty will mean that an estimated 43% of transactions each year will attract no stamp duty whatsoever, up from 25% before the introduction of the Bill. No one purchasing a second home or investing in a buy-to-let property will cease paying stamp duty, as the 3% surcharge on the purchase of additional dwellings will continue to apply. More than half all transactions in the east midlands, the north-west and Yorkshire and the Humber will attract no stamp duty at all, with about six in ten transactions in the north-east having no stamp duty liability.

We are lifting significant numbers of families, first-time buyers and home movers out of stamp duty, helping those aspiring to own their own home. That means that a couple buying an average home in the east midlands worth about £248,000 would otherwise have paid nearly £2,500 in stamp duty, but will now pay nothing at all. This measure will directly help people to keep more of their hard-earned money. An estimated 90% of those claiming first-time buyer relief will now be lifted out of stamp duty entirely. First-time buyers are able to access up to £8,750 in relief following the Government's changes.

I should make it clear that these changes apply to stamp duty land tax, which covers only England and Northern Ireland, but they also mean—through the usual block grant adjustment—an additional £100 million for the devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales.

The United Kingdom has always been a nation of homeowners, and under our plans it will continue to be so. We are cutting stamp duty for hard-working people and supporting them in getting on to and up the housing ladder. The Bill will reduce the up-front costs of moving, it will support the hundreds of thousands of jobs reliant on a healthy property market and it will help give people who aspire to home ownership the means to make it a reality. For those reasons, I commend the Bill to the House.

7.20 pm

**James Murray** (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op): Yesterday was one month since the previous Chancellor delivered his mini-Budget. Since then we have had a month of utter chaos, a month of the most extraordinary U-turns and a month in which the Conservative party recklessly inflicted damage on our economy—damage that the British public will be paying for and that will take years to fix, yet the Conservatives are clinging on to power, putting their party’s interest before the country’s. We are here today debating one of the very few remaining pieces of the former Chancellor’s mini-Budget.

As hon. and right hon. Members will know, the current Chancellor—I assume he is still in post as we speak—U-turned on almost all his predecessor’s plans. One of the measures he decided to keep was lifting the cap on bankers’ bonuses. It is particularly hard to understand why he chose to do so when even bankers themselves do not seem to have been advocating for it. In fact, it could involve reputational damage that I know many of them fear. None the less, lifting the cap remained a priority for the previous and current Chancellors.

As we know, the current Chancellor also decided to keep the legislation that reversed the national insurance rise and repealed the health and social care levy. We are glad that the Government finally followed the position that Labour set out over a year ago that raising taxes on working people in a cost of living crisis is wrong. The decision to reverse the national insurance rise was itself a U-turn by the current Chancellor, the outgoing Prime Minister and their colleagues on the position they held just last year. At least by doing the right thing the right hon. Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt) avoided doing a U-turn on a U-turn in this particular instance.

The current Chancellor also decided to keep the changes to stamp duty that were announced on 23 September and that we are debating today. Under these changes, which are the subject of the resolution we have just debated and the Bill that is now to be read a Second time, the nil rate threshold for stamp duty payments on residential properties is increased, effectively by removing the existing lowest band. There are consistent changes to the higher rates for additional dwellings and changes to the threshold and limits for first-time buyer relief.

Before I address the substance of the proposed changes, I would like to ask the Minister about the process of the legislation before us. In the business of the House statement on Thursday 13 October, the Leader of the House of Commons said that we would today be debating “a resolution relating to stamp duty land tax (reduction), followed by all stages of the Stamp Duty Land Tax (Reduction) Bill.”—[*Official Report*, 13 October 2022; Vol. 720, c. 258.]

Four days later, the current Chancellor confirmed that the stamp duty changes would proceed. However, during her next business of the House statement on 20 October, the Leader of the House said that we would no longer be considering all stages of the Bill today, only its Second Reading. That most recent statement by the Leader of the House did not set a date for the Bill’s remaining stages. What message does that send?

Treasury Ministers will know that, across the country, families and businesses are crying out for stability. In the housing market, as in many parts of the economy, certainty is prized. That is why, when the stamp duty

cut was announced, it took effect straight away. It had to be in place immediately to avoid giving people a reason to delay their home purchases as they waited for an announced change to come into force. Indeed, the policy paper published alongside this announcement on 23 September confirmed that no consultation had been carried out on the measure. The reason stated was:

“It would not be in the public interest to consult, as this may have an adverse effect on the housing market if buyers delayed purchases during the consultation period.”

Yet now, the remaining stages of the Stamp Duty Land Tax (Reduction) Bill have been delayed.

This last-minute flip-flop of parliamentary business sends the message that it is open to the new Prime Minister and whoever his Chancellor might be to change their mind over these stamp duty changes. By delaying the Bill’s remaining stages, the Government have introduced more uncertainty into the housing market, which is the last thing anyone needs. I do not know what the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, the hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Richard Fuller), will be able to say that will give homebuyers any confidence in this matter, but I urge him to try to give them and the housing sector whatever assurances he can.

I fear that the Government have learned nothing from the mistakes they made two years ago about uncertainty when it comes to stamp duty. As hon. Members may remember, when stamp duty was last changed in the summer of 2020, the legislation was rushed through Parliament earlier than planned. This happened after someone thought they were being clever by briefing the press about the plans of the then Chancellor—now the incoming Prime Minister—three months ahead of their being implemented. In that debate, the former Member for South West Hertfordshire and Chief Secretary to the Treasury, David Gauke, was quoted as having said that this trailing of plans months ahead would be “hugely counter-productive”. He said that even “two days of speculation” over such plans would be “unhelpful”. So this concern is nothing new. It is crucial that stamp duty changes are not left hanging. Decisions either way must be executed swiftly and with certainty. These last-minute changes to parliamentary business seem to be another reminder that the Conservatives are not fit to govern.

As I said in the previous debate, it would be easy for us as the Opposition simply to vote for the stamp duty cut today, but it would not be right and it would not be responsible. At a time when our economy is reeling from the long-term damage the Conservatives have done, when current and future homebuyers are facing spiralling and prohibitive mortgage costs and when we are still flying in the dark as the Tories refuse to publish the Office for Budget Responsibility’s forecasts, this is not the time to spend £1.7 billion a year on this tax cut.

There is so much else the Government could be doing to support the housing market and to help people to get a secure and decent home that they can afford. Beyond restoring financial stability, they could go further and adopt some of our plans to introduce a mortgage guarantee scheme, to raise stamp duty for foreign buyers and to give first-time buyers first dibs on newly built properties. Those are some of the plans we need after 12 years under the Tories, during which home ownership rates have fallen. Compared with when the Conservatives came to power in 2010, there are now 800,000 fewer households under 45 who own their own home. At the

same time, nearly 1 million more people are renting privately. Some of them might once have been hopeful that the Government would deliver on their commitment to ban no-fault section 21 evictions, but that promise was made more than three years ago. It was pushed into the long grass, and it was rumoured a few weeks ago that it was about to be dropped. Now, with a new Prime Minister coming through the revolving door, its fate is anyone's guess. The only safe conclusion is that the Tories cannot deliver the security, stability and affordability that people need.

This debate is focused on the stamp duty changes that the Government are seeking to approve, but it cannot be taken outside the context of their disastrous mishandling of the economy. After 12 years of failure, the Conservatives have shredded any claim to economic competence they might once have thought they had. We are suffering an economic crisis created in Downing Street. The damage has been done and working people are paying the price. The Conservatives can rearrange the personalities in Downing Street, but they have inflicted damage on our country and have no mandate to govern. It is time for the British people to have a say on our country's future. It is time for a fresh start with a Government who are ready to sort out the Tories' mess, to grow the economy for working people and to build a fairer, greener future. It is time for general election.

7.28 pm

**John McDonnell** (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I will be extremely brief and fulfil my commitment to the shadow Secretary of State for Levelling Up. The reason I rise to speak is that I met a group of constituents at the weekend and I said that I would use this debate to identify and explain the situation that they are facing in my constituency. I have listened to the Minister and to the sentiments that she put forward, which are well intentioned in many ways but do not reflect the reality of what my constituents are facing at the moment.

We have a housing crisis in my constituency, with overcrowding on a level we have not seen in maybe decades. We have homelessness, and there is no longer access to housing via council housing because our council housing stock has mainly been sold off. I do not think any new council houses have been constructed directly by the council.

The problem we face is that wage levels, after 12 years of austerity, mean that most of my constituents, particularly the young ones, are nowhere near striking distance of being able to purchase their own home, despite everything we have done, working with the financial sector, to encourage them to do so. Many people living in the rented sector and hoping to purchase their own home are seeing their wages devoured by the rents they have to pay. They cannot save up for a deposit, and when they look at mortgage rates, particularly after what has happened over the past few weeks, they have no hope of being able to cover mortgage costs.

Frankly, this Bill is no help whatsoever to my constituents. It is interesting to look at who it does help. When the former Chancellor, and soon-to-be Prime Minister, introduced similar measures during the pandemic, they benefited corporate landlords and the banks. I have 4,000 new properties being built in my constituency, and most of them will go to corporate landlords. Many will

go to people moving from outside the area because of the Elizabeth line, and few will benefit local families or local young people.

We are seeing a boom in private landlordism in my constituency, where the buy-to-let property experience is one of high rents, poor maintenance and harassment by landlords, who are often completely unregulated. The Minister and the Government have said much about the Bill helping first-time buyers and about the doubling of the threshold benefiting all, but the Bill will largely benefit landlords and the banks that lend to them. As the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) mentioned, the Bill will also benefit second home purchasers.

I find it extraordinary that incorporated landlords can still offset 100% of their mortgage interest against profits. Between 1990 and 2020, we saw 41,700 landlords incorporate themselves in order to benefit from what is actually a tax-avoidance scheme. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North (James Murray) mentioned the cost of this programme in the previous debate. On the estimate made on the day of the mini-Budget a few weeks ago, the cost is £1.655 billion. I find it hard to see how this is compatible with what the new Chancellor is saying about a new wave of austerity having to be forced upon us because of the mismanagement of the economy in recent weeks.

The Opposition will oppose this Bill, and I fully agree. This is not the time for such a measure. We could assist first-time buyers to get on the housing ladder through housing supply and reducing overall property costs. If the Government insist on proceeding with this Bill, we could protect the first-time buyer measures by paying for them through an excess profits tax on the landlords and banks that are profiting from the Government's measures.

Finally, I repay the debt I owe my constituents from the weekend by saying that this Bill will not help people in my constituency. We need a new council house programme, a reduction in interest rates and investment in housing on a scale never seen before. We need housing that is accessible and affordable to all. Otherwise, I will have more homeless people, more people living in overcrowded properties and, yes, more people sleeping in beds in sheds trying to survive the next winter.

I plead with the Government to drop the Bill. I hope the incoming Prime Minister will not see this as a priority and that at next week's Budget we will have a more rational debate about housing policy.

7.34 pm

**Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): The housing crisis in this country is huge, and it is more than just an issue of supply. In my community, as I mentioned in the previous debate, a catastrophe has emerged over the past two years. I have never seen such appalling need. The average house price in my constituency is something like 12 times the average household income. The simple fact is that any benefit from this Bill will help, if we are lucky, a fraction of 1% of people who want to buy a house but are currently unable to do so.

This Bill is not a very good use of public money when we are in the throes of a Conservative Government heroically seeking to do their best to counter the impact of a Conservative Budget. This Bill is a surviving element

[Tim Farron]

of that disastrous Budget. It does not seem to be the best use of money, given that the majority of beneficiaries will be wealthy people who do not need a stamp duty cut. What it will do, as we said in the previous debate, is fuel a second home boom that is already causing a huge amount of damage to communities like mine.

I asked myself why this Bill is one of the few survivors of the disastrous mini-Budget. I can only conclude that it is because the people who are damaged and offended by it live in rural communities, so the Government feel that they can take them for granted. I put it on the record that these people will not be taken for granted. Again, the average house price in my community is spiralling towards £300,000, but people's incomes are significantly less than £30,000 per household, never mind per individual. When there are things the Government could do to address the affordable housing crisis, it is all the more frustrating to see such a blunderbuss waste of public money.

The Government are talking about changing planning law so that developers do not need to provide affordable housing in developments smaller than 50 homes. Well, most developments in communities such as mine are smaller than 50 homes, so there will be a carte blanche for developers never to build another affordable home in the lakes and the dales, or in communities not dissimilar to yours, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I gave the Government an opportunity in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill Committee, which they refused to take, to give themselves and planning authorities the power, in extreme circumstances—those of us living in national parks absolutely are in extreme circumstances—to say that only affordable housing can be built in new developments. Even under existing rules, developers wriggle out of their affordability requirements and obligations by using viability assessments. They go to the development site and say, “I found a few more rocks than I was expecting. I therefore cannot afford even the 35% affordable homes that we were going to build.” Again “affordable” has a rather broad definition.

The Government could be doing a whole range of things with both new stock and existing stock. Why will they not accept the proposal I made in this place and in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill Committee, and will be making again, to change planning law so that second homes and holiday lets become separate categories of planning use? We could then keep a lid on the number of second homes and holiday lets in communities like mine.

It is very hard to support a proposal that is the sole straggling survivor of a disastrous mini-Budget when one suspects that the only reason it has survived is because the people hurt by it are living in communities that the Government think they can take for granted. Well, they cannot and must not be allowed to take them for granted. I am sure we will see a revised fiscal programme from the Government in the next few days, so we wait to see what it contains. I do not understand why they are clinging on to this proposal, which will do such little good even for those it helps and such harm to those it harms, when they have the chance to think again. I strongly urge them to do just that.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** We now come to the wind-ups. I call the shadow Minister, Tulip Siddiq.

7.38 pm

**Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab):** I thank the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) for his speech. I agree with him wholeheartedly that very few people will benefit from this Bill, which does not seem to be the best use of public money.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) on his typically powerful speech about the problems of overcrowding and homelessness in his constituency, and about the impact on young people who are struggling to get a foot on the housing ladder. I am sure that the constituents he met will be grateful that he has aired their concerns on the Floor of the House.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North (James Murray) made clear, Labour does not oppose the principle of additional support for homeowners and buyers. Indeed, I have seen at first hand in my constituency of Hampstead and Kilburn how the link between wages and house prices has completely broken down in recent years. It has become increasingly hard for many of my constituents to move up the housing ladder, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington pointed out. As a result, home ownership has gone down dramatically in my constituency since 2010, with private renters now accounting for 30% of the population in Hampstead and Kilburn. Across London, average private rents have risen by over an astonishing £4,500 a year compared with the position in 2010, which is miles ahead of my constituents' average wage growth. As we have heard today, this problem is not limited to London and the south-east; 12 years of this Government has created a dysfunctional housing market in every part of the country. Tragically, after what was already 12 difficult years for first-time buyers, the Conservatives' reckless approach to the economy has now made things even tougher for young families looking to buy their first home, and for working people struggling with their mortgage payments.

After the Government's mini-Budget crashed the economy, 40% of mortgage deals were withdrawn from the market and mortgage rates in fixed two-year deals rose to an average of more than 6%. It is important not to forget the real-world consequences of the decisions made in this House: people looking to refinance a two-year fixed mortgage will now be paying £580 more per month, on average. That is an astonishing amount of money. For families already struggling with the worst cost of living crisis in a generation, an additional £580 a month in living costs could be crippling.

I hope the Government are taking note of the figures I am talking about, because they are not just figures; they are about real-life people who are struggling to make ends meet. Indeed, Oxford Economics estimates that if interest rates remain at the levels currently being offered, thousands of families could be facing negative equity and mortgage arrears. The Bank of England has forecast that the number of households struggling with their mortgage rates will hit a record high next year.

What is the Government's response to the chaos they have caused in the housing market? It is even more uncertainty. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North said, the Government's last-minute decision only to give the Bill its Second Reading today sends a message to the housing market that Treasury Ministers are once



again preparing for a U-turn. I would be interested to hear from the Minister today whether he believes that this time next week a stamp duty cut will still be Government policy, or whether the Government will once again follow Labour's advice and drop this ill-thought-out proposal.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North was completely right to point out that this plan will do little to help people take their first important step on to the housing ladder and that it is just another Government handout for wealthy landlords and second home owners. Labour is the true party of home ownership, which is why we have committed to a target of 70% home ownership across the UK. We will achieve that by looking at reform of the planning system to increase house building. Because if the Government keep inflating demand without increasing supply, house prices will only rise.

Our approach will mean giving first-time buyers first dibs on newly built homes and an end to buy-to-let landlords and second home owners getting in first. We will provide additional help for first-time buyers through our mortgage guarantee scheme and introduce a higher stamp duty for foreign buyers, to prevent overseas investors from buying up property and pricing out British households. Finally, we will review planning regulations so that speculators cannot prevent communities from getting shovels in the ground and building the homes they need to thrive.

If this Government were serious about support for first-time buyers, those are the sensible and costed policies they should also adopt for themselves. But this Government are not serious about home ownership and, as we have seen in recent weeks, not serious about fiscal discipline. After the damage that the Conservatives have caused to our economy with their disastrous mini-Budget, the country simply cannot afford a £1.5 billion handout to rich second home owners and buy-to-let landlords. That is why I want to echo the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North that it would not be fiscally right or responsible to support this stamp duty cut today, because not only are we the party of home ownership; we are also concerned about economic competence and fiscal responsibility.

Our proposals to support first-time buyers are fully funded, whereas the Government have refused even to publish the Office for Budget Responsibility's forecasts for their plans. Our proposals will help first-time buyers to get on the housing ladder, whereas the Government's proposals will help only the rich. Our economic plan would provide stability and security, whereas the Government offer only economic incompetence and uncertainty. The Minister was worried that we were using up our big hits for this debate. He does not need to worry, because we are saving our big hits for the election campaign, which we hope will be very soon.

7.45 pm

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Richard Fuller):** I thank Members for their contributions to the debate. At its start, my hon. Friend the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury set out the critical importance of the Bill and the Government's cut to stamp duty land tax. The Bill is important to home movers and to first-time buyers; it is important for jobs and businesses connected

to the property industry; and it is important for our economic growth. Stamp duty land tax at high levels can reduce a household's willingness to move. This tax cut will enable more people to move home each year, which will, in turn, boost economic growth through the businesses and jobs the property industry supports.

The Labour Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Ealing North (James Murray), made points about the cost of mortgages due to recent economic uncertainty and interest rate rises. I just point out to him that interest rates and mortgage rates have been rising since last autumn in response to global trends, including Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine, and the UK is not immune to these trends. Crucially, interest rates are not solely rising in the UK; the US Federal Reserve has been raising its base rate since March 2022.

**Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab):** I just want to be clear: how sure is the Minister that the new Prime Minister is not going to overturn this stamp duty stuff?

**Richard Fuller:** I am more sure of that than I am that I will be in my position tomorrow. This is a serious debate and an important point about mortgage rates has been made. I am just trying to point out the two issues: rates have been rising since autumn; and this is a global change in interest rates.

Our stamp duty cuts will help the situation by reducing the up-front costs of moving. This Bill will save a family moving into an average home in England £2,500. As the Exchequer Secretary mentioned, we are returning money that can be spent to help cover moving costs, improvements, new furniture or appliances.

The Opposition spokesman asked questions about the processing of the Bill, but he missed the fact, of course, that the stamp duty change is already in effect and the Government are continuing with the legislation. The right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) made some good points about house building. I just point out to him that in 2019-20 almost 243,000 net additional dwellings were delivered, which was the highest amount in nearly 20 years; and that at the spending review 2020-21 the Government confirmed £11.5 billion of funding for the affordable homes programme from 2021-22, which is the largest cash investment in affordable housing for a decade and is providing up to 180,000 new homes across England.

The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) repeated the points he made earlier about issues to do with purchasing additional property. I just repeat that the Government's stamp duty cut will ensure that about 43% of purchases each year will pay no SDLT whatever and that none of those will be purchases of second homes or buy to lets.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq), in closing for the Opposition, said that the Government somehow seem to be encouraging foreign buyers and she talked about introducing a charge for foreign buyers. I just remind her that there is already a 2% charge for non-residents on SDLT.

Let me conclude by reminding this House of what this Bill is all about. It will mean that about 43% of transactions—

**John McDonnell:** Will the Minister look at the issue of the 100% offset that incorporated landlords now have against profits?

**Richard Fuller:** Of course I am happy to look at all suggestions, including the one the right hon. Gentleman has made.

This measure will mean that around 43% of transactions each year pay no stamp duty whatever, which will help to support the housing market. I say to both Opposition spokesmen—the hon. Members for Ealing North and for Hampstead and Kilburn—that as result of this measure first-time buyers in their constituencies who would not have qualified for zero stamp duty will now qualify, and Labour will today be voting against that. I would also say to the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) and the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves), the shadow Chancellor, who are not in their places, that the average mover buying the average house in their constituencies would not have qualified for zero-rate stamp duty land tax before this measure, and Labour will again be voting against that tax cut today.

This measure will boost labour mobility, support hundreds of thousands of jobs and businesses, increase transactions to boost the property industry, and continue the Government's record of supporting people, including younger people, into home ownership. For those reasons, I commend the Bill to the House.

*Question put.* That the Bill be now read a Second time.

*The House divided:* Ayes 288, Noes 152.

## Division No. 70]

[7.50 pm

### AYES

Afolami, Bim  
Afriyie, Adam  
Aiken, Nickie  
Aldous, Peter  
Allan, Lucy  
Anderson, Lee  
Anderson, Stuart  
Andrew, rh Stuart  
Ansell, Caroline  
Argar, rh Edward  
Atherton, Sarah  
Atkins, Victoria  
Bacon, Gareth  
Bailey, Shaun  
Baillie, Siobhan  
Baker, Duncan  
Baldwin, Harriett  
Baron, Mr John  
Bell, Aaron  
Benton, Scott  
Beresford, Sir Paul  
Bhatti, Saqib  
Blackman, Bob  
Blunt, Crispin  
Bottomley, Sir Peter  
Bowie, Andrew  
Bradley, Ben  
Brereton, Jack  
Bridgen, Andrew  
Brine, Steve  
Bristow, Paul  
Britcliffe, Sara  
Browne, Anthony  
Bruce, Fiona

Buchan, Felicity  
Buckland, rh Sir Robert  
Burghart, Alex  
Butler, Rob  
Cairns, rh Alun  
Carter, Andy  
Cartledge, James  
Cash, Sir William  
Cates, Miriam  
Caulfield, Maria  
Chalk, Alex  
Chishty, Rehman  
Chope, Sir Christopher  
Churchill, Jo  
Clark, rh Greg  
Clarke, rh Mr Simon  
Clarke-Smith, Brendan  
Clarkson, Chris  
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey  
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse  
Colburn, Elliot  
Collins, Damian  
Costa, Alberto  
Courts, Robert  
Coutinho, Claire  
Crabb, rh Stephen  
Crosbie, Virginia  
Crouch, Tracey  
Daly, James  
Davies, David T. C.  
Davies, Gareth  
Davies, Dr James  
Davies, Mims  
Davison, Dehenna

Dines, Miss Sarah  
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
Docherty, Leo  
Donelan, rh Michelle  
Double, Steve  
Doyle-Price, Jackie  
Drummond, Mrs Flick  
Duddridge, Sir James  
Duguid, David  
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain  
Dunne, rh Philip  
Eastwood, Mark  
Edwards, Ruth  
Ellis, rh Michael  
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie  
Eustice, rh George  
Evans, Dr Luke  
Evennett, rh Sir David  
Everitt, Ben  
Fabricant, Michael  
Fell, Simon  
Firth, Anna  
Fletcher, Katherine  
Fletcher, Mark  
Fletcher, Nick  
Ford, rh Vicky  
Foster, Kevin  
Francois, rh Mr Mark  
Frazer, rh Lucy  
Freeman, George  
Freer, Mike  
French, Mr Louie  
Fuller, Richard  
Fysh, Mr Marcus  
Gale, rh Sir Roger  
Garnier, Mark  
Ghani, Ms Nusrat  
Gibb, rh Nick  
Gibson, Peter  
Gideon, Jo  
Glen, John  
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert  
Gove, rh Michael  
Graham, Richard  
Grant, Mrs Helen  
Gray, James  
Grayling, rh Chris  
Green, Chris  
Green, rh Damian  
Griffith, Andrew  
Grundy, James  
Gullis, Jonathan  
Hall, Luke  
Hammond, Stephen  
Hancock, rh Matt  
Hands, rh Greg  
Harper, rh Mr Mark  
Harris, Rebecca  
Harrison, Trudy  
Hart, Sally-Ann  
Hayes, rh Sir John  
Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
Heapey, rh James  
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris  
Henderson, Gordon  
Henry, Darren  
Higginbotham, Antony  
Hinds, rh Damian  
Hoare, Simon  
Holden, Mr Richard  
Hollinrake, Kevin  
Hollobone, Mr Philip

Holloway, Adam  
Holmes, Paul  
Howell, John  
Huddleston, Nigel  
Hudson, Dr Neil  
Hughes, Eddie  
Hunt, Jane  
Hunt, Tom  
Jack, rh Mr Alister  
Jenkin, Sir Bernard  
Jenkinson, Mark  
Johnson, Dr Caroline  
Johnson, Gareth  
Johnston, David  
Jones, Andrew  
Jones, rh Mr David  
Jones, Fay  
Jones, Mr Marcus  
Jupp, Simon  
Kearns, Alicia  
Keegan, Gillian  
Knight, rh Sir Greg  
Knight, Julian  
Kniveton, Kate  
Kruger, Danny  
Lamont, John  
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea  
Leigh, rh Sir Edward  
Levy, Ian  
Lewer, Andrew  
Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
Loder, Chris  
Lopez, Julia  
Lord, Mr Jonathan  
Loughton, Tim  
Mackinlay, Craig  
Maclean, Rachel  
Mak, Alan  
Malthouse, rh Kit  
Mangnall, Anthony  
Mann, Scott  
Marson, Julie  
May, rh Mrs Theresa  
Mayhew, Jerome  
Maynard, Paul  
McCartney, Jason  
McCartney, Karl  
McPartland, rh Stephen  
Menzies, Mark  
Merriman, Huw  
Metcalfe, Stephen  
Millar, Robin  
Miller, rh Dame Maria  
Milling, rh Amanda  
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
Mohindra, Mr Gagan  
Moore, Damien  
Moore, Robbie  
Mordaunt, rh Penny  
Morris, Anne Marie  
Morris, David  
Morris, James  
Morrisey, Joy  
Mortimer, Jill  
Mundell, rh David  
Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
Neill, Sir Robert  
Nici, Lia  
Nokes, rh Caroline  
O'Brien, Neil  
Offord, Dr Matthew

Opperman, Guy  
 Penning, rh Sir Mike  
 Philp, rh Chris  
 Poulter, Dr Dan  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Randall, Tom  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob  
 Richards, Nicola  
 Richardson, Angela  
 Roberts, Rob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Ross, Douglas  
 Rowley, Lee  
 Russell, Dean  
 Rutley, David  
 Sambrook, Gary  
 Saxby, Selaine  
 Seely, Bob  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Simmonds, David  
 Skidmore, rh Chris  
 Smith, rh Chloe  
 Smith, Greg  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, rh Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Spencer, Dr Ben  
 Spencer, rh Mark  
 Stafford, Alexander  
 Stephenson, rh Andrew  
 Stevenson, Jane  
 Stevenson, John

Stewart, rh Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Streeter, Sir Gary  
 Stuart, rh Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunderland, James  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Syms, Sir Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Timpson, Edward  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie  
 Trott, Laura  
 Tugendhat, rh Tom  
 Vickers, Matt  
 Villiers, rh Theresa  
 Walker, Sir Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watling, Giles  
 Webb, Suzanne  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather  
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John  
 Wiggin, Sir Bill  
 Wild, James  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, Mr William  
 Young, Jacob  
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Wendy Morton and**  
**Craig Whittaker**

## NOES

Ali, Rushanara  
 Ali, Tahir  
 Amesbury, Mike  
 Anderson, Fleur  
 Antoniazzi, Tonia  
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan  
 Barker, Paula  
 Begum, Apsana  
 Benn, rh Hilary  
 Betts, Mr Clive  
 Blake, Olivia  
 Blomfield, Paul  
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
 Brown, Ms Lyn  
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
 Bryant, Chris  
 Burgon, Richard  
 Byrne, Ian  
 Byrne, rh Liam  
 Cadbury, Ruth  
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan  
 Carden, Dan  
 Charalambous, Bambos  
 Clark, Feryal  
 Creasy, Stella  
 Cruddas, Jon  
 Cryer, John  
 Cummins, Judith  
 Cunningham, Alex

David, Wayne  
 Davies, Geraint  
 Davies-Jones, Alex  
 De Cordova, Marsha  
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh  
 Dodds, Anneliese  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Duffield, Rosie  
 Eagle, Dame Angela  
 Eagle, Maria  
 Eastwood, Colum  
 Efford, Clive  
 Elliott, Julie  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Eshalomi, Florence  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Evans, Chris  
 Fovargue, Yvonne  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 Gill, Preet Kaur  
 Green, Kate  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Griffith, Dame Nia  
 Haigh, Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette

Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendrick, Sir Mark  
 Hobhouse, Wera  
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hollern, Kate  
 Hopkins, Rachel  
 Howarth, rh Sir George  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Johnson, Kim  
 Jones, Darren  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan  
 Jones, Ruth  
 Jones, Sarah  
 Kane, Mike  
 Kendall, Liz  
 Khan, Afzal  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Leadbeater, Kim  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lightwood, Simon  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lynch, Holly  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMorrin, Anna  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Morgan, Stephen  
 Morris, Grahame  
 Murray, Ian  
 Murray, James  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Nichols, Charlotte  
 Norris, Alex

Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Osborne, Kate  
 Owatemi, Taiwo  
 Peacock, Stephanie  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Mr Toby  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Pollard, Luke  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Reed, Steve  
 Reeves, Ellie  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell  
 Rodda, Matt  
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Sobel, Alex  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Sultana, Zarah  
 Tami, rh Mark  
 Tarry, Sam  
 Thomas, Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick  
 Thornberry, rh Emily  
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twist, Liz  
 Vaz, rh Valerie  
 Wakeford, Christian  
 West, Catherine  
 Western, Matt  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitley, Mick  
 Whittome, Nadia  
 Yasin, Mohammad  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Colleen Fletcher and**  
**Mary Glindon**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Bill read a Second time.*

## Business Without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** With the leave of the House, we shall take motions 6 to 11 together.

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

### PUBLIC SECTOR INFORMATION

That the draft Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 18 July, be approved.

## DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION

That the draft Digital Government (Disclosure of Information) (Amendment) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 15 July, be approved.

## MERCHANT SHIPPING

That the draft Merchant Shipping (Additional Safety Measures for Bulk Carriers) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 21 June, be approved.

## MERCHANT SHIPPING

That the draft Merchant Shipping (High Speed Craft) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 4 July, be approved.

## TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

That the draft Exclusivity Terms for Zero Hours Workers (Unenforceability and Redress) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 6 July, be approved.

## PREVENTION AND SUPPRESSION OF TERRORISM

That the draft Terrorism Act 2000 (Alterations to the Search Powers Code for England and Wales and Scotland) Order 2022, which was laid before this House on 18 July, be approved.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

*Question agreed to.*

**Doncaster Sheffield Airport**

*Motion made and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Rebecca Harris.*)

8.4 pm

**Nick Fletcher** (Don Valley) (Con): On 13 July this year, Peel shocked my constituency with the announcement of the potential closure of Doncaster Sheffield Airport. This is the reason for the debate. Let me tell the House the story. I shall start with the place, then the stakeholders, how we got here, where we are now, questions for this House, and, finally, one last glimmer of hope.

Doncaster Sheffield Airport was originally RAF Finninglay. I remember going there as a very young boy. I was in the back of a Ford Escort, sat between two older brothers, with my legs sticking to black vinyl seats. It was not a pleasant journey, but, oh, what I saw when I got there: I saw Concorde for the first time, the Red Arrows, Harrier Jump Jets lifting vertically from the ground and then bowing in front of us before roaring off into the distance, and I heard the deafening sound of the Vulcan—what wonderful memories.

Sadly, Finninglay closed in 1996, but, to the joy of the people of Doncaster and beyond, the airport reopened in 2005 as Doncaster Sheffield Robin Hood Airport—a silly name, but that is for another day. I was fortunate to fly from there the second day after it opened. It was a wonderful place, and Members can see why it is now so dear to me and my constituents.

I have briefly talked about the place. I want now to talk about the stakeholders. We have the employees who are to lose their jobs, the businesses that will no doubt have to move, and the public who love our airport. We have Peel, the landowners and operators of Doncaster Sheffield Airport, the combined authority and its elected mayors, past and present, Doncaster Council and its mayor, central Government and me.

Let us talk about the people first. The airport has won many awards. It is a great building in a great place with a great car park, but it is the people who make it. The friends of Doncaster Sheffield Airport, the staff of DSA, the contractors who make it all work, and the firefighters and security who keep all safe. Then there are the businesses on site and in the hangars nearby: 2Excel and the Yorkshire Aero Club to name just a couple; Tui and its staff; and the public from across the region. All of these have been amazing and have kept me going through their continued work to keep the airport open in tough times. Tens of thousands of people have signed petitions—a Facebook page of 15,000 people. They are great people, all wanting to save the airport. To all of them, I say thank you.

Now let me talk of the two key players: Peel and the combined authority. Peel is a huge landowner across our country. Board members include: John Whittaker; Steve Underwood; and Robert Hough. Peel owned Sheffield Airport. It closed that and built houses on it. It also owned Teesside Airport, and would no doubt have closed it had it not been saved by Mayor Ben Houchen. Peel has a precedent for doing that.

Oliver Coppard is Mayor of our combined authority and has been in position since May this year. Before this, it was the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis). Oliver has devolved powers and moneys. Let me explain

what that means. When people are asked whether they want more powers locally, they will say yes every time—why would they not? And that is what has happened here.

In 2018, under the leadership of the hon. Member for Barnsley Central, South Yorkshire became a combined authority with an elected Mayor. That means that powers move from central Government—this place—to the combined authority now led by Oliver. Our Mayor has powers over economic growth, education, infrastructure and transport. He also has a substantial amount of money that he can use to drive growth. This is gainshare money and is set out as £30 million a year for 30 years—a total of £900 million. He can borrow against this, too. Peel and our Mayor are the key players.

Doncaster Council is the local authority in which the airport sits. It has compulsory purchase powers and obviously deals with planning. The council is led by an elected Mayor, too.

Where do the Government sit? If these powers are devolved, there are only so many levers that they can use. The use of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 has been raised by Members. I, too, have written to the Secretary of State on this issue. The Act states that if there is a disruption to a service that could cause potential loss or injury to human life, the Act could be used. Why is this so relevant at Doncaster Sheffield Airport? For those who do not know, our airport has companies on site that offer coastguard and oil spill services for central Government. We also have the National Police Air Service operating from a specialist-built facility—good people doing good things across our nation.

When I read about the Civil Contingencies Act, I too believed it was a way forward. Sadly, at least at present, it appears not to be. I spoke to the company that offers those services and, although there may be disruption to its business operation, it can still offer the services. Is that argument dead? Maybe not, but it does not appear to be as fruitful as first thought. Perhaps the Minister can advise us.

So what can the Government do? They can use the weight of their office and the Department to press for combined authorities and companies to do the right thing. I thank Baroness Vere and my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts) for their help and support. As the Prime Minister at the time said, we must do all we can to protect DSA, and I believe they have done much. Some may wish they could do more, and so do I—but that, I am afraid, is devolution. For them to do more, we would need to return powers to Government. Maybe that is the real answer.

Finally, there is me, a Back-Bench MP. Let me tell the House what I have done. Well, no, let us just say: much. This debate is not about me. It is a debate about saving Doncaster Sheffield Airport, and any other regional airport in the future. We have spoken of the site and we have spoken of the stakeholders. The question is how we got here.

It must be said that, as much as Peel has annoyed me, more than most over the past three months, it has at least put its money where its mouth is in the past. Many people believe that the Great Yorkshire Way, a wonderful road connecting the M18 directly to Doncaster Sheffield Airport, was paid for by the taxpayer, but no—much of the £60 million project was private investment, £11 million of it from Peel itself. As much as I would like to haul Peel over the coals at this stage, I cannot.

The sad fact is that Peel sought financial support from the combined authority for approximately three years, in the form of an equity share worth £20 million and then, reluctantly, in the form of a loan. For three years, I have been informed, Peel was led a merry dance by the combined authority, which provided a catalogue of excuses and delays without clear process. I have been led to believe that first, it claimed there was no money, despite devolution; secondly, it failed to grasp state aid issues and made no effort to lobby on them and finally, environmental concerns were given as the reason why the £20 million loan was not even put to the leaders of the combined authority in March this year.

**Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): We are all here to support the hon. Gentleman and we want to engage in a constructive debate, but I must say that what he has been told is not the case. If I am fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will clearly articulate what the mayoral combined authority did for Doncaster Sheffield Airport and to support Peel over the period when I was the Mayor. I completely understand why the hon. Gentleman makes that point, but I can assure him, as I can assure all hon. Members, that in the period from 2018 to the point of the mayoral election we worked incredibly hard to support Peel and to work with the airport. If I get the chance later on I will be very clear about precisely what we did.

**Nick Fletcher:** I will come on to that, because I want a public inquiry to get to the truth of this matter, but I will cover that in my speech.

The combined authority appears never to have properly embraced Doncaster Sheffield Airport as its own airport, and to have badly underestimated the economic loss to the region. It was complacent with Peel and favoured investment closer to its own patch in Sheffield.

This region has failed to behave sensibly under devolution, continuing to act in silos rather than devising and implementing a cohesive economic plan. The economic loss could be simply catastrophic. I asked Peel whether, if the £20 million had been made available this April, we would be in this position. Peel said no. Let me just leave that there for the House: if the £20 million had been made available, Doncaster Sheffield Airport would not be closing. The combined authority may disagree, but the fact remains that the £20 million never appeared and Peel has said it is the fault of the combined authority. That is why I want a public inquiry. If that is not the truth, then what is? A public inquiry will find out.

**Dan Jarvis:** The hon. Gentleman is being generous with his time. In April 2022, DSA indicated that it did not wish to continue developing the loan proposal at that time. It is hard not to conclude that what he has been told, although I think he is presenting it in good faith, is not the case.

May I put one point to the hon. Gentleman? He has raised concerns about devolution, both today and previously, referring to the powers and the money vested in the Mayor. For the sake of clarity, it would be helpful if he could say precisely what powers—he has mentioned the gain share—and precisely what money he thinks the current South Yorkshire Mayor should be deploying in support of Doncaster Sheffield airport. What powers and what money?

**Nick Fletcher:** Maybe we need to sit down with the Mayor of Teesside and see how he worked it out, because I have been told that he has exactly the same powers as Mayor Oliver Coppard and that Mayor Oliver Coppard has twice as much money as he does, yet he has bought an airport and he is moving forward with it.

Regarding the fact that DSA said it did not want the loan in April, this is why I want a public inquiry. I have been very careful about what I am saying, although I know I can say what I choose in this House, because I am telling the hon. Member what I have been led to believe. I want a public inquiry so that the people of Doncaster and South Yorkshire can get to the bottom of this question. If what I am saying is true, it is a disgrace.

**Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab):** The hon. Gentleman was just asked a direct question. It does not need a public inquiry to work out what the factual position is. Will he say very clearly what powers he thinks the Mayor has to go in and intervene with Peel, which clearly does not want to engage and does not want to sell?

**Nick Fletcher:** Exactly the same again: Peel did not want to sell to Ben Houchen, but it did sell to Ben Houchen. It is no good sitting there and saying it did not—it did. Oliver Coppard has twice the money and exactly the same powers, and his job is economic growth for the area. Ben Houchen bought an airport off Peel that Peel never necessarily wanted to sell.

I will make some progress. The next question is where we are now. The combined authority failed to set up a mayoral development corporation and Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council failed to start a compulsory purchase order. They both say they cannot, but it is the threat that counts in a business deal. That is why I have championed the Civil Contingencies Act; it may not be viable, but it is the threat that counts.

I have tried to work collegially on this and, to be fair, in week 10, on the Friday before the announcement was to be made, the combined authority came up with a deal to cover Peel's losses for 13 months. Although that is not a Ben Houchen deal, at least it was something. Peel would not lose any money, it would get the local council, the combined authority and the Government on-side, and it would get me off its back. If, 13 months from now, no buyer had been found and the airport was still making a loss, at least Peel would have tried; local jobs would have been saved during a cost of living crisis, the airport would have supported the local economy through this period and businesses on site would have had time to get their contingency plans in good shape. But no—Peel still says no.

There is something Peel is not telling me, and again, a public inquiry is needed. Why would Peel want to annoy local and central Government, its customers, its staff, the local people and me, when it could have its losses covered, and still say no? There is something Peel is not telling me, so a public inquiry is needed.

In the last week of the initial six-week consultation, the combined authority's big idea was to put the airport on the market. These are the people in charge of economic growth for South Yorkshire. Five weeks after I, a Back-Bench MP, had written to Virgin Atlantic, British Airways, Ryanair and numerous other airlines, our devolved authority in charge of economic growth went to the market.

I really cannot get my breath, but it is day 45 of this saga, and the combined authority is only just going to the market with our airport. I have tried to be collegial throughout my time dealing with this matter, to show a united front against Peel, but it has been harder than anyone can imagine—not being allowed to join meetings and, when I am, having to sit and listen every to reason why things cannot be done rather than reasons why they can.

Finally, we have three consortia around the table with Peel. Those talks went on through last week, but as yet I have heard no more. There is little time; people are about to lose their jobs. I have to ask whether we would have stood a better chance if the combined authority had gone to the market in week one instead of week five. I am sure we would.

**Miriam Cates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con):** Thank you for being so generous with your time. As a fellow South Yorkshire MP, can I just say how grateful I am—I know that many of us in the House are—for the tireless work that you have done championing the airport?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. The hon. Lady must say, "The work he has done."

**Miriam Cates:** Apologies, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am grateful for the work that my hon. Friend has done, on behalf of the people of South Yorkshire, trying to rescue the airport. Does he believe that the local authorities and the combined authority have underestimated its economic and social value? If so, why does he think that is?

**Nick Fletcher:** Yes, massively. The important word in "combined authority" is "combined"—it is Doncaster, Rotherham, Barnsley and Sheffield coming together. I do not think the combined authority leaders, past and present, have told the leaders of those councils how important the airport is for the growth of the entire area and beyond. They have not sold it. They should have sold it; if they had, we would not be losing our airport. As I said, we need a public inquiry to find out the reasons for that, but I am afraid the silo working that I spoke about earlier is typical of Labour councils up and down the country.

**Dan Jarvis:** I am grateful to the hon. Member for giving way. He said a moment ago that the current Mayor has twice the money that Mayor Ben Houchen has in Tees Valley. I would be grateful to hear the facts that underpin that, and I am sure the House would be most illuminated, because that is not my understanding. Let me also return to the crucial point about powers. What powers does the hon. Member think are invested in the Mayor that he is not using?

**Nick Fletcher:** On the money, the South Yorkshire Mayor has £30 million per year for 30 years. That is £900 million. Ben Houchen, the Mayor for Teesside, has £15 million a year for 30 years. That is £450 million. I believe we are two years behind where we should be because Doncaster and Barnsley councils wanted to create a Yorkshire-wide mayoralty. Nevertheless, we are where we are.

With regard to powers, I say again that we have powers to set up mayoral development areas, we have compulsory purchase powers, we have community asset powers—we have all these different levers but, unfortunately, none of them has been used.

**Alexander Stafford** (Rother Valley) (Con): I am intrigued by those powers, and I think where the power lies is the nub of the issue. We have all seen the great success of Mayor Ben Houchen in Tees Valley, but why is that not happening in South Yorkshire? My hon. Friend talks about compulsory purchase powers. Is he saying that if the Mayor wanted to, he could—perhaps with Doncaster Council—buy the airport to save it, similarly to what Ben Houchen did, but that he has chosen not to do so?

**Nick Fletcher:** The compulsory purchase powers sit with the local authority, and it could have used them. The argument will be that, to use compulsory purchase powers, it is necessary to go through a series of phases first: compulsory purchase has to be the last resort. I understand that, but the threat of its use would have made Peel sit down at the table far sooner, and we may have stood a chance of saving the airport. Using compulsory purchase orders when the airport has closed and been asset-stripped by its owners is not going to help anyone. We are where we are. As I said a moment ago, we have consortia around the table. Let us hope that things change in the next few days.

I could speak for another hour, but I know my time is limited. I want to leave the House with three questions. First, what can this place do to stop this happening again? Should we make all airports community assets? Should any sale or closure of an airport have to be agreed by the local Mayor or the Secretary of State? Should any operator have to give a notice period of, say, two to five years? I do not know, but something must be done.

Secondly, before any more devolution can take place, can it please be explained properly to the electorate what that means? I believe it has been a disaster for South Yorkshire so far. People really need to know what they are signing up for and voting for.

Thirdly, can we have a public inquiry? I need the people of Doncaster to know what has happened. It is important. They really need to know where to put their cross the next time they vote.

**Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. Before he winds up his excellent speech, in which he has clearly laid out the issues, the work that he has been doing to solve them, and some solutions, may I just say that my West Yorkshire constituents have lobbied me too? This is a regional airport that they use, so on their behalf I say to my hon. Friend, “More power to your elbow.” I congratulate him on everything that he has been doing to campaign for this important regional airport.

**Nick Fletcher:** I thank my hon. Friend. That just proves that the airport is used by people from all across the north of England and is such a fantastic asset.

Peel has been stubborn—I believe desperately so—and its board, mainly John Whittaker and Robert Hough, will have to live with what it is trying to do and what its legacy will be. I am told that John Whittaker is a good man, and he can stop this at the click of his fingers. The question is, will he do the right thing? I hope so.

However, Peel is a business, and businesses make profit. Although I do not believe that greed is good, Peel is doing what businesses are supposed to do: making money. Sadly, I believe our elected Mayors have not done what they are supposed to do. They have been left wanting—absent at first, then slow and, in the words of local business leaders, chaotic. They have shown no vision and are championing our airport only now, when it is probably too late.

Just look at the difference between our Mayor’s social media account and Ben Houchen’s. Our South Yorkshire Mayor is tweeting childish memes when the people he represents—the people who voted for him—are losing their jobs and South Yorkshire is losing its future, while Ben Houchen’s social media is littered with success stories of investment, jobs and giving the next generation an inspiring future.

If we lose our airport, Peel will need to be held accountable, but the combined authority should be dissolved. It is not working, and it is not working for Doncaster. Our combined authority Mayor is buying trams for Sheffield while Doncaster gets second-hand buses and a closed airport. It is simply not good enough. And where is our Doncaster Mayor? Nowhere to be seen.

**Alexander Stafford:** If, as is reported, Peel is planning to sell the site or get rid of it for houses to be built on it, who exactly would benefit from the council tax on those houses? Would the South Yorkshire Mayor and Doncaster Council get money directly from the rate payers who bought those houses? Does my hon. Friend think there is anything weird about that way of doing things?

**Nick Fletcher:** My hon. Friend makes his point; as I say, I hope that those sorts of things will come out as part of the public inquiry.

I have said throughout our campaign that we must keep the faith. I am so saddened. I know that we cannot keep an airport open because people are fond of it, but Doncaster people really are fond of the airport, and I am too. I therefore want to try to end on a note of optimism that we still have a glimmer of hope. The consortia and Peel are still in the room and the combined authority offer is still on the table. I want them to know that if they save our airport, I will be their champion, and so will the good people of Doncaster.

It is a great airport and I know that, with the right owner and the right support, it would be viable. I therefore ask Peel one last time to do the right thing, reverse this ridiculous decision, accept the combined authority’s offer, give the sale the time it needs and let us turn Doncaster into the aerotropolis its founder, John Whittaker, once dreamed of.

8.28 pm

**Edward Miliband** (Doncaster North) (Lab): I speak as the constituency Member for Doncaster North. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) for securing the debate and for his efforts to help save the airport, which he has talked about. I also pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster Central (Dame Rosie Winterton), the Mayors of Doncaster and South Yorkshire and their teams, and my colleagues, including our shadow

[*Edward Miliband*]

Transport Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh). I also mention Mark Chadwick of the Save Doncaster Sheffield Airport Facebook page, who has run a brilliant campaign, as the hon. Member for Don Valley said, and the local trade unions, which organised a rally on Saturday.

It is one minute to midnight as far as the airport is concerned. We in this House owe it to the workers who are at risk of losing their jobs, and to the whole community, to work together and do absolutely everything we can in the days that we have left; not to point fingers or play the blame game, but to try to keep the airport open. That is the focus of my remarks. On Saturday, I heard from people who have worked at the airport since it opened in 2005 and I heard the uncertainty, anguish and sense of pessimism that they felt. They expect us in this House to leave no stone unturned in seeking to keep the airport open.

Let us get the position clear: responsibility for this decision lies with Peel. Peel has taken the decision. It has refused the offer of a 13-month subsidy from the South Yorkshire Mayor to cover its losses and keep the airport open while a buyer is found. Indeed, looking at the situation, one can only reach the conclusion that it is determined not to sell because it wants to use the land for other purposes. The problem with the idea that the airport should somehow be purchased by the South Yorkshire Mayor has a flaw at its heart: Peel is refusing to sell. The issue of the compulsory purchase order is important, but it would take at least a year to go through that process.

**Nick Fletcher:** I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman has ever done a business deal—I really do not know—but what we do is put on as much pressure as possible and use every lever from day one. That way, when we have the people in the room, they are thinking, “Is this going to happen?” I have kept quiet all the way through and have not said what I have wanted to say, because I wanted to show a united front with Opposition Members and the Mayor, but it has been like watching child’s play in front of my eyes. We should use every lever we have, pile on the pressure and hope that Peel will sit down and talk to us. I honestly believe that if I had not started this campaign on day one, the issue would have been swept under the carpet, because nobody on the Opposition side of the House wanted it.

**Edward Miliband:** When the hon. Gentleman looks back at this debate, I honestly do not think that he will think that kind of partisanship does him any favours. Of course the council has talked about doing a CPO and has discussed it with him, but it has tried to explain the time that would take.

Our focus needs to be on Peel. We need to send a united message from this House that it can still do the right thing, because there are credible bidders. I urge it to accept the generous offer of the South Yorkshire Mayor as it considers those bids from credible buyers. If it does not do that, its name will be mud in the city and region forever more, and deservedly so.

I also appeal to the Government through the Minister, although I know it is not her area of responsibility; she already answered an urgent question on it earlier. I will

explain the background to the legal advice that my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster Central and I commissioned around the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. We commissioned that because of the national dimension of the services run from the airport, which include the National Air Police Service, search and rescue, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, the airport fire service, oil spill dispersant work and military activity. They are national activities, which is why we think the Civil Contingencies Act is engaged. The short notice given to these services, which have been told to cease operations by 18 November, also gives them little time to prepare and find alternatives.

I will briefly turn to the legal advice of Lord Falconer of Thoroton, who was a co-sponsor of the Act. He is not a lawyer who we found on the street; he was the Lord Chancellor and was responsible for co-piloting the legislation through the House. We have made the legal advice available, and we can obviously make it available to Members here if they have not seen it. He says:

“It is my opinion that under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, the Transport Secretary”—

or, by the way, any Government Minister—

“has clear legal authority to intervene to prevent the closure of Doncaster airport...due to the disruption of essential services run from the airport”.

He goes on, and this is the key point:

“The shortness of the period before closure means for many, if not all, of these services an interruption of their life-saving services, and for some of them potentially a permanent reduction in quality. No doubt some of them will find alternative bases. How good they are and when remains to be seen. In this truncated timetable, in breach of the lease, there is the potential for disruption to these life-saving services.”

For those familiar with the Act, Lord Falconer is applying the test in section 1, which defines an emergency as an event or situation that

“involves, causes or may cause...loss of human life,...human illness or injury,...damage to property,...disruption of facilities for transport, or...disruption of services relating to health.”

He also says:

“There is no doubt that the disruption or interruption of the services described above constitute an event or situation which ‘causes or may cause’ any one of the circumstances described above.”

**Nick Fletcher:** I want this to work—the Civil Contingencies Act to work—and I have spoken at length with the people offering such services, but they have said there will be no disruption to their services. I actually asked them, but it is not something I want to raise on the Floor of the House because we are again showing our cards to Peel.

The right hon. Member keeps on pressing this point, but I have been through it. I wrote to the Secretary of State, and the Secretary of State has written back to me and said that she cannot use the Act. This is a Labour peer passing advice to a Labour Member of Parliament, but I still backed it and I still went to the Secretary of State. I have tried it, and I think this is taking us away from the argument that we are here because a £20 million loan never appeared, and that is why we are losing our airport. We have the consortia and Peel around the table, and what we now need to do is press as hard as we can for them to make the right decision. Going on about the Civil Contingencies Act, which we have gone through many times, is not helping.



**Edward Miliband:** I say to the hon. Gentleman, because he keeps wanting to play the blame game, that there will be time to do so. If we do not succeed, there will be time for him to do all the finger pointing, and for him to put this on his election leaflet and try to blame the Labour party, but do not do it now. Do not do that while we are trying to save the airport. If he wants to do that, let him do that, but do not do it now. Let us work together to try to save the airport.

Would it require boldness and commitment to use the Civil Contingencies Act? Yes, it would. I have to say that the hon. Gentleman says he has clear advice from Government, but the Secretary of State for Transport will not even meet me. I have been in this House for 17 years, and I have never had the experience of a Secretary of State refusing even to meet me, or indeed other Members of Parliament or the South Yorkshire Mayor, over an issue as important as this.

The Government's position has been that they will do everything they can to save the airport. Lord Falconer is happy to make himself available. Let us get around the table with the Secretary of State. Maybe her advice will be that there is nothing she can do, but why not have the conversation? There is nothing to fear from the conversation. It is almost as though the Government think that somehow they will be culpable if they have such a meeting and engage. They will not be culpable if they have the meeting and engage; they will be culpable if they do not have the meeting and do not engage, and I am afraid that is what they are doing.

I am going to end my remarks, because other Members want to speak, by appealing to the Minister—I know her from another life when she was the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the COP26 President, which she did very well and we had a good relationship—that courtesy and commitment demand that we get around the table with the South Yorkshire Mayor and with Members of Parliament to leave no stone unturned. Maybe we will not succeed, but let us try to work together on this. Time is incredibly short, and we owe it to all the workers and to the community to fight all the way until our options have run out. Responsibility lies with Peel, and I appeal to Peel to do the right thing, but I also appeal to the Government to get around the table with us and see whether there is a way forward.

8.39 pm

**Alexander Stafford** (Rother Valley) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) for securing this important debate and for his tireless work over the past 105 days to save our airport. And it really is our airport across South Yorkshire, with Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham, Sheffield—we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney), near Huddersfield and West Yorkshire, and my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Brendan Clarke-Smith) is here to show support and how important the airport is for Nottinghamshire. The airport is a community asset and something close to our hearts. My hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley mentioned Concorde and the Vulcan, and it is an iconic and important part of our history and culture.

This is also about jobs, and the economic and social value that the airport brings to our region. There will be many things we disagree on—there already are—but we all agree on one thing: we want to save the airport and

try to make it work. No one wants to play the blame game and we all, including Labour Members, want to pull levers to put on Peel the pressure that my hon. Friend for Don Valley was talking about. Let us be honest: Peel is ultimately at fault, as we have seen in Sheffield, Manchester and the Tees Valley, where it wants to close airports and build housing or industrial estates in order to get the rent. Let us be honest about what it is trying to do, and say that we as elected Members want to try to stop it doing that.

In some places Peel has been successful, as we have seen in Sheffield, but in other places it has not been. That is crucial, it is not a partisan point, and we should look at a case study. I was a geographer at school, and we would write case studies and give an example of something. We have the case study of Teesside and the Mayor of Tees Valley, when Peel was in a pretty similar situation—obviously we have more money in South Yorkshire than they do there—and Peel wanted to sell the land for its airport and build houses and an industrial park.

I looked intensely at why Ben Houchen has been so successful. I do not believe it is just because he said, “I want to save an airport,” which he clearly did and has done. That was not his game. His game was, “I want to make the Tees Valley a better place, with better jobs, a better community and better society, and the airport is part of that.” We do not have the same approach. We talk too much about the airport in isolation—of course an airport is important—but we should be talking about how the airport in South Yorkshire is integral to the prosperity of South Yorkshire, and how it fits in with wider plans, whether those are freeports, industrial zones, or bus franchising—Members will know I am a big advocate of that. How does the airport fit in with the wider communication plan? We cannot see the airport in isolation, because ultimately that might fail. We need to see how it combines the whole of our region together.

**Mr Betts:** I am interested in what the hon. Gentleman is asking for. He must accept that the airport in Teesside is costing an awful lot of public money. Presumably he is happy for the Mayor of South Yorkshire, if Peel agreed, to put in just as much money, perhaps £20 million out of the £30 million a year. He then argues for franchising. Does he accept that choices have to be made? The Government have not given the Mayor an unlimited budget. Presumably he wants everything to be spent out of that £30 million, when that clearly is not possible. Is he saying we should give Peel an open cheque and it can have what it wants? That is what he seems to be saying.

**Alexander Stafford:** The hon. Gentleman has brought my speech on a bit, because what I am asking for is vision. I am asking the South Yorkshire Mayor for a vision of South Yorkshire. I want to know where South Yorkshire will be in five, 10 or 20 years' time, and what my children will experience when they grow up in South Yorkshire. I do not want them to have bus franchising here or an airport there. I want to hear,

“South Yorkshire is going to be a better place, and this is how we're getting there.”

We are talking about money and bus franchising, but ultimately we need that to feed into a wider vision. The whole point of the South Yorkshire Mayor, or any Mayor—I still have great reservations about the mayoralty, because I do not see that vision coming.

[Alexander Stafford]

We speak about being unpartisan, and I will pay credit to what happened in Manchester, as well as in Tees Valley and the west midlands, where the Mayors have visions of what they want their regions to look like. I do not know what vision our Mayor has for our region. He probably wants to save the airport, and we have talked about bus franchising, but that is not a vision. In order for the airport to work, it needs to be part of a wider vision of prosperity. It is about how Sheffield is linked to Doncaster, and from Barnsley down to Rotherham, and how each part of it fits that vision. When the Mayor has set out the vision—I hope that it will be a good vision—he should use the levers of power available to him to make it a reality. He should say to the people of South Yorkshire, “I have my vision and this is where the airport fits into it. These are the levers—the powers and the £900 million given to me by the Government—that I will use to make that vision happen.” He may or may not say, “We need to save the airport,” but I want to see how that fits into the vision and how it all goes together.

We have already heard about the Civil Contingencies Act, the £20 million loan and lots of things. That is too piecemeal. The failure here is not necessarily the failure of the airport. The failure is of vision and of the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority. The success in the Tees Valley is because its Mayor has a vision, knows what he wants to do and is combining those. We do not have that in South Yorkshire. That is the ultimate failure.

**Dan Jarvis** *rose*—

**Alexander Stafford:** I give way to the former Mayor.

**Dan Jarvis:** I am just checking that the hon. Member knows that there is a strategic economic plan. Included in that is a clear articulation of the importance of the airport. Has he read it?

**Alexander Stafford:** I am talking about the current Mayor. Of course, I have read the plan. We can all see where the airport fits into it, but that is not how it links together. It is too piecemeal. We may disagree on whether that plan is correct—I disagree with it—but it is too piecemeal. We need an overarching vision for how that works together with the industrial zones and the freeport.

I commend once again my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley on his cross-party way of working. He is a far nicer gentleman than me when it comes to working cross-party.

**Mark Eastwood** (Dewsbury) (Con): My hon. Friend mentions cross-party working. That is similar to what my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) is trying to achieve, working across South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire on the Penistone line—another transport-related project—and all the MPs and the Mayors are fully in agreement on it. Does he agree that it is important that we try to work together on a cross-party basis?

**Alexander Stafford:** Of course, I agree. It is incredibly important that we work cross-party. That is why I have been saddened by some of the debate as well as by the urgent question earlier. We are not working cross-party. There are too many red herrings being thrown about—we

have heard about civil contingencies and this law and this stuff—without working together. We need to unite to pull all those levers to save our airports. We should look at all options, including compulsory purchase if necessary. We have dealt with the situation before in Tees Valley, where we beat Peel. The only difference now is that we have a different Mayor in charge. That is the only conclusion that I can come to.

8.47 pm

**Stephanie Peacock** (Barnsley East) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) on securing this important debate. Thousands of jobs are dependent on Doncaster Sheffield airport, and the stark reality is that there are only days left to save it. Conservative Members have made a number of assertions that the Mayor has the powers to step in, but no one has been able to explain what those powers are. Those cited would take years to exercise.

While Peel is not willingly offering the airport for sale, the reality is that the South Yorkshire Mayor has made Peel Group an offer of public money to keep the airport running until next October and has helped to find three potential investors interested in purchasing the site and keeping the airport operational. Discussions are ongoing between the Peel Group and potential investors. They are non-political, and we hope for a positive outcome, but the Peel Group still refuses to confirm whether it is willing to suspend closure and whether it is even in a position to sell Doncaster Sheffield Airport Ltd. Indeed, if Peel is refusing to sell the airport, the Civil Contingencies Act remains the only way to save it, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) outlined.

The Conservative party seems to be forgetting the assurances made by the outgoing Prime Minister in the last few weeks that the Secretary of State would address the issue immediately and protect the airport. I am really disappointed that the Transport Secretary has not turned up to the debate and that the Government still refuse to meet Opposition Members. This is a grave situation for people across South Yorkshire, including the thousands of workers whose employment relies on the airport, local businesses and, of course, all of us who rely on the emergency services stationed at the airport. It may well be that they can continue to fulfil their contractual obligations, but no doubt they will be disrupted. Has the Minister met the emergency services to discuss that? It is imperative that Ministers step up, that we work together and that Ministers use their powers to do everything they can to save Doncaster Sheffield airport.

8.49 pm

**Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) on securing the debate and on the tireless work he has put in to try to save the airport, which I think is widely acknowledged. However, as has been observed by a number of right hon. and hon. Members tonight, we need to work together. We cannot afford for this to turn into a political row, because the stakes are too high. I think all of us recognise that Doncaster Sheffield airport is a huge economic asset for our region. South Yorkshire and the surrounding areas would be weakened and undermined if the airport were to close, so we all have

an absolute responsibility to do everything we possibly can. However, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) said, the focus has to be on Peel.

I say this with all humility, but I have a pretty comprehensive understanding of the powers that are invested in the mayoralty and the money that is available to the Mayor. For four very difficult years, I worked with local leaders and national Government to make the most of that particular arrangement. I was sorry to hear the hon. Member for Don Valley say that he does not think it is working for South Yorkshire. Many very, very senior members of his Government and very many Conservative Members on his side do think it is working for South Yorkshire. I worked closely with a number of Government Ministers to ensure that it did.

**Nick Fletcher:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Dan Jarvis:** Let me just make a bit of progress, then I will give way. I want to reinforce the very important point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North made about making sure that Peel does the right thing.

A very good and reasonable offer from the Mayor was put to Peel. That offer would have enabled it to continue to operate the airport for up to 13 months. That crucial 13-month period would have provided the time and space to ensure that the ongoing negotiations with the three parties that have stepped forward were given every chance to succeed. Even at this very late hour, I still hope that Peel—I hope it is watching this debate tonight—does the right thing and gets back around the table with the Mayor and the combined authority to look at whether it might be prepared to reconsider. I am happy to give way if the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene.

**Nick Fletcher:** I thank the hon. Member for giving way. I just want to go back to the fact that he believes devolution is working for Doncaster. The city region sustainable transport settlements bid was for £570 million. Some £110 million of that was taken off the top straight away for the trams in Sheffield. The rest of the money, the £460 million, was then divvied up between Doncaster, Rotherham, Sheffield and Barnsley. Another item is the cultural money that has just come to South Yorkshire—£1 million from central Government to the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority. How much did Doncaster get? It got £38,000, or 3.8%. I just want him to confirm that devolution is working for Doncaster people, because I do not think it is.

**Dan Jarvis:** What I can confirm—I am, frankly, uniquely well placed to be able to confirm it—is that for the period of time I was the Mayor, I moved heaven and earth to work very closely with all local leaders to ensure that the money we had available to commit was committed in a way that was fair and equal. Frankly, I am very proud of the fact that none of the leaders were ever able to come to me to say, “You were favouring Barnsley or Sheffield or Doncaster.”

The hon. Gentleman makes a specific point about the money invested in Sheffield in Supertram. That is a very legitimate question for him to raise. I advise him to talk to colleagues on his own Government Front Bench,

because it is almost always the case, as a mayoral combined authority, that you are bidding for—I hope the Minister will confirm this, because this was absolute in my experience and it was the experience of other mayors—pots of funding that are controlled by national Government. Always it is the case that there are very strict rules governing the way that money can be spent. While I was the Mayor, I moved heaven and earth. The hon. Member will remember that we had a number of good-natured constructive conversations to ensure that Doncaster got its fair share. I can look him and the House in the eye and say that Doncaster, along with Barnsley, Rotherham and Sheffield, always got its fair share.

There are issues relating to how national funding pots are structured and created. We do not really do devolution properly in this country. We do not devolve pots of money to mayoral combined authorities for them to commit based on their priorities. The money that comes from Westminster and Whitehall always has very stringent conditions attached. That is not how it should be, but that is the reality.

I was sorry to hear the hon. Member raising concerns—admittedly, that had been raised to him—about the approach from the combined authority in recent years. I categorically assure him and the House that, over the four years that I was the Mayor, we worked tirelessly to make sure that we did everything that we possibly could to invest not just in Doncaster Sheffield airport, but in GatewayEast, as he knows well, because it is in his constituency. GatewayEast is an area that has huge economic potential not only for Doncaster, but for the wider region. Throughout my tenure as the Mayor, there were numerous and significant interventions.

Let me give a flavour of those interventions so that the hon. Member might be a bit reassured. In referring to the Great Yorkshire Way, he made the point, rightly, that private investment went into funding that, but he should also understand—I hope he does—that, in March 2017, the mayoral combined authority provided £9.2 million for the construction of the Great Yorkshire Way. In March 2019, we granted a loan of £3.5 million for capital works, helping to support a key source of the revenue at Doncaster Sheffield airport. In March 2020, there was a second loan of £5 million to enhance passenger capacity. In June 2020, the MCA agreed to extend the £3.5 million loan period for the car park enhancement and defer all interest payments until 2024 to support the airport through the pandemic, which was clearly an incredibly challenging time for airports around the world.

In November 2020, discussions about a significant equity investment began. The MCA took that very seriously at the time: I appointed my then chief exec to lead on the negotiations and we appointed consultants to look very carefully at the business case. It was ultimately determined that the investment would not comply with the subsidy control rules. We sought to work around that, and that is why discussion started at that point about a £20 million loan.

**Nick Fletcher:** We are talking about the jewel in the crown of South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority—the one thing that can set the entirety of South Yorkshire area alight and bring investment into our area—and the hon. Gentleman said, “It has been given an £8.5 million

[Nick Fletcher]

loan in the last five years". That is what it has had: an £8.5 million loan in five years for the jewel in the crown, for 1.8 million people's economic growth and economic future. The Mayor has just spent £24 million, I believe, on some new trams. I am lost for words—I am sorry.

**Dan Jarvis:** The hon. Member has got his maths wrong. The first thing I said was that £9.2 million had gone into supporting infrastructure—

**Nick Fletcher:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Dan Jarvis:** No, I will not. I will make a bit of progress. I then went on to detail a series of other financial interventions that were set alongside a huge amount of activity that was going in to support the airport. Here is the critical point, which I made to the hon. Member earlier: in April 2022—bear in mind that, as he will recall, we were in purdah at that point—the Peel Group indicated that it did not wish to proceed with the work around the £20 million loan.

**Nick Fletcher:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Dan Jarvis:** No, I will not; I am going to make some further points and I will give way to the hon. Member in a moment.

The truth of the matter is—I say this with all humility—that I was there; I was in the room, did the meetings, had the conversation and directed my officers to do the work. We worked very closely with Mayor Ros Jones, who has been a tireless supporter of Doncaster Sheffield airport for many years. The truth is that we completely acknowledged the huge value that DSA added to our regional economy and, as part of the work that we were doing, underpinned by a very detailed strategic economic plan that I am not sure that the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Alexander Stafford) has read, we produced a renewal action plan that provided the wider vision for the kind of economy—

**Alexander Stafford:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** If it is about the contents of the speech, it is not a point of order.

**Alexander Stafford:** On a point of order, I said in my speech that I had read the plan; the hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) is now saying that I have not. For the record, he cannot just say things completely contradicting something that I have said a few minutes before. It is completely disingenuous.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** No—we cannot have “disingenuous”. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could say “bewildering” or something like that.

**Alexander Stafford:** I withdraw my previous comment. “Bewildering”—fine.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** That will do. It is obvious to me that there are differences of opinion about facts and the interpretation of facts. That is why there are different sides of the House and why we have a system in which everybody gets the chance to state their opinions and facts. Let us not get heated about it.

**Dan Jarvis:** Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The other really important point for hon. Members to understand is that, in addition to the significant financial interventions and the clear recognition of the importance of DSA as part of the economic future of South Yorkshire, we did three other really important things as well; the hon. Member for Don Valley knows about them because he and I discussed them at the time. I was always of the view that one of the greatest things we could do to support the long-term economic viability of DSA was to continue to invest in the supporting infrastructure, to make it easier for people to get to the airport. That is why my then officers, working closely with Doncaster Council, did a huge amount of work to draw together the basis of a proposal that would have put an east coast main line station at Doncaster Sheffield airport. That, I think, could have been transformative for the airport and a lot of work, done closely with Transport for the North, went into drawing together the basis of that significant infrastructure proposal.

The hon. Member for Don Valley knows where we got to with that; it was a credible proposal that went forward to national Government. Unfortunately, it was not supported by national Government. Additionally, we also looked at what we could do to better enhance intra-regional connectivity. I was very conscious that there were transport infrastructure interventions that we could have carried out that would have made it easier for local people in the South Yorkshire area to get to the airport. Again, we were not successful in drawing down money to support that.

The third point, with which the hon. Member for Don Valley is very familiar, is that we put a lot of time and investment into developing a freeport proposal for the GatewayEast site. I will let the House into a bit of a secret: not everybody in South Yorkshire was necessarily in favour of that proposal because it potentially came with a range of measures that were not universally popular. However, the decision I took, working closely with the mayoral combined authority, was that, as part of the process of supporting Doncaster Sheffield airport and making it more economically viable in the longer term, we would play the game and work closely with national Government. On that basis, I took the decision to put forward a freeport proposal for GatewayEast, adjacent to Doncaster Sheffield airport. That proposal was not successful even though the Treasury's own analysis, I think, subsequently scored our South Yorkshire bid better than other bids that were ultimately successful.

We tried to get the east coast main line station put in, and we put forward a proposal that was unsuccessful. We did work to improve intra-regional connectivity; that was unsuccessful. Then we put forward the freeport proposal and that was unsuccessful.

**Nick Fletcher:** The hon. Gentleman has questioned my maths. I am very good at maths: £5 million and £3.5 million is £8.5 million—that is the loan—and £9.2 million was used for the road. Peel put in £11 million, which is £1.8 million more than the combined authority put in. That is what I am trying to say.

I am not making excuses. I am asking why, if the airport is the jewel in the crown of South Yorkshire—I am sure that those are the combined authority's own words—it is not being supported more. I am not giving

excuses. I understand the hon. Gentleman's comments about freeports; I am trying to get an investment zone for the area now, which will hopefully be even better than a freeport. But if the combined authority is not seen to invest in its own infrastructure and its own jewel in the crown, what does that say to the Government? "Are you prepared to invest in your own?" "Well, no, we're not." What is the point?

We need vision, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Alexander Stafford) says, that is what has been lacking. With silo working, it has become "Sheffield is trams and Doncaster is planes." I am afraid that that is just not good enough.

**Dan Jarvis:** I recommend that the hon. Gentleman spends a bit of time with my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) to get a sense of the realities of local government finance. The reality is that the revenue that the Mayor has at any one time to expend is very limited. The hon. Member for Don Valley mentioned the £30 million of gainshare; there is a very strict split between capital and revenue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East made the point that there are a range of other financial commitments that the mayoral combined authority has to service. There are other infrastructural investments that have to be made. The job of the Mayor is to look at things in the round and work out what money is available and where it can best be deployed.

The hon. Member for Don Valley did not mention the sum of £20 million, which is a very significant commitment from the mayoral authority. As I have said to him previously, in April 2022, when we had gone into purdah and I was going to be Mayor for a couple more weeks, the Peel Group indicated that it did not wish to continue developing the loan proposal at that time. That was an offer in good faith that had been worked up between senior officers in the mayoral combined authority and senior officials in the Peel Group, but they took the decision that they did not want to continue those conversations. That is the reality of it.

**Mr Betts:** Does my hon. Friend share my disappointment that parts of South Yorkshire sometimes think that the way forward is to have a row with other parts of South Yorkshire rather than working collectively, as the Manchester authorities appear able to? This is not about Doncaster's airport versus Sheffield's trams. Sheffield is a major city. Major European cities have light rail systems; Sheffield needs and wants a light rail system. It should not be about having one or the other or fighting over the scraps; it should be about arguing collectively for extra money for the infrastructure that we need in each of our areas. That is why Sheffield MPs are here tonight to support Doncaster Sheffield airport—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. I am getting confused about who is intervening on whom. The hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) has the Floor. The hon. Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) has intervened on him. Have I just let the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) intervene on the hon. Gentleman intervening? I do hope not?

**Mr Betts:** I am sorry if I confused you, Madam Deputy Speaker; I hope that I did not confuse anybody else at the same time. I was intervening on my hon.

Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) to ask whether he agrees that it is unfortunately all too common among some people in South Yorkshire to start a blame game between the constituent parts of the authority, rather than working collectively as Sheffield Members are here to do tonight.

**Dan Jarvis:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend's important point. The truth of the matter is that every Member of Parliament in South Yorkshire wants Doncaster Sheffield airport to stay open. We all want that, which is why we are collectively frustrated that we have not had the opportunity to get around the table with a Minister and voice our concerns in that kind of forum. It is a good thing that we are having this debate tonight, but let us be honest: it is only a quirk of fate that we have been able to have this elongated discussion. It is only because today's business ended sooner than normal that hon. Members have the opportunity to put their concerns on the record.

**Mark Eastwood:** May I correct the hon. Gentleman on one point? He has just referred to Members of Parliament in South Yorkshire, but Members of Parliament in west Yorkshire are also very concerned about this, which is why I have been supporting my hon. Friends the Members for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher) and for Rother Valley (Alexander Stafford) in their campaign. Quite a number of fingers are being pointed at the Mayor and at the Government, but it is the Peel Group on which we ought to be focusing, and what I want to ask the hon. Gentleman is this: how do we get the Peel Group to the table so that this can be discussed and subsequently resolved?

**Dan Jarvis:** The hon. Gentleman has made an important point. I entirely recognise, and am grateful for, the support that has come from Members outside South Yorkshire. I know that there is strong support from Members in West Yorkshire and North Yorkshire, and indeed from further afield—from north Nottinghamshire and the east midlands.

I do not think anyone in this place does not want the airport to remain open. That is why I am expressing so much frustration. Given the importance of the asset for the region and given the overwhelming cross-party support, I honestly cannot understand why the Secretary of State does not act. I am not having a go at the Minister, because I know that this is not within her brief—the Minister responsible sits in the other place—but I think that those who have been around for a while will understand that Ministers have a duty and a responsibility to sit down and meet their colleagues, which is why I am genuinely frustrated that there has not been such an opportunity.

Even at this late hour, I still think there would be merit in a meeting between Members on both sides of the House, from further afield than South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, North Yorkshire and the Humber. I think they should get round the table in the Department with the Minister and the Secretary of State so that our concerns can be voiced. That, I think, would be a constructive gathering, because in the end we all want the same thing. None of us wants to see the jobs go; none of us wants to see South Yorkshire's economic potential undermined by the loss of this strategic asset. All of us want to see a regional airport strategy that works in the best interests of our regions.

[Dan Jarvis]

I have never been one of those people who pit the north against the south. That is an entirely unhelpful metric. The Minister is looking around; I do not suggest for a moment that anyone present is doing that, but sometimes in the context of a conversation about levelling up, the north is pitted against the south and vice versa. I note that an airport in Kent which closed a number of years ago is about to reopen. The Government are supporting that proposal, and I think they are doing the right thing. I want people in Kent to have the best possible access to such facilities. However, I also want people in South Yorkshire, in Doncaster, in the north of England, to have access to this kind of infrastructure.

We will have a new Prime Minister very shortly. He is a Yorkshire MP. There is a big opportunity for him to do something significant at this late hour. The new Prime Minister knows his way around the Treasury, and he knows what the art of the possible is.

**Alexander Stafford:** The hon. Member says that there is an opportunity for the new Prime Minister to do something. Apart from having a meeting with Members who are in the Chamber tonight, what is the “something”, which keeps being alluded to, that Members want the Government to do? Is there a lever that the Government are not pulling which the hon. Member wants them to pull? On our side, we are saying that the South Yorkshire Mayor will want to make a compulsory purchase. What lever does the hon. Member believe the Government should be pulling?

**Dan Jarvis:** As my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North made very clear, the option involving the Civil Contingencies Act does provide a mechanism—*[Interruption.]* The Minister laughs. The legal advice that underpins the excellent work done by my right hon. Friends the Members for Doncaster North and for Doncaster Central (Dame Rosie Winterton) comes from one of the pre-eminent legal minds in our country, described by the hon. Member for Don Valley as a Labour peer. The truth of the matter is that this is someone who is highly respected within—*[Interruption.]* The Minister chunters from a sedentary position. *[Interruption.]* We are trying to be constructive here, and the proposal that was brought forward was absolutely worthy of merit. I very much hope that officials in the Minister’s Department have looked at it closely and taken legal advice. The letter from my right hon. Friends the Members for Doncaster North and for Doncaster Central (Dame Rosie Winterton), which many of us co-signed, invited the Minister in a sensible grown-up and constructive way to meet us to have a conversation about this, but we have never had that meeting. It is very frustrating that we have not had the opportunity to sit round the table and have a grown-up conversation—*[Interruption.]* The Minister is yawning and looking at her watch. People’s jobs are on the line and Government Ministers will not get round the table and meet us—*[Interruption.]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. We will not have this conversation from a sedentary position. The Minister will very shortly be addressing the House and will be able to answer all these questions. Very shortly, I think.

**Dan Jarvis:** I will take the hint, Madam Deputy Speaker, and draw my remarks to a conclusion.

Members put it to the Secretary of State at Transport questions recently that we thought there was merit in having a grown-up conversation. The Secretary of State said that she did not want to do that. That is a great shame. Imagine what it must feel like tonight for the people who work at Doncaster Sheffield airport. They can see the clock ticking down and they are days, hours, away from losing their jobs, yet Government Ministers will not even sit down with Members of Parliament to hear their concerns. I would be happy to give way to the Minister if she can tell me that she is happy to arrange an urgent meeting with Members from across the House. In my time in this House, I can never remember a situation where a matter of such importance as this has not led to a ministerial meeting.

**Nick Fletcher:** I just want to quickly go back a bit, and then I will address the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. I believe that the £20 million loan was withdrawn around about 12 March and never actually made it to the cabinet meeting that was going to sign it off. That is when it should have been signed off. I believe that there is no record of it in the minutes. As I say, this is only what I am led to believe. There was no record of it in the minutes; it was not there. I do not believe that the Mayor for Doncaster raised it either. That is an important point, and maybe we can look at those minutes to see if it was there.

This is why am asking for a public inquiry. I am trying to be collegial here. I have tried all the way through this, and I will continue to try, but I have been excluded from meeting after meeting of Labour Members with regard to working groups and suchlike. I have also spoken to the Minister and the Secretary of State several times about the Civil Contingencies Act.

**Dan Jarvis:** I am mindful of your advice to draw matters to a conclusion, Madam Deputy Speaker, but would say to the hon. Member that we are trying to save the airport here. He might want to dig into the minutes but, as I said to him previously, the offer was on the table and in April 2022, Peel indicated that it did not wish to continue with developing the loan proposal at that time. That is the absolute fact of the matter.

My final point is to return to the frustration, which is held by many, that we have not had the opportunity to meet Ministers to impress upon them the importance of this issue. I very much hope that when the Minister comes to the Dispatch Box she will take the opportunity to confirm that she will urgently convene a meeting and give Members from right across the House and from all in the region who have been represented in the debate the opportunity to have a constructive meeting with the Secretary of State, given the importance of the issue. I very much hope that she will take the opportunity tonight to confirm that the Secretary of State will be prepared to do that.

9.18 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Katherine Fletcher):** Let me first apologise to the House. The hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) was correct: I was yawning. That is because I was up at 5.30 this morning to go and open Bond Street tube station, which is a cracking example of the type of

investment that people working together can deliver for people. But he is correct, I am flagging a touch, so I will attempt to keep my remarks brief.

I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Nick Fletcher). He is possibly the best Fletcher in this House. It is obvious how important this debate is to people, and I praise his tenacity in championing this issue. He cares about the future of the airport, he cares about his constituents and he cares about his friends and family. I was touched listening to him talk about watching the Vulcans. I saw them as a child at Woodford aerodrome, which is no longer there. I miss seeing them, and I share his passion for it, even though I do not have the aviation brief.

The Government are deeply disappointed that the Peel Group has taken this difficult decision to close Doncaster Sheffield airport. It is a commercial decision made by the airport's owners, and I am aware of the concerns about this decision among passengers, constituents across the South Yorkshire region, businesses and organisations in the supply chain and people who work at the airport.

I set out many of the issues during the urgent question, but I will give a brief recap. I make it clear that, although the UK Government support airports, we do not own or operate them. Several Opposition Members have suggested that a meeting would magically unlock the situation, but I do not believe it would—I will return to the topic of meetings.

The devolved Administrations, local authorities and combined authorities in other areas of the UK are frequently shareholders in the regional airports that serve their communities, as is the case with Manchester Airports Group, Birmingham airport, London Luton airport and, more recently, Teesside International airport. The UK aviation market operates predominantly in the private sector. Airports invest in their infrastructure to attract airlines and passengers, and airlines are well placed to deliver services to their customers by responding to the demand for different routes.

Since the Peel Group's announcement on 13 July of a review into the future of Doncaster Sheffield airport, the Government have been actively working with local stakeholders to encourage a future for aviation at the site. I understand that South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority and Doncaster Council have been working to explore options for a locally led solution. The local authorities have written to the Peel Group to pass on the details of the parties who are interested in discussing the potential to invest in the airport. I understand that, as of today, the Peel Group has already begun to engage with the parties interested in a commercial deal.

The aviation Minister, Baroness Vere, met the Peel Group on 19 October and strongly encouraged it to engage seriously with any interested parties, and has received assurances that it will do so. She has been strongly encouraging the Peel Group to consider the offer of financial bridging support from the local authorities and the mayoral combined authority if it requires time to take forward discussions with investors. I understand that there are some questions that need to be addressed about the stepping stones to medium-term strategic viability, but she has discussed that with the Peel Group.

The Government have remained engaged with all parties throughout the review. Since the decision to close the airport, there has been regular contact between

officials and representatives from the Peel Group, the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority and Doncaster Council. The Government are committed to encouraging local leaders and the Peel Group to work together to find a solution for the site that will benefit local people and the regional economy.

The hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) mentioned that Doncaster Sheffield airport currently offers a base for the National Police Air Service and for 2Excel Aviation, a private company that delivers search and rescue services for the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. I am happy to confirm that Baroness Vere has met 2Excel and understands that there are contingency plans in place. Officials have also engaged with the Home Office about the National Police Air Service fixed wing support.

The right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) mentioned Lord Falconer, who I am sure is an eminent legal brain. He has had the opportunity to meet Baroness Vere and to engage on whether the threshold for civil contingencies has been met. The threshold is necessarily extremely high, as the then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster set out when the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 was introduced by the Blair Government. Unfortunately Baroness Vere, despite Lord Falconer's suggestion, is not happy that this is a national emergency, because both services have engaged with her and can put in place contingency plans. She is further assured that the Peel Group is working with them to make sure that any bridging period is covered. That does not cover the essence of the debate, but I just want to offer the hon. Lady that assurance.

The Government have made it clear to Peel Group that it needs to manage the closure process effectively and in consultation with operators at Doncaster Sheffield Airport. The Peel Group has publicly stated that it will work with those operators to minimise the disruption to their operations and customers. We have pressed Peel Group to honour that—when I say “we”, I mean my colleagues within the Department—and to avoid disruption to those important operations.

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 has been mentioned. It requires a high bar to be engaged. It requires an emergency, which is defined as a situation that threatens “serious damage to human welfare...damage to the environment...or war, or terrorism”

which affects the security of the United Kingdom. As someone who has used Robin Hood airport, as it then was, I understand how important such an airport is. However, the advice the Department is getting is not that the threshold has been reached to engage the 2004 Act. As the Transport Secretary has highlighted, we are just not persuaded on that. I think we can all agree that it would be much better for all if a commercial solution could be found to minimise the disruption to these operations.

**Stephanie Peacock:** Obviously we have a disagreement, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) has outlined. May I just press the Minister to explain to the House and to us why the Secretary of State is refusing to meet Opposition Members? Can the Minister not this evening just commit to a meeting?

**Katherine Fletcher:** I ask the hon. Lady to bear with me for a moment, because I am planning to address that. I will first just address the call for a public inquiry made so passionately by my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley. A very high bar needs to be cleared for a public inquiry. Although we have gone away to look and understand the potential grounds for one, the recommendation is that a locally led review and solution could have similar and perhaps more positive effects in a shorter timescale than the full public inquiry that he calls for. He notes that South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority and Doncaster Council are integral to developing commercially viable solutions. Discussions between the authority, council and Peel are still ongoing, to assess the credibility of investors. As he outlined, powers sit with the local authorities and, as such, I think it would be right for the local authorities and their leaders to push for a locally led review, rather than having a public inquiry at this time.

**Nick Fletcher:** Would that not be people marking their own homework? That is all I am concerned about.

**Katherine Fletcher:** I am probably at the point where my expertise in the aviation portfolio is far outweighed by that of my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts), who is sat on the Bench in front of my hon. Friend and perhaps would be able to offer him some advice on that.

I wish to return to the point about meetings. I have mentioned Lord Falconer and his legal advice, and the meeting with Baroness Vere about the Civil Contingencies Act option. I am reliably advised that meetings with Department for Transport officials have been offered to the South Yorkshire Mayor by the Secretary of State as a prelude to further meetings. DFT officials are also having weekly meetings with the local authorities, often involving the chief executive of Doncaster Council. I will happily give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Witney if this is not correct, but I am also informed by officials that when he was previously aviation Minister he convened a meeting between Mayor Ben Houchen and Mayor Oliver Coppard in which this was included.

**Stephanie Peacock:** It is great that the Minister has listed those meetings, but she has failed to answer the point that I have made, along with many of my colleagues: the Secretary of State sat there at Transport questions and three times refused to meet us. She is not here this evening. Why will the Minister not just agree to meet Labour Members?

**Katherine Fletcher:** Unfortunately, I cannot acquiesce to the hon. Lady's request, because the issue is not within my portfolio. I am extremely happy to pass on her request to the aviation Minister, but I am sure the hon. Lady would not want me to make commitments for her at the Dispatch Box when she is not here.

We have met the emergency services, Lord Falconer, 2Excel, the police and the local Mayor, and we have organised other meetings. I gently say to several Opposition Members that this all seems a bit panicky when I have given a bit of a to-do list of what is being done and my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley has been running such an effective campaign for 104 days.

**Stephanie Peacock** *rose*—

**Katherine Fletcher:** I am going to make some progress.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Alexander Stafford) spoke passionately about Yorkshire's vision and future and about his desire to join up the dots. As a nascent Transport Minister, I share the idea that joining up the dots and setting out a coherent vision for the future is really important, be that for the north-west, South Yorkshire, the northern powerhouse or the whole country, and I commend him for his point.

To conclude, I congratulate everybody who has participated in possibly one of the lengthiest Adjournment debates—as my first Adjournment debate, it will certainly last long in my memory. I am delighted to hear everybody share their memories and their passion. In the spirit of working together, I look forward to results perhaps coming through.

Doncaster Sheffield airport is important to constituencies across the House and the region, and I have no doubt about the strength of people's feelings. I call on Peel Group to continue to work with stakeholders to ensure that the impacts of its decision to close the airport are minimised or that another solution is found. The Government are clear in their wish to see local leaders work on a solution that best serves the interests of the wider community, and the Department stands ready to help. I am pleased that potential investors have come forward and registered an interest, and I reiterate my desire for Peel Group to engage in the best possible way. I have been assured that it has given that commitment to Baroness Vere, and I hope that it will consider the bridging support offered, to allow for commercial decisions to move forward.

The Government will continue to work with all parties to exhaust all options to preserve the airport.

**Stephanie Peacock** *rose*—

**Katherine Fletcher:** I am nearly done.

However, we recognise that the final decision on whether an offer is accepted sits with Peel, because this is a commercial airport site. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker; I think this has been a really good debate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

9.32 pm

*House adjourned.*



# Westminster Hall

Monday 24 October 2022

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

## Covid-19 Vaccines: Safety

4.30 pm

**Elliot Colburn** (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 602171, relating to the safety of covid-19 vaccines.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. On behalf of the Petitions Committee, I will read out the prayer of the petition, which states:

“There has been a significant increase in heart attacks and related health issues since the rollout of the Covid-19 vaccines... This needs immediate and full scientific investigation to establish if there is any possible link with the Covid-19 vaccination rollout.

It is the duty of the Government to ensure that the prescribed medical interventions of its response to Coronavirus are safe. We believe that the recent and increasing volume of data relating to cardiovascular problems since the Covid-19 vaccine rollout began is... enough... to warrant a full Public Inquiry.”

The petition has amassed over 107,000 signatures, including signatories from my own Carshalton and Wallington constituency. I put on record my gratitude to the Petitions Committee Clerks and the team behind the scenes for organising today’s debate, and particularly to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency—the MHRA—which recently briefed me on its vaccine safety surveillance strategy. Throughout my speech, I will point out why I do not think that the Government should launch a public inquiry into vaccine safety; it would be a waste of taxpayers’ money, and is not necessary for reasons that I will discuss.

The covid-19 vaccine has been the subject of four previous e-petitions debates in Westminster Hall, and of many other parliamentary debates, many questions and much Committee work since the pandemic hit. It is worth remembering that, for the first 26 months of the pandemic, over 178,000 people across the UK died within 28 days of a positive covid-19 test. It remains my position that vaccination is the single most effective way to reduce deaths and severe illness from covid-19.

More than 53 million people in the UK have received at least their first covid-19 vaccine, and I put on record my thanks to the amazing staff and volunteers who contributed to that gargantuan operation, which was a shining example of effective national collaboration. I would go so far as to say that, in the public inquiry into covid, the Government should look at how the vaccine roll-out was such a success, how we can learn from that success and how we can apply those lessons in future circumstances.

**Sir Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): My hon. Friend has obviously done a lot of preparation for the debate. Did part of that preparation include looking at Oracle Films’ “Safe and Effective: A Second Opinion”, which was produced about a month ago and has already had more than 1 million views online? Most people think it highly persuasive.

**Elliot Colburn:** I have not seen that publication, although I have read a lot of the significant amounts of material that have been shoved through my constituency office door by a large number of anti-vax protesters, who have flyposted my office on no less than a dozen occasions, and intimidated my 18-year-old apprentice and the people who live above my constituency office. Given that the content of that literature includes climate change denial, moon landing denial and so on, I am inclined to ignore it completely.

It is impossible to vaccinate every person in the country, nor should vaccines be thrust upon people without their consent. People have a right to know what is put in their bodies, and have the autonomy to decide whether to have a vaccination. It is therefore the job of the state to ensure not only that vaccines are safe for use and continually reviewed, but that knowledge of why they are safe and effective is communicated well to our constituents.

With that in mind, I will briefly outline the steps taken to review the safety of covid-19 vaccines before the roll-out, and the continuous monitoring of vaccine safety. All vaccines must be tested through a series of clinical trials to establish their efficacy and safety, and must have a product licence before they can be made available for widespread use in humans.

The MHRA is responsible for regulating all medicines and medical devices in the UK by ensuring they work and are acceptably safe. Starting in 2020, a dedicated team of MHRA scientists and clinicians carried out a rigorous, detailed scientific review of all the available data in the development of covid-19 vaccines, including from laboratory pre-clinical studies, clinical trials, manufacturing and quality controls, product sampling and testing of the final vaccine, and it considered the conditions for the vaccine’s safe supply and distribution.

In early June 2020, the MHRA set up an independent expert working group to begin some of the most important safety work. In August 2020, a second working group was formed with different expertise, this time to advise the MHRA on the benefits and risks of the vaccines in development. The groups were formed of 48 experts from outside the MHRA, including virologists, epidemiologists, immunologists and toxicologists.

In September 2020, the MHRA started preparing laboratories for independent batch testing of the vaccine. Although the vaccine manufacturers carried out their own comprehensive testing regimes on the batches of products they produced, it is vital that tests focusing on safety and quality are conducted independently too. In the UK, the independent testing is performed by the National Institute for Biological Standards and Control, which is part of the MHRA. Before any batch testing can reach the public, the NIBSC must conduct a rigorous assessment to check that it is consistent with characteristics derived from results from batches previously shown to be safe, and from effective clinical trials or routine clinical use. That work began in November 2020.

The covid-19 vaccines were developed in a co-ordinated way that allowed some stages of the assessment processes to happen in parallel, which enabled the producers and regulators to condense the time normally needed. That rolling review allowed the MHRA to review data as it became available from ongoing studies, rather than waiting.

**Danny Kruger (Devides) (Con):** My hon. Friend talks about the independence of the MHRA, and I very much hope he is right about that. Is he aware that it is overwhelmingly funded by the pharmaceutical companies that it regulates? Does he have any concerns about the objectivity of its work?

**Elliot Colburn:** No, I see nothing to concern me about the independence of the MHRA. Indeed, I saw a group of anti-vax protesters outside the House today, holding up signs saying, “Vaccines kill,” and, “Would you not believe that pharmaceutical companies kill?” It seems a bit of a strange business model for a pharmaceutical company to kill off everyone it is trying to administer a vaccine to. I have seen absolutely nothing to concern me that the MHRA has any problems with independence.

For previous vaccines, we have had to wait for a full package and for each stage to be finished before moving on to the next stage. That is one of the reasons that the covid-19 vaccine was developed at such speed; corners were not cut, but the model was changed.

Pfizer and BioNTech fed the MHRA data to be assessed even before the final clinical submission in November 2020. Once it was submitted, scientific and clinical experts robustly and thoroughly reviewed it with scientific rigour, looking at all aspects, including the laboratory studies, the clinical trials and more. That included assessing the level of protection the product provides and how long that protection is provided for, as well as its safety, stability and how it needs to be stored.

On top of that, the MHRA has a range of experts inspecting the sites used across the whole lifecycle of the vaccine, from its initial development in a lab to its manufacture and distribution once approved. The inspectors work to legislation that incorporates internationally recognised clinical standards. The MHRA seeks advice from the Commission on Human Medicines, the Government’s independent advisory body, which critically assesses the data before advising the UK Government on the safety, quality and effectiveness of any potential vaccine.

I wish I could delve deeper into the specifics of how and why vaccines work, but we would be here all night and I do not want to duplicate the work that has been done in other debates. Nevertheless, I hope I have managed to demonstrate succinctly the rigorous scientific testing that occurs prior to a vaccine being distributed in the UK. However, the main premise of much of the literature that has been distributed about the impact of the covid-19 vaccine and the nationwide roll-out needs to be looked into. As part of its statutory functions, the MHRA continually monitors the use of vaccines to ensure that their benefits continue to outweigh any risks. This monitoring strategy is continuous, proactive and based on a wide range of information sources, with a dedicated team of scientists reviewing information daily to look for safety issues or unexpected events.

**Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con):** My hon. Friend is making a good speech. My constituent Gareth Eve lost his wife Lisa Shaw when she was only 44, as a result of the AstraZeneca vaccine. He is not an anti-vaxxer. Although the debate is on the broad issue, does my hon. Friend agree that matters such as how families get compensation could be dealt with

much better, even if he does not agree with a full public inquiry into the entire body of the issue? So many families, including that of my constituent, have been left waiting for that support for a very long time.

**Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair):** Order. I appreciate that hon. Members wish to represent their constituents, but interventions must be interventions and not speeches.

**Elliot Colburn:** I am very sorry to hear of the case of my hon. Friend’s constituent, and I agree that we need to look at compensation and measures when things go wrong. No vaccine is without risk. No medicine is without risk, but that is the balance that we must weigh up when making decisions about our own health.

Let me return to the safety and efficacy of the vaccine, and how that is monitored. The core of this work is individuals self-reporting any adverse effects post vaccination, and active surveillance of particular groups of adverse events. That is well known as the yellow card scheme. I recently met representatives of the MHRA to be briefed on its vaccine safety surveillance strategy, which has four main pillars, the first of which is enhanced passive surveillance through observed versus expected analysis. The MHRA performs enhanced statistical analysis on data generated through the yellow card scheme to evaluate observed versus expected event reports in order to determine whether more events are occurring after vaccination than might be expected ordinarily. That assists the MHRA to identify when and where vaccine-related side effects are signalled.

Secondly, the MHRA conducts rapid cycle analysis and ecological analysis to supplement the yellow card scheme, which relies on direct reporting. The MHRA also analyses anonymised electronic healthcare records, particularly by way of the clinical practice research datalink Aurum dataset, which captures data from 13 million registered GP patients in the UK. It will track a range of theoretical side effects in order to detect safety signals. The MHRA also performs ecological analysis to monitor trends in high priority vaccination population cohorts—for example, increased trends among the elderly.

Thirdly, the agency performs targeted active monitoring; it has developed a new, voluntary follow-up platform for a randomly selected group of those vaccinated through the NHS. The group is contacted at set intervals to determine the frequency and severity of any vaccine side effects. Finally, there are formal epidemiological studies. The above methods detect signals and patterns but do not necessarily confirm vaccine causation. As such, where necessary, formal epidemiological studies are undertaken to solidify causal links.

As of 28 September 2022, in the UK, 173,381 yellow cards had been reported for Pfizer-BioNTech; 246,393 for AstraZeneca; 42,437 for Moderna; 14 for Novavax; and 1,848 for vaccines where the brand was not specified. For Pfizer, AstraZeneca and Moderna, the reporting rate is about two to five yellow cards per 1,000 doses administered.

The use of the yellow card scheme has been used as an example of why vaccines do not work, but it is important to note that the scheme is a self-reporting system. It cannot be used to prove a causal link between reported symptoms and potential damage caused. The reported reaction could have occurred regardless of the vaccine, or the person reporting could have no knowledge

of the relationship between that symptom and the vaccine; it may have occurred even if the person had not been vaccinated altogether. I could get on the phone to the yellow card scheme right now and say that I have a side effect from a vaccine—I could completely make it up. The scheme has no verification process.

**Danny Kruger:** I think my hon. Friend is suggesting that the yellow card scheme numbers exaggerate the potential negative effect of the vaccines. Is he aware that the independent MHRA suggests that vaccine injuries have been under-reported by one in 10, meaning that there may be 10 times more vaccine-related injuries than the yellow card scheme reports? Surely, if there is an exaggeration, it is in the opposition direction from the one that he is suggesting.

**Elliot Colburn:** I am aware of that, but the point I am making is that the yellow card scheme is not a determining factor of damage done by the vaccine; there is no way to prove a causal link, as the reported reaction could have happened anyway. The worldwide awareness of covid, its blanket media coverage over multiple years, and the impact it has had on all our lives, are bound to have led to an increase in reports from previous vaccine roll-outs. Most reports relate to injection site reactions, including a sore arm and generalised symptoms, such as flu-like symptoms, illness, headache, chills, fatigue, nausea, fever, dizziness, weakness, aching muscles or rapid heartbeat. Generally, those reactions are not associated with more serious illness and likely reflect an expected, normal immune response to vaccines.

There have been some occurrences of inflammatory heart conditions following a covid-19 vaccination, but fortunately they are incredibly rare. For Pfizer, the suspected myocarditis reporting rate is 12 reports per 1 million doses. For suspected pericarditis, including viral pericarditis and infective pericarditis, the overall reporting rate is eight reports per 1 million doses. For Moderna, that is 42 per million, and for AstraZeneca four per million.

The events reported are typically mild, with individuals usually recovering within a short time, following standard treatment and rest. The benefits of the vaccines in protecting against covid-19 and the serious complications associated with it far outweigh any currently known side effects. I understand that one of the biggest concerns about vaccine safety is the potential influence on excess deaths. Of course, the excess mortality rates have increased. However, there is no evidence to prove a causal relationship between a spike in excess deaths and covid-19. I am not clinically trained, so I do not wish to preach in this debate, but multiple drivers could have caused the spike, including the impact of missed and delayed diagnoses earlier in the pandemic, and the long-term impact of covid-19 on people who contracted it; and that has been confirmed to me by the MHRA.

In one study this year, researchers estimated how often covid-19 leads to cardiovascular problems. They found that people who had the disease faced a substantially increased risk for 20 cardiovascular conditions in the year after infection with coronavirus. Researchers say that such complications can happen even in people who seem to have completely recovered from a mild infection. With millions—perhaps even billions—of people having been infected with the virus, clinicians are wondering

whether the pandemic will be followed by a cardiovascular aftershock. Again, I am not clinically trained, but I wanted to touch on that point to provide some food for thought, because I understand that the issues around excess mortality rates are of extreme importance.

Easily the biggest elephant in the room while discussing the safety of the covid-19 vaccine and a potential inquiry into its safety is that the Government have already announced a public inquiry into their handling of the covid-19 pandemic as a whole. Since the Government responded to the petition, the terms of reference for the UK covid-19 public inquiry have been published by the Cabinet Office. One of the inquiry's aims is to examine

“The response of the health and care sector across the UK...including the development, delivery and impact of therapeutics and vaccines”.

The first preliminary hearing of module 1 of the inquiry took place just a few weeks ago, with the second due to take place next Monday. The inquiry will further announce modules in 2023 that are expected to cover both system and impact issues, including vaccines, therapeutics and antiviral treatment. I would be grateful if the Minister could shed a bit more light on the aim of the content of the modules that will be investigating the vaccines, and if she could provide more details on how others can contribute towards the process, including those who signed the petition.

I will bring my comments to a close because other Members wish to contribute. I appreciate that for some people the question of whether the covid-19 vaccine is safe is still up in the air, and I understand that my comments may not easily persuade them otherwise. However, we know that vaccines are the best way to protect against covid-19 and they have already saved tens of thousands of lives. I hope that I can offer some reassurance to those who are unsure about this matter that the right steps were taken to ensure that vaccines were safe prior to roll-out, and that vaccines continue to be monitored for their safety and effectiveness. I hope that they can also be reassured by the Minister's remarks that the Government are including an extensive investigation into the vaccine as part of their covid-19 public inquiry, and that separate investigation is not necessary.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair):** Nobody from the Opposition Benches? No. I call Danny Kruger.

4.51 pm

**Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn), who gave a very good defence of the vaccine programme and of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency. I respect that, but I regret his response to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope), who raised the point about medical expertise that casts some doubt on the vaccines. My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington chose to smear all opponents of the vaccine programme. Of course there are lunatics out there who make absurd and outrageous claims, but there are many reasonable and respectable people who have anxieties about the vaccine programme, particularly people who have suffered as a result of the programme and their families.

[*Danny Kruger*]

I am a member of the all-party parliamentary group on covid-19 vaccine damage, which my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch chairs. The APPG looks at vaccine injuries, and we had what I think was our first meeting last week in a Committee room in Portcullis House. I am afraid there were only a tiny handful of colleagues there, but well over a hundred members of the public attended, which is not the usual story for an APPG. I felt somewhat ashamed, on behalf of Parliament, that that was the first time that those members of the public—including families of the bereaved, who are themselves injured citizens—had had the opportunity to be in a room with members of this House, but I am very pleased that we are having this debate, and particularly pleased that there is an opportunity for members of the public to hear from the Minister on this topic.

I should say to members of the public who are watching that we have in Westminster Hall today a very good Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Dr Johnson), who is genuinely committed to health, including public health, and she showed a real interest in this topic and in the effect of covid policies when she was a Back-Bench MP.

Although many questions about our covid response need to be answered, the UK is by no means the worst offender. We are not Canada, New Zealand or China—places where Governments think they can exterminate covid by depriving their population of the most basic civil liberties. However, I am afraid that we still have many questions to ask ourselves, and even much to be ashamed of. I put on record that in hindsight I am particularly ashamed of my vote to dismiss care workers who did not want to receive the vaccine. I very much hope that the 40,000 care workers who lost their jobs can be reinstated, and indeed compensated. A group of us—including, I think, the Minister—held out against compulsory vaccination of health workers when that was proposed by the Government last winter. I think that resistance turned the tide, to a degree, on Government policy, and we emerged from the lockdowns more quickly than we might otherwise have done, yet we still have a policy of mass vaccination, which I want to query on behalf of constituents who have written to me about it.

My query starts with a simple point. In October 2020, when preparations were being made for the vaccine roll-out, Kate Bingham, the head of the vaccines agency, said:

“There’s going to be no vaccination of people under 18. It’s an adult-only vaccine, for people over 50, focusing on health workers and care home workers and the vulnerable.”

Why was vaccination extended to the whole population? I do not think we have ever had a completely satisfactory answer to that question. I ask it again, because my concern is that extending the vaccination programme became an operation in public persuasion—an operation in which dissent was unhelpful or even immoral, and an operation that justified the suppression and even vilification of those who raised concerns.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. Unlike any other vaccine, the covid vaccine was given to people who had natural immunity because they had provably contracted the virus. Why were those people vaccinated?

**Danny Kruger:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The best vaccine against covid is covid, and many people were naturally immune. There are questions to be asked about the effects of vaccination on the immune system.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington made an understandable point about the importance of resisting misinformation. As I mentioned, there are certainly many crazy theories out there to which we need not give credence. If we are talking about a programme of vaccinating the population, it is important that the public are persuaded to do what the Government want them to do, so I understand why the Government should have a public health information campaign. However, it is an essential principle of medical ethics that people must be able to give informed consent before any treatment, and I worry about whether we can say that consent was fully informed in all cases.

Throughout, there has been misinformation in favour of the vaccine. I would not say that was deliberate; it was possibly accidental. We can tell that with hindsight. Perhaps the most egregious example was the claim that the vaccine is 95% effective; as was mentioned earlier, Dr Malhotra presented on this to the APPG last week. That figure refers simply to the relative risk, instead of the actual or absolute reduction in risk to an individual. The absolute risk reduction is really less than 1%.

There was also the widespread claim that the vaccine stops transmission, so people should take the jab to protect other people. We were all told that; we all believed that for many months. Last month, we heard from Pfizer that its vaccine was never tested to see whether it would stop transmission. Despite that, we had the notorious claim by Professor Chris Whitty that even though the vaccine brought no benefit to children, children should be vaccinated to protect wider society. I am all for thinking about society, not the individual, but that, again, feels like a profound break with medical ethics. A lot of people are asking what the vaccine does to children and young people, and Professor Whitty is right that the benefit to healthy children seems to be essentially nil.

There are genuine questions to be asked. I have not verified these questions; I merely ask them on behalf of my constituents. How do we explain the increase in the rates of myocarditis, heart attacks and excess deaths among young people? Indeed, across the general population, it is plausible, though not definitive, that the vaccine is responsible for more harms than we know about. As I said in my intervention, we know from the yellow card scheme that up to one in 200 hundred people vaccinated report an adverse reaction. That is bad enough in itself, but we also know that adverse effects are significantly under-reported through the yellow card scheme. Based on the MHRA’s research, there may be as many as 10 times more serious adverse reactions than the yellow card system shows.

**Apsana Begum** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is important for the Minister to explain how people who say they have experienced damage from the vaccine can ensure that they are heard? There is the yellow card scheme, the module in the public inquiry, and people can apply for vaccine damage compensation, but there need to be more meaningful ways through which people can be engaged with on their experiences of damage.

**Danny Kruger:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady—I absolutely agree. This is a very important moment in which the Minister can hear from Members speaking on behalf of their constituents. I encourage far greater engagement with citizens who have suffered from vaccine damage, or even lost loved ones to it.

There may be innocent explanations for the rather terrifying facts I have mentioned; I very much hope there are. If these are conspiracy theories, we need them to be comprehensively and courteously debunked.

To close, I have four questions for the Minister. First, will she review the vaccination of children? Children have strong naturally acquired immunity, and the chance of death from covid for a healthy child is one in 2 million. I believe we should follow other countries, such as Denmark, and stop vaccinating children altogether. I invite the Minister to review that aspect of the policy.

Secondly, will the Minister make representations in Government, and to Baroness Hallett, on broadening the terms of reference for her inquiry, so that they explicitly include the efficacy and safety of the vaccines? I hear what my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington says, and he is absolutely right: the inquiry terms of reference include mention of the vaccination programme and its effects. He may well be right that that is sufficient, and that the review will properly consider the topics that we are discussing. I hope so, but that needs to be made more explicit; I invite the Minister to comment on that.

**Sir Christopher Chope:** I wrote to Baroness Hallett, asking her to ensure that the terms of reference specifically covered the safety and impact of vaccines. As a result of representations, not just from me but from others, the terms of reference were amended to make it quite clear that vaccines, their impact and the potential damage done by them are included.

**Danny Kruger:** I am grateful for that clarification. It causes me concern to hear that it took my hon. Friend's representations to ensure that the inquiry will consider the effect of the vaccines. We need to go further and talk about efficacy and safety, not just impact. We need to be explicit about what questions we want answers to. These issues need to be covered directly. We need the public inquiry to consider these matters, because of the compromised nature of medical regulation in our country. I mentioned that the MHRA is funded by the pharmaceutical companies that produce the drugs and vaccines that it regulates. There might be some universe in which that makes sense, but this is not it. I do not think that is right.

Thirdly, we need to do a lot more for the injured and bereaved, as the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Apsana Begum) said. I agree with all the recommendations of my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch, and we will hear from him shortly on what needs to be done to raise the threshold for compensation for the injured, and the speed of payouts. I agree with him that we need clinics for people with adverse reactions, just as we do for people with long covid.

Finally, we need to change the power imbalance. I am sorry, on behalf of Parliament, that this is the first proper debate that we have had on this subject. I regret that victims and families have had to struggle so hard to get engagement of the system. I hope that the Minister

agrees to meet some of the people here, and other representatives of families affected by the vaccines, for a proper exchange of information and ideas, and I hope that she will request that Dame June Raine of the MHRA meets them, rather than ignoring letters for months.

A new Government take over this week. I hope that the Minister, who was appointed only recently, will stay in post, and that we can start a new chapter in the story of covid. No more remote power telling people what to do. Let us put truth and justice back into public life, and restore trust in the experts on whom we rely.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair):** We should be all right for time, but bear in mind that three people wish to speak, and I need to start the wind-ups at 5.30 pm.

5.2 pm

**Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I am, as was mentioned, the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on covid-19 vaccine damage. The group is now up and running. We had an enormously well-supported meeting in Portcullis House last Thursday. I agree with the legitimate concerns of the 100,000-plus people who signed the petition, and share their belief that the recent data relating to cardiovascular problems, which is increasing in volume, is of enough concern to warrant an inquiry on safety. As I have said, the big Hallett inquiry on covid-19 will cover a lot of this ground, but it will not report for many years. In the meantime, people are being encouraged to have more and more boosters, and they understandably want to know the impact of those boosters on their health and the risks and rewards.

As well as being chairman of the APPG, I have taken an interest in the subject for about a year, and produced a private Member's Bill on the subject, and I hope to produce another, which will have its Second Reading next month. Coroners up and down the country have found in their reports that deaths have been caused directly by covid 19 vaccines. I have spoken to some of the bereaved; indeed, I spoke to the gentleman referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for North West Durham (Mr Holden)—the gentleman who attended our meeting on Thursday, and whose wife was a journalist in Newcastle. I have seen with my own eyes the suffering of people who are bereaved or still suffering adverse reactions.

I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn), in introducing the debate, did not have much to say about the people who we know have suffered death or serious injury as a result of the vaccines. My hon. Friend showed himself to be rather the victim of producer capture—the producer in this case being the MHRA. He does not seem to have allowed his researches to go further than the MHRA. Has he, for example, looked at what has been happening in Germany? The Paul Ehrlich Institute is the German regulator responsible for vaccine safety. On 20 July, the institute confirmed that one in 5,000 people was seriously affected after a vaccination. That also reflected a finding that it published earlier in the year, in which the institute tried to raise the alert that one in 5,000 vaccinated people experienced a serious side effect, such as heart

[*Sir Christopher Chope*]

muscle inflammation. It said that, statistically, every 10th person must expect a severe consequence from having a course of three or four vaccines. The institute uses the World Health Organisation definition of a “serious adverse event”, meaning one that results in hospitalisation or is life-threatening or life-changing. After a course of four doses, the risk of a report to its system of a serious adverse effect is one in 1,250. That is serious information coming from the regulator of a country that is highly respected for the quality of its healthcare.

Is it not interesting that the number of adverse reports referred to the institute is far fewer than the number of adverse reports that led to the 1976 swine flu vaccine being withdrawn? Some hon. Members may recall that, in 1976, the President of the United States, Gerald Ford, was panicked by swine flu into organising a vaccination campaign. When reports emerged of suspected adverse reactions, including heart attacks and Guillain-Barré syndrome, and there were 53 reported deaths, people began to worry about the safety of the vaccine. The Government halted that mass vaccination programme in December of that year. In that case, the Government acted on far fewer adverse events than we have talked about in this debate and decided that, given the balance of risk and reward, it was too risky to continue with the vaccination programme. Let us look at the facts and not just be beholden to the MHRA. If this were a debate about the MHRA, I would have masses of material on it.

The Government seem to be in denial about the risks of these vaccines. Only this morning, the deputy chief medical officer for England was on the radio saying that the boosters were perfectly safe and effective, but they are not perfectly safe, and there is a question about whether they are effective, but that is for another debate. The fact that they are not perfectly safe has now been admitted by the Government. Indeed, the UK Health Security Agency has issued “A guide to the COVID-19 autumn booster”—you may have seen a copy of it, Sir Roger. It requests that people get another booster from their GP. Unfortunately, the cover letter from the NHS makes no reference to any risks associated with the vaccine, but if one looks at the document included in the envelope, it talks about serious side effects. It says,

“Cases of inflammation of the heart (called myocarditis or pericarditis) have been reported very rarely after both the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines. These cases have been seen mostly in younger men and within several days of vaccination. Most of the people affected have felt better and recovered quickly following rest and simple treatments.”

It then states:

“You should seek medical advice”.

What it does not state is what happens to those people who do not recover. That is what I will concentrate on in the remainder of my remarks. Those people, if they are disabled to the extent of 60% or more, may be eligible for payments under the vaccine damage payment scheme. They might get £120,000. That scheme, however, is not fit for purpose, because its description of disability does not necessarily apply to autoimmune conditions such as those suffered as a consequence of covid-19 vaccine damage. And what about all of those people

who are only 59% disabled? There is no financial help for them and, even more worryingly for many, no specific medical help.

The Government refuse to provide specialist help for these vaccine victims. Although they have set up long covid clinics, vaccine victims are being ignored. I have asked parliamentary questions about this, but I have not been able to get a satisfactory answer as to why there are no clinics for those victims of vaccine damage. As a result of the Government’s behaviour, victims are increasingly telling their loved ones, neighbours and friends about their circumstances, which is leading to a much lower rate applications for booster vaccines. That is happening because the Government cannot suppress the information that ordinary people are sharing with one another, even though there is very little on this topic in the mainstream media.

Many people now would not touch a booster with a bargepole, and I include myself among them. I am not anti-vax—I had my first two vaccines—but from all that I have seen and know about this, the increase in boosters is counterproductive for many and dangerous for some. We need to take into account what is happening on the ground. People are becoming increasingly vaccine-hesitant. Large numbers of doctors and health professionals are now calling for a complete halt to the vaccination programme because the risks outweigh the benefits.

**Sir John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): The thing to understand is that there is a fundamental difference between these kinds of vaccines and vaccination per se. Vaccination per se has saved millions of lives here and elsewhere, but these vaccines are qualitatively different. Science matters, but much matters more.

**Sir Christopher Chope:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. In the United States, they changed the definition of a vaccine. We have always understood a vaccine to mean someone receiving into their system something containing a small element of that which they were being vaccinated against, so that their system could react against it and protect them if they were later exposed to a large amount. But unlike those old vaccines, these vaccines do not use the raw material, so in many senses it is a misnomer to describe them as vaccines at all. That information is not really out there among the public any more than the fact that the booster vaccines have not been tested on humans at all during studies; they were tested only on mice. People are being used as victims for experimentation, and that is why they are getting worried.

Finally, Oracle Films’ film, “Safe and Effective: A Second Opinion”, is available on YouTube—I make no apology for the fact that I participate in that film—and sets out a different view on the safety of these vaccines. I am not saying we should ban all covid-19 vaccines and have a complete halt. What I am saying is that there is an urgent need for the Government to get to grips with this issue before more people are duped into having vaccines that they probably do not need, that will not do them any good and that will present risks to their health.

**Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair):** Could I ask Mr Bridgen and Mrs Elphicke to confine their remarks to six minutes?

5.15 pm

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I will try to curtail my remarks to six minutes.

This is a hugely important debate and it is overdue. Those people who have questioned the efficacy or safety of the vaccines have generally been cut down and cancelled. That is why this is so important. I do not claim to be any sort of expert, but my degree a long time ago was in genetics, behaviour and biochemistry. Science works by challenge, and the science behind the vaccines has not been allowed to be challenged.

A study published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, included 7,806 children aged five or younger who were followed for an average of 91.4 days after their first Pfizer vaccination. The study showed that one in 500 children under five years of age who received a Pfizer mRNA—messenger ribonucleic acid—covid vaccine were hospitalised with a vaccine injury, and one in 200 had symptoms ongoing for weeks or months afterwards. Will the Minister outline the Government's current policy on vaccination and boosters, and our current policy for the vaccination of children?

Half a per cent. of the children—40 out of the 7,806—had symptoms that were still ongoing and of unknown significance at the end of the trial. That was during a two to four-month follow-up period, so 0.5% of the children had an adverse effect that lasted for weeks or months. In two cases, the symptoms were confirmed to have lasted longer than 90 days. Given that evidence, perhaps the Minister could explain why we are vaccinating healthy children who are at minimal risk from covid. Surely that is in breach of the Hippocratic oath to do no harm. We are not in a situation where we can ask young people to risk their lives to protect older people. In a civilised society, that cannot be the way it works.

According to *The Independent* in April, more than 1,200 claims have been made to the vaccine damages payment scheme, which entitles successful applicants to £120,000, as pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope), if a causal link between vaccination and severe reaction culminating in injury or death is proven. Does the Minister recognise those figures? Sarah Moore, a lawyer who represents 95 families seeking claims, said that her clients felt “silenced and ignored”, adding that they cannot speak about vaccine harm or linked injuries without being accused of being anti-vax. What is the Minister's view on victims being labelled as anti-vaxxers?

The Department of Health and Social Care commissions research through the National Institute for Health and Care Research. There is £1.6 million that has been allocated for a programme to understand the rare condition of blood clotting with low platelets following vaccination for covid-19. Does the Minister think that is sufficient? Is there a sufficient breadth of investigation considering all the things we are finding out about the vaccines? Where is the cost-benefit analysis by age group for the vaccines, given the risks that they carry, especially as the pharma companies are now admitting that vaccination does not impact on transmission? Did the Government know, when they mandated vaccines for care and NHS workers, that the vaccines had not been tested to find whether they prevented transmission?

The Florida department of health conducted an analysis through a self-controlled case series, which is a technique originally developed to evaluate vaccine safety. The analysis found that there is an 84% increase in the relative incidence of cardiac-related death among males aged 18 to 39 within 28 days following messenger ribonucleic acid vaccination. With a higher level of global immunity to covid-19, the benefit of vaccination is likely outweighed by that abnormally high risk of cardiac-related death among men in that age group. The recommendation now in Florida is that they do not vaccinate any male under the age of 40.

Florida's surgeon general, Dr Joseph Ladapo, said:

“Studying the safety and efficacy of any medications, including vaccines, is an important component of public health. Far less attention has been paid to safety and the concerns of many individuals have been dismissed—these are important findings that should be communicated to Floridians.”

I suggest that such important findings should be transmitted to everyone who has had a vaccine or is contemplating a booster. I also had the pleasure of meeting Dr Aseem Malhotra at the APPG launch last week. He made a very strong case for the idea that up to 90% of adverse vaccine reactions are not even being reported.

Finally—I wish I had longer to speak—what is the Government's analysis of the excess deaths that we are suffering in this country, across Europe and in the Americas? Even a casual glance at the data shows a strong correlation between vaccine uptake and the excess deaths in those regions. Surely we must have an investigation. Tens of thousands more people than expected are dying. This is really important, and if we do not get it right, no one will believe us, and trust in politicians, in medicine and in our medical system will be lost. [*Interruption.*]

**Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair):** Order. I call Natalie Elphicke.

5.21 pm

**Mrs Natalie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. This important debate shows the importance of the petitions process in raising issues that it is essential to explore, even when they are contentious or do not reflect a majority view. The petition has attracted more than 200 signatures from my constituency. In addition, on behalf of my constituents, I have written to Health Ministers a number of times in relation to compensation and individual cases of harm.

The covid vaccine development—the sharing of intellectual property, know-how and scientific endeavour, the rapidity of the regulatory process, and the operational roll-out across the entire country—was truly remarkable. We should rightly be proud of everything that was done to stop the covid pandemic in its tracks. However, we are now a considerable way on since the development of the vaccine, and some sort of ongoing vaccination programme is expected to continue. The dust has now settled, but concerns about a number of medical, regulatory and ethical issues persist, as has been set out.

Constituents have raised with me their considered and researched concerns about their experiences, including variations in the menstrual cycle; the long-term impact on fertility—whether people can have children—cardiovascular concerns; muscle issues, including carpal tunnel syndrome; the triggering of serious autoimmune responses, and much more besides. In the past, concerns about the measles,

[Mrs Natalie Elphicke]

mumps and rubella vaccination, for example, had an adverse impact on take-up before they could be fully allayed, but it is also true that authorised and regulated drugs have caused immeasurable harm and have had to be withdrawn.

It seems that concerns about the vaccine process have been mounting, and they must be considered and addressed, not ignored, if we are to continue to ensure widespread support for a national vaccination programme and confidence in such important drugs. Are the Government considering, accepting and addressing those concerns?

5.24 pm

**Steven Bonnar** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir Roger. I commend the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn) on moving the motion, and I thank all those who signed the petition, including 119 of my Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill constituents. I also thank Members for their thought-provoking contributions to the debate, which I am happy to attend to outline my party's position on the safety of covid-19 vaccines.

The covid vaccine has saved millions of lives, not just here in the UK but across the world. In the first year of the vaccination programme, 19.8 million out of a potential 31.4 million covid-19 deaths were prevented worldwide, according to estimates based on excess deaths from 185 countries and territories. In Scotland alone, the vaccine saved almost 28,000 lives; that is, an estimated 86% of potential deaths were prevented in Scotland as a result of the vaccination uptake. Thousands of people in Scotland are still alive today because of the coronavirus vaccines. Dr Jim McMenamin, the director of health protection infection services at Public Health Scotland, said:

"This important study shows that thanks to high vaccine uptake among the people of Scotland, and early implementation, the COVID-19 vaccination programme is estimated to have saved more than 27 thousand lives".

Despite that, there has been a significant increase in heart attacks and related illnesses since the covid-19 vaccinations started to be distributed in 2021. To determine whether there is any connection with the covid-19 roll-out, the Government must conduct an immediate and complete scientific investigation, and ensure that the prescribed medical interventions of their response to coronavirus are indeed safe. As we know, every vaccine used in the UK is subject to approval by the independent Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency. The vaccination programme has always been guided by the expert advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

This year, the Scottish Government are looking to maximise the co-administration of boosters and flu vaccines, drawing on learning from previous winter vaccination campaigns. I myself will take my booster—on top of the three vaccinations that I have already taken—when I am called to do so. After consideration and discussion with my 14-year-old daughter, she informed me that she will also take her booster when the time comes. Everybody should be able to do so. Everybody eligible for a covid-19 vaccination in Scotland will also be invited for a flu vaccine, and can safely receive both vaccines at the same time and at the same appointment.

The clinical trials of the vaccines have shown them to be effective and acceptably safe. However, as part of its statutory functions, the MHRA continuously monitors the use of vaccines to ensure that their benefits continue to outweigh any risks. For example, during the pandemic, vaccines for pregnant women were initially suggested to be a risk, but the MHRA reassured the public then, as it does now. Its advice remains that the covid-19 vaccines are safe and effective during pregnancy and breastfeeding, and there is substantial evidence to support that advice.

**Andrew Bridgen:** The hon. Gentleman may not be aware, but contradictory evidence was issued on two separate days. One piece of advice said that pregnant and breastfeeding women could have the vaccine, and then another Government body said that that was not safe and that it did not recommend it.

**Steven Bonnar:** I thank the hon. Member for his intervention. I am sure that, no matter which subject we discuss, there will be pros and cons, and arguments for and against. We believe in the institutions that govern our health in Scotland, and we believe that they will make the right advice available to all our constituents.

More than 11 billion jabs have been administered so far. Johns Hopkins University puts global deaths related to covid-19 at 6.5 million. Although the vast majority of vaccinations do not result in serious adverse effects, there will of course be a small number of incidents in which there are serious problems. Those must be fully investigated. We believe that vaccination is the best course of action, because the danger of injury from coronavirus significantly outweighs the chance of harm from vaccines. It is a cruel truth that some people will experience some adverse effects, including disability and death. We know that a grieving person whose partner passed away recently as a result of the AstraZeneca vaccine has now received the first payout under the UK's compensation mechanism. We must recognise the significance of that. There are severe, legitimate claims of harm from the jab, and they must be respected and listened to. That is vital to maintain faith in the UK's vaccine programme now and in the future. As those who claim make clear, making claims is not about being anti-vaccine. The concerns are legitimate, and we must listen and learn.

The Scottish Government have set up an independent Scottish covid-19 inquiry to provide scrutiny on the handling of the pandemic and to learn important lessons. The input of bereaved families has been fundamental in developing the Scottish inquiry's terms of reference, and the Scottish Government are committed to engaging with them. That will be long-lasting. The terms of reference provide adequate breadth for the inquiry to consider the elements that came through strongly in stakeholder engagement. It will be up to the new chair, when appointed, to decide how to investigate the issues listed in the terms of reference. It should not be assumed that a topic or group will be excluded from consideration simply because it is not explicitly referred to.

Following consultation with all the devolved Governments, the UK inquiry's terms of reference include a number of areas of particular interest to the devolved Governments. The Scottish Government look forward to engaging fully with the UK inquiry to identify the lessons that we all need to learn.



5.31 pm

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I, too, commend the way the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn) opened the debate, and I thank him for his candid support for the vaccine programme.

At the start of September, we had a debate in this very Chamber about the covid-19 vaccine damage payment scheme. I want to begin my speech in the same way as I started my speech in that debate, by saying that the covid-19 vaccine is safe and effective and has saved countless lives. I and the entire shadow Health and Social Care team remain extraordinarily grateful to those who sacrificed countless hours to facilitate our vaccine roll-out.

We are here debating this petition because of the vaccine. Without it, we would probably still be dialling in from our homes—me in Denton, frantically trying to sort my dodgy wi-fi and battling my dog for custody of the study chair. Some 51 million people have been fully vaccinated, and more than 151 million doses have been given in the United Kingdom. Without the vaccine and the extraordinary work of scientists, volunteers and NHS staff, we would not have been able to reclaim the liberties that we were forced to forfeit over the course of the pandemic.

Members from across the House will be aware that all vaccines go through rigorous and ongoing testing procedures. The covid-19 vaccines went through several stages of clinical trials before being approved, and met strict independent standards for safety, quality and effectiveness.

**Andrew Bridgen:** Surely the hon. Gentleman is well aware of the much-publicised interview of a Pfizer representative by a committee of the European Parliament only a couple of weeks ago, when they admitted that they had done no testing whatever to see whether the vaccination prevented transmission of the virus.

**Andrew Gwynne:** Yes, I heard that. Of course, the issue is that we were protecting the lives of those people who needed the vaccine to be able to get on with their day-to-day lives. The covid vaccines did go through several stages of clinical trials before approval and, as I am sure the Minister will make clear in her response, the MHRA continues to monitor the use of the vaccines to ensure that their benefits outweigh any risks. That is an important fact.

**Sir Christopher Chope:** I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but if the vaccines were so safe, why was it necessary for the vaccine manufacturers to seek an indemnity against liability for negligence from the Government and the taxpayer?

**Andrew Gwynne:** I suspect that they wanted those assurances because of the rapidity of the roll-out. There is an ongoing process of testing the vaccines. These things are kept under review all the time by the scientists, the Government and the Department of Health and Social Care.

As the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington said, the MHRA operates the yellow card scheme to collect and monitor information on suspected safety concerns. A dedicated team of scientists review information daily to monitor the vaccine roll-out. For this reason,

His Majesty's Opposition and I do not view the ask of this petition—a public inquiry into covid-19 vaccine safety—as necessary.

Serious vaccine side effects are extremely rare, and catching covid-19 without vaccine protection remains overwhelmingly more dangerous than getting the vaccine itself. Where vaccine damage does tragically occur, it is right that individuals and their families can access the vaccine damage payment scheme, which I spoke at length about in September. We must ensure that this scheme remains fit for the future. I did raise some concerns about that in the previous Westminster Hall debate on this issue, because it is important that those who are eligible can access financial support.

The petition claims that there has been “a significant increase in heart attacks and related health issues since the roll-out of the covid-19 vaccines began in 2021.”

I appreciate the strength of feeling of those who signed this petition, and I do want to understand more from the Minister about any investigations being undertaken by the health authorities and scientists.

**Andrew Bridgen:** Was the shadow Minister not listening to my speech? The report in Florida showed an 84% increase in deaths from cardiac arrest in men between the ages of 18 and 39.

**Andrew Gwynne:** I was indeed listening to the hon. Gentleman's speech. He should have let me finish the sentence, because I was saying that I want to understand from the Minister what investigations are being undertaken by health authorities to ascertain whether this is actually the case, because there is conflicting information.

The hon. Gentleman talks about a study in Florida. It is important that we take into account all the information from across the globe. There is no data in this country from Office for National Statistics, the MHRA or any other public health body that actually backs that up. Therefore, it is important that all this data is kept under review and scrutinised. I think it is important that the Minister gives us assurances that that is being done.

As the Government made clear in their response to the petition, there have been rare reports of myocarditis and pericarditis. That has informed product information advice for healthcare professionals and patients, as the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) pointed out. However, it is worth reinforcing just how rare these specific adverse reactions are. Across all vaccines used in the UK, there has been a reporting rate of just 0.01% for myocarditis and pericarditis. Even where this side effect has occurred, most cases have been mild and individuals have recovered.

There is an awful lot of misinformation regarding vaccine efficacy and safety, and it is vital that any debate about vaccine safety is led by the facts. Could the Minister set out what action she will be taking to tackle vaccine misinformation and to provide accurate reassurance to those who remain hesitant? How will she get robust data out there for proper and effective public scrutiny, so that we can reinforce that efficacy?

I hear a lot in my capacity as shadow Public Health Minister about concerns relating to yellow card reports. To that I reiterate the MHRA guidance, which clearly states:

“Many suspected ADRs reported on a yellow card do not have any relation to the vaccine or medicine”.

[Andrew Gwynne]

The yellow card reporting scheme allows individuals and health professionals to report any suspected reactions or side-effects, even if the reporter is not sure that they were caused by the vaccine. It is often the case that events recorded via the yellow card scheme would have happened anyway.

I feel passionately about tackling vaccine misinformation head-on, because the truth is that we are not in a position to be complacent. In the UK, people are still dying because they have not been vaccinated, and uptake among certain communities is still far too low, but the challenge is also global. More than 20 nations across the world have first-dose vaccine rates of lower than 20%. In Burundi, just 0.2% of people have received their first dose. The United Kingdom has an important role to play in ensuring that low-income countries can access vaccines, but also in making the argument, domestically and on the world stage, that vaccines are safe and effective. That will ensure that we remain better protected not only against covid-19 and potential mutations, but against future pandemics, where trust is a key tool in protecting people and communities across the globe.

This has been an important and wide-ranging debate, and one that I am glad we were able to facilitate. We in this House may have different views on this subject, but we also have a responsibility to protect the health of the people we represent, and that means using our platforms to make it clear that covid-19 vaccines are safe and effective—something that I am sure the Minister will wholeheartedly agree with.

5.41 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Dr Caroline Johnson):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Elliot Colburn) for his kind words regarding the covid vaccine programme, and for bringing this important and timely debate to the House. It is timely because we started the covid-19 boosters autumn scheme just a few weeks ago.

Before I respond to the points that have been made in the debate and try to answer all the questions posed by right hon. and hon. Members, I thank Members—particularly those on the Opposition Benches, including the hon. Members for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) and for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Steven Bonnar)—for their support for the vaccine scheme. I also thank each and every person in the country who has come forward for their jabs, as well as the tens of thousands of NHS staff and volunteers who made that happen.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington asked why the vaccine programme had worked so well. It worked so well because of the dedication and hard work of all who were involved in it—from the Government to the NHS, and from the volunteers to pharma. I was honoured to volunteer alongside people from my local area as young as 15 and as old as in their 80s. It was truly a community effort.

The take-up of the covid-19 vaccine has been huge, and over 151 million vaccines have been delivered in the UK, meaning that more than 90% of people aged 12 and

over have received at least one dose and more than 40 million have received a booster or third dose. We have also made a great start to the autumn booster campaign. Since the start of the campaign on 5 September, more than 10 million people in England have stepped forward for their jabs.

Our safe and effective vaccines have underpinned the Government's strategy for living with covid-19. They have allowed the economy and society to reopen, and the country's ability to live with the virus in the future will continue to depend on deeper and broader population immunity. Critically, they have also reduced the pressure on the national health service and allowed us to start to tackle the elective care backlog.

Vaccines remain our biggest line of defence as we head into a challenging winter period. Vaccinated people are less likely to get seriously ill with covid-19 or seasonal flu, or to be admitted to hospital, and there is also evidence that they are less likely to pass the virus on to others. We know the covid vaccine has saved tens of thousands of lives—that is tens of thousands of mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, sisters, brothers, sons and daughters who are thankfully still with us.

**Andrew Bridgen:** Is the Minister aware that excess deaths run somewhere—there are two different sets of figures—between 18,000 and 25,000 this year alone?

**Dr Johnson:** I am referring to the covid vaccine, which has saved hundreds of thousands of lives. I take my hon. Friend's point, but there is no evidence that those deaths were caused by the covid vaccine. Let me acknowledge and pass on my sympathies to the very small number of people for whom vaccines may not have worked as intended, and who may have suffered an adverse reaction from vaccines.

I turn to vaccine safety. All vaccines used in the UK covid-19 vaccine programme are safe. In the UK we have some of the highest safety standards in the world. The MHRA is globally recognised for high standards of quality, safety and medicines regulation. Each covid-19 vaccine candidate is assessed by teams of scientists and clinicians on a case-by-case basis. There are extensive checks and balances at every stage of vaccine development. It is only once each potential vaccine has met robust standards of effectiveness, safety and quality set by the MHRA that it will be approved for use.

It is also important to stress that the surveillance of vaccine safety and adverse reactions does not stop once a vaccine has been approved. The MHRA and the UK Health Security Agency constantly review a wide range of available data on the safety of vaccines, including UK and international reports of adverse reactions.

**Sir John Hayes:** People outside the House will not know that although the Minister has been in her job a relatively short time, she is a remarkably dedicated and diligent person. No Minister is more likely or determined than she is to get to the facts when looking at the international data. Will the Minister give the assurance that she will consider all the information available, including that international data, when she draws conclusions about the content of this debate and the cases that have been made by many of my constituents and others?

**Dr Johnson:** I thank my right hon. Friend for his kind words. I will, of course, look at all the evidence. He is aware of my experience as a clinician and he knows that I will look at the evidence-based medical process.

As part of the surveillance into currently used medicines and vaccines, the MHRA continues to review all the suspected adverse drug reaction reports—known as the yellow card reports—relating to covid vaccines, which right hon. and hon. Members have mentioned. Through the MHRA yellow card scheme, members of the public and healthcare professionals can report any suspected side effects. A comprehensive surveillance strategy alerts us to any unforeseen adverse reactions to the vaccine, to enable us to act swiftly when required.

In April 2021, we quickly responded to reports of extremely rare cases of concurrent thrombosis and thrombocytopenia following vaccination with the first dose of AstraZeneca. At that point, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation advised that adults under 30 without underlying health issues should be offered an alternative vaccine to the AstraZeneca if one was available. That was later extended in May 2021 to adults under 40 without underlying health issues. The MHRA, as my hon. Friend the Member for North West Leicestershire (Andrew Bridgen) said, has undertaken a thorough review of UK reports of thrombosis and thrombocytopenia. While the estimated incident rate has increased over time as awareness of the condition increases across the healthcare system, the number of cases remains extremely low, given that more than 49 million doses of AstraZeneca covid-19 vaccine have been administered.

A number of colleagues asked about myocarditis. There is no evidence that people are at an increased risk of cardiac arrest in the days and weeks following the vaccine. The risk of getting myocarditis or pericarditis after the vaccine remains very low. A large study of 4 million vaccinated people in Denmark, published in the *British Medical Journal*, found that there were no deaths or diagnoses of heart failure in people who were diagnosed with myocarditis or pericarditis after being vaccinated.

In the highest-risk group, those aged 18 to 29, until the end of September this year there were 29 cases for every million second Pfizer doses and 68 cases for every million second Moderna doses given in the UK. The risk is much lower after a booster dose, and in other age groups the risk is lower still. However, it is worth remembering that catching covid-19 can significantly increase the risk of cardiac arrest and death, and the risk of developing myocarditis. There are an estimated 1,500 cases of myocarditis per million patients with covid—far greater than the risk of myocarditis following vaccination.

Let me turn now to some of the questions that have been asked. My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington asked about the inquiry and how people would be able to contribute to it. It will listen to and consider carefully the experiences of bereaved families and others who have suffered loss as a result of the pandemic. It will not consider individual cases; instead, listening to such accounts will inform its understanding of the impact of the pandemic and the response, and any lessons to be learned. Individuals will be able to engage through the inquiry's listening exercise and the details of that will be brought forward in due course.

My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) asked about informed consent. Indeed, I think that he produced the leaflet that provides the information that allows people to understand that the JCVI has recommended the vaccine because on balance it is beneficial to people; it is more likely to be of benefit to them than harm. Equally, however, each individual will be provided with information about the vaccine, as they are with all medical treatments, so that they know the benefits they can expect and the risk of side effects, however small, as well as what they are. As I say, he produced an example in the debate of a leaflet containing such information. What is important is that people are aware of the benefits and risks and can make informed decisions. Vaccination is not compulsory, but we are aware that it is of great benefit to the population and to individuals at risk of covid.

**Sir Christopher Chope:** What happens if somebody suffers a 50% disability as a result of having the vaccine, through an adverse reaction, or an unusual event? What do the Government do to help that person? They do not provide any compensation, or any special help through the health service, or a clinic, so what do they do?

**Dr Johnson:** My hon. Friend is talking about the vaccine damage payment scheme, which has been running since 1979 and provides a payment of up to £120,000—a tax-free lump sum, a one-off payment—for people who have been severely damaged by vaccines, on the balance of probabilities, which is determined when people apply. That does not prejudice any claim that they may have in a legal sense and they can still pursue a civil claim should they wish to do so. It has been asked whether there should be a separate scheme for covid, but of course it is right that all vaccines are treated in a similar fashion.

My hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger) asked a few questions. He asked about the terms of reference of the inquiry being a matter for the chair, which indeed they are. He also asked whether I would commit the chair of the MHRA to meet specific people, but that is not for me to decide; it is up to the chair. My hon. Friend's other question was about children's vaccines. He is aware of my thoughts on that: it is important when we vaccinate children that the vaccines are of benefit to the child themselves. I am aware that when the vaccine was approved that was the decision made by all four chief medical officers and it is very important that the Government listen to and take medical advice. Since then, some things have changed. Natural immunity is more widespread and school disruption is no longer an issue. I understand that very shortly, at its next meeting, the JCVI will consider whether children's vaccines should continue to be recommended, on the basis of the current situation. I think it is right that medical research is reviewed regularly as it becomes available and is taken into account.

The position of the MHRA remains that for most people the benefits of the covid-19 vaccine continue to outweigh the risks. The surveillance strategy is working, as we have discussed. We are able to respond quickly to ensure safe administration of all covid vaccines. I reiterate that the public should be very confident that all tests are completed to the very highest standards and that vaccines are safe.

Despite the progress we have made, we must not become complacent.

**Sir Christopher Chope:** Would the Minister be willing to address the all-party parliamentary group on covid-19 vaccine damage in a private meeting, so that she can hear at first hand some of the concerns that members have?

**Dr Johnson:** I thank my hon. Friend for that question. He will be aware of events today and I will at least have to see whether I remain in post before I potentially commit somebody else to such an event.

As I was saying, despite the progress we have made, we must not become complacent. We cannot risk an increase in serious illness, hospitalisations and deaths from covid. The UKHSA estimates that vaccinations had averted up to 128,000 deaths and 262,000 hospitalisations by the end of September 2021, and many more since then.

We must do everything in our power to protect those who are most vulnerable to the virus and keep pressure off the NHS in a tough winter period. Viruses such as covid-19 spread much more easily in winter when we socialise indoors. To protect those most at risk and help to reduce pressure on the NHS, we are delivering an autumn booster dose to those who are most in need of an extra layer of protection. Even if someone has had all of their jabs so far, and perhaps had covid too, they might still need an autumn booster to strengthen their protection. I encourage everyone who is eligible to come forward for their covid booster and seasonal flu jab today. To encourage vaccination against covid and flu and boost uptake, the NHS is making every effort to make it as convenient as possible for individuals to take up the offer, including offering both covid and flu vaccines at the same time, where possible, to reduce the number of appointments needed. Our NHS staff and volunteers are pulling out all the stops to deliver the next phase of the covid vaccine programme at speed once again, with more than 3,000 sites up and down the country involved.

The NHS was the first healthcare system in the world to deliver a covid-19 vaccine outside clinical trials, and it is now the first to deliver the new, variant-busting vaccine. Bivalent vaccines target two different strains of covid-19. They will give us a broader immunity and therefore potentially improve protection against variants of the virus. Whatever vaccine people receive in the autumn booster programme, they can be assured that it remains effective in preventing severe disease against all current variants and any potential future variants.

As I draw to a close, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington for bringing this important debate to the House at such an important time. The Government have already commissioned a public inquiry into the pandemic, and covid vaccines will be reviewed as part of that inquiry. There are no plans for an inquiry solely on vaccine safety. We face a tough winter ahead, and collectively we must do everything we can to protect those who are most vulnerable and to reduce pressure on the NHS. I encourage everyone who is eligible to step forward for their covid and flu vaccines as soon as they are able.

5.56 pm

**Elliot Colburn:** It is unusual to be in this place and be lambasted by colleagues, but I make no apology for looking out for the health and wellbeing of my constituents. I completely agree with the sentiments raised throughout the course of the debate. We have to do more, and I urge the Minister to look into what more we can do for those who are adversely affected. I will not apologise for not allowing that to be a gateway that allows vaccine misinformation to come into the mainstream.

Some people have said that the debate is overdue. I hastened to remind colleagues in my opening remarks that there have been four of these Petitions Committee debates, let alone the Backbench Business debates and private colleagues who have come forward to ask for debates. This is not overdue; it has happened plenty of times. We have given a lot of parliamentary time to this. Yes, there is more that we can and must do for those who suffer harm, but it is worth reiterating that the system for approving and monitoring vaccines is robust, the inquiry exists already and vaccines are a great British success story. It was a Brit who discovered vaccines in the way that we know them today, and they have been effective in tackling a range of illnesses that would previously have been life-threatening or very dangerous indeed. The proof is that they work, they are saving lives and they protect us and others. I join the Minister in urging people to come forward for their vaccines this winter, to help to protect themselves and others and ensure the strain on our NHS is as minimal as possible.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered e-petition 602171, relating to the safety of covid-19 vaccines.

## Human Rights Legislation Reform

[YVONNE FOVARGUE *in the Chair*]

*[Relevant documents: Correspondence from the Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights to the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, relating to the introduction of the Bill of Rights Bill, reported to the House on 29 June, Correspondence from the Lord Chancellor on the introduction of the Bill of Rights Bill and Bill of Rights Bill Human Rights Memorandum, reported to the House on 20 July, Correspondence from the Lord Chancellor confirming that the Bill of Rights Bill has been paused, reported to the House on 19 October, and the Thirteenth Report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, Session 2021-22, Human Rights Act Reform, HC 1033, and the Government's response, HC 608.]*

6 pm

**Scott Benton** (Blackpool South) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 607712, relating to human rights legislation reform.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Fovargue. More than 230,000 people have signed this petition, including 283 people from my own constituency of Blackpool South. It is obvious why a petition on human rights has been incredibly popular and gained such widespread support.

This country has always been a leading champion of human rights, democracy and freedoms internationally and possesses a proud history stretching all the way back to Magna Carta in 1215. This has progressed, and rightly so, to a huge number of rights across all aspects of life and society to provide people with freedom of expression and a right to education and safety in the workplace, among many other things.

However, there is increasingly a perception that the current “rights culture” is contrary to common sense and flies in the face of the original purpose behind the various pieces of legislation. In some cases that has provided a platform for criminals hoping to escape punishment or delay and frustrate natural justice.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): Will the hon. Member give way?

**Scott Benton**: I will make some progress. The creator of this e-petition stated that he did not want any changes to the Human Rights Act 1998 because he was concerned that people's human rights would be less respected. I do not believe for one second that that would be the case. Reforms to the Human Rights Act would bring clarity to the currently opaque human rights standards, specifically those imported and adopted from the European convention on human rights. It is important to note that that does not mean reduced rights for people at home. Any update to the Human Rights Act should not seek to scrap people's fundamental human rights, and any update to the Act should retain the ECHR and its original principles. However, we must ensure that the Human Rights Act and its interpretations are not used to undermine the desired will of the public or that of our democratically elected Parliament.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Does the hon. Member see any role for the protection of minority rights under the Human Rights Act and the ECHR?

**Scott Benton**: I thank the hon. and learned Lady for her intervention. If she will wait a few moments, I will cover that. Of course, all aspects of human rights should be covered within our provisions and protections, but there should be a balance between protecting those rights and allowing the Government to ensure that national security issues are protected at the same time.

The British people rightly believe that they should be subject to British law, made by British lawmakers for whom they have voted and by British judges. This Government were elected in 2019 on a manifesto that promised to update the Human Rights Act to ensure a proper balance among the rights of individuals, our national security and effective government.

**Margaret Ferrier**: One of the aims of the legislation is to prevent trivial human rights claims wasting judges' time and taxpayer money. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government have not yet evidenced that that is enough of a widespread issue to risk watering down the rights of citizens across the UK for nominal financial savings?

**Scott Benton**: The hon. Lady will be aware that the Government are actively considering that. To be entirely honest, I wish the Government had moved ahead on the issue at different points over the past 12 months, but we have had consultations and things that rightly need to be considered in the round. Today we have a new Prime Minister. It will be up to him and his team to set out the new direction forward. I am sure those comments will be reported back to the Department by the Minister. The overreaching ECHR is tipping the balance away from national security and effective border controls in favour of serious criminals and terrorists who are abusing the legislation to avoid deportation. Various ECHR articles have been expanded beyond their original intention. What most frustrates me and the residents of Blackpool is the expansion of article 8 on the right to respect for private and family life, which serious criminals are using to make mockery of our broken asylum system.

In 2020, the Strasbourg court made the controversial decision to allow a Nigerian national who was sentenced to four years in prison for drug offences and had a conviction for battery to remain in the UK on health grounds. That has set the dangerous precedent that if the state wishes to deport an individual, it must be able to show that, when compared with the NHS, the healthcare to which the individual would be entitled in their own country would not significantly impact on their life chances. That is obviously an unrealistically high bar to meet.

In a second case, another convicted drug dealer used article 8 on the right to family life despite assaulting his partner and making no child maintenance contributions whatsoever—what complete and utter irony! The absurd list goes on and on. More than 70% of successful deportation appeals are now based solely on article 8.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): I am a little confused by the hon. Gentleman's speech, and I wonder whether the 230,000 who have signed the petition would

[Andy Slaughter]

think that they were listening to the right debate. I thought he said that he wishes to remain in the ambit of the European convention on human rights, and therefore of the Court—I think that that is Government policy as of last week—but he now seems to be arguing against that. Where exactly does he stand?

**Scott Benton:** I am far from a legal expert, but there is a middle way between protecting people’s fundamental human rights and continuing to enshrine the ECHR in British law, and ensuring that the Government have wiggle room so that serious foreign national offenders can be deported and our asylum system is not overtly abused. Of course, that is the subject of the Government’s ongoing consultation. I look forward to the Government, and far more experienced legal minds than me, finding a way through that minefield.

We cannot fix a broken asylum system until we reform the Human Rights Act. Someone who wants to claim asylum should go through the correct procedure, under which the UK has a number of safe and legal routes. However, 28,000 people illegally crossed the channel in small boats last year, and 75% of them were men between the ages of 18 and 39. Although asylum claims should be processed within six months, many claimants do not hear back within that time, and the appeals process can take many years. Frankly, the residents of my Blackpool constituency are fed up of seeing the asylum system being abused and of the time it takes to deport those who come here, which lengthens year after year.

Simplifying the system, ensuring that claimants demonstrate that they have been materially disadvantaged before they can make a claim and strengthening the emphasis on societal impacts such as criminal behaviour will help to protect our national security and save the taxpayers’ money that is spent in the courts system and on costs associated with accommodating and supporting asylum seekers who have pending applications.

The Human Rights Act received Royal Assent in 1998 and came into force in 2000. Tony Blair’s aim was to incorporate into UK law the rights contained in the ECHR, which took effect in 1953, but after such a long time, the Human Rights Act could not have foreseen the incredibly complex challenges that we face today. It is absolutely right that the Government review that Act with a focus on the modern era, while reinforcing the primacy of UK law and protecting the fundamental freedoms that we all enjoy.

6.9 pm

**Jon Cruddas** (Dagenham and Rainham) (Lab): I welcome the petition and I congratulate those who organised and signed it. It requests that the proposed reform of the Human Rights Act be withdrawn. However, that demand appears to have been somewhat overtaken by events, so the first question to ask is whether the petitioners’ objectives remain valid. As we know, politics moves pretty quickly, and the proposed reforms have been withdrawn. The Prime Minister ditched the plans for a new Bill of Rights on 7 September. The papers were briefed that Ministers were deeply concerned about the drafting of the Bill. It was pulled just five days before its Second Reading, soon after the Justice Secretary had himself been sacked.

At the time—precisely six weeks and five days ago—the Prime Minister told the Cabinet that her Government would reassess ways to deliver this agenda. Note that she said that she disagreed not with the objectives of the withdrawn legislation, but rather with the method of their implementation. Fast forward to last week: six weeks and two days after the Prime Minister took office, the Conservative party reassessed her ability to deliver her own agenda and unceremoniously ditched her. That leaves human rights reform up in the air.

So is the petition still valid? I think it most certainly is, because the proposed Bill was in the last Conservative manifesto, and as far as I can work out it has been in successive Conservative manifestos since 2010. Indeed, despite withdrawing the draft legislation, the present Prime Minister supported such a Bill when she was Justice Secretary. I assume that the new leader—the Prime Minister unveiled this week, and the next Leader of the Opposition—will in turn pledge to establish the legal supremacy of the UK Supreme Court so that UK courts can disregard rulings from the ECHR. Therefore, despite the Prime Minister ditching the Bill, the issues contained in the petition remain highly relevant and valid.

We can confidently assume that, despite the Conservative party and the Government disintegrating before us, the party is still intent on reforming the Human Rights Act—perhaps one of the few things that unites its different factions. Therefore, the petition’s objective that the Government must not

“make any changes to the Human Rights Act, especially ones that dilute people’s human rights in any circumstances, make the Government less accountable, or reduce people’s ability to make human rights claims”

remains highly relevant. Despite the fact that the Bill has been axed, those issues will not go away, and they therefore deserve to be debated.

We do not really acknowledge the true significance of the proposed human rights reforms. Let me give hon. Members a brief example. The contents of the last Queen’s Speech, on 10 May—it seems like ages ago—were widely described as a damp squib, reflecting a Government who had run out of ideas:

“a party without a project”,

to quote a *Guardian* editorial. I thought at the time that such an interpretation was slightly wrong. Simply seeing the Queen’s Speech as an incoherent, aimless collection of 38 Bills, symptomatic of an inert, drifting Government, misread what was going on. Such a misreading is important, because it suggests that there was little to see here, and therefore little obligation to contest it and provide an alternative.

Probably the most radical element of the Queen’s Speech, which will be debated tomorrow, is the Brexit freedoms Bill—an extraordinary piece of legislation entailing the wholesale dismantling of domestic law through the constitutionally outrageous use of sunset and Henry VIII clauses. I thought at the time that the Bill of Rights was almost a constitutional companion piece to that piece of legislation. Axing the Human Rights Act would dramatically reset our strategic international position and the rights and freedoms afforded to British citizens. Acknowledging the radical character of those initiatives in the last Queen’s Speech poses many challenges and opportunities for my party, in terms of what we stand for and what we would do.

**Margaret Ferrier:** The Scottish Government have been clear that they oppose this legislation and would invite Holyrood to oppose it too. That means that if the UK Government pushed ahead, they would be showing a disregard for devolution. Does the hon. Gentleman share the concerns of those living across the UK that their rights are potentially being stripped away without consent?

**Jon Cruddas:** I will come to that when I mention different approaches to economic and social rights, which should be the cornerstone of an alternative approach to a new Bill of Rights in the UK. That goes with the grain of what is happening in Scotland, in contrast to the objectives of the present Government in Westminster. To put it charitably, the Government are a total shambles, and even compared to early September, the possibility of a Labour Government is more likely. It would be useful to find out what Labour's approach is to reform of the HRA, for instance, whether it would seek to defend the present Act or offer its own alternative Bill of Rights.

The Conservative reform of human rights, which will reappear, cannot be discussed without acknowledging the international context in which it occurs. When set against an international backdrop of war and escalating authoritarianism, the proposed human rights reform suggests a country withdrawing from our international obligations and democratic oversight, both abroad and at home. That is not an accident. The Government have stated a wish to comply with the human rights convention, but they would also seek to mandate our judges to disregard some of its most basic principles and protections. Those include the so-called positive obligations on public bodies to investigate crime and wrongdoing. These are precisely the methods that produced remedies for the victims of the black cab rapist, John Worboys, alongside a range of other cases providing justice for victims—most famously through the Hillsborough inquiry—and a series of cases of justice for soldiers, including the case at Deepcut.

The reform would likely see more cases going to Strasbourg, not less, and would once again expand the power of the Executive, which would be more free to rule by regulation and restrict the interpretive power of the courts. When Europe and the world are crying out for international leadership and solidarity, our Government appear to be running in the opposite direction. We might assume that it is was only the likes of Russia, Poland and Hungary that cynically remained in treaties, such as the human rights convention, while corroding them from within. What I find truly extraordinary is to think that in 2023, the 75th anniversary of the universal declaration of human rights—partly crafted by British lawyers—the Government planned to axe the Human Rights Act, the direct descendant of that convention, which sought to unite countries after fascism, authoritarianism and genocide.

Winston Churchill would arguably be turning in his grave. In his opening speech to the Congress of Europe in May 1948, Churchill said that the new Europe must be “a positive force, deriving its strength from our sense of common spiritual values. It is a dynamic expression of democratic faith based upon moral conceptions and inspired by a sense of mission. In the centre of our movement stands the idea of a Charter of Human Rights, guarded by freedom and sustained by law.”

That statement, 75 years on, has a contemporary feel to it, as authoritarianism and fascism are once again on the march, threatening the foundations of liberal democracy.

While I am glad to see that the legislation has been withdrawn, it comes with one downside. The Government's withdrawn attempt to deny rights to the British people, wrapped up in the almost Orwellian language of a new Bill of Rights, did offer opportunities for opponents to build a coalition around an alternative, rather than simply defend the status quo. It would be a radical new Bill of Rights that builds on the Human Rights Act rather than dismantles it, and one that might echo themes from Franklin D. Roosevelt's vision of a second Bill of Rights in 1944, which informed the universal declaration of human rights.

Such an alternative Bill of Rights might include the right to work, to free education, to access to public health, to housing, to security for all and to freedom from fear. If Labour rethinks its whole approach to modern citizenship, I like to think that could be part of a radical levelling-up agenda. It would be a new democratic and economic covenant between the state and its citizens, one that is aligned with Administrations in Scotland and Wales, which are also seeking to build such an agenda. It would not only honour the Good Friday agreement's commitment to the human rights convention, but would be in keeping with the long-term quest for a Bill of Rights in Northern Ireland. That offers a different type of radicalism to that of the Queen's Speech, and the ditched attempts to attack our human rights, alongside the desire to consolidate power within the Executive and strip away access to justice.

In conclusion, my basic point is a simple one: the last Queen's Speech was no damp squib. Reform of the Human Rights Act is a big deal that should be challenged. Thinking that there is little to see here concedes too much ground, and reinforces the political groupthink that underplays the radical character of this Government and their potential to isolate us, diminish our international standings, consolidate long-term economic weaknesses and enduring patterns of inequality, and hand over even greater powers to the Executive. There is plenty to see here. It deserves a radical alternative. The Human Rights Act, as it currently exists, protects all of us; we lose it at our peril. It is essential that we are allowed to challenge public authorities when they get it wrong. The Human Rights Act has changed many lives for the better. It must be protected and built on, and not subject to reforms that reduce its scope and limit what people can rely on it for. This debate will endure. That is why the petition before us retains its significance and should be warmly welcomed.

**Yvonne Fovargue (in the Chair):** I do not wish to impose a time limit at the moment, but I will call the SNP spokesperson at around 7 pm.

6.20 pm

**Sir Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Fovargue, and to have the opportunity to debate this important petition.

I will start from the basic principle that the Government and the Conservative party have always been firmly committed to our adherence to the European convention

[*Sir Robert Neill*]

on human rights. For some of us, that is absolutely non-negotiable and fundamental, and rightly so because historically it has been a largely British-driven instrument. British common law traditions have actually greatly developed both the convention itself and the development of the Strasbourg Court's jurisprudence.

It is worth bearing in mind that, as the hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas) alluded to, one of the principal authors of the European convention on human rights, the late Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, later Lord Kilmuir, was, at the time, a Conservative Member of Parliament, had been a prosecutor in the Nuremberg trials and later served as a Conservative Lord Chancellor. Conservative respect for human rights is actually very deep-rooted and, for many years, the UK was a diligent member of the convention, without having the Human Rights Act in domestic legislation. It was sensible to have an Act that enabled the remedies available under the convention to be sought in the domestic courts, rather than having to go directly to Strasbourg. That was the purpose of the Human Rights Act when it was introduced. It is not essential in terms of our commitment to human rights to have a statute in domestic law, but it is certainly convenient and greatly helps many British citizens in the assertion of their convention rights. I think it is right that we keep it, but does that mean it should not be reformed? Of course not. Any legislation has space for reform and improvement and that was the commitment in the 2019 Conservative party manifesto, the manifesto on which this Government were elected. I am happy to support that.

It was consistent with that manifesto commitment that the then Lord Chancellor and Justice Secretary, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland), commissioned an independent review of the operation of the Act with a view to modernising and updating it. That was the manifesto commitment—no less, but also no more. In consequence, Sir Peter Gross KC, a distinguished former Lord Justice of Appeal, headed up an independent review panel, which took extensive evidence—over 180 submissions plus roadshows around the whole UK—and produced a detailed report. Subsequently, Sir Peter gave compelling evidence in support of his report to the Justice Committee, the Joint Committee on Human Rights and to, I think, the Constitution Committee of the other place.

If there is to be reform, I suggest that Sir Peter's balanced report is the appropriate template. It touches upon a number of practical changes that could be made. For example, the ambiguity that his panel concluded exists around the hierarchy of rights—the prioritisation of rights—under section 2 of the current Act. Strengthening the means of dealing with the margin of appreciation—that is the way in which there is a degree of flexibility—is consistent with the principle of subsidiarity. According to this principle, each member state of the convention has some flexibility in the way it interprets the rights and the enforcement of judgments and decisions according to their own domestic legal traditions. Developing the concept of judicial dialogue was started again and brought to its current form by Lord Clarke when he was Lord Chancellor, and then developed in the Brighton declaration and subsequently by the Copenhagen declaration. That is a constructive means of developing

jurisprudence within the member states. Further recommendations include tackling one or two other thorny practical issues around remedial orders and in relation to extraterritoriality, which is a real issue. Sir Peter posits various alternative ways, but, ultimately, these Houses, as a legislature, would have to decide upon them. Those would be practical improvements and reforms.

I was surprised when, after Sir Peter delivered the report, my right hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab) produced a consultation document that went rather beyond the party's manifesto and then introduced a Bill of Rights that, again, went rather beyond the manifesto and Sir Peter's panel's recommendations. Without reciting the history, in September, as has been observed, the Lord Chancellor paused the passage of that legislation and wrote to the Justice Committee and other relevant Committees, notifying them that that was the position. The Lord Chancellor was right to do so. The Bill of Rights, which has had no more than its First Reading, went beyond the manifesto commitment; it also went beyond the sensible changes that I, as a Conservative, want to see, which would be consistent with the evidence that was available to Government. It would also needlessly undermine some of the practical workings of the convention rights for UK citizens.

That is not to say that there are not circumstances where either judgments in the Strasbourg Court or the application of convention rights by the domestic courts do not cause controversy or political sensitivity, if I can put it that way. However, for context, it is worth remembering that the number of instances in which the UK is in breach of its convention obligations is absolutely trivial. I was struck by that fact when I was a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, but also when looking at the evidence we have had most recently. The UK actually has one of the best records of compliance with our ECHR obligations of any of the member states.

The figures in the “Report to the Joint Committee on Human Rights on the Government's response to human rights judgments 2020–2021” show that the number of adverse judgments has declined from 19 in 2011 to 4 in 2020. There has been a consistent downward trend. Similarly, the number of cases brought against the United Kingdom ongoing before the courts has declined from 2,500 odd in 2013 to 124. It is worth bearing in mind that many of those cases are now historic. They related either to certain elements of retention of evidence in terrorism cases that have now been dealt with or to the prisoner voting issue, in particular—of course, a minor amendment to the legislation resolved that issue and brought us into compliance with the convention. The outstanding issues, apart from those that hit the headlines around immigration and asylum and one or two other matters, are actually very minor.

When we look to change an important piece of legislation and at the strength of our commitment to our international obligation under the convention, it is worth bearing in mind that the issues are very limited and discrete. I therefore hope that we will leave the passage of the Bill paused and that the Government will reflect that, of all the issues confronting the Ministry of Justice, there may be other, rather more pressing issues that we should be dealing with. If we do move forward with reform, to which I would have no objection, I hope



that we use the evidence-based approach that Sir Peter Gross and his panel set up for us. That, I argue, is the responsible and sensible way forward, and one that completely meets our manifesto commitments.

6.29 pm

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill). I am in a very significant measure of agreement with him, particularly about the need for evidence-based policy making.

I rise to speak as Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights. I remind Members that it is a Joint Committee of both the Commons and the Lords, which takes half its members from each House. It is, of course, a cross-party Committee. As the Committee responsible for scrutinising the Government's human rights record, we have conducted two inquiries considering plans to reform the Human Rights Act. During our inquiries, we heard evidence from experts with a diverse range of views and from people who have benefited from using the Human Rights Act. Having considered all that evidence, we remain of the view, which we have expressed in a number of previous reports, that the Human Rights Act is functioning as intended and enables human rights to be enforced effectively in the United Kingdom, with little need for recourse to the European Court of Human Rights. For that reason, based on the evidence we have heard and the information we have considered, we believe that the Government have failed to make the case for repealing and replacing the Human Rights Act with a Bill of Rights.

We were pleased to have confirmation from the current Lord Chancellor that the Government were looking again at the Bill of Rights Bill and that its progress would be paused while they conducted a thorough review of the Bill. We were pleased to hear that, unlike before, he intends to look at the evidence base, including the independent Human Rights Act review. We were concerned by the Government's lack of engagement with experts, Parliament and the public over the Bill of Rights Bill. It followed the independent Human Rights Act review, as we have heard, significant parliamentary engagement and inquiries, and a public consultation exercise, which elicited over 12,000 responses. That is the sort of extensive engagement we should be having before we embark on reform, but engagement has to be genuine and have meaning and purpose, and those who engage should be listened to.

The Bill of Rights simply does not reflect what the Government heard from Parliament's Committees, their own commissioned independent review or their consultation exercise. The Government's own consultation analysis shows that many responders were in favour of maintaining the status quo and the Human Rights Act, and believed that the changes proposed were unnecessary. Despite that lack of support, the Government decided to pursue a reform, in which they went to the length of repealing and replacing the Act altogether.

The Government's consultation analysis provided scant to no reasoning to explain why they decided to disregard the views of a significant number of consultees. In the Joint Committee's opinion, that calls into question the integrity of the whole consultation process preceding

the Bill of Rights. We concluded that, given the overwhelming lack of support for these radical reforms, repealing the Human Rights Act and replacing it with a Bill of Rights was neither democratic nor necessary. We were particularly worried about the international implications of repealing the Human Rights Act. Our primary worry was that removing the Act would weaken protections for people living in the United Kingdom, but we were also worried about how it would be perceived internationally.

When we visited the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg earlier this year, we highlighted our concerns. It was emphasised to us that the Human Rights Act is viewed internationally as the gold standard and a model example of how human rights can be effectively embodied into domestic law and practice. It was impressed on us by our interlocutors that any weakening of the mechanisms in the Act could damage the United Kingdom's reputation internationally and weaken the UK Government's position when seeking to ensure that other states uphold their human rights obligations. Importantly, we were left in no doubt by those we spoke to that the United Kingdom's status as a leading member of the Council of Europe and one of the founders of the ECHR means that any reforms to the Act that suggest that we are wavering in our commitment to the convention's protections could be a green light for other less committed nations to weaken their own human rights protections.

Other hon. Members have spoken about the incredibly positive impact that the Human Rights Act has had on human rights in the United Kingdom, and the Joint Committee has highlighted that in a number of its reports. It has highlighted that it has made it far easier for individuals to enforce their rights, because they can do so in their domestic court, and that is much cheaper and easier. Before the passing of the Human Rights Act, an individual had to take their case directly to the Court in Strasbourg. That process was subject to long delays, by which I mean many years, and on average cost applicants £30,000. As the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst indicated, another benefit of the Human Rights Act is that it has led to a significant decrease in the number of cases brought against the UK before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, because we resolve our own human rights problems at home, in the domestic courts of our jurisdiction. The hon. Member gave some statistics about that.

Contrary to what people sometimes think, having a Human Rights Act, and incorporating the ECHR into the domestic law of the United Kingdom, has also enabled courts—in my jurisdiction of Scotland and in those of England and Wales, and of Northern Ireland—to influence the development of European Court of Human Rights case law. We heard that there is a strong dialogue between the UK Supreme Court and the Court in Strasbourg; they both influence each other's jurisprudence, and that often works to the benefit of the United Kingdom.

Another important thing that the Human Rights Act has done is embed a human rights culture in public authorities. We heard from a number of witnesses—including an NHS trust, the National Police Chiefs' Council and the British Association of Social Workers—that the Human Rights Act has placed human rights at the

[Joanna Cherry]

centre of decision making in public authorities, and that the legal framework assisted them in making complex decisions.

We also heard that the Human Rights Act has been central to the devolution of justice and policing in Northern Ireland, and of course we know that it is embedded in the Good Friday agreement. It also plays a very important role in the constitutional underpinning of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Senedd. As other hon. Members indicated, in my own jurisdiction of Scotland, the Scottish Parliament has gone beyond the Human Rights Act to embed, for example, the UN convention on the rights of the child. The Joint Committee was very clear that we do not believe that the Human Rights Act should be reformed without the consent of the devolved legislatures, because it is so important to them.

I want to be clear: the Joint Committee on Human Rights is not saying that there should not be any amendments to the Human Rights Act, but we would like human rights protections to be strengthened rather than weakened. For example, we want the right to protest—a very important aspect of the right to freedom of expression—to be given greater protection in the Bill of Rights Bill, and we want the right to an effective remedy, as protected by article 13 of the ECHR, embedded. We also want the Government seriously to consider incorporating other international human rights treaties, such as the UN convention that I just mentioned and the refugee convention. That should include the right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution, in terms similar to those of article 14 of the universal declaration of human rights.

We are pleased that the current Lord Chancellor has paused the process. We had a very positive letter from him last week. We are looking forward to engaging with him, and we are delighted that the Government will go back and look at the independent review in a way that they did not before. The Committee will continue to engage with the Government, but we emphasise that we believe in evidence-based policy making. It is our view that so far we have seen no evidence to justify the argument that significant changes to the Human Rights Act are either necessary or desirable.

6.38 pm

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): It is a pleasure to be serve under your chairmanship, Ms Fovargue, and a real pleasure to follow the eminent Chairs of two Select Committees: the Joint Committee on Human Rights and the Justice Committee. With perhaps difference nuances, they both said very much the same thing, and so I will not repeat it for a third time: if there is a priority in legislation, reform of the Human Rights Act is not it. That is essentially what the terms of the petition say.

Despite that, when he was Lord Chancellor, the right hon. and learned Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland) set up the Gross review. That was a substantial piece of work and its recommendations were proportionate, so if changes are to be made, we should perhaps be guided rather more by that than by the subsequent consultation, which as far as I can see paid no regard

whatever to the Gross report. In fact, it appeared to be based rather more on a shorter piece of work, the 2009 book, “The Assault on Liberty”. The right hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab) read his own book again—something that I have tried and failed to do on several occasions—rather than looking at the report that his Department commissioned.

It is a shame, and I would probably err on the side of not reforming at all, because the Human Rights Act is a piece of legislation that we should be proud of. It is a practical as well as principled part of constitutional law, and it has worked very well. However, all this did not start in the last year or two, but probably over a decade ago, with the use of legislation aiming to repeal or reform the Human Rights Act as part of the culture wars agenda and throwing red meat to various members of the governing party. It is in the same bracket now as tomorrow’s Bill on retained EU law, flights to Rwanda and the public order legislation to curtail freedom of speech that we had last week. It is a real shame that we are passing legislation of that kind, as is the motivation for passing it.

All this also means that we get confused about the constitutional impact. For example—given that both Members are present—at Justice questions last week, the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Scott Benton) asked the Minister replying to today’s debate:

“It is becoming pretty clear that we cannot get a grip on the small boats crisis and deliver significant reform of our asylum system without reforming the Human Rights Act. What is the Government’s plan?”

The Minister’s response was:

“we are committed to the European convention on human rights and to the UN refugee convention. We believe that our proposals are within the law and that no court has said otherwise.”—[*Official Report*, 18 October 2022; Vol. 720, c. 525.]

They cannot really have it both ways: either the existing law is sufficient to do what the Government are doing or it needs to be changed.

I feel that, on many occasions, what is put forward and argued results from the outcomes of individual cases that individual MPs do not like, or from their own prejudices or what they perceive to be the views of their constituents, but which might in fact not be. That is a very poor way to legislate, so I was pleased to see that, with the demise of the right hon. Member for Esher and Walton, the Bill of Rights Bill—which was very much his individual project, in a way that is probably quite unhealthy—also saw its demise. Indeed, it was described in rather brutal terms, not by his successor but by Downing Street, as “a complete mess”. That is quite a harsh term for a Government to use about one of their own flagship pieces of legislation, so probably the best thing that could happen to that Bill now is to be quietly tucked away in a cupboard, so that it becomes just a bit of constitutional history and never sees the light of day.

I do not know, but certainly my impression from Justice questions last week—in which three times the Secretary of State or the Minister said very clearly that the Government would wish to stay within the ambit of the European convention and the European Court—is that there seems to be no urgency at all about replacing the current legislation. That implies that we can perhaps move on and quietly forget this whole rather sorry episode. I notice that the Library page relating to today’s

debate says of the Bill that “its fate is...unclear”. Perhaps it should remain unclear and we can all move on to more important things.

6.44 pm

*Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.*

7.7 pm

*On resuming—*

**Yvonne Fovargue (in the Chair):** The debate may now continue until 7.53 pm. I call Andy Slaughter.

**Andy Slaughter:** Thank you, Ms Fovargue. That welcome respite from my speech gives me a hint not to go on too long.

Before we were interrupted by the bell, I was saying that reforming human rights legislation should not be a priority for the Government. Having had time to study his brief, the Minister knows—perhaps he will even still be in post tomorrow; who knows?—that the criminal and civil courts face some of their worst backlogs. There is a real crisis of confidence in the justice system. There is also real crisis in accessing justice, and particularly in legal aid, as the Government concede to some extent in the reviews they have undertaken—or, in the case of the civil legal aid review, are undertaking. There is more than enough for the Minister and his colleagues to do without looking for work and interfering with legislation that is working well.

In a way, the Government are in a favourable position. They have an excuse to move on and quietly forget the bee in the bonnet of the right hon. Member for Esher and Walton. If they wish to follow the lead of the Chair of the Justice Committee and look at the matter again, they have a really fine report by Sir Peter Gross and his colleagues. They do not really need to go any further than that. I will not go through this in depth—I do not see any point in doing so until we know what the Government are bringing forward—but it made me weep to see the way that the Human Rights Act was being misconstrued, whether in relation to parliamentary sovereignty or in relation to the margin of appreciation. The proposed reforms, particularly to sections 2 and 3 of the Act, really distorted both the purpose and the effect of the Act.

Constitutional legislation is a very difficult thing to get right, but the Act was thought to be a success, and it effectively made the conduct of justice easy, because it brought human rights down to domestic level. It gave direct access to the UK courts, and it meant that justice was obtainable at lower cost, more speedily and in a more relevant way. The Government have said they will not take us out of the European convention on human rights, and that we will still be subject to the judgments of the European Court, so the only change will be that it the process will be much more protracted. How can that be in the interests of justice, or the interests of the citizen?

As my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas) said, this is not about lawyers or high-falutin’ principles; it is about the ability of citizens to challenge the state and institutions on important areas of law, and regarding decisions that fundamentally affect their everyday lives, when they get things wrong. What is obnoxious about that? That is the role that the Human Rights Act performed; that is the role it continues to perform, with or without the sort of amendments

that we have talked about today. To repeal it, as an act of political bravado, is simply irresponsible and I urge the Minister away from that course.

I like to think that we will hear a little bit more from the Minister. I am not hopeful because the Secretary of State has already said that he will take his time, but I hope that we will hear at least a little bit about the direction of travel and where the Government think we should be going on this issue. That would be a helpful outcome of this debate. The almost 250,000 people who have urged caution on him would be pleased to hear that that message is being heeded in the Ministry of Justice.

7.12 pm

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** It is a pleasure, Ms Fovargue, to serve under your chairmanship. I thank the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Scott Benton) for presenting the petition. I am very much in favour of retaining the Human Rights Act as it is. The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) said that there might be a need to do some tweaking or make some changes. I am not against that, provided we have a chance to discuss it and see what the changes are. However, I am very much of the opinion that the Human Rights Act should be retained as it is.

I start by thanking all the 230,000 people who signed the online petition to stop reform of the Human Rights Act. That is almost a quarter of a million people who voiced their objection to human rights being diluted in any circumstance, and I believe that they reflect the views of possibly millions more people. Certainly, people to whom I speak in my constituency want things left as they are. All these people oppose moves to make the Government less accountable, and support increasing the ability of people in need to make human rights claims; I, too, think there is a need to have that opportunity in the law.

To give an idea of just how many people 230,000 are, that is twice the population of even the largest constituency in the UK, and it is about one in eight voters in Northern Ireland, which has a population of 2 million people. This is not a fringe issue; it is a massive issue. The correspondence that I receive on it tells me that people are deeply concerned about it.

In fact, as a general rule, people want more human rights safeguards in place, not fewer. A third of the population of the United Kingdom believes that the UK Government are not doing enough to promote human rights abroad. I am very pleased to see the Minister in his place, and I will make some comments about human rights abroad. As everyone knows, I chair the all-party parliamentary group on international freedom of religion or belief, and I am a deep and strong believer that when it comes to making trade deals with any country in the world, the key to that process must be regard for human rights, including people’s liberty to serve and worship their god as they wish. I know that the Government are committed to that; I understand that. However, I still want to put that on the record.

As I say, a third of people in the UK believe that the UK is not doing enough to promote human rights abroad; I think that the Government are quite active, but people tell me otherwise. Almost three quarters of

[*Jim Shannon*]

the British public agree that the UK should take into consideration a country's human rights standards when negotiating or signing a deal with it. More than half of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland agrees that the amount of foreign aid given to a country should be tied to its performance against human rights standards; I fully support that condition. When I ask questions of Ministers with responsibility for different parts of the world about that, I am encouraged by what they say happens in that regard.

If this Government—my Government—are to reform human rights, they should make the standards higher. Let us do human rights better, rather than water them down. If that is what the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West is saying—I think it is—I agree that we should do that, rather than make the legislation more dependent on the Government's economic and trade interests.

Human Rights Watch said to the Joint Committee on Human Rights that the repeal of the Human Rights Act would

“weaken human rights protections...and send a negative signal globally about the value of international human rights standards and the worth the UK government attaches to them.”

I am confident that the Minister does not want that to be the opinion of those who look at the United Kingdom from outside. I think many would agree that that is a scathing assessment of the impact that any repeal would have.

Globally, human rights have never been under greater threat. We know about all the things that are happening in Putin's war in Ukraine. Every one of us is dismayed, disgusted and angered by it, and our Government and our Ministers have taken strong action. We all watched the protests across the villages, towns and cities of Iran. Ladies were often at the fore in those protests; they are the ones feeling the brunt of it. More than 400 people have been killed—most of them women and children—and almost 20,000 have been arrested, all looking for freedom, liberty and human rights. We support that. Then there is China's treatment of the Hongkongers, not just in Hong Kong but in Manchester, as we witnessed the week before last. We want human rights observed in this country as well as in Hong Kong. The bombings of schools in Afghanistan are human rights abuses. It is really quite annoying. Those are things that have made the headlines in just the past month. If we are to continue to be a global champion of human rights, we cannot let the message be lost. What we do at home is so important.

Hon. Members have made fantastic contributions, and I endorse all of them. Many have a greater knowledge than I do. In my capacity as chair of the APPG for international freedom of religion or belief, I am frequently in dialogue with civil society organisations and Government representatives from countries where freedom of religion or belief is a major concern. When I talk to all those groups from across the world, it is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland's leading influence in the defence of human rights that makes bilateral accountability possible. That is vital. I and many others are concerned that replacing the Human Rights Act with a Bill of Rights would send to those countries the message that the UK does not practise what it preaches. That is the interpretation they will make. I am sure that the Minister will respond positively and lay that to bed.

We must see human rights as an absolute good in themselves, and not as a means to an end. Such transparently selfish interests would inevitably undermine attempts to promote human rights abroad, and would do far more harm than good.

The Human Rights Act should be left as it is. There are many in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and many more across this great world, whom we have a duty to protect. We need the Human Rights Act, not a Bill of Rights, but if we change the Act, we should make it better. I cannot and will not agree to the dilution of the current provisions.

7.19 pm

**Steven Bonnar** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Fovargue. I commend the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Scott Benton) for moving the motion.

We have had a very good debate. It is clear that this issue is close to the hearts of many of our constituents across the four nations. We heard from my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), who is an authority on these matters. It is always worth noting all she has to say as the Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights.

We also heard from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon); we are often on opposing sides in debates and Divisions in this place, but I fully agree with everything he has said today. I thank the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) and the hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas) for their excellent contributions. Of course, I also thank the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) for his interrupted contribution; I am glad to say that none of the points he was making was diluted—political bravado, indeed. I place on record my thanks to the public who have partaken in their democratic right and signed the e-petition, including 326 from my constituency of Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on what can only be described as an unashamed attempted power grab by the Government, in the form of their proposed reform to the Human Rights Act. There is absolutely no justification for such reform at this time, other than this Government creating for themselves the potential to be above the law. Such is the UK Government's desire to substantially harden an already hard Brexit that they are literally ripping out the final piece of European-related legislation that we have. It is not a piece of legislation that could, nor should, be changed lightly, if at all.

The Human Right Act aims to protect every individual across our society. We lose that at our peril. It is an essential law that has allowed us to challenge public authorities when they get things wrong. It has helped to secure justice on issues from the right to life to the right of freedom of speech. The Human Rights Act has changed many lives for the better; it must be protected and not subject to reform that reduces its scope or limits when people can rely on it. The reform is a threat to how and when we can challenge those in power; it will strip some people's rights away and require people to have permission from a judge before they can take a state to court. The UK Government must respect the rule of law. Their changes will mean that future UK

Governments, of all political leanings, will be beyond the reach of public accountability. Where is the democracy in that?

The utter contempt of the UK Tory Government for the upholding of human rights has been blatant; we see it in their attempts to send refugees, some of the most vulnerable people in our society, to Rwanda. Since that scheme was invented, public pressure and the protections in our legal system have meant that not one refugee has been sent on a plane. Ironically enough, we are on our third Home Secretary since then. I suppose that is not that surprising; we are also on our fourth Chancellor and third Prime Minister in that short space of time. The Government should focus on far more important things than tinkering with human rights legislation.

It was the words of that former Home Secretary, the right hon. and learned Member for Fareham (Suella Braverman), that I found most chilling—I alerted her to the fact that I would mention her. It was her “dream” to see planes of refugees sent to Rwanda. Of all the dreams to have! Surely the outcry at that statement proves that the Conservative party’s interpretation of human rights protections is starkly different from that of the wider public and Members from across this Chamber.

One of the most concerning elements of reform for my constituents in Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill is the implication for the integrity of the devolutionary settlement. We have heard from Members about the encroachments on that. The Scottish Government, along with other devolved Governments, have been abundantly clear that they do not support any such reforms, which would erode rights that years of devolution have achieved. A report published in July 2021 by the Joint Committee on Human Rights concluded,

“The Government should not pursue reform of the HRA without the consent of the Scottish Parliament”.

Well, that consent has not been given.

In their Bill of Rights, the Tories say they want to “strengthen this country’s proud tradition of freedom, curtail abuses of the human rights system and reinforce the democratic prerogatives of elected Members in this House over the legislative process in respect of the expansion of human rights.”—[*Official Report*, 14 December 2021; Vol. 705, c. 913.]

It takes some serious neck from this Government to portray themselves as coming to the defence of judges, when they have been at constant war with them over the judgments they have given that the Government did not like. Tory proposals to uphold citizens’ rights simply do not equate with the reality of legislation passed under this UK Government, such as the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, the Judicial Review and Courts Act 2022, the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, the Elections Act 2022 and the Public Order Bill, all of which impede the rights of our citizens.

The UK Government must stop all attempts to rewrite the constitution and devolved settlements. Such practices cannot continue, and Scotland does not accept that manner of working. I implore the UK Government to stop all attempts to reform the Human Rights Act, and I fully support the aims of the petitioners.

7.25 pm

**Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Fovargue. The strength of feeling on the issue has been demonstrated

not only by the nearly 250,000 people who signed the petition, but by the speeches we have heard today. My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas) said that the Human Rights Act provides justice for victims, including soldiers, women facing violence and victims of Hillsborough. My hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) said that replacing the Human Rights Act was completely the wrong priority for the justice system, and spoke about his hope that that will now be abandoned with the demise of the previous Justice Secretary, the right hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab). The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) shared his commitment to the Human Rights Act, and noted the very large number of people who signed the petition and the strength of feeling on the issue.

The case has been made very strongly for why the Human Rights Act is such an important piece of legislation, and why it should not under any circumstances be scrapped and replaced with the Government’s Bill of Rights Bill. It is a relief that the Government did not bring forward the Bill for Second Reading last month. I hope that the Minister will confirm that it will not come back, and that the Government will drop their attempt to scrap the Human Rights Act. Make no mistake: rather than a so-called Bill of Rights, it is a rights-removal Bill, which is designed to dilute the rule of law and weaken the rights of British citizens.

The Human Rights Act was brought in by a Labour Government, with a simple but profound aim: to bring rights home, ensure human rights protections are accessible, and provide a mechanism to hold the Executive to account. For the last 25 years, the Act has met that aim. Indeed, it is recognised around the world, and has been integral to the Union of our nations. As has been said, the Scottish Government consistently made clear their support for the Act in their response to the Government’s Bill of Rights Bill consultation. The Welsh Government have recorded their opposition to any proposal to replace the Human Rights Act. Perhaps most significantly of all, the Act has played a large role in peace in Northern Ireland, because the full incorporation of the European convention in domestic law was a key aspect of the 1998 Good Friday agreement.

Members across the House would have grave concerns about legislation that could undermine the Union. We have talked today about the importance of evidence. The hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) called for any review to be evidence-led, and the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) said that the Joint Committee on Human Rights completed two cross-party reports that concluded that the Human Rights Act is working well and does not need to be repealed or replaced. That was also the conclusion of the independent expert review, and the view of well over 250 charities, trade unions and human rights organisations that joined together to call for the protection of the Act. Organisations working with vulnerable people—ranging from the charity ACTION:FGM to Mind, the Chronic Illness Inclusion Project, the Down’s Syndrome Association and Southall Black Sisters—have also said that the Act is a proportionate and well-drafted protection of our fundamental liberties. The evidence that the Human Rights Act is working is overwhelming.

Far from the mythical rights culture that the Conservatives point the finger at, the Human Rights Act has time and again been the course of redress for

[*Ellie Reeves*]

those failed by the state. Take Corporal Anne-Marie Ellement. After she reported being raped by two Royal Military Police officers, she suffered bullying, ostracism and overwork. In the end, she took her own life. Using the positive obligations under article 2—the right to life—Anne-Marie’s family secured a fresh inquest into her death and a new rape investigation.

The results of those investigations led to improvements in the military justice system that have helped to support servicepeople who have been victims of rape and sexual assault in the military. It also led to the formation of the service complaints ombudsman, an independent body that investigates complaints by service personnel. The positive obligations under article 2 also ensure that bereaved families of the Manchester Arena attack in 2017 and the Fishmongers’ Hall attack in 2019 received full investigations, which examined whether the attacks could have been prevented. The lessons learned were placed on counter-terror operatives to better protect people in the future.

The Human Rights Act is an essential tool for upholding women’s rights to live free from violence through positive obligations under the Act, but the Conservatives’ rights removal Bill would remove them, thereby limiting women’s ability to challenge the state’s failures to protect them. A prime example of positive obligations under the Human Rights Act in protecting women is the case of black cab rapist John Worboys, who my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham and Rainham also spoke about. Despite two of his earliest victims reporting their experiences to the police, systematic failures to properly investigate or take those reports seriously meant that he was not charged, and was free to continue attacking women for many years. Thanks to the Human Rights Act, those victims were able to take the police to court and hold them responsible.

More recently, the High Court judgment regarding the policing of the Clapham Common vigil for Sarah Everard saw the Act play a crucial role when a court ruled that the Met had failed to understand the law when it banned women for holding a vigil for Sarah. Thanks to the Human Rights Act, the organisers were able to seek redress. It is unconscionable that the Government are pursuing an agenda that will attack those basic rights, and I hope that the Minister will confirm that the legislation will not come back.

Rather than looking to the genuine positives of the Human Rights Act, in the proposed legislation the Government attempted to dismiss it as a law misused and exploited by criminals and extremists. The truth is that the Act offers essential daily protections for citizens, which in so many cases we take for granted. There is no justifiable reason for the Government to try to curb those obligations on the state to protect our human rights. Doing so simply seeks to absolve the state of responsibility. Unless the Minister is willing to accept the importance of the Human Rights Act, and commit to dropping the Government’s Bill of Rights, I am afraid that it adds to the Government’s scoresheet of not being on the side of victims, not being serious about tackling violence against women and girls, and not being a guardian of the rule of law.

Labour, on the other hand, believes in a country that is accountable and has proper checks and balances, where institutions seek to protect the rights of the

people they serve, rather than cover up and obfuscate when things go wrong. That is what we aspire to, and it is why a Labour Government would defend the Human Rights Act.

7.33 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Gareth Johnson):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Fovargue. I thank the hon. Members for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas), for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon), the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Steven Bonnar), and my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) for their contributions.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Scott Benton) for introducing the debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee, and I thank the creator of the petition, who I understand is in the Public Gallery, for his engagement with Parliament. I hope he will agree that we have had a very constructive debate. There may be slight differences of opinion, but the debate has been positive. I also thank the hon. Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves). I like the people of Lewisham West; when I stood there in 2005, I found out that I liked them rather more than they liked me, but that is a separate issue. She represents a wonderful constituency, and I thank her for her contribution.

I am genuinely grateful that the debate gives me the opportunity to set out the Government’s position on this issue. The UK has a long and proud history of recognising and standing up for the fundamental human rights of individuals. Robust protection of those rights, such as freedom of thought and of expression, is a vital cornerstone of our modern democracy. In recognition of that, the Government pledged in our manifesto to review and update the Human Rights Act, which was created in 1998 to give further effect in UK law to the rights set out in the European convention on human rights.

Almost a quarter of a century has passed since that Act came into force. It has occupied an important position in the UK’s human rights framework, but after over 20 years, it is entirely right that we should look at it again and seek to update it, not with the intention of reducing protection of our rights and freedoms, but to make sure that this country’s human rights framework continues to be the best that it can be, meets the needs of the society that it serves, and remains a leading example on the international stage. We want to ensure that the Act strikes the proper balance between the rights of individuals on the one hand, and our vital national security and effective government on the other.

The Government established the independent Human Rights Act review in December 2020 to examine the framework of the Act, how it operates in practice, and whether any change is required. Chaired by the former Court of Appeal judge Sir Peter Gross, who my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst mentioned, the review panel was tasked with considering the relationship between domestic courts and the European Court of Human Rights, and the Act’s impact on the relationship between the judiciary, the Executive and the legislature.

The Government are most grateful to Sir Peter and his panel for their valuable report, which was published in December 2021.

Following the report, the Government commenced work on a Bill of Rights. Their reform programme not only took the report into account but considered wider issues relating to our domestic framework, including the need to strike a balance between individual rights and the wider public interest, and to give public authorities the confidence to carry out their duties. As Members might expect, when a new Government were formed, the Bill's progress through Parliament was paused in the light of a wider review of policy priorities. We are taking this opportunity to closely consider our approach to updating the Act, and to ensure that the provisions that we put forward will deliver the Government's objectives as effectively as possible.

Let me be clear that any reform to the Act will be in full compliance with the European convention on human rights, and with the UK's other international obligations, including the Belfast/Good Friday agreement, the Northern Ireland protocol, and our trade and co-operation agreement with the European Union. More broadly, we will maintain our leading role in the promotion and protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law internationally. The UK's record at the European Court of Human Rights demonstrates our commitment to ensuring that human rights are protected. The UK's human rights record is strong. Of all the state parties to the European convention on human rights, the UK has the fewest applications to the court per million inhabitants. The figures that I have are slightly different from those given by my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, but the point remains the same: at the end of 2021, applications against the UK made up only 0.17% of the Court's case load, and very few of the Court's final judgments find a violation by the UK; two did in 2020, and five in 2021.

We continue to be a strong supporter of the work carried out by the United Nations treaty bodies to uphold the broader human rights system. The UK remains a strong advocate of the United Nations Human Rights Council, and we have a deep commitment to the success of its universal periodic review. We believe that it is an important mechanism of universal and constructive peer review. It allows the sharing of best practice and promotes the continual improvement of human rights on the ground, and is therefore a process we will continue to engage with.

The UK has been praised in the UN's previous universal periodic review dialogues for our leadership on certain recommendations and our commitment to the review process. We have recently published our state report for our fourth universal periodic review, the dialogue of which is scheduled for November 2022. This petition rightly points out that the Human Rights Act provides important protection. While I could not disagree with that sentiment, it does not preclude us from looking carefully at how the Act could be improved.

**Andy Slaughter:** The Minister is making a good case for "If it ain't broke, don't fix it". He has used the phrase "review and update" himself, so I assume we will have no more of "repeal" and "replace", which is what it says in clause 1 of the paused Bill. He has rightly said that we are both a contributor to international human

rights and are less criticised than many other countries in that respect. Are those not all arguments for not needing a comprehensive review? Twenty years is not a long time. Magna Carta has been around for about 800 years—we are not talking about repealing that.

**Gareth Johnson:** The Conservative party manifesto at the last general election made it clear that we wanted to review and update the Human Rights Act. We would still remain compliant with the European convention on human rights, whatever changes are made. It is purely to review and update the Act. The manifesto does not say that we wish to repeal and scrap the Human Rights Act.

**Steven Bonnar:** I thank the Minister for giving way; he is being very generous. He makes reference to manifesto pledges and his commitment to deliver on them. I wonder why it is only his Government who are allowed to deliver on their manifesto pledges. The Scottish Government have a clear manifesto pledge to deliver an independence referendum. Self-determination comes under human rights, and I wonder why he would like to deny that to the people of Scotland.

**Gareth Johnson:** That might take us down a rabbit hole that you, Ms Fovargue, might regard as being out of order. The hon. Gentleman will know that the Human Rights Act is not a devolved matter; it is retained by the UK Parliament to legislate on. Updating the Act to ensure that it serves its intended purpose and keeps up with the needs of a changing society is a crucial step towards doing just that, and the work to review how best to achieve that continues. I look forward to updating the House on that work in future. I reassure all hon. Members present that protecting the rights and freedoms currently enjoyed in this country will remain of the utmost importance throughout this process.

7.43 pm

**Scott Benton:** I thank you, Ms Fovargue, and all those hon. Members who have spoken in the debate. We have heard thoughtful contributions from all who have spoken, including the hon. Members for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas), for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon), the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill), as well as all Front-Bench Members.

It is a particularly opportune time for this debate, with the incoming new Prime Minister. Tomorrow, the Department will establish a way forward, and I am sure that the Minister will feed back all the shades of different opinions from today's debate. We have alluded to our manifesto commitment to review and update the Act, and I am reassured by the Minister's comments that that is still on track. Of course, we are now in the second half of this Parliament, so the sooner that comes forward, the better. Along with Back-Bench colleagues, I look forward to seeing what the Government produce and how they will safeguard people's rights, while allowing us to reform our immigration system and ensure that those who are a threat to national security can be deported. It is a difficult circle to square,

*[Scott Benton]*

but I have every faith that the Minister and his team can achieve it. Thank you, Ms Fovargue; I am happy to close the debate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered e-petition 607712, relating to human rights legislation reform.

7.44 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Written Statements

Monday 24 October 2022

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

### NHS Charging Regulations Exemption for Ukrainians

**The Minister of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Robert Jenrick):** The Government continue to take measures in response to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine to support those who ordinarily live in Ukraine who have come here to seek safety and support.

In March 2022, my predecessor amended the NHS charging regulations to allow residents of Ukraine, and their immediate family members, who are lawfully in the UK, to access NHS care in England for free, including those who transfer here under official medevac routes. This covers all potential treatment needs, except for assisted conception services, to align with the existing exemption for those whose immigration health surcharge (IHS) fees have been waived.

We committed to review this concession by 17 September. Today I am pleased to announce that my Department has completed its review and has agreed to maintain these concessions for a further 12 months at which point they will be reviewed again.

Those who will continue to benefit from this exemption include:

Anyone who uses an alternative temporary—less than six months—visa route outside of the family or sponsorship routes.

Anyone who chooses to extend their visit or seasonal worker visa temporarily, without going through the IHS system.

Anyone who is in the process of switching visas.

This Government continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with our Ukrainian friends and we are proud to maintain our support for Ukrainian residents in our country.

[HCWS340]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Public Order Bill: Clause 9 and ECHR

**The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Jeremy Quin):** My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord Sharpe of Epsom) has today made the following written ministerial statement:

On a free vote with cross-party support, an amendment was inserted into the Public Order Bill by the House of Commons on Tuesday 18 October. Clause 9 establishes designated areas—buffer zones—around abortion clinics where interference with people accessing or providing abortion services would be an offence.

Section 19(1) of the Human Rights Act provides a mechanism to notify Parliamentarians if a statement cannot be made that a clause is compatible with the ECHR, but this does not fetter the right of Parliament to legislate in such a way, should it wish.

I am unable, but only because of clause 9, to make a statement that, in my view, the provisions of the Bill are presently compatible with Convention rights but the Government nevertheless wish to proceed with the Bill.

The Government have published a separate ECHR memorandum with their assessment of the compatibility of the Bill's provisions with the Convention rights: this memorandum is available on the Government website.

I am sure this House will naturally wish to debate and scrutinise this amendment further. I look forward to continue working with all colleagues on this legislation as the Bill moves through Parliament.

[HCWS342]

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Northern Ireland: Commissioning of Abortion Services

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Chris Heaton-Harris):** As Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, I am required under section 9 of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019—the NIEF Act—to ensure that the recommendations in paragraphs 85 and 86 of the 2018 report of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women—the CEDAW report—are implemented in full.

The Abortion (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2022, which came into force on 20 May 2022, provide the Secretary of State with the same powers as a Northern Ireland Minister or Department for the purpose of ensuring that the recommendations in paragraphs 85 and 86 of the 2018 CEDAW report are implemented.

Today, I am announcing that the UK Government will ensure the commissioning of abortion services.

21 October marked the three-year anniversary of the decriminalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland. It is not right that three years on, women and girls in Northern Ireland are still unable to access the full range of healthcare to which they are lawfully entitled.

The UK Government have been clear that they would commission abortion services if the Department of Health did not act. We regret that this step is needed, in what ought to be a matter for the Department of Health to implement. The Government have been left with no other option, as women and girls have been left without safe and high quality services, with many having to travel to the rest of the UK or turn to the unregulated market to access healthcare to which they are legally entitled. The devolution settlement does not absolve me of my legal obligation to ensure that women and girls can access abortion services in Northern Ireland, as they can in the rest of the UK.

I will be meeting the chief executives of health and social care trusts in Northern Ireland in the coming weeks to ensure these services can be provided. Ultimately, it remains the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Executive to fund abortion services in Northern Ireland. The UK Government will ensure that appropriate funding is available to enable healthcare professionals to take the necessary steps to ensure that essential training and recruitment of staff can progress, and services can be implemented.

[HCWS341]



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