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**14 November 2022**

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

**PARLIAMENTARY**  
**DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Monday 14 November 2022**

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# House of Commons

*Monday 14 November 2022*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

### NEW WRIT

*Ordered,*

That the Speaker do issue his Warrant to the Clerk of the Crown to make out a New Writ for the electing of a Member to serve in this present Parliament for the Borough Constituency of Stretford and Urmston in the room of Kate Green, who since her election for the said Borough Constituency has been appointed to the Office of Steward and Bailiff of His Majesty's Manor of Northstead in the County of York.—(*Sir Alan Campbell.*)

## Oral Answers to Questions

### HOME DEPARTMENT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Operation Deter

1. **Iain Stewart** (Milton Keynes South) (Con): What recent discussions she has had with the Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police on the effectiveness of Operation Deter. [902154]

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman):** Before I answer, on behalf of the UK may I pass on my thoughts and prayers to all those affected by the terrible attack in Istanbul yesterday? I am sure that the whole House will join me, on behalf of the UK Government, in saying that the UK stands with Turkey in the fight against terrorism. We send our condolences to all those affected.

Last month, I visited Thames Valley police to meet the chief constable, force leaders and student officers. A number of topics were discussed, including the delivery of Operation Deter. I am always keen to discuss interventions that the chief constable and local partners believe to be effective in reducing knife crime.

**Iain Stewart:** The police and crime commissioner for Thames Valley, Matthew Barber, introduced Operation Deter as a zero-tolerance approach to knife crime. It started in Milton Keynes and is now being rolled out in the force in other areas. It is already delivering some very encouraging signs in reducing knife crime. Will my right hon. Friend review it further and encourage other forces to replicate it in their areas?

**Suella Braverman:** I have met the excellent police and crime commissioner, to whom my hon. Friend refers, on two occasions now—perhaps more—and I really welcome all initiatives that show measurable impacts against violent crime. I am determined that interventions that are proven to work are delivered across our forces. I am also a big supporter of violence reduction units. I am very keen to look at the verified results of Operation Deter, alongside all innovative approaches. I am clear that all options should be explored and that we should support operations that work.

### Hate Crimes

3. **Afzal Khan** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): What steps she has taken to tackle hate crimes. [R] [902156]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Miss Sarah Dines):** Hate crime is a scourge on communities across the country. We expect the police to fully investigate hateful attacks and ensure that the cowards who commit them feel the full force of the law.

**Afzal Khan:** The Home Secretary said that the public want the police to tackle crime, yet the Home Office cut the number of police officers and left Islamophobia to increase over the last five years. Year after year, Home Office figures show that British Muslims are the victims of the highest number of hate crimes. This Islamophobia Awareness Month, will the Home Secretary take any steps to root out this insidious hatred, which impacts our British Muslim community?

**Miss Dines:** There is a cheeky two-part question there. In relation to police numbers, I remind the hon. Gentleman that in his own area we have already recruited 804 new officers and there will be lots more coming in that space. On religious hate crimes against Muslims, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is working hard in this area. I remind him that this Government have done more than any other to tackle anti-Muslim hatred. We have provided extra money—over £4 million between 2016 and 2022—to monitor and combat anti-Muslim hatred. I remind him that, in addition, the Home Office allocated £24.5 million to protect mosques and Muslim faith schools through the Places of Worship: Protective Security Funding Scheme in May 2022. A new Muslim faith schools protective security scheme will also be delivered this year. The Government are thoroughly committed to stamping out this evil crime.

### New Police Officers: Entry Pay Rates

4. **Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): What discussions she has had with (a) Cabinet colleagues and (b) relevant stakeholders on the adequacy of entry pay rates for new police officers. [902157]

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman):** The independent Police Remuneration Review Body makes recommendations to the Government on the pay and allowances for police officers. In July, we announced that we had accepted the review body's recommendation to award a consolidated increase of £1,900 at all pay points with effect from 1 September, targeted at the lowest-paid to provide an uplift of up to 8.8%.

**Jonathan Edwards:** Police officers inform me that they have faced a 20% real-terms pay cut over the past decade, and there seems to be a particular problem with new recruits. My local federation tells me that some of its officers are using food banks and that a potential new recruit decided to continue his career with a fast food chain because he had been offered a pay rise. Does the Secretary of State admit that pay and remuneration for police officers—professionals who put their lives in danger on our behalf—is a real problem?

**Suella Braverman:** The Government recognise that increases in the cost of living are having a significant impact on the lower-paid. In that context, and after careful consideration, we chose to accept in full the review body's recommendations to award the consolidated increases that I mentioned. We want to ensure that there is support for our officers, who play a vital role in this country.

**Boris Johnson** (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con): Given that on the streets of London alone, entry pay rates have already attracted 4,734 more police officers to join the Metropolitan police, and given how vital it is to continue to provide the right place for those new recruits to be properly trained, does the Home Secretary agree that Uxbridge remains the most sensible place in Hillingdon to have a place station? Will she join me in passing that view to the present Mayor of London?

**Suella Braverman:** My right hon. Friend speaks a lot of sense, as usual. He is absolutely right and he has a huge amount of which to be proud when it comes to increasing the numbers of police officers on the frontline fighting crime and standing up for victims, which Labour has opposed at every opportunity. If I may make a humble request of him, will he give up some of his precious time to advise the current Mayor of London who is wholly failing on fighting crime, having seen a 9% increase in crime in London? The Mayor really could take some advice from his predecessor.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister, Sarah Jones.

**Sarah Jones** (Croydon Central) (Lab): New statistics published today reveal that the mini-Budget cost even more than we first thought—a staggering £30 billion. That comes on top of 12 years of austerity, which has seen a real-terms pay cut for police and staff, thousands of jobs lost and prosecutions plummet. The Home Secretary was in the Cabinet and the Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire was No. 2 in the Treasury at the time of the mini-Budget. Will they both now apologise to our police for the damage they have done?

**Suella Braverman:** The Government are clear that policing must have a modern pay structure that recognises and rewards skills and competence, rather than time served. In line with that approach, chief constables have the discretion to pay an officer a starting salary of between £23,556 and £26,682 depending on qualifications and experience. The settlement is fair. We want our police officers to be empowered and strong in the fight against crime.

## Neighbourhood Crimes: Effectiveness of Police Community Support Officers

**5. Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): What assessment her Department has made of the effectiveness of police community support officers in tackling neighbourhood crime. [902158]

**The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp):** The Government are determined to reduce neighbourhood crime, and I am pleased to report that, since 2019, neighbourhood crime has reduced by about 20%. It is up to chief constables to decide on the level of PCSOs that they choose to recruit, but as the House will be aware, we are in the process of hiring an extra 20,000 police officers, after which we will have a record number of uniformed officers serving.

**Helen Hayes:** Police community support officers have a vital role to play in tackling neighbourhood crime and building trust and confidence in policing at a community level, because they are often the most visible officers to our communities. Will the Minister therefore confirm how many fewer officers are assigned to neighbourhood roles in England and Wales today compared with 2010? How long does he expect it to take until police officer and staff numbers in neighbourhood roles reach the same number again?

**Chris Philp:** I can confirm that neighbourhood crime is about 20% lower than in 2019, as I said a moment ago. I can confirm that after the 20,000 officers have been recruited in April next year, we will have a record number of uniformed officers serving in this country. I can also confirm that the Metropolitan police area, which includes the hon. Lady's constituency, the shadow Policing Minister's constituency and my own, already has a record number of uniformed officers.

**Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): PCSOs play a vital role in London wards' safer neighbourhoods teams, which perform a vital function. Will the Minister ask the Mayor of London why he is starving boroughs such as Barnet of the officers needed to make up SNTs to tackle crime and antisocial behaviour?

**Chris Philp:** The Metropolitan police already have more uniformed officers than at any point in their history, and in the current financial year they have had a funding increase of £170 million on last year, so I think my right hon. Friend asks a very reasonable question.

**Barry Gardiner** (Brent North) (Lab): In the London Borough of Brent, 320 hours of safer neighbourhoods teams' police time has been abstracted in the past three months. The figures are not routinely made public, but it is important for communities to have access to that information because they need to know that their safer neighbourhoods teams are there to act for them. Will the Home Secretary undertake to publish abstraction figures as a matter of routine?

**Chris Philp:** Such operational matters are for the police, but I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about the level of abstraction owing to the unjustified Just Stop Oil protests. In October and early November, about 11,000 Metropolitan police officer shifts were lost as a

result of having to police those outrageous and unnecessary protests. That is a matter of concern, and that is why it is so important that we see an end to these protests as soon as possible.

**Vicky Ford** (Chelmsford) (Con): I usually get very positive feedback about Chelmsford's pubs, clubs and nightclubs, but in recent weeks there has been a flurry of emails and comments on social media about suspected spiking incidents at one establishment. I have been in touch with our excellent city centre policing team, who are among the hundreds more police we have had in Essex in the past five years. Will the Minister join me in encouraging all those who think they may have been victims of spiking to come forward and report the incidents to the police so that the perpetrators can be caught and held to account?

**Chris Philp:** My right hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. I certainly join her in calling on victims to report these very serious and damaging offences as quickly as possible. The Government are committed to producing a report on the prevalence and nature of spiking and the action needed to tackle it by April next year.

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

**Naz Shah** (Bradford West) (Lab): Neighbourhood policing and PCSOs should be at the heart of communities, providing proactive policing to keep communities safe, yet after cutting thousands of neighbourhood police officers from our streets, the Tories have cut 8,000 PCSOs. Labour has made a commitment to hire thousands more PCSOs as part of a fully funded neighbourhood policing programme. Will the Minister match that commitment, or will further cuts be coming after Thursday's Budget?

**Chris Philp:** As the hon. Lady knows, the total funding going into policing this year is £16.9 billion, which is a £1.1 billion increase on last year. I have said it once or twice before, but I will say it again: come April next year, when those 20,000 extra officers are hired, we will have a record number of uniformed officers serving on our streets.

#### **Families with Leave to Remain: No Recourse to Public Funds**

6. **Sir Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): When she plans to publish improved data on families with leave to remain but no recourse to public funds. [902159]

**The Minister for Immigration (Robert Jenrick):** The Home Office now publishes an extensive range of data in respect of NRPF change of conditions applications, including data on age, gender and nationality. We are open to other avenues to obtaining further NRPF-related data; plans for doing so have been set out in published correspondence with the UK Statistics Authority.

**Sir Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): At present, the Home Office does not know how many people it gives leave to remain with no recourse to public funds attached. For months, Ministers and officials at the Department have been saying that a new IT system is about to be introduced and will give us that information. The chair of the UK Statistics Authority, whom the Minister mentioned, told me in a letter in February that the new

system would be operational some time this year, rather than last year as previously announced. When will the Department take back control and switch on its new system so that it can provide this completely basic information?

**Robert Jenrick:** I understand the right hon. Gentleman's long-standing interest in this issue. We have made it clear on a number of occasions that we also want to deepen and enrich the level of data that is available. We have been speaking to our stakeholders to see what further steps we might be able to take, and I shall be happy to keep the right hon. Gentleman informed.

#### **Asylum Application Backlog**

7. **Dr Luke Evans** (Bosworth) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to tackle the asylum application backlog. [902160]

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman):** We are clear about the fact that the asylum system needs to do better and cases need to be processed more quickly. The aim of the asylum transformation programme is to bring the system back into balance and modernise it. Its focus is on increasing productivity by streamlining and digitising processes to speed up decision making and increase efficiency and output.

**Dr Evans:** A hotel in Earl Shilton, in my constituency, has twice been identified as a way of trying to deal with the backlog, but has failed in that regard owing to health and safety concerns about fire in particular. I was therefore surprised when constituents wrote to me saying that they had seen asylum seekers in the hotel. I contacted the borough council, the county council and the police, but none of them knew anything about it, so I checked social media and found that the story had been corroborated and was true. When I contacted the Home Office, it took 72 hours for it to be confirmed that they had been placed there. This is completely unacceptable. What is the Home Secretary doing to ensure that it does not happen in other constituencies, and will she meet me to discuss the situation in Earl Shilton so that communication can be improved?

**Suella Braverman:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising this issue. We have experienced unprecedented pressure on the system recently, and responding to it has been challenging for our operational partners. We have a statutory duty to provide destitute asylum seekers with accommodation. We do inform local partners of our actions, but despite our ambitions to do that expeditiously, owing to the recent incredible pressure on the system we have sometimes fallen short. I understand that a direct communication has been sent to my hon. Friend, but I can say to him now that we want to improve our engagement to ensure that there is much better understanding and much better support for local communities that are affected.

**Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): We now know of at least four sexual assaults on children who have been left in these hotels for months because of the backlog. In a meeting with MPs last week, the Home Secretary's officials committed themselves to providing

details of the safeguarding requirements for private contractors if Ministers gave them permission. If the Home Secretary is so confident that she is doing everything she can to fulfil the duty of care for these vulnerable children, will she give that permission and will she publish those details?

**Suella Braverman:** I have been very straight in saying that our asylum system does need improvement. The Immigration Minister and I are working intensively and improving our processes, and the duties to those in our care and how they are discharged, whether those concerned are adults or children, or other vulnerable people. There has been unprecedented pressure on the system, but we are working apace to procure alternative accommodation, and have been doing so for several months. As I have said, we are working intensively, and we hope to secure everyone's support in that effort.

**Sir Roger Gale** (North Thanet) (Con): Clearing the processing backlog is clearly one of the keys to solving the whole asylum problem, and we need to get on with it and make sure that it is done as fast as possible. The other key is, of course, controlling the source of the problem. I was pleased to learn of the measure signed by my right hon. Friend in Paris this morning, which is a modest step towards solving a much greater problem. Does my right hon. Friend agree that rather than populist policies which may grab headlines, the only way to solve this problem will be through painstaking hard work of the kind that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and Mr Macron have instigated?

**Suella Braverman:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his support and input on this challenging issue, and I was pleased to visit Manston with him a few weeks ago. He is absolutely right; there is no single solution to this problem, and international co-operation is a vital part of the solution. That is why I am very grateful to French partners for their effective work to date and also for their support for the positive step forward in the new deal that I signed this morning with my opposite number in France, which will greatly deepen our co-operation and further our response to illegal migration in the channel.

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): In Hounslow there are more than 3,500 asylum seekers waiting for a determination on their applications in, at the last count, 12 interim or contingency hotels. They have been waiting not weeks, not months, but even years. They are existing in accommodation and eating food unfit for animals, and Clearspring Ready Homes and a network of unaccountable subcontractors are skimming off vast profits and ripping off the accommodation providers, the vulnerable asylum seekers and, of course, the taxpayer. As the Home Secretary admits, the Home Office has a challenge here, so why will she not contract with local authorities that have expertise in procuring accommodation and that will ensure the basic standards that the hon. Member for Bosworth (Dr Evans) is concerned about, and ensure safeguarding as well—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. That is an important point but I have to get other Members in as well. We cannot have speeches; we must have short questions. I think the Home Secretary has got the drift of this one.

**Suella Braverman:** There are many plans afoot to try to improve the processing of asylum claims, and one of those relates to procuring alternative accommodation for those seeking asylum. We need to reduce our reliance on hotels, improve our productivity within the asylum processing system and ensure that people stop making the journey in the first place. There are huge levels of work ongoing, and I would encourage the hon. Lady to support those plans and our work.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister, Stephen Kinnock.

**Stephen Kinnock** (Aberavon) (Lab): The Nationality and Borders Act 2022 establishes a new category of asylum seekers that the Government claim are not permitted to claim asylum in Britain and should therefore be removed, but because the Government have failed to secure a returns agreement with France, and because their Rwanda policy is completely unworkable, 16,000 people in this category have been stuck in limbo waiting an additional six months for a decision, at huge cost to the British taxpayer. Of those 16,000 waiting in limbo, only 21 have been returned since the Act came into force. Do Ministers therefore accept that their own legislation is adding further delays, cost, chaos and confusion to an already broken system while doing next and nothing to remove failed asylum seekers who have no right to be here?

**Suella Braverman:** I find it staggering that Labour Members seem to love complaining about the system but when we introduced laws to fix it, what did they do? They opposed them every step of the way. We wanted to make it easier to deport foreign national offenders; Labour voted against it. We wanted to fix our asylum system; Labour voted against it. We secured a groundbreaking agreement with Rwanda; Labour would scrap it. Labour Members are very good at complaining, but they have absolutely no solution at all.

#### Visitor Visa Applications: Potential Barriers

8. **Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): What steps she is taking to reduce potential barriers for (a) family, (b) spouse and (c) visitor visa applications. [902161]

**The Minister for Immigration (Robert Jenrick):** Our immigration system allows people from across the globe to come to the United Kingdom to visit and join family here. Over 2 million entry clearance visas were issued in the year ending June 2022, but it is also right to ensure that visitors intend to leave at the end of their stay and that those coming to join their family can be supported by the family and not by the British taxpayer.

**Imran Hussain:** According to the Home Office's own figures, just under 20% of the total accepted and rejected visitor visa applications ended up being rejected, yet when it comes to those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi nationality, the figure suddenly, dramatically and inexplicably rises to 30%. Does the Minister really expect us to believe that there is no racial or religious bias at the Home Office?

**Robert Jenrick:** The hon. Gentleman is completely wrong, and he makes a baseless slur against my officials at the Home Office. All visa determinations are based on objective criteria, and I would add that 303,000 visas

and permits were granted for family members in the year ending June 2022, which is 61% more than in 2019. The Home Office is granting record numbers of these visas, and we do so in an entirely objective fashion.

**Luke Hall** (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): My constituent Mary Samuels is the legal guardian of her niece Faith, who is currently in Sierra Leone. Mary submitted a visa application for Faith as a non-British child of a parent who has permission to be in the UK, as Faith's lack of parents or guardians in Sierra Leone is putting her at serious and substantial risk. Although I am grateful for our conversations with the Home Office, those conversations have been ongoing since July 2021. I know that the Minister cannot comment on this case on the Floor of the House, but will he commit to personally reviewing the case and to meeting me to discuss how we can ensure that this intolerable situation for Mary and Faith is concluded as quickly as possible?

**Robert Jenrick:** My hon. Friend has been following this exceptional case assiduously. I can say that the application is in its final stages of consideration, and the applicant will be notified of the outcome as soon as a decision has been made. I am of course happy to meet him if that would be helpful.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the shadow Minister, Holly Lynch.

**Holly Lynch** (Halifax) (Lab): In contrast to family, spouse and visitor visas, golden visas were available until February 2022 to all who could afford them, including the world's super-rich, with next to no background checks. Spotlight on Corruption has found that, of all the golden visas issued, around half—that is more than 6,000—have been reviewed for possible national security risks. When he was Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Minister for Security called for the 2018 review of golden visas to be published. Can the Government confirm when we will finally see that review?

**Robert Jenrick:** My right hon. Friend the Minister for Security has been clear that we will publish that report at the earliest available opportunity, but I would add that this is the Government who brought an end to golden visas and who led the world in economic sanctions in support of the people of Ukraine.

### Knife Crime and Serious Violence

9. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What steps she is taking to tackle knife crime and serious violence. [902164]

13. **Ben Everitt** (Milton Keynes North) (Con): What steps she is taking to tackle knife crime and serious violence. [902169]

19. **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to tackle serious violent crime. [902176]

**The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp):** The Government have taken a dual approach to tackling serious violence, combining tough enforcement with programmes steering people away from crime. Since 2019, we have invested £170 million in the areas most

affected by violence to boost the police response, and we have invested a further £170 million in developing violence reduction units to tackle the root causes of violent crime. These programmes together have been assessed as preventing 49,000 violent offences in their first two years.

**Bob Blackman:** Harrow is, generally speaking, a safe borough in which to live, but we have seen an 18% increase in knife crime this year. There were 41 major incidents last month, and only last week there was a major incident in which three people were stabbed and put into hospital. Does my right hon. Friend agree that what is needed is not just extra police officers, but apprehending people who carry knives, punishing them by taking them to court and imprisoning them so they cannot cause damage to other people?

**Chris Philp:** I agree with my hon. Friend that a robust police response is essential, as is the courts making robust use of the two-strikes rule requiring a mandatory prison sentence on a second conviction for possessing a bladed article. Those are very important, and I am happy to look with him at how they are working and whether they need to be pushed a bit further. I am sorry to hear about the knife crime statistics in Harrow. Nationwide, knife crime, or knife-enabled crime, is down about 9% compared with pre-pandemic levels. If my hon. Friend feels that more needs to be done in his area, I would be happy to discuss it with him.

**Ben Everitt:** The two-strikes strategy is not something we have done in Milton Keynes. The Home Secretary has heard about Operation Deter, under which people caught with a knife in Milton Keynes will spend time behind bars. Along with the right legislation and the right policing strategies, such as Operation Deter, we need to work with local communities. Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the Knife Angel to Milton Keynes as we work with communities to raise awareness of the consequences of knife crime?

**Chris Philp:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend; the Knife Angel and other organisations do fantastic work, and I strongly commend them. It is exactly that kind of initiative that some of the funding streams I mentioned earlier are designed to support.

**Alex Cunningham:** A couple of weeks ago, I watched film from a security camera in Stockton showing two men; one used a chainsaw to cut through the door of a house while the other set about smashing all the windows in a bid to get to the resident. Who knows what would have happened if they had got in? That is another example of terrifying attacks by dangerous, organised criminals determined to silence our communities as they fight to control their illegal drug businesses on Teesside. The Government love to spin a story about police recruitment, but will Cleveland police ever get back the hundreds of police officers cut since 2010 and the resources needed to protect our communities and catch these criminals?

**Chris Philp:** I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman that the kind of crime he describes is despicable and that those who commit it should be pursued, prosecuted and imprisoned. I met the excellent police and crime commissioner for Cleveland, Steve Turner, just a short time ago—

**Alex Cunningham:** He won't give us the resources.

**Chris Philp:** I also met the chief constable, Mark Webster, just a week ago. The hon. Gentleman mentions resources, and of course Cleveland this year is receiving an extra £7.8 million compared with what it received last year and it has been allocated 239 extra officers as part of the police uplift programme, 197 of whom are already in post.

**Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab):** In September, I asked a then Home Office Minister why it is still legal for anyone aged 18 and over to walk into a shop and buy a machete. I was told, because the incidence of the use of machetes on our streets is increasing, that the serious weapons review is looking at this matter. Will this Minister tell us when that will be concluded and when the Government will act to ban the sale of machetes in this country?

**Chris Philp:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question and I have a lot of sympathy for the point he is making. In the two or three weeks since I have been in this position, I have met the Met's Deputy Assistant Commissioner McNulty, who has particular expertise in this area and is the National Police Chiefs' Council lead on this topic. He has made a number of interesting proposals that are consistent with what the right hon. Gentleman just suggested. I am studying those carefully and sympathetically, and hope to have more to say on this topic in the near future.

#### Biometric Residence Permits

10. **Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con):** What steps she is taking to tackle delays in the processing of biometric residence permits. [902165]

**The Minister for Immigration (Robert Jenrick):** There are currently no material delays in the physical production or delivery of biometric residence permits. We aim to deliver a BRP within seven working days of the immigration decision. All BRPs are currently being produced within 48 hours of receipt of a production request at the secure printing facility. Our secure delivery partner, FedEx, is attempting to deliver 99% of BRPs within 48 hours of their production and is successfully delivering nearly 80% of them first time.

**Caroline Nokes:** I thank my right hon. Friend for those statistics, which appear to be somewhat at odds with the experience of my constituents: Oksana Vakaliuk, a refugee from Ukraine, has been waiting since 1 May for her BRP; Adnam Hameed was granted his tier 2 visa in May and was still waiting for his BRP last month; and Mohammed Poswall has been waiting since July for his wife to receive the spousal visa stamp in her passport. I really appreciate the work that my right hon. Friend is doing in this respect, but the challenge is that these individuals could be working in our economy, contributing to meeting our skills shortages and paying tax. Will he meet me to go through these and other cases to help understand what is causing the delays, which may be specific to my region?

**Robert Jenrick:** I would be happy to meet my right hon. Friend. As I said in answer to her initial question, the data suggests that the vast majority of customers are receiving their BRPs within seven days and the

system is working in an acceptable fashion. But if cases are falling through the cracks, it is of course right that we aim to fix that, and I would be pleased to meet her.

**Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab):** Biometrics are obviously important, but going back to spousal visas, which have also been mentioned, the wife of my constituent is an Afghan citizen who is stuck in Iran. As we know, Afghan refugees are not being treated well in Iran, but the Home Office, in reply to me, says that it will not particularly expedite this case. Will the Minister afford me the same courtesy that he did to the right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) and look into the case that I have mentioned if I write to him after this session?

**Robert Jenrick:** I would be very happy to do so.

#### Ingredients Scheduled under Drug Legislation: Review

11. **Charlotte Nichols (Warrington North) (Lab):** Whether she is taking steps with Cabinet colleagues to ensure that the potential health benefits of ingredients scheduled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001 are kept under review. [902167]

**The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp):** Drug control seeks to strike a balance between preventing criminality on the one hand and allowing access for legitimate use, such as medicines development, on the other. The Government are guided in their decisions by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs as a well-established process for taking these decisions, and of course we follow the expert advice.

**Charlotte Nichols:** Psilocybin should never have been designated a schedule 1 substance, but this position by the Home Office has become even more untenable following publication this month of the largest multi-site phase 2b trial of psilocybin for treatment-resistant depression. The study found rapid and enduring reductions in depression symptoms on a 25 mg dose. The further, very promising research in the UK is being severely hindered by psilocybin's schedule 1 status and the prohibitive associated costs for our academic researchers. Will the Home Secretary finally commit to rescheduling psilocybin and related compounds to schedule 2, to allow more research into mental health treatment paradigms that could see a happier, healthier and more productive country and a growth boom for our science, innovation and pharmacology sectors?

**Chris Philp:** The drug to which the hon. Lady refers is an MDMA-based medicine. The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs is currently considering the barriers to legitimate research that are posed by controlled drugs. Once we have had its advice on the topic, including the implications for psychedelic drugs, such as MDMA and psilocybin, we will obviously take an appropriate decision in relation to research. In relation to more widespread availability, we will follow the decisions made by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence before reaching any such decision ourselves.



### Illegal Cross-channel Movements: Discussions with French Counterpart

12. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What recent discussions she has had with her French counterpart on illegal cross-channel movements. [902168]

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman)**: The Prime Minister and I are committed to reducing dangerous illegal migration into the UK, which is why I was in Paris today with my French counterpart, Gérald Darmanin, to agree a new joint strategy and operational plan, which will drive forward our next phase of co-operation and make this route unviable eventually.

**Michael Fabricant**: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her agreement in Paris today but, as she herself has said, there is no silver bullet. Given that there are so many hundreds of miles of French coastline to be policed, will this agreement be a game changer?

**Suella Braverman**: As my hon. Friend says, on its own, this agreement will not fix the problem—it is important that everyone is clear about that. However, I am very proud of the co-operation that the UK and France have led in recent years. This deal represents a step change and a big step forward in our joint challenge. For the first time under this new integrated approach, UK officers will join law enforcement colleagues in France as embedded observers to share real-time information relating to small boats. The deal will include significant investment in intelligence capability and information sharing that all agencies will use, including the National Crime Agency and Europol. I believe that this is a big step forward and I encourage everyone here to get behind it.

**Mr Speaker**: I call the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee.

**Dame Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Home Affairs Committee's report on small boat crossings, published in the summer, made a series of recommendations, one of which was more engagement with the French, so we very much welcomed the announcement this morning. Of course, it is the fifth announcement on arrangements with the French in four years, and there is not a single one thing that will solve this problem. That is why we made a series of recommendations, including: securing an agreement with the EU on the return of failed asylum seekers; and piloting the provision of initial UK asylum applications at facilities within French reception centres. That would mean that individuals wanting to seek asylum in the UK could do so without having to get into those awful dinghies and make that treacherous journey across the channel. Will the Home Secretary look again at the whole suite of recommendations that the Select Committee made after two years of looking at this subject?

**Suella Braverman**: I read with interest the report from the Select Committee, which makes several important points about greater collaboration and deeper co-operation with our friends in France. Last year our joint efforts saw more than 23,000 dangerous and unnecessary crossings prevented, and this year to date more than 30,000 crossing attempts have been stopped by the French.

Joint working has also resulted in the dismantling of 55 organised crime groups and secured more than 500 arrests since its inception in 2020. That operational collaboration is absolutely integral to solving this common challenge.

**Mrs Natalie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con): Regrettably, the modest French agreement falls short of what is needed to address the scale, impact and urgency of the channel crossings issue. We do not need more observation—we need action taken on the French side. Even today, as the ink dried on this new deal, small boats crept through the sea-mist and one even landed on a beach in a residential coastal village in my constituency. Will my right hon. Friend meet me and Kent leaders to discuss the dreadful impact on local services, which they described in a letter to her two weeks ago as being at breaking point?

**Suella Braverman**: I thank my hon. Friend for all her work on this issue over several years. As I said, I am not going to overplay this agreement. It is an important step forward and provides a good platform on which to secure deeper collaboration, and it represents progress. For the first time, UK officers will be on the ground in France, working hand in hand with their French counterparts. They will be working side by side in the command HQ. They will be working with intelligence and surveillance material together. They will be partners in a very material sense in the fight against this challenge. Is that going to solve the problem on its own? It will not, but I encourage everybody to support the deal we have secured.

**Mr Speaker**: The Home Secretary might not like it, but if I may give her some positive advice, when you answer a question you are meant to look to the Chair. That is all I will say.

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): The Home Secretary insists that the agreement announced today represents a step forward, but is she able to tell the House whether it will mean fewer small boats crossing the channel?

**Suella Braverman**: A large win from the agreement is that there will be more French gendarmes patrolling the French beaches. There is a 40% uplift to the number of personnel that the French are deploying. That must be a success, and I encourage the right hon. Lady to welcome it.

**Mr Speaker**: We come now to the shadow Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): It is astonishing that the Home Secretary has not made an oral statement on this subject, given the number of people who want to ask questions. She is preventing full scrutiny of this deal. Could that be because her written statement admits that there have been only 140 smuggling-related convictions across all of Britain and France in 35 months? Can she confirm that that means there have been on average just four convictions a month for those dangerous crimes, even though last month alone nearly 7,000 people arrived in the UK as a result of organised criminals profiting from putting lives at risk? Why is the Government's action against criminal smuggler gangs so pitifully weak?

**Suella Braverman:** Why is the Government's action so pitifully weak? We introduced legislation—an extensive Bill designed specifically to deal with the problem occurring on our shores—and on every occasion, what did Labour Members do? They voted against it. If they were really serious about solving this problem, they would be supporting our proposals, not carping from the sidelines.

**Yvette Cooper:** That is a totally nonsense answer. The Home Secretary obviously is not aware that former chief constables have warned that her Nationality and Borders Act 2022 makes it harder to prosecute people traffickers, and that in fact it is adding six-month delays to the asylum system and pushing up the costs.

Patrols and intelligence sharing are welcome but long overdue, but will the Home Secretary match Labour's funded policy for a major expansion of additional specialist officers in the National Crime Agency as part of a proper plan to work with other countries to investigate and crack down on those gangs? Or is she actually preparing for cuts in policing and security operations on Thursday because her party's disastrous management of the economy has let everyone down?

**Suella Braverman:** Of course we need to go further and faster in the fight against illegal migration. I am very disappointed and concerned by the unprecedented numbers of people arriving here illegally. We are taking steps to fix it. The reality is, as I said, that this year alone more than 30,000 attempts have been prevented by the French. I have come back today from securing a deal that will increase the number of French patrols on the French coastline, which will reinforce our collaboration and intelligence work and strengthen our joint fight, but what do Labour Members do? They criticise. They criticise because the simple truth is that this is not about the French deal or our response, but about their abject failure to speak on behalf of the British people. They do not care about illegal migration; they want an open-doors migration policy, as they always have.

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

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): Of course, we all welcome closer co-operation with the French, but the Home Secretary is absolutely right to temper her expectations given that previous deals were signed in 2010, 2014, '15, '16, '18, '19, '20 and, indeed, '21. What discussions has she had with the French about safe legal routes for those with clear links to the United Kingdom, linked if necessary with an appropriate returns agreement? Surely she must see that only a deal that includes safe legal routes can make a significant and lasting impact.

**Suella Braverman:** I am not going to repeat myself, but I think the deal is a good step forward and a great platform from which to build deeper co-operation. I say gently to the hon. Gentleman that his question would have much more credibility if Scotland stepped up further and took a better share of those who come here seeking refuge and asylum.

### Topical Questions

T2. [902179] **Richard Fuller** (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman):** The UK is working closely with France to reduce illegal small boat crossings over the channel. Over the past year, those efforts have produced results. Today, I was in Paris with my French counterpart, Gérald Darmanin, to agree a more integrated and strengthened approach aimed at making that lethally dangerous route unviable, with world-class law enforcement teams from both countries working even more closely together. That is a positive step forward.

For the first time, UK officers will join French law enforcement teams as embedded observers, sharing real-time information on the ground and in command HQ. We will provide investment of up to £62 million this year, supporting cutting-edge surveillance technology, the expansion of the UK-France joint intelligence cell, and more French officers patrolling the French coast. This is an international problem; it requires an international solution.

**Richard Fuller:** May I raise a question about the Afghanistan citizens resettlement scheme on behalf of a constituent whose father has played a prominent role in women's education, achieving recognition and awards from the United Nations? The ACRS is a clearly structured scheme, but may I request a meeting with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to discuss the very special circumstances of my constituent's father?

**Suella Braverman:** The Afghan citizens resettlement scheme, which commenced on 6 January 2022, will see up to 20,000 at-risk people resettled to the United Kingdom. If my hon. Friend sends me the details, I will ask the relevant teams to look at that case.

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

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): On Friday, a commission established by Refugees for Justice and led by Helena Kennedy KC concluded that the 2020 stabbings and shooting at asylum accommodation in Glasgow's Park Inn could have been avoided, and recommended important asylum reforms. Will the Home Secretary or the Minister for Immigration agree to meet Baroness Kennedy—with whom I spoke this morning—and Refugees for Justice to discuss that important report?

**The Minister for Immigration (Robert Jenrick):** I would be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman and the Baroness to discuss her report. We take safety at immigration removal centres extremely seriously. If I may, I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the immigration enforcement officers and others who responded to the recent disturbance at Harmondsworth in London. Their hard work in difficult circumstances was much appreciated by all of us.

T5. [902182] **Damian Green** (Ashford) (Con): I welcome the agreement that the Home Secretary has signed with the French Government. It is a contribution to dealing with the asylum crisis and therefore allowing hundreds of hotels, including some in my constituency, to go back to doing their proper job. Does she recognise that we also need an asylum system that can process applications quickly? If the figures remain at 1.5 decisions per week

per decision maker, as they are now, or at four a week, as in the Government's latest pilot, we will never see an end to the backlogs and delays, so may I urge the Government to be more ambitious?

**Robert Jenrick:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his question and his advice on this matter. We want to increase the productivity of our Home Office staff so that cases are not being decided to the tune of one per person per week, but at four, five or six per person per week, as they were a few years ago. We have had a positive pilot in our Leeds office, and we now intend to roll that out at pace across the country.

T3. [902180] **Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): We have 8,000 fewer PCSOs, 6,000 fewer neighbourhood police officers, and people can see for themselves that there are fewer uniformed officers on our streets. No doubt the Home Secretary will deny yet again that the Government have cut police. In the vain hope that the public might be reassured by something that this Government say, I will ask again: will she commit to matching Labour's plan to recruit 13,000 more neighbourhood police officers? No more smoke and mirrors: yes or no?

**The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp):** There is no need for smoke and mirrors when the police budget this year is £1.1 billion higher than last year, and there is no need for smoke and mirrors when on completion of the police uplift programme in just a few months' time, there will be more uniformed police officers on our streets than at any time in this country's history.

T7. [902184] **James Daly** (Bury North) (Con): What steps are the Government taking to increase charging rates for offences of rape, serious sexual offending and harassment against women and girls?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Miss Sarah Dines):** I thank my hon. Friend for his serious question, and I know he works hard in Bury North to talk about the issue. The Government are committed to tackling violence against women and girls. We are taking action through the rape review and the tackling violence against women and girls strategy and tackling domestic abuse to improve the police's response to these crimes. Charge volumes for rapes are up 8%. It is not enough, and there is a lot more to do, and we are working hard with schemes such as Operation Soteria in the hope that these good practices will progress throughout the country.

T6. [902183] **Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): We have cases marked urgent not responded to within two months and weekly phone calls with MPs' offices being cancelled at short notice. When will Ministers get a grip of officials and make sure that Members of this House are treated with respect, so that we can represent our constituents?

**Robert Jenrick:** The hon. Gentleman and I have already spoken about this matter, and it is absolutely right that officials at the Home Office treat Members of Parliament and their staff with the respect they deserve and that we ensure they get the relevant meetings and decisions. Anything I can do to facilitate that—for him or any other colleague—of course I will do.

T9. [902186] **Mark Eastwood** (Dewsbury) (Con): Having completed the course, I thank Sergeant Richard Neeves and West Yorkshire police for organising my participation in the parliamentary police and fire service scheme. Does the Minister agree that Members from across the House should be encouraged to take part in the scheme if they want to gain a greater understanding of the pressures and challenges our police officers face day-to-day?

**Chris Philp:** I join my hon. Friend in thanking Sergeant Richard Neeves for the work he did in encouraging and helping my hon. Friend to participate in the parliamentary police and fire service scheme. Yes, I do agree: Members from right across the House should engage in that scheme.

T8. [902185] **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Ind): When 172 men, women and children who were asylum applicants in Acton were bussed suddenly to Ashford in Kent, 80 miles away from their schools, NHS networks and faith communities, it made the TV news. It happened because the private provider of hotel accommodation wanted it back. Will the Home Secretary look into that case, because there is a human cost to uprooting families at the drop of a hat, as well as the waste of taxpayer money in shifting people from hotel to hotel when they could be contributing and paying in if they were processed faster?

**Suella Braverman:** The reality is that the accommodation pressure that we are seeing today is a symptom of the broader problem of unprecedented numbers of people arriving here illegally, at a level that we have not seen before. That is putting pressure on the system to find and provide accommodation for these people, as we have a duty to accommodate them. We need to stop the crossings, which will ease pressure on accommodation.

**Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): I recognise the agreement reached this morning with the French to stop illegal migrants crossing the English channel in small boats, but what else will my right hon. Friend do to take lessons from other European countries? Germany and Sweden, for example, do not recognise refugee applications from Albania. Countries such as Italy and Poland are physically stopping people from crossing their border illegally. What more will be done to tackle this problem?

**Suella Braverman:** My hon. Friend is right that there is a real need for a multi-pronged approach. It is not quite right that countries like Germany or Sweden do not accept asylum applications; rather, they may have higher burdens of proof or thresholds that need to be met. We need to change some of the regimes that govern asylum and some of the rights being claimed, in a large number of cases, unmeritoriously. We will make an announcement on the measures that we are taking in due course.

T10. [902187] **Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): I welcome the Minister for Immigration to his place. Will he meet me to discuss an Afghan spousal visa case that I have been dealing with for over a year? Pakistan will not grant her a visa so that she can travel to her biometrics appointment.

**Robert Jenrick:** I would be very happy to look into that case for the hon. Lady.

**Sajid Javid** (Bromsgrove) (Con): Of all the issues that the Home Secretary has to deal with, few are more harrowing than child sexual abuse. The independent inquiry into child sexual abuse recently reported that there were 8.8 million attempts to access such imagery online in the UK in a single month. May I ask my right hon. Friend whether the Online Safety Bill will include a provision for UK companies to report such content to the National Crime Agency? Will she work with her colleagues to bring forward the Bill this year?

**Miss Dines:** This issue is very close to my right hon. Friend's heart and to mine. The Government are committed to tackling all forms of child sexual abuse to keep children safe at home, outside and online. There is a lot of good work being done by the NCA and GCHQ. In relation to timing, I am hopeful that we will have some news imminently.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): When it comes to immigration policy, it is "Oui, oui, oui" to working with the French Republic, but when it comes to bespoke policies for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to deal with demographics and labour shortages, it is "Non, non, non." What is the difference? Why are we not allowed bespoke policies in his Government, working with the Scottish Parliament, to enable us to do that?

**Robert Jenrick:** Because we are all blessed to live in one United Kingdom. There is no material difference: Scotland's unemployment rate was 3.3% and its economic inactivity rate was 21% in recent figures, compared with the UK average of 3.5% and 21%, respectively. It is more important that we work together as one UK. Those are exactly the terms on which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has just concluded this very important agreement.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): While co-operation with the French is no doubt welcome, is it not the case that since 2015 the British taxpayer has subsidised the French police force to the tune of £200 million? Since then, a record number have been intercepted but an even higher record number have made it across the channel. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that there is nothing in the agreement that obliges the French police to detain and arrest anyone they intercept and that, therefore, they are free to come back the following night and try again? Are we not throwing good money after bad?

**Suella Braverman:** I do not believe that this is throwing good money after bad because, as I said, this year alone we have seen 30,000 successful interventions by the French to stop attempts to leave France and come here illegally. That is a very impressive record but is not enough, because it is not fixing the problem. Increasing the number of gendarmes as agreed under the deal, the embedded observers, and joint working at a real level on the ground between the UK and the French, will, I believe, take us forward in combating the scourge.

**Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): There is a huge problem with the over-policing of black children due to adultification, which is where minors are treated as adults. Some 799 children aged between 10 and

17 were strip-searched by the Met between 2019 and 2021 without any being arrested. We need an urgent independent investigation into the over-policing of black children. Will the Minister commit to one?

**Miss Dines:** I know this issue is dear to the hon. Member's heart. The police must use their powers carefully to target the right sort of offenders. It is of concern that that can sometimes appear to be disproportionate. Nobody should be stopped and searched because of their age, race or ethnicity. There are codes of conduct in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and there is the use of body-worn video data. About 40% of stop-and-searches that take place in London are of young men—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Minister, sit down.

**Mr David Davis** (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): The announcement today is clearly a good thing, but is the Home Secretary entirely confident that she will have sufficient aerial surveillance assets in place so that we can do our half of the job properly?

**Suella Braverman:** I have visited our clandestine command and control team, headed up by Dan O'Mahoney and Border Force officials, and we have a military presence. Some very impressive technology is being used, such as surveillance drone technology, to enable and facilitate better co-operation with the French.

**Karl Turner** (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): Why do the Government continue to extend the temporary offshore wind workers concession? The industry is not even asking for it. Will the Minister meet me to discuss the issue?

**Mr Speaker:** A quick yes or no will do.

**Robert Jenrick:** I would be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman. The extension was reviewed by the Government and, on the basis of the representations made to us by the industry, we extended it to April 2023. If he has heard other representations, I would be pleased to hear about them.

**Tom Hunt** (Ipswich) (Con): On Friday, we found out that Ipswich Borough Council's temporary injunction to prevent the Novotel being used for up to 200 economic migrants was unsuccessful. More to the point, the owners are now saying they might have them for 12 months not six months. I heard in the media that the Government might move away from hotels to temporary accommodation such as Pontins. Can the Minister give me an update on the plan for moving away from hotels to much more basic and cheaper accommodation?

**Robert Jenrick:** We want to exit hotels as soon as possible, including in my hon. Friend's constituency, and move to simple but decent accommodation that does not provide an additional pull factor to the UK. The challenge is considerable, however, as 40,000 people are making that perilous crossing every year, which places immense pressure on our asylum system and prevents us from providing the kind of humane and compassionate response that we want to provide to people coming here in genuine peril.

**Munira Wilson** (Twickenham) (LD): Last week, the new Met Police Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley came to Twickenham to meet community representatives. He said that one of the biggest pressures facing his officers is dealing with large numbers of mental health cases; sometimes, multiple officers are spending entire shifts with people in mental health crisis because the NHS does not have a bed for them. Will the Minister outline what his Department is doing to work with the NHS to ensure that provision is in place so that officers can be out dealing with burglaries and catalytic converter theft, which is what my constituents are worried about?

**Chris Philp:** The hon. Lady makes an important and valid point. I had a similar conversation with Sir Mark a couple of weeks ago and I was out with officers in my borough of Croydon the week before last where the emergency response team told a similar story. Sir Stephen House is looking at this topic as part of his review into police productivity, but I also plan to have discussions with colleagues across Government, including in the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England, to find out what more we can do. The issue that she raises is certainly real.

**Dr Kieran Mullan** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): It is vital that our police forces draw on the best talent in our communities, including people who excel outside the classroom. Following our discussions, can the Home Secretary update the House on future plans for entry routes into policing?

**Suella Braverman:** I thank my hon. Friend and other honourable colleagues for their important campaigning to ventilate this issue. He speaks not only with passion,

but with a deep understanding of the issue. I very much agree with him. I think that there are people from all walks of life who do not necessarily have a degree or want one who can be very good police officers. That is why I have asked the College of Policing to consider options for a new non-degree entry route to complement the existing framework. The current transitional arrangements will be extended in the meantime, and I am very clear that the police force must be open to those who neither have or want a degree.

**Kim Leadbeater** (Batley and Spen) (Lab): In Batley and Spen, we continue to face serious problems of antisocial behaviour, reckless driving and dangerous parking. Ultimately, behaviour change is key, but in the short term, neighbourhood police and local councils need the resources to catch and punish those who show no respect to our communities. When will the Government properly invest in neighbourhood policing, and when will they stop cutting already stretched council budgets so that councils can use their power to tackle dangerous parking?

**Chris Philp:** Council budgets are obviously a matter for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and they will be set out in the local government funding settlement in a few weeks' time. When it comes to police budgets, which are the Home Office's responsibility, as I have said once or twice already, the budget this year is £1.1 billion higher than it was last year—it stands now at £16.9 billion—and by April next year, when the police uplift programme is complete, we will have more uniformed police officers recruited than at any time in our country's history.

## Mali: UN Peacekeeping Mission

3.41 pm

**The Minister for Armed Forces (James Heappey):** West Africa is an important region for the United Kingdom and our allies across Europe, and the UK is strongly committed to supporting the UN to deliver its peacekeeping commitments around the world. That is why, since 2018, we had been supporting the French-led counter-terrorism mission in Mali with CH-47 Chinook helicopters under Operation Barkhane, and more recently, since 2020, through the deployment of a long-range reconnaissance group as part of the UN's MINUSMA—multidimensional integrated stabilisation mission in Mali—peacekeeping mission.

The House will be aware, however, that in February President Macron announced the drawdown of French troops in Mali, and was joined in that announcement by all other European nations, as well as Canada, that were contributing to the French-led Operations Barkhane and Takuba. In March, Sweden announced that it would be leaving the UN's MINUSMA mission. Today, I can announce that the UK contingent will also now be leaving the MINUSMA mission earlier than planned.

We should be clear that responsibility for all of this sits in Bamako. Two coups in three years have undermined international efforts to advance peace. On my most recent visit last November, I met the Malian Defence Minister and implored him to see the huge value of the French-led international effort in his country. However, soon afterwards, the Malian Government began working with the Russian mercenary group, Wagner, and actively sought to interfere with the work of both the French-led and UN missions. The Wagner Group is linked to mass human rights abuses. The Malian Government's partnership with the Wagner Group is counterproductive to lasting stability and security in their region.

This Government cannot deploy our nation's military to provide security when the host country's Government are not willing to work with us to deliver lasting stability and security. However, our commitment to west Africa and the important work of the UN is undiminished. We have been working closely with our allies to consider options for rebalancing our deployment alongside France, the EU and other like-minded allies.

On Monday and Tuesday next week, I will join colleagues from across Europe and west Africa in Accra to co-ordinate our renewed response to instability in the Sahel. This will be the first major gathering in support of the Accra initiative, which is a west African-led solution focused initially on preventing further contagion of the insurgency into Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin and Niger, and tackling the growing levels of violence in Burkina Faso as well as in Mali, making this a very timely conference, indeed.

Of course, it is not just the UK military that will remain committed in west Africa—the UK will continue its commitment to Mali and the Sahel through our humanitarian, stabilisation and development assistance, working in close co-ordination with partners—nor is this a reduction in our commitment to the United Nations. The UK remains an important contributor of troops through Operation Tosca in Cyprus and of staff officers across several missions, and provides training to around 10,000 military, police and civilian peacekeepers from a range of countries annually. We remain the fifth

largest financial contributor and will continue to drive reform in New York. Indeed, we are working with New York on developing a pilot, to be delivered through the British peace support team based in Nairobi, to develop the capacity of UN troop contributing nations across Africa. We will, of course, co-ordinate with allies as we draw down from Gao and have been sharing our plans with them over recent months. The Army will be issuing orders imminently to reconfigure the next deployment to draw down our presence.

We are leaving the MINUSMA mission earlier than planned and are, of course, saddened by the way the Government in Bamako have made it so difficult for well-meaning nations to remain there. The work of our troops has been outstanding, and they should be proud of what they have achieved there. But through the Chilcot report and our wider experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, we, like so many allies, are clear that the military instrument should not be deployed on counter-insurgency or countering violent extremism missions unless there is a clear and compelling commitment towards political progress.

We will work quickly with allies in the region and across Europe to support the Accra initiative to deliver security, stability and prosperity in west Africa. Our commitment to the region is undiminished.

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

3.45 pm

**John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab):** I thank the Minister for the advance copy of his statement—he always treats this House with great courtesy—but I have to say that I was disappointed, Mr Speaker, as you will be, that nearly three hours before I received a copy of the statement I was reading about his decision on *The Times* online.

MINUSMA is the UN's deadliest peacekeeping mission, with 281 fatalities to date, so I want to start by paying tribute to all those British troops who have been deployed with the UN in Mali since 2020 and all the RAF air and ground crew who have been deployed in Mali since 2013.

The UN Security Council only renewed the Mali mission's mandate, which Britain strongly supported, in June. What now for the UN's MINUSMA force without the UK's long-range specialised reconnaissance? What now for the UK's contribution to stabilising the Sahel, which experts say has become the new epicentre of terrorism? What now for the neighbouring states of Mali, which look to the UK for support in the face of increasing activity from Islamic extremist groups? And what now for the west's capacity to balance the Russian Wagner Group mercenaries in the region?

Will the Chinook deployment continue to support the UN mission? *The Times* reported that this has already been withdrawn, although the Minister has not mentioned it this afternoon. And when exactly will the current Royal Scots Light Dragoons on the ground in Mali be withdrawn?

This statement is long overdue. France announced the withdrawal of troops from Mali back in February, and when I asked the Defence Secretary about this days later he said the UK was

“now reviewing our next steps.”—[*Official Report*, 21 February 2022; Vol. 709, c. 17.]

I got the same answer when I asked again nearly four months later. Now, fully nine months after France, and eight months after Sweden, why has it taken Britain so long to make the same decision? We need strategic planning and foresight from Ministers for this region, not a tactical silence while they work out what on earth to do.

President Macron marked the end of the French Operation Barkhane last week by pledging a new strategy within half a year for working with African countries. Is the UK working with France on this new strategy? Will the Government produce a similar UK strategy?

In the Government's 2020 integrated review there was just one passing reference to the Sahel and two short factual statements about Mali. Will the current IR update make good the Sahel-shaped gap in UK strategic security thinking?

Finally, ahead of the autumn statement, today's decision on reducing our commitment to UK United Nations peacekeeping is a reminder of the importance of clarity over UK defence spending. The Defence Secretary agreed the current spending settlement, giving the Ministry of Defence back in 2020 a £1.4 billion real cut in day-to-day spending. He now says, as he told the Select Committee on Defence, that

"the inflationary pressure on my budget for the next two years is about £8 billion".

How much does Defence actually need from the Chancellor on Thursday to plug the Defence Secretary's budget black hole?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Just before the Minister comes in, I have seen what has been given to *The Times*, and I am disappointed. I have the greatest respect for the Minister, but it is pretty appalling that somebody decided to hand to *The Times*, for it to put online, exactly what he has just given to the House. I hope that he will look into that and that whoever in the Department passed it to *The Times* will be reprimanded and reminded that Members of this House come first, not the media.

**James Heapey:** Mr Speaker, I could not agree more. You know that the Secretary of State and I are not the sort of Ministers who play these games. There was no deliberate briefing, and we are angry that the discourtesy of someone within our organisation means that you have read about this in *The Times* rather than heard it from the Dispatch Box. That was not the plan.

The right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) had a long list of questions, which I will do my best to rattle through. I think that I covered some of them in the statement. On what is next for the UN force, the UN was already in a process of reconfiguration, given the changes in troop-contributing countries that it was facing and the reality of the situation on the ground. The insurgency has moved from the tri-border area of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso to further south in Burkina. The challenge in the north of the country is no longer the insurgency against the al-Qaeda affiliate JNIM or Islamic State Greater Sahel, but the same competing tribes as five or six years ago. In the south of the country, the Malians are mostly focused on the survival of the junta that came to pass. There is an incoherent set of security challenges that the UN is trying to navigate, and I think it would be the first to admit that MINUSMA as a mission is struggling as a consequence of those three different challenges within the country.

That leads to the right hon. Gentleman's absolutely correct question about stabilising the wider Sahel. It would be erroneous to think that MINUSMA, which was a UN mission struggling to match the excellent military endeavour of troop-contributing countries with any meaningful political progress, was really doing anything to stabilise the Sahel. The centre of mass of the insurgency has moved south into Burkina, where the competition is acute. Prigozhin has recently been in Ouagadougou offering Wagner's services. I think that everybody is concerned that this is now about avoiding contagion from Burkina and ensuring that we work with the Burkinabé armed forces to get after the insurgency where it now is, because that is at the heart of the challenge in the Sahel. That is what the Accra initiative—a west-African designed solution to a problem in west Africa—is aiming to get after, and the UK, France, the EU and others are seeking to get behind it, because we think that is the most credible option for restoring stability in the Sahel.

The right hon. Gentleman asked, "Why now? Why wasn't there a rush to make a decision back in February when the French left?" He knows that other countries from Europe have continued, and we have been in discussion with them about what we should do and what looks like the most sensible route forward. To have rushed to a decision back then, before we were sure what the right solution was in west Africa, would have been knee-jerk. The right thing to do, as I have been doing, is to travel around the region. I have been in Mali, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo, and my counterparts from France have been visiting Niger, Benin and other countries extensively, and between us we have been able to map out what we think the best solution is.

The CH-47 commitment to Barkhane was already drawn down, and I believe that that was the subject of a written ministerial statement when the decision was made. Although the Chinooks were left to help the French move out of Mali, they have not been actively participating since Barkhane ended. The casualty evacuation capability for MINUSMA remains for as long as MINUSMA is patrolling.

The IR's relevance is borne out by the conclusion that we have come to, because its decision was around capacity building upstream and recognising that, often, our presence can be the catalyst to insurgency. That is very much what the western African nations feel: they do not want us on their borders physically fighting the insurgency as they think that accelerates things. They want us to be working with them to support them in generating capability. Finally, on defence spending, we all wait for Thursday.

**Sir James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): As ever, my right hon. Friend shows a mastery not only of defence, but of the very complicated politics in Mali. Clearly, after Operation Barkhane closed and the French left, it was only a matter of time before there was a withdrawal. In particular, the Chinooks were providing the heavy lift for the French, but it simply did not make sense if the French were not there. He touches on the Wagner Group, which has a pervasive influence across the Sahel into west Africa and further south. Does he think that the situation could be a lot worse after Ukraine? A lot of armed combatants from the Wagner Group have been sucked into the Ukraine conflict. If there is a resolution to that conflict, I suspect that the

[Sir James Duddridge]

Wagner Group will flood back into west Africa, causing problems not only in the countries he mentioned but further south in places such as Zimbabwe.

**James Heapey:** I very much enjoyed working with my hon. Friend when he was the Minister for Africa. It is a shame, however, that his collection of African ties has been put out to retirement—they were quite something.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The role that the Wagner Group is playing in Africa is very different from the one it is playing in Ukraine. In Ukraine, it is effectively generating a force, apparently conscripted from Russian prisons, to augment the Russian frontline as a manoeuvre element. In Africa, the role is somewhat different. In Mali, it is there principally at the invitation of the coup leadership to ensure the survival of the coup. In the Central African Republic, it has been doing something broadly similar, but has in the process been engaged more widely in the security in that country. Nobody should pretend that the Wagner Group is up to any good—it is universally up to mischief—but across Africa it is doing different things depending on what the Governments who have brought them in have asked them to do. But it remains a bunch of murderous human rights-abusing thugs and there is not a country on the planet that is any better for its presence.

**Mr Speaker:** We come to SNP spokesperson, Chris Stephens.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and thank you for your comments on the leak to *The Times* online.

We commend the bravery and dedication of the UK armed forces personnel serving with the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali. Picking up on the theme of the Wagner Group, will the Minister detail fully what diplomatic steps have been taken to address the presence of Wagner Group combatants in Mali and elsewhere in the world? Is he considering individually sanctioning Wagner Group fighters present in Mali? Will he present to the House the work that the recently announced office for conflict, stabilisation and mediation, and the conflict and atrocity prevention hub, will undertake, and the exact funding and staffing levels? Given that he says his commitment to the Sahel region is undiminished, are the Government considering reversing the cuts to aid in the Sahel region, including cuts to the conflict, stability and security fund?

**James Heapey:** Mr Speaker, there was a bit noise behind me and I did not catch the middle part of the hon. Gentleman's question, which was about an office that is being set up. I will check the record and write to him on that.

On the wider effort in west Africa, it goes without saying that the military instrument alone will not be the answer to any of west Africa's problems. There has to be a political and economic track that sits alongside the military. I suggest that the vehicle through which that economic and political track will most effectively be delivered is the Economic Community of West African States. The EU has very strong relationships with ECOWAS, so it is likely to be in the lead on that, but when I was in Abuja, I also met ECOWAS officials. Obviously, the

UK will engage with ECOWAS on the wider development, economic, political track, as well as the stuff we are doing militarily with Ghana and the Accra initiative.

**James Sunderland** (Bracknell) (Con): I thank the Minister for his statement. Our withdrawal is disappointing, as I suspect it will exacerbate the very reasons for our deployment in the first place, but I clearly accept the political judgment. Will he confirm to the House that the UK force protection profile will be maintained in full accordance with the threat as we withdraw?

**James Heapey:** It absolutely will. The long-range reconnaissance patrolling will stop almost immediately and, on the next rotation, the force that follows on to deliver the draw-down will have everything needed within it for full force protection.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): The UK deputy permanent representative told the UN Security Council on 10 October that the UK supports MINUSMA—we should pay tribute to the bravery of those troops, given the losses to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) referred—but said that there were questions about “whether and how the mission can maintain a viable presence in Mali.”

Given the factors—political instability, the Wagner Group and others—that have led to withdrawal of French and UK troops and those of other nations, what is the Government's view about the continued operation of MINUSMA in the circumstances in which it now finds itself?

**James Heapey:** That is a matter for the UN. As I said in response to the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), our view is that the MINUSMA mission is stagnant. The political track has not been advancing for a number of years—since the first coup or, arguably, before that—and a very successful military mission has therefore been undermined by the lack of progress in Bamako. There is also a wider point: the mandate for that UN mission—like that of the UN missions in the Central African Republic and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo—is exclusively about peacekeeping, and if there is not a peace to keep, those missions can feel rather toothless as a consequence. We are communicating all those things in New York. As I said in response to a number of colleagues, we want to be very constructive. We feel like we have some understanding of what is going on alongside the French as penholders. We want to see a more cohesive approach to security in west Africa, with the security probably being delivered by the Accra initiative, the diplomatic and economic track being done by ECOWAS and the UN being ready to keep the peace once it is made.

**Katherine Fletcher** (South Ribble) (Con): Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to visit RAF Odiham and see a stripped-down Chinook with the iconic red sand of Africa falling out of it. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the withdrawal is no reflection of the service of those who were in country and those who were working so hard in the UK to support them? And may I press him on what we are doing to combat the Wagner Group in Africa? As a former trade envoy, I think that the opportunities for the peoples of Africa and the UK



to work together for mutually beneficial trade are enormous, but they are threatened by the instability that the Wagner Group brings.

**James Heapey:** I echo my hon. Friend's praise for the troops who have been involved. The Chinook force has been involved for a long time and has been on an aggressive rotation of operations, particularly the engineers. It has done extraordinary work to keep the Chinooks flying in very difficult conditions.

My hon. Friend is also right about the wider challenge of Wagner. It is very opportunistic, appearing in countries where it thinks there are opportunities for it to win business, but it is deeply exploitative. It invariably asks for payment through mineral wealth or access to oil and gas. The country that we offer as an example to many African colleagues is Mozambique, where Wagner was taken in and then kicked out because of the way in which it behaved when it was there. We communicate keenly with countries across Africa about the dangers of taking Wagner in. We try to show that, when they engage with the UK, France, the US and other western allies, they get a security partnership that wants nothing in return other than the advancement of our shared interests and security in the region.

**Richard Foord** (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): In his address to the House earlier this year, President Zelensky asked Parliament to proscribe the Wagner Group as a terrorist organisation following atrocities that it had committed in Ukraine. Reports suggest that, since the coup in Mali, the Wagner Group has been linked to massacres in which hundreds of civilians have been killed. Will the Minister commit to speaking to the Home Secretary or the Minister for Security about proscribing the Wagner Group as a terrorist organisation?

**James Heapey:** I certainly will.

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Ind): I was very interested to hear the Minister make reference in his statement to the Chilcot report. In the light of the horrors of Mali and the terrible loss of life there, I understand the withdrawal of French and British troops, but I would like the Minister to be clear about how many British troops are now going to be deployed in that region of Africa. Crucially, what is the long-term aim of this—what exactly are we getting ourselves into? That is clearly why the Minister made reference to Chilcot, which said that there had to be clear aims and objectives before British troops were deployed overseas.

**James Heapey:** The right hon. Gentleman is right to ask that question. I do not think that the situation is as binary as every soldier, sailor and aviator currently in Mali finding themselves redeployed around western Africa. My suspicion is that the Accra initiative countries will be asking for slightly different capabilities from the long-range reconnaissance group that is currently in Mali. Very obviously, however, everything that we do to increase the capacity of Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin and Niger to guard against further contagion, get

after the insurgency in Burkina and get after it again in Mali needs to be joined up with a wider regional economic and political plan, probably delivered by ECOWAS.

I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman heard this, but on Monday and Tuesday next week I will be in Accra, where representatives of the EU, the UN, France, the UK, ECOWAS and all the member states of the Accra initiative will be discussing exactly this issue, because we need a cohesive strategy that brings together the military, the political and the economic.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): I put on record my deepest respect for the armed forces who have served in Mali. With the rising threat from extremist groups in the region, does the Minister believe that the withdrawal of troops could lead to an eventual outpouring of refugees, as we saw in Afghanistan?

**James Heapey:** No, I do not, for the simple reason that the UK troops in Gao are now somewhat north of the centre of mass of the insurgency. The argument that I am making gently is that our position in Gao is not that relevant, given where the security challenge in west Africa is. The real challenge now is getting after the insurgency in Burkina; making sure that in Ouagadougou there is enthusiasm for working with western allies, not Prigozhin and Wagner; and extending security back out from Burkina. That is where the challenge is now, and that is what everybody is meeting to discuss in Accra next week.

#### MESSAGE FROM HIS MAJESTY THE KING

The VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD acquainted the House that she had a Message from His Majesty the King to this House, signed by His Majesty's own hand.

The Message was presented to the House, and read to the House by the Speaker, as follows:

*To ensure continued efficiency of public business when I am unavailable, such as while I am undertaking official duties overseas, I confirm that I would be most content, should Parliament see fit, for the number of people who may be called upon to act as Counsellors of State under the terms of the Regency Acts 1937 to 1953 to be increased to include my sister and brother, The Princess Royal and The Earl of Wessex & Forfar, both of whom have previously undertaken this role.*

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Penny Mordaunt):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It may help if I inform the House that hon. Members will have the opportunity to consider a response to His Majesty's gracious message ahead of the Opposition day debate tomorrow. It may also help if I inform the House that there will be legislation relating to the message for the House to consider in due course. Should the House agree to the Humble Address as the first business tomorrow, that legislation will provide a proper opportunity to debate the matter that has been raised.

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the Leader of the House for that point of order.

## Point of Order

4.9 pm

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Ind): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I have given notice of it to you and to the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting).

At the conclusion of last Wednesday's Prime Minister's Question Time, I tried to raise a point of order to ask why the Prime Minister had not given me prior notice that he would make reference to me in the Chamber. During the few minutes that followed, you may not have heard the Member for Ilford North using what I consider to be very unparliamentary and actually quite demeaning language towards people in our society who suffer from dementia or senility. That has led to a lot of people contacting me who are very upset about this because they have loved ones they have lost to dementia.

I would be grateful, Mr Speaker, if you could just set out that this kind of language is totally unacceptable—as, indeed, is any other form of abuse of any type—that it will not be repeated in this Chamber and that you will absolutely not allow it to be repeated at any time.

**Mr Speaker:** Let me begin by thanking the right hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order. He has raised two issues. On the first, the House's "Rules of behaviour" document states:

"You should notify colleagues whenever... you intend to refer to them in the Chamber (other than making passing reference to what they have said on the public record)".

I have reminded the House of that rule on numerous occasions. However, in this context, I think that the Prime Minister's comments can be taken as a passing reference to the public record of the right hon. Gentleman when he was the leader of the Labour party. To that extent, I am not persuaded that notification in advance was required, however courteous it might have been to give it. I would always say that it is nice if we can let people know, as general good form. In any event, the right hon. Gentleman raised the point with the Prime Minister during the statement which followed Prime Minister's Question Time, and has once again, quite rightly, been given an opportunity to put his side of the issue on the record.

The right hon. Gentleman's second point—with which I have the greatest sympathy—concerned the comment said to have been made by the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting). I have to say that the right hon. Gentleman is correct: I did not hear the comment, which is not recorded in the *Official Report*, which I did check. Had I done so, I would have intervened because I consider it falls well short of the respectful language and tone that we should all demonstrate. However, I understand that the hon. Member for Ilford North has written to apologise to the right hon. Gentleman and has had an opportunity to put his point on the record.

This gives me an opportunity to remind all Members of the importance of good temper and moderation in the language that we use in this Chamber. Certainly it is not a good example to use it against each other and I think we should learn from this.

I am now going to move on, but I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order.

## Australia and New Zealand Trade Deals

[*Relevant documents: e-petition 554372, Establish free movement & trade agreements with Canada, Australia & New Zealand; First Report of the International Trade Committee, UK trade negotiations: Scrutiny of Agreement with Australia, HC 444; Second Report of the International Trade Committee, UK trade negotiations: Agreement with Australia, HC 117; Third Report of the International Trade Committee, UK trade negotiations: Agreement with New Zealand, HC 78; Fourth Report of the International Trade Committee, UK trade negotiations: Parliamentary scrutiny of free trade agreements, HC 815; and the First Special Report of the International Trade Committee, UK trade negotiations: Scrutiny of Agreement with Australia and Agreement with Australia: Government Response to the Committee's First and Second Reports, HC 704.*]

4.12 pm

**The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Australia and New Zealand Trade deals.

The Australia and New Zealand free trade agreements are deals that will deliver for people, businesses and our economy. These are our first "from scratch" free trade agreements since we left the European Union, and they are deals of which this country can be proud. They demonstrate our ambition as an independent trading nation. They secure commitments that, in places, go above and beyond international best practice, and put us at the forefront of international trade policy.

I was here in June 2018 when we were finalising the call for input, and I was here again as the Minister in June 2020 when the negotiations were launched. It is great to be back at the Department to see the deal having been done, and I look forward to many similar deals as the Minister responsible for trade policy. I am delighted that the Leader of the House, who was recently in this role, was sitting next to me earlier and discussing the important part played by both herself and the present Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan), over the past year. I should also pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss), formerly the Prime Minister, and the International Trade Secretary throughout a large part of this process.

We negotiated these ambitious deals with like-minded partners apace but with diligence, going further and faster than, for example, the European Union has been able to. The EU has yet to get a deal with Australia over the line, and only recently concluded talks with New Zealand, after four years. The deals represent a deepening of our relationship with close allies, fellow members of the Five Eyes intelligence partnership and like-minded democracies which share our beliefs in fairness, free enterprise, high standards and the rule of law.

Last year, our bilateral trading relationship with Australia was worth £14.4 billion, and exports to Australia supported more than 100,000 UK jobs in 2016. Exports to New Zealand supported more than 16,000 UK jobs in that year. These deals will strengthen those links, supporting increased volumes of trade, jobs and wages and bringing more choice for the UK consumer.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): The Minister will be aware that the Australia deal in particular has created quite a lot of concern among Britain's farmers. For example, Jilly Greed of the Suckler Beef Producers Association has said:

"This is an absolute betrayal...this is Christmas all over for Australia".

The former chief economist of the National Farmers Union has said:

"Agriculture will bear a disproportionate cost. So desperate are the Government to do deals, they are preparing to slim down agriculture".

How would the Minister respond to those allegations?

**Greg Hands:** I am delighted to respond, because I have had extensive interaction with all the five nations' NFUs during this process. We have delivered a deal that phases in the changes. The right hon. Gentleman might reference the fact that the trade deal we have with the European Union, which he supported, gives the EU comprehensive access from day one. This deal phases in access for Australia and New Zealand for a period of up to 15, and in some cases 20, years. I think that is worth consideration, as is the extensive interaction we have had with the NFU and with farmers. I have met MPs and their constituency farmers at some length and we will continue to interact with the NFU and the NFUs in all the nations to ensure that we are in full listening mode when it comes to Britain's essential farming community.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): Further to the intervention from the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), I have here a copy of "Y Tir", the monthly publication of the Farmers Union of Wales, which states:

"There will always be winners and losers when it comes to negotiating liberalised free trade agreements, and it is clear from the UK Government's impact assessments that UK agriculture will be one of the losers if these deals are ratified".

Does the Minister acknowledge the widespread concern among our agricultural communities that the British Government are selling them down the river?

**Greg Hands:** I disagree with that. I am just checking my records and I have had extensive interactions with representatives of NFU Cymru during the negotiation process. I met them on 19 May 2021—I met the Farmers Union of Wales on 19 May as well—and on 26 May, 16 June and 13 September. It was important for us to get the confidence of the farming community in Wales and I also did various Zoom calls at the time—this was during one of the lockdowns—with MPs and their constituent farmers. The protections we have in the deal are very considerable. For example, the tariff rate quotas carry on for 10 years in some cases, and there are product-specific measures to protect sensitive agriculture produce from years 10 to 15 as well as bilateral safeguard mechanisms. There are a lot of protections there.

**Ben Lake** (Ceredigion) (PC): Will the Minister give way?

**Greg Hands:** I will give way in just a moment, but perhaps the hon. Gentleman will explain what his position might be and whether his party will ever support a single trade deal that has been proposed either by the European Union or by the UK Government. Will he tell us that?

**Ben Lake:** It is not often that I get the opportunity to do so, and I am happy to say that when there is a good trade deal for Welsh farmers, I will be very happy to support it. Further to the Minister's point about NFU Cymru, that union and the Farmers Union of Wales have both expressed concerns about the cumulative impact of the various trade deals. Has that featured in any assessments the Department has made, and if so, can he share with us what he makes of Welsh farmers' concerns about this cumulative impact?

**Greg Hands:** I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for trade deals and I look forward to him voting for one of them one day. In terms of the impact on Welsh farmers, I must point out some of the market access that we have recently gained—for example, Welsh lamb is now able to enter the US market for the first time in many decades due to the United States removing the small ruminants rule, and I was in Taiwan only last week are trying to negotiate access for Welsh lamb to the Taiwan market. When it comes to accumulation, he ought to think about the fact that there is tariff-free, quota-free access for the European Union for the UK at the moment. That has been the case from day one of the trade and co-operation agreement.

**John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): Surely one of the points we ought to be considering is the fact that about a third of the beef consumed in the UK is already imported. Some of it is imported from Brazil, where there are concerns about deforestation, and a big amount is imported from the EU, primarily from Ireland. We might not see fresh competition from Australian beef, but import substitution might be part of the equation.

**Greg Hands:** The right hon. Gentleman makes a strong point. We are all in favour of competition, and of consumers being able to make their choice, but I would add that meat exports from Australia and New Zealand are much more likely to go to the far eastern markets. A big percentage of the exports from Australia and New Zealand currently go to those far eastern markets that, frankly, we would like to access by joining the CPTPP trade agreement. We want to have a piece of that action. He is right that it is more likely that exports from Australia and New Zealand will displace those from the EU, giving choice to consumers.

These are more than just deals with like-minded and long-standing partners; they are part of the UK's new strategic approach.

**Sir Paul Beresford** (Mole Valley) (Con): Before we entered the common market, the Australia-New Zealand agricultural juggernaut centred on this country for its trade. As my right hon. Friend said, that trade is now going to 100 or more countries, so it has spread. Our farmers survived and did not complain before the common market, and that will continue.

**Greg Hands:** My hon. Friend is an expert on the connections between the United Kingdom and the continent of Australasia. He makes a good point about restoring trading connections that existed prior to this country's membership of the European Union. We should treat these two trade deals as an opportunity not a threat, which is a point he makes well.

[Greg Hands]

These deals are a key part of our Indo-Pacific tilt. The Indo-Pacific region matters to the UK, as it is critical to our economy, our security and our global ambition to support open societies. Rapid economic growth in the Indo-Pacific region is shifting the world's centre of economic gravity eastwards. In the first two decades of this century, the Indo-Pacific region accounted for 50% of global economic growth in real terms; by 2050 that is expected to be 56%. The Indo-Pacific is home to half the world's people, and there are significant economic opportunities for the UK in trading with the region. These deals are just the start.

These two agreements are a significant step towards our accession to the CPTPP, membership of which will further open up 11 Pacific markets across four continents worth £9 trillion of GDP in 2021. Joining the CPTPP will put the UK at the heart of a dynamic group of growing nations. We negotiate deals that are tailored to the UK's strengths, such as our world-class service industries that employ 82% of our workforce and account for 80% of our economy. These deals will unlock new markets, create jobs and drive the growth that the UK, like many other countries, needs right now. They will provide real outcomes for real businesses.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): What does the Minister make of the International Trade Committee's finding that more export opportunities and greater safeguards for the food industry could have been negotiated? How are the Government implementing the lessons learned for future deals?

**Greg Hands:** I thank the International Trade Committee for its various reports on both deals, and I look forward to engaging with its Chair, the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil), and indeed the whole Committee.

It can be said of any negotiated deal that something might have been better, as that is an inevitable consequence of negotiation. There is a bit of give and take. The safeguards for UK agriculture build in a very considerable length of time, of 15 or, in some cases, 20 years, for people to adjust. I contrast that with the European Union deal—the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) voted to have no deal with the European Union—which gave instant access.

Today, I will explain to the House how these important deals will help firms in every part of the country to flourish and grow. First, these agreements will remove 100% of tariffs on all goods, most of which will come into effect as soon as the agreements are in force—that is particularly with reference to UK exports. They will reduce red tape on British goods sold to Australian and New Zealand markets, making our exports even more competitive. Our automotive sector is among the many UK industries that will reap the rewards. For example, McLaren says that these tariff reductions

“will support and facilitate customer and network growth across Australia in the coming years.”

Nissan says that removing the 5% duty on car exports will help further exports to Australian customers of the Leaf, Qashqai and Juke cars it makes at its Sunderland plant. The removal of tariffs of up to 10% on car parts and on some vehicles sold to New Zealand is good news for other vehicle manufacturers across the UK.

A range of other industries will also benefit. For example, Nairn's, the Edinburgh-based oatcake manufacturer, says savings from removing 5% tariffs under our New Zealand deal will help offset the increased costs that have affected businesses following covid-19 and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Food and Drink Federation believes the removal of a range of tariffs will help to give UK businesses significant growth opportunities and make them more competitive in the New Zealand market.

UK investors will benefit from more access than ever before to opportunities in Australia and New Zealand, with guaranteed rights to invest across the economy. We are maximising opportunities for British companies to invest and grow their businesses in Australia. It will be easier for UK businesses to expand into both Australia and New Zealand, because we have increased the screening thresholds in both deals, meaning that fewer UK investments will be subject to review.

We also secured outcomes that encourage further inward investment into the nations and regions across the UK. In 2020, the UK was the second most popular destination for Australian foreign direct investment, and Australia is a big global investor. In 2019, there were more than 2,000 Australian-owned local business units in the UK, employing more than 71,000 people, and in 2020 we were the fourth largest destination for foreign direct investment from New Zealand.

Our Australia and New Zealand trade deals will also give our service industries a competitive edge on data and digital. Some 80% of our economy is in services. Scotland's financial services industry and engineering services firms in the west midlands will benefit, and new opportunities will be provided for Welsh fintech firms in Cardiff. Our Australia deal allows professionals in areas such as engineering, accountancy and architecture to get visas to work. The law firm Herbert Smith Freehills says that these measures will make it easier for its staff to work across the UK and Australia. We also have access to the £10 billion Government procurement market in Australia, putting our firms on an equal footing with Australian firms. Just last month, I visited Informed Solutions, which is headquartered in Altrincham, and its management told me how much they were looking forward to the ratification of the upcoming free trade agreements to assist their business as well.

We have world-leading digital chapters, opportunities in cyber-security trade and so on. We also have a small and medium-sized enterprises chapter, which is very important for helping these companies navigate a free trade agreement. My Department is working hard at spelling out our many advantages, to businesses large and small. The national chairman of the Federation of Small Businesses, Mike Cherry, has said that our trade deal with Australia was great news for many of its members, as the small business chapter will ensure that the needs of smaller businesses are fully catered for in the years to come. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade often likens trade agreements to new motorways: they are at their most useful when they are well used by cars. That is why my team is meeting companies around the country to explain how they can make full use of our deals. Of course, businesses that want to trade with Australia and New Zealand and need more personalised help can turn to our network of trade advisers.

I have reflected on the many economic advantages offered by our free trade agreements, but these deals are not just about commerce. They are also about creating deeper international partnerships that will benefit both our citizens and the wider world, as well as our wider strategic objectives.

**Stephen Kinnock** (Aberavon) (Lab): We are discussing making sure that these deals are about not just economic benefits, but the social partnership and ensuring that workers' hard-won rights are not undermined by doing a trade deal that could lead to a race to the bottom. Will the Minister explain therefore why the deals do not contain any commitment to the International Labour Organisation core conventions?

**Greg Hands:** I thank the hon. Member for his intervention. I know that he takes a strong, keen and constant interest in these issues. Let me say to him that the UK's commitment to human rights, workers' rights and various social justices are not always best pursued through trade agreements; we do pursue them bilaterally as well. I do not believe that there are any widespread concerns in relation to Australia and New Zealand, but I am happy for him to write to me if he has concerns about workers' rights in those two countries. However, it is not obvious to me how a trade deal will necessarily be the best way to pursue those objectives in any case.

Together our nations can use trade to address contemporary challenges such as economic degradation, health pandemics and threats to global security. Both of these deals support that endeavour, including the provisions that uphold high standards and foster co-operation on shared challenges. With world-leading chapters on trade and gender equality, the deals demonstrate our commitment to break down barriers that exist for women in trade, whether as workers, business owners or entrepreneurs.

The UK-Australia agreement contains an innovation chapter, which is the first of its kind in any FTA between two partners in the world. This will ensure that our trading relationship remains at the forefront of emerging technologies. I might just add that the Confederation of British Industry said that our deal with New Zealand puts us at the fore of the green trade revolution and showcases to the world that trade and climate change can go hand in hand.

**Tony Lloyd** (Rochdale) (Lab): The Minister talked earlier about allowing the British public the chance to purchase in a competitive environment, but competition requires information. If there is no adequate chapter in the Australia agreement about environmental standards and the use of coal, for example, can he tell the House how it is possible for an educated consumer to buy in the way that he suggests?

**Greg Hands:** The hon. Member raises a very good point. The UK-Australia deal is the first Australia trade deal that has a dedicated chapter on the environment. I recommend that he looks at the deal to see what it does for the environment, which is something we take very seriously indeed. We did it in the run-up to COP, so it is very topical as well.

**Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD) *rose—*

**Greg Hands:** I will not give way, as I am about to finish.

The country's departure from the European Union opened up new possibilities for us to enhance our relationships with the rest of the world. Our deals with Australia and New Zealand show that we are seizing this opportunity. These deals can increase annual trade between the UK and Australia and the UK and New Zealand by £12.1 billion.

I look forward to hearing the contributions from the official Opposition, who I think abstained on Second Reading of the Trade (Australia and New Zealand) Bill, and also from the Liberal Democrats and the SNP, which I think opposed the Bill on Second Reading.

**Tim Farron** *rose—*

**Greg Hands:** Perhaps the former leader of the Liberal Democrats can explain why he was so opposed to the deal.

**Tim Farron:** I am extremely grateful to the Minister for giving way to me, however he chooses to do so. We are very strongly in favour of free trade, but we also believe that free trade has to be fair. Let me take him back to his earlier comments about the strategic value of this. Does he understand that trade deals must have strategic value when it comes to protecting our ability to feed ourselves as a country? Does he understand why those of us who represent rural communities are deeply concerned about the imbalance that exists between farm standards on this side of the world and those in New Zealand and Australia on the other? We think that might undermine our ability to feed ourselves because it will put British farmers out of business.

**Greg Hands:** I look forward to the hon. Member actually supporting one of these trade deals. I have already pointed out the safeguards that exist in both deals: the long transition period and the substantial tariff-rate quotas. I am talking about all of the protections and safeguards that are in those deals for British farmers—the non-regression clauses on animal welfare, for example, which will prevent Australia or any other country from seeking to gain a trade advantage if they were to weaken their animal welfare rules. I will be frank, though; I have seen no evidence that Australia will be looking to do that, but the deal does have protection for our farmers and our consumers.

Our free trade agreements reflect the needs of modern business and play to this country's strengths. They will create deeper friendships between our citizens and they will begin a new era of free trade between our nations. In short, these are free trade agreements for the 21st century and I commend them to the House.

4.34 pm

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): Today is a significant day, and I wish the Minister a happy birthday. What better present could the Secretary of State have given him than being absent and allowing him to open this debate in her place?

I welcome this general debate on the Australia and New Zealand trade deals. Yesterday, Remembrance Sunday, was a powerful reminder of our shared history and shared past sacrifice. The UK, Australia and New Zealand have deep enduring bonds, shared values and common goals. The Opposition support AUKUS; we recognise

[Nick Thomas-Symonds]

the key and central priorities that the UK, Australia and New Zealand share on the world stage, and we will continue to support the achievement of those goals.

I also put on record my desire to see a deepening of our trade links with our friends in Australia and New Zealand through trade agreements, and ever-closer relationships on all levels. I am especially pleased to say that both countries now have very fine Labour Governments in office.

Of course, we are having this debate after the deals have been signed, but they must now be honoured and worked with for the benefit of people here and of our friends in Australia and New Zealand. Specifically on negotiations, the high commissions of Australia and New Zealand have been remarkably helpful in briefing hon. Members across the House and briefing me as shadow Secretary of State, and I express my gratitude to them for all that they have done throughout the process.

To be clear, our debate today is not about the Opposition's commitment to our deepening relationship with Australia and New Zealand. Rather, the question for this House is whether this Conservative Government secured the best possible deals on behalf of our constituents, and let us be frank: the best possible deals were not achieved.

The Australia deal is “one-sided”—not my words, but those of the current Prime Minister, who said so absolutely clearly over the summer. In fairness to him, we can see why he takes that view. The impact assessment for the Australia deal shows a £94 million hit to our farming, forestry and fishing sectors, and a £225 million hit to our semi-processed foods industry. On the New Zealand deal, the Government's own impact assessment states that,

“part of the gains results from a reallocation of resources away from agriculture, forestry, and fishing”,

which will take a £48 million hit, while semi-processed foods will take a £97 million hit.

Ministers know the serious concerns about the agriculture elements of these two agreements and the precedents that they risk setting. We in the Opposition are very proud of our UK farmers and the standards of excellence they seek to uphold, and we believe that British produce can be a huge success in new markets, but we must also recognise the need for a level playing field for our farmers.

The Government claim that they are trying to mitigate the impact of the two deals, with tariff-free access being phased in. In the New Zealand deal there are tariff-rate quotas and product-specific safeguards for 15 years. Similarly, in the Australia deal the phasing-in period on beef and sheepmeat is of the same period, but the quotas that the Government have set for imports from Australia are far higher than the current levels.

We only need to see what other countries achieved in trade deals with Australia. When Japan negotiated a trade deal with Australia, it limited the tariff-free increase in the first year to 10% on the previous year. South Korea achieved something similar, limiting the increases to 7%. Yet this Government have negotiated a first-year tariff-free allowance with a 6,000% increase in the amount of beef the UK currently imports from Australia. On sheepmeat, it is a 67% increase. I have a simple question

for the Government: why did they not achieve the same things that Japan and South Korea did, and why have our Ministers failed to ensure that the Australian agricultural corporations are held to the same high standards as our farmers?

It is good to see the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) in his place. As I am sure he will recall, when he was Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, he said that he faced “challenges” in getting the former Prime Minister—it is quite confusing these days; I mean the most recent former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss)—and the International Trade Secretary to enshrine animal welfare in deals. It is no wonder that the National Farmers Union said that it saw

“almost nothing in the deal that will prevent an increase in imports of food produced well below the production standards required of UK farmers.”

It is perhaps no surprise that Australia's former negotiator at the World Trade Organisation said:

“I don't think we have ever done as well as this.”

They are called trade “negotiations” for a reason, and it is a shame that the Government failed to put forward the strongest possible case for the UK. At the very least, I ask Ministers to go away and work out what more they can do now to support our food producers in the face of these challenges.

**Jonathan Edwards:** Some farmers are very concerned about the procurement aspects of the deals, which will allow producers from Australia and New Zealand to compete for UK procurement deals. UK producers, however, are unable to compete in Australia and New Zealand, likely because of the economies of scale challenges.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** The hon. Gentleman raises a useful point. Our farmers are seeking a level playing field. We believe in our farmers and we want them to be able to compete on the same basis.

We also see in the Australian deal a lack of success on tackling climate change. The former COP26 President, the right hon. Member for Reading West (Alok Sharma), told the House last December that the Australia deal would reaffirm

“both parties' commitments to upholding our obligations under the Paris agreement, including limiting global warming to 1.5°.”—[*Official Report*, 1 December 2021; Vol. 704, c. 903.]

However, the explicit commitment to limiting global warming to 1.5° was not in the deal, despite the fact that the Minister had said that only a matter of days before it was signed. What went wrong in those final days? Was it perhaps that Ministers simply gave way for the sake of getting a completed deal?

The current Secretary of State for International Trade, the right hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Kemi Badenoch), was sadly not here to open the debate. When she was standing to be Conservative party leader, she branded the net zero climate target “unilateral economic disarmament”. I think it is fair to say that there are worries about her commitment to delivering the progress needed on climate change, given that she has expressed that view publicly. Not only does that view misjudge the economic imperative of action to tackle climate change, but it fails to recognise the huge opportunities that the

transition to net zero could provide. The question must also be asked: how broken can a party be when dabbling with climate change denial is a way to drum up support from its members?

On labour standards and workers' rights, the Government did not push as hard as they might have done, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) said in an earlier intervention. On the Australia deal, the TUC said that the

“agreement does not contain commitments to ILO core conventions and an obligation for both parties to ratify and respect those agreements”

and that it provides

“a much weaker commitment to just the ILO declaration.”

That is a mistake. We should not set a precedent for new trade agreements across the globe to sell short our workers here or elsewhere.

**John Spellar:** I accept my right hon. Friend's point when it comes to dealing with some countries, but in the case of the deal with Australia, where there is a strong Labour Government committed to workers' rights and trade union rights, and a strong trade union movement, are we not slightly making a mountain out of a molehill here?

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** I completely agree with my right hon. Friend about the Australian Government. Having met a number of representatives of the Australian Government, I know that their commitment to workers' rights is second to none. It is a shame that we did not see a similar commitment from this Conservative party, frankly. Of course, the issue with the Australia deal is the precedent that it sets: other countries with lower workers' standards than Australia will look at the standards in the deal and think that they should be the starting point in negotiations. A further issue is around geographical indicators, on the cross-party International Trade Committee said:

“The Government has failed to secure any substantive concessions on the protection of UK Geographical Indications in Australia”.

We have to ensure backing for our fantastic national producers and not let them be undermined.

**John Spellar:** Is it not also the case that this trade deal does not, for example, have an investor-state dispute settlement clause, because with comparable legal systems and comparable levels of development it is not necessary? Surely we do not need one template for all sorts of trade deals with all sorts of countries in very different circumstances.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** I completely agree with my right hon. Friend that we do not need a single template, but we could do with a core trade policy and a core set of objectives from the Government.

I turn to the issue of scrutiny, because for those in this House who follow trade matters closely, it will not have gone without being noticed that this debate brings a distinct change of focus from Ministers at the Department for International Trade. Ministers—I would say they are new Ministers, but I think the Minister for Trade Policy, the right hon. Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands), is competing with Frank Sinatra in the comeback stakes—will I am sure be aware of stinging rebukes from the cross-party International Trade Committee,

which has regularly and strongly raised the need for better scrutiny structures around trade deals. It called in its recent report for

“the Government to accept specific recommendations to enable better scrutiny of any FTAs”.

That is very much a cross-party matter—the hon. Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) has regularly made the case to me as the shadow Secretary of State as well as to the various Secretaries of State and I hope that those criticisms and recommendations are having an impact. I hope that those recommendations, which come from right across the House, are being heard. Perhaps that is why we have at least ended up with today's debate, although the irony is not lost on us that parliamentary time has now been allocated to agreements that were long ago signed and agreed.

**Stephen Kinnock:** My right hon. Friend is being generous in giving way. On this point about scrutiny, he is a Welsh MP like me, so does he agree that these deals have a huge impact on, for example, the Welsh farming industry? Does he share my regret that the Government have not published an impact assessment for the devolved nations, and that they have ridden roughshod over any conventions on consulting properly with the devolved nations, whose Governments are such important stakeholders in this process?

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** I entirely share my hon. Friend's concern about the lack of specific impact assessments. I also share his disappointment that there is not a specific set of structures in place where the devolved Administrations can make their voices heard at a far earlier stage in the process. That would be extremely helpful.

**Greg Hands:** I am sorry, but that is just not a complete representation of what actually goes on. The ministerial forum for trade, which I set up—I have not yet chaired a meeting of it since returning to the Department, but it will be meeting soon—allows all three devolved nations to meet me to discuss forthcoming trade deals, forthcoming negotiations and trade policy overall. That is exactly what it is in place for.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** First, I am pleased to hear that from the Minister, because certainly the feedback I have had from the devolved Administrations has not been positive with regard to the political interaction they have had prior to trade deals being signed. Also, there is the issue of the extent to which the needs of the devolved Administrations were taken into account. He has said that to me today from the Dispatch Box, so I hope that he is as good as his word with the ongoing trade deal negotiations and that the devolved Administrations will not only have the opportunity to have their say, but will be listened to.

**Greg Hands:** I am looking forward to a meeting with Vaughan Gething later this week, if I am not mistaken—it might be next week, but it is in the coming days. It is important to recognise that trade policy is a reserved matter, but it does have a significant impact on areas of devolved competence, such as agriculture. That is why it is right that the UK Government carry out the negotiation, but that they involve and inform the devolved Administrations. That is exactly how it works with the ministerial forum for trade and other interactions.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** I entirely agree that it is the UK Government who are carrying out the negotiations, but they should not just carry out the negotiations and inform the devolved Administrations about them but take their views into account before the negotiations begin. I hope that the Minister will be as good as his word. I am sure we will see that in the months to come.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): This is a very interesting and useful conversation. Is it not right that other countries do this very differently? Belgium includes its regions in the negotiating teams, which are therefore in the room. The USA includes representatives of trade unions and businesses in the negotiating teams, who are therefore in the room. Australia, in this instance, excludes any matters that the states are responsible for, so they are not touched on in this trade deal. Is it not the case that this Government are the weakest of all the partners?

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right that there is a better way to do that, as he eloquently sets out.

On the theme of scrutiny, Lord Grimstone said in May 2020 that the Government do not envisage

“a new FTA proceeding to ratification without a debate first having taken place on it”.—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 23 February 2021; Vol. 810, c. 724.]

Clearly, that has not happened, and that is why this debate is in such odd circumstances. There are crucial elements to both these deals that deserve wider debate and scrutiny.

I want to highlight the real challenge in the Committee for the Bill that the Minister referred to, which was not a Bill about giving effect to a whole range but a specific, narrow Bill on public procurement provisions. The nature of the Bill meant that, under the entirely appropriate rules of this House, finding areas of debate in Committee was very difficult. It was prohibitively narrow: climate change, workers' rights, consultation with devolved Administrations and animal welfare were not within the scope of the Bill. The agreements were signed before they came before Parliament, so the scope for meaningful debate was fatally curtailed. There has been no scrutiny worthy of the name.

The International Trade Committee rightly criticised the process on the Australia deal and the Government's premature triggering of the 21-day process under the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 without the full Select Committee consideration being available to Members. When pressed, the Government refused to extend the process. All the while, in a number of urgent questions, the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan), swerved I think eight invitations—I will be corrected if I am wrong—to attend the International Trade Committee. I wonder whether the Government's reticence to open themselves up to scrutiny is because, ultimately, they know they are falling short.

**Anthony Mangnall** (Totnes) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman is making an important point about scrutiny, and it is not one I can escape now that I have some level of collective responsibility as a Parliamentary Private Secretary, I hasten to add. Does he agree that there is a wider conversation to be had about the Constitutional

Reform and Governance Act, which was introduced under a Labour Government, and about whether a more effective system could be put in place? It seems that we are out of kilter with our Commonwealth friends.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** The hon. Gentleman makes the perfectly reasonable point that we need to look at the whole scrutiny process to make it effective and to update so that it is fit for the current situation.

I have indicated that the current Prime Minister thinks the Australia deal is one-sided. Frankly, that is just one of many criticisms that Conservative Ministers and MPs have levelled at their own Department for International Trade and their own Ministers. The former Exports Minister, the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer), rightly said that the trade access programme is underfunded. He said of it:

“We support too few shows, we don't send enough business, our pavilions are often decent but overshadowed by bigger and better ones from our competitors.”

That could be due to the fact that the budget for our trade show access programme began to fall sharply.

I looked carefully at when in the past 12 years the trade show access programme started to be cut in the last 12 years—I have the figures here for every year. It seems to have happened in the middle of the last decade when a new Chief Secretary to the Treasury was appointed, so I wondered who that was. The Minister has been in post for only a short period on this occasion, but we have had a number of robust exchanges previously, which I have always enjoyed, and this is not a subject that he has ever sought to debate me on before. When I checked who that confident, new, shining Chief Secretary to the Treasury was who started the cuts to the tradeshow access programme, however, I found that it was none other than the current Minister for Trade Policy.

Ministers for Trade Policy have a chequered history under recent Conservative Governments. We have just seen the Leader of the House of Commons, the right hon. Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt), in her new role. She was criticised for her attentiveness and availability as Trade Minister, not by me or any Opposition Member, but by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, who said:

“There have been a number of times when she hasn't been available, which would have been useful, and other ministers have picked up the pieces”.

Meanwhile, if we read the remarkable coverage of the tenure of the most recent former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for South West Norfolk, at the Department for International Trade, it is amazing that there was even limited progress, given that the main aim appears to have been securing photographs for Instagram. I will say this for her time as International Trade Secretary, however: although her requests when travelling in Australia were for sauvignon blanc and fancy coffee, they are nothing compared with the Australian delicacies that I understand the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock) has sampled when out there.

All hon. Members on both sides of the House would agree that a trade deal offers our friends in Australia a fantastic array of British exports, but I fear that they will want to reconsider their options when the first expensive import that arrives is a tariff-free version of the right hon. Member for West Suffolk. I will leave that



subject there, aside from the passionate plea that I always make when important elections are under way, such as the bushtucker trial: it is important for people to continue to make their voices heard, and I am sure that people across the country, especially in West Suffolk, will be keen to continue exercising their vote on a daily basis.

The disorder and chaos that we have seen across Government in recent months, and specifically at the Department for International Trade, speak of a Government who lack focus and direction. I speak to huge numbers of businesses every week and they continually express how damaging the instability is; it has real consequences in damaging our exporting opportunities. The utter chaos of financial instability, the tanking of the pound and the damage to our country's standing are extraordinarily serious.

That instability and lack of clarity are why we have ended up in a situation where promises have been broken and vital progress has slipped. The trade deal with the USA has not been delivered. The trade deal with India done by Diwali has not been delivered. The promise that 80% of UK trade would be under FTAs by the end of 2022 has not been delivered and will not be delivered. It does not have to be that way.

**Anthony Mangnall:** I think we may have been here before, so I apologise for reiterating what I have said previously. The right hon. Gentleman keeps saying that we are not delivering and that we are taking too long, but also that deals are being signed too quickly. The Labour party seems to be at odds with itself. Whether it is our desire to join the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership; our desire to do trade deals with Japan, which we have achieved; the Australia and New Zealand trade deal; or the UK-US state trade deal, those deals are being signed and we are joining new groups. It is not fair or accurate to say that we are not delivering the trade deals that we set out to achieve.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** What the hon. Gentleman omits is that I am judging the Government not against a standard I am putting forward that is impossible to reach but against their own 2019 manifesto. There is no inconsistency between being in favour of free trade deals and hoping that the Government will agree decent ones at the negotiating table.

**Anthony Mangnall** *rose*—

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** As I am finishing in a moment, I will not take another intervention.

The Government's central trade strategy is a litany of broken promises. We are debating these two trade deals in strange circumstances long after they were signed, sealed and delivered. Access to British markets is not, however, a bauble to be traded away easily, as the Government repeatedly do. The Government must stop selling the UK short, and come forward with a core trade strategy that will allow our world-leading businesses to thrive and deliver for communities across the country. Quite simply, it is time for strong government with a sense of purpose, which the Conservative party is in no position to provide.

5 pm

**George Eustice** (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): The current Secretary of State for International Trade had no role in the discussions on these deals, although my right hon. Friend the Minister for Trade Policy did and will recall some of them. The Secretary of State was not in the Cabinet at the time, nor in any of the Cabinet Committees, while the Minister has defended the position that was taken at the time.

My position is obviously slightly different: I was in the Cabinet in 2021 and I was on the Cabinet Sub-Committee that argued over the Australian trade deal—for, yes, there were deep arguments and differences about how we should approach it—but since I now enjoy the freedom of the Back Benches, I no longer have to put such a positive gloss on what was agreed. I hope my right hon. Friend will understand my reason for doing this, which is that unless we recognise the failures the Department for International Trade made during the Australia negotiations, we will not be able to learn the lessons for future negotiations. There are critical negotiations under way right now, notably on the CPTPP and on Canada, and it is essential that the Department does not repeat the mistakes it made.

The first step is to recognise that the Australia trade deal is not actually a very good deal for the UK, which was not for lack of trying on my part. Indeed, as my right hon. Friend pointed out, there were things that we achieved, such as a special agricultural safeguard for years 10 to 15, staged liberalisation across the first decade and the protection of British sovereignty in sanitary and phytosanitary issues. It is no surprise that many of these areas were negotiated either exclusively or predominantly by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on behalf of the UK team, but it has to be said that, overall, the truth of the matter is that the UK gave away far too much for far too little in return.

What would a good agreement have looked like? It would have been one having enduring TRQs on beef in particular, but probably also for sheep. The volumes would probably have started at about 10,000 tonnes per annum, raising after a decade to about 60,000 tonnes or perhaps 80,000 tonnes, which could have been manageable. We did not need to give Australia or New Zealand full liberalisation in beef and sheep—it was not in our economic interest to do so, and neither Australia nor New Zealand had anything to offer in return for such a grand concession. Let us not forget that, while we are about to open our market to unbridled access for Australian beef, Australia remains one of the few countries left in the world that maintains an absolute export ban for British beef. Not a single kilo of British beef can be sold in Australia since it maintains a protectionist ban, using the BSE—bovine spongiform encephalopathy—episode as a sham reason for doing so.

The impact of full liberalisation is hard to predict; the reality is that, provided we maintain a ban on hormones in beef, volumes might remain quite low, but here is the big challenge. The CPTPP negotiation that is under way could mean accession and agreement to new dispute resolution processes that will undermine the UK's sovereignty in SPS issues and actually undermine our approach when it comes to banning hormones in beef. If some foreign court or foreign mediation process were to say as a matter of treaty that the UK had to

[George Eustice]

accept beef from Australia treated with hormones, that could change the nature of this agreement considerably; volumes could rise significantly, perhaps to more than 200,000 tonnes over time, and that would have a very severe impact on British beef.

**Anthony Mangnall:** I may be wrong, but it is my understanding that CPTPP dispute mechanisms are through the World Trade Organisation, and I am not sure that the WTO, as it stands, can override any one of our SPS standards. Does my right hon. Friend agree?

**George Eustice:** The CPTPP has provisions for its own dispute resolution and they are modelled on what happens in the WTO, but here is the thing: if we do not get the negotiation right with CPTPP it might undermine our ability to practise our own SPS regime and have independence in this area.

If we were to have a significant increase in Australian beef, because we had been forced by a court or a dispute resolution service to allow hormones in beef—and there have been close challenges in the past, through the WTO—that would be intolerable for any British Government. The Government of the day would probably have to trigger article 32.8 of the agreement and give six months' notice to terminate the FTA. In my view the best clause in our treaty with Australia is that final clause, because it gives any UK Government present or future an unbridled right to terminate and renegotiate the FTA at any time with just six months' notice. Many Members will remember that we had hours of fun in the last Parliament discussing triggering article 50 of the treaty on European Union; I suspect we would prefer not to have to go back to that, but article 32.8 is the ultimate and final sanction, which, as things have turned out, is a critical safeguard given the size of the concessions made to Australia in the trade deal.

What lessons should we learn? First, and most important, we should not set arbitrary timescales for concluding negotiations. The UK went into this negotiation holding the strongest hand—holding all the best cards—but at some point in early summer 2021 the then Trade Secretary my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss) took a decision to set an arbitrary target to conclude heads of terms by the time of the G7 summit, and from that moment the UK was repeatedly on the back foot. In fact, at one point the then Trade Secretary asked her Australian opposite number what he would need in order to be able to conclude an agreement by the time of the G7. Of course, the Australian negotiator kindly set out the Australian terms, which eventually shaped the deal.

We must never repeat that mistake. The Minister and Secretary of State will currently be getting submissions from officials saying that we need to join the CPTPP in a hurry and that if we do not do so now we will not join the club early enough and will not be shaping the rules—they will be saying, “We might miss the boat, this is a crucial part of the Pacific tilt” and so on. But the best thing the Minister can do is go back and tell Crawford Falconer, “I don't care if it takes a decade to do this agreement; we will get the right agreement—we will never again set the clock against ourselves and shatter our own negotiating position.”

The second lesson is that we must look at making a machinery of government change. I believe all responsibility for agrifood negotiations, including relating to tariff rate quotas, should be transferred from the Department for International Trade to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, because DEFRA has superior technical knowledge in this area. It is important to remember that DEFRA never left the world stage; the DIT is a new creation with people often lacking experience but doing their best to pick things up, whereas even during the EU era DEFRA maintained a presence in trade negotiations, advising and informing the EU's position and dealing with matters such as market access around the globe. DEFRA is worldly and has deep technical knowledge in this area and it should, therefore, take full responsibility for negotiating TRQs in agrifood.

The third change we must look at making is strengthening the role of Parliament in scrutinising and perhaps even agreeing the negotiating mandate. Countries such as Japan and the United States and the EU all use their parliamentary processes to their advantage. When we were negotiating with Japan and seeking to increase access for British cheese, I remember Japan said, “We would love to, but unfortunately we can't because there is a parliamentary motion that we cannot breach. Therefore, we cannot retreat on this position.” The UK does not have that. We could use Parliament and a mandate agreed by Parliament to say to trading partners, “We're not able to agree to what you're asking for.” However, if they perceive that Crawford Falconer calls the shots and that he will always go through some back channel to get something agreed, we will not be in a strong position and our negotiating position will be undermined.

That brings me to my final point. I have always been a huge fan of the British civil service; I was never a Minister or politician to level criticism at them. I enjoyed nine years of incredibly good relations with civil servants at all levels, but I do want to raise a comment about personnel within the Department for International Trade. Crawford Falconer, currently the interim permanent secretary, is not fit for that position, in my experience. His approach was always to internalise Australian demands, often when they were against UK interests, and his advice was invariably to retreat and make fresh concessions. All the while, he resented people who had a greater understanding of technical issues than he did. It was perhaps something of a surprise when he arrived from New Zealand to find that there were probably several hundred civil servants in the UK civil service who understood trade better than he did, and he has not been good, over the years, at listening to them. He has now done that job for several years, and it would be a good opportunity for him to move on and for us to get a different type of negotiator in place—somebody who understands British interests better than he has been able to.

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

5.11 pm

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): May I extend my birthday wishes to the Minister, too? I will not ask him how many candles are on his cake, but I am afraid that I cannot hold a candle for the defence he gave for these deals. It seems that I am not alone. In addition to the right hon.

Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), there seem to be many more Tory critics; I will refer to a few of them in my remarks.

First, a general debate is no replacement for genuine parliamentary scrutiny. The Government have failed to provide that, even though it was promised. The deals, lumped together in the debate, are one-sided and a betrayal of farmers. They threaten food security and animal welfare, reduce consumer confidence, find climate change expendable and do nothing to mitigate the enormous losses of Brexit. Quite possibly, they are also breaking international law. Yet again, no reason is provided to support this further exercise in UK self-harm. They simply double underscore the increasing risks of the UK and the need for Scotland to become a normal, independent country and to rejoin the world's most successful trading bloc, the EU.

Let me cover those points in order and in more detail. When I say that they are one-sided deals, I am, as we have heard, quoting the current Prime Minister. He was right. Of course, given that his party is in power, he was also being generous. These are awful deals. They are unmitigated disasters. That is why the Government are refusing to allow Parliament to vote on them. These deals are the legacy of the previous Prime Minister and make as much sense as the infamous mini-Budget.

**Anthony Mangnall:** The hon. Member is making a point about whether we can vote on the deals. The reality is that having a vote on them would not change anything, as he full well knows. We are leading people down a path without clarifying how, under the CRaG mechanism, the votes would make no changes to the trade deals that we are debating.

**Drew Hendry:** I admire the hon. Member's dexterity. Having been in the House when he has quite rightly criticised the lack of scrutiny offered by the Government, I understand that he is now in the employ of the Government and must sing a different tune. The fact of the matter is that this is not good enough.

**Anthony Mangnall:** Will the hon. Member give way?

**Drew Hendry:** No, I am going to make some progress.

Given that his party was in power, the Prime Minister was, as I have said, being generous. These are awful deals. They are unmitigated disasters and that is why Parliament is not getting the chance to scrutinise them properly. They will do similar harm as the mini-Budget to the sectors concerned. The current Prime Minister also said that they

"shouldn't be rushing to sign trade deals as quickly as possible".

We agree, but wait a minute: he is the Prime Minister! Why, then, is he allowing this to proceed? If he does not agree with it, is not letting it go through just another part of a grubby deal for power? It makes no sense otherwise.

The Government are keen enough to tear up deals such as the Northern Ireland protocol, yet they will not get around the negotiating table on these deals, even though they can do so. These deals are bad, very bad, for our farmers and food producers. The National Farmers Union president, Minette Batters, says of the Australia deal that

"this is a one-sided deal. When it comes to agriculture, the Australians have achieved all they asked for and British farmers are left wondering what has been secured for them."

And well might they wonder.

She went on to say of the New Zealand deal:

"The government is now asking British farmers to go toe-to-toe with some of the most export orientated farmers in the world, without the serious, long-term and properly funded investment in UK agriculture that can enable us to do so. This is the sort of strategic investment in farming and exports that Australian and New Zealand governments have made in recent decades."

This has a knock-on effect on our food security. These deals are bad policy at the worst possible time. The laissez-faire, couldn't care, get it over the line Brexiteer ideology has de-prioritised domestic food production in support of importing cheaper—for now—lower standard food. That is dangerous and should be put on hold immediately. It sets a thumpingly bad precedent. The rest of the world is watching and wants the same one-sided access that has been squandered here.

**Anthony Mangnall:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Drew Hendry:** If the hon. Gentleman wants to pick up on that point, I will give way.

**Anthony Mangnall:** I will, on food security. That is exactly why the Government passed, in the Agriculture Act 2020, the need to report back on food security—so that we could review the situation and ensure that this country has a full and complete level of food security. Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that, actually, that shows that we are taking it seriously, rather than ignoring it?

**Drew Hendry:** It will come as no surprise that I do not agree with the Government Member. These are damaging deals. They are one-sided and other people will want access.

Talks are ongoing with India, Brazil, Mexico, the Gulf states, the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership countries and Canada. Will they now accept less than has been offered here? This might just be the damaging start of the process. No wonder the National Audit Office report says that the UK Department for International Trade is "taking risks" in its haste to sign new deals.

This is bad for consumers. Research by Which? found that 72% of people across the nations of the UK do not want food that does not meet current standards coming in through trade deals. And boy, do standards differ! In Australia, animal welfare standards are well below what is expected of our producers, particularly on pigs, eggs, sheep and beef, with cramped sow stalls, battery cages, the painful mulesing of sheep, huge herds of cattle in zero-grazing feedlots, and permissible live animal transport times that are twice the length of ours. Australian poultry farmers use 16 times—I repeat, 16 times—more antibiotics per animal than our farmers. The UK Government's own advisers have voiced concern about the impact on UK farmers of the overuse of pesticides in Australia, including 144 highly hazardous pesticides.

**John Spellar:** But do we not also import chicken from countries with very questionable standards, such as Brazil, from which we also import beef, and Thailand? Are there not, even within the EU framework, considerable variations in animal welfare standards?

**Drew Hendry:** If there are variations in standards, they are certainly nothing like this. The line that the right hon. Gentleman intervened on was 144 highly hazardous pesticides.

Perhaps none of this should come as a surprise, given that the former Prime Minister who brokered the deal employed the former Australian Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, as a trade adviser. Incidentally, I do not think that the Australians will return the favour. Abbott is a notorious climate sceptic. That is why the deal gets worse and worse, leaving aside all the obvious food miles involved in all the imports. He is on record as saying, when he was Australian Prime Minister, that his main role in trade talks was to ensure that his negotiators “weren’t sidetracked by peripheral issues such as...environmental standards”.

It looks like he succeeded on both sides of the world—that is little surprise with this fracking Government, whose Prime Minister had to be shamed into attending COP27. Australian oil and gas production is set to increase substantially until at least 2030, with dozens of new coalmines, yet there is nothing on that on the UK Government’s agenda. It is no wonder that even Tory Lord Deben, the chair of the Climate Change Committee, condemned the Australia deal as “totally offensive”.

The Scottish Government called on the UK Government to prioritise the Paris agreement commitments, but the UK Government signed this deal with nowt. Indeed, we know that they actively scrubbed all the concerns in haste to get the deal signed, as departmental emails prove. There are no legally binding, enforceable climate change conditions in either deal. As I said, it is no wonder that they do not want the deals to be scrutinised. They may, however, have broken international law through the lack of scrutiny. They will probably just shrug their shoulders, of course, like their Prime Minister and former Prime Minister, because they are getting pretty good at lawbreaking on that side of the House. A formal complaint will, however, be heard by the Aarhus convention compliance committee.

These tragicomic deals are put into even sharper focus for this Brexit and bust Britain by the deal that the EU has just signed with New Zealand. Yes, you guessed it, Madam Deputy Speaker—it is on better terms than the UK deal, with actual farming safeguards. In the first year of the agreements, the UK will allow 12,000 tonnes of New Zealand beef into the UK, whereas the 27 EU countries will allow only 3,333 tonnes between all of them. By year 15, the UK will allow a whopping 60,000 tonnes, while the EU will have capped imports at 10,000 tonnes and will still apply a 7.5% tariff. The EU has secured a better deal on beef, sheep, cheese, butter and more.

Let us look at what we have lost through Brexit. In the EU, about half of our trade used to be paperwork-free, but 100% of trade is now bundled up in red tape. For every £490 of damage from the loss of EU trade, the deals combined will realise £3 at best. Scotland’s food industries are being painfully punished for something that Scotland voted against. Fruit and vegetable exports to the EU are down by more than half, and dairy and eggs are down by a quarter. Brexit is a disastrous economic hit that Scotland should not be forced to endure. As for the deals we are debating and those planned, we call on the Department for International Trade to publish an impact assessment of the free trade

deals with Australia and New Zealand, and the proposed free trade deals with the CPTPP, India and Canada, with a particular focus on food and farming, showing the anticipated effects in all four nations.

The UK Government must stop gambling with Scottish farming, food production, manufacturing and trade. They have failed to protect our brands. They have gambled with food standards, workers’ rights and protections. They are reckless over the environment and climate change, and, as has been so obvious, they have turbocharged inflation and threatened people’s wellbeing, as well as diminished their household budgets. And yet, they have the brass neck—the utter cheek—to say that we should have supported this place, so often in a race to the bottom, especially in this international lunacy and trading failure.

People in Scotland can see that the risk is not in being a normal, independent country, but in remaining shackled to Westminster. They see that these one-sided deals do nothing for our farmers, damage our food security, lower standards, fail on animal welfare and climate change, possibly break international law and do nothing to mitigate the eye-watering costs of Brexit. The deals cannot be supported and it is clearer than ever that Scotland must return to the EU as an equal and normal independent country to escape Westminster’s basket-case ideologies.

5.24 pm

**Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con):** That was a really disappointing speech from the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry). I was interested to hear the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), who is obviously deeply into the debate—much more so than I am. I thank the Minister for his quick and enthusiastic cruise through it, which was a present for us on his birthday.

The UK’s trade with New Zealand is particularly long-standing. It took off with the first refrigerated shipment of meat in a boat that set sail in 1882, loaded with sheep. It was called the *Dunedin*, as I hope the Scots with us will have noticed. Sadly, it disappeared at sea with all crew in 1890.

I may not have the same knowledge as some other speakers, but I have a personal interest, as my accent shows. I hold a passport from both countries—New Zealand and this country—and many people think from my accent that I am Australian, so I guess I can add that in as well.

New Zealand and Australia were and are huge agricultural producers. There used to be a huge market in the UK for lamb and milk products, but now the spread is very much broader. I have just been to New Zealand, where many farmers are looking to this country to help to fill their portfolio for the EU, so I have no fear. Before the UK entered the Common Market, as it then was, Australia and New Zealand provided the UK with huge trade in lamb and milk products—Anchor is one of my favourite butters. In return, the UK sold manufactured products to New Zealand and Australia. British manufacturing, particularly of cars and household goods, dominated. That was the norm, and I see the opportunities in these deals as a return to the norm.

The kith and kin links and the support that Australia and New Zealand gave to the UK in the two world wars may help us to understand why both Commonwealth

nations are sympathetic to us. When the UK went into the Common Market, the loss or diminution of the UK market was sorely felt. They did not like it—they were aggrieved—but when there was a reduction in both countries' trade, they did not just sit on their hands; they went out and got other deals. More than 100 nations are now on their trading list and they are key members of the TPP, which has been mentioned several times today. That could be important to us, because our links could help us to get in on the partnership.

The new agreement will give UK manufacturing, tech and services companies access to the antipodean markets and, importantly, open access for UK professionals to live and work in Australia and New Zealand. Equally, it will open the door to Australasian professionals, including medical and dental professionals and accountants—and dare I suggest rugby coaches for Wales and Scotland? I thought I might get a bite there.

My Mole Valley farmers were deeply concerned that opening the doors to tariff-free imports would swamp the UK agricultural sector, particularly for dairy products and to some degree for beef and sheepmeat. Fortunately, as the Minister has pointed out, the agreement includes staggered phasing of tariff reductions, which is particularly welcome. Having just been to New Zealand, I can say that it is quite apparent that it will want support from our products to fill its quotas for the EU.

The UK needs to push its goods in both countries. For example, New Zealand and Australia's roads are currently dominated by Asian-manufactured vehicles. I have asked people there why they are not buying British. The answer is "We will when the prices come down and the tariffs come down." With this tariff reduction, we have a chance to take our share and more, but we have to use it. We have to get out there, and we have to push our products in those two countries. I am willing to offer my services as a translator—because their English is difficult—or even as a trade envoy. The opportunity is there, but we have to go out and get it.

5.30 pm

**John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): Trade is one of the issues that, from time to time, erupt in British politics. Indeed, in some areas it has dominated political discussion, and it has twice split—torn apart—the Conservative party. After all, that is why we had free trade halls in many of the great cities of the industrial north and midlands.

There is a strong case to be made for open trade, and I sometimes wish the Government would make it more strongly, both in general and in detail, and particularly in relation to the opportunities it presents. We have heard a great deal about some of the possible problems, and I shall come on to those shortly, but there are also opportunities for our industries and services, which were mentioned a moment ago by the hon. Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford).

We have to recognise, and we should be making the argument, that trade has been a major engine of human progress for millennia, and has driven prosperity, innovation and a flow of ideas. It has enabled the development of civilisation. When people advance arguments against trade, one almost wonders whether they consider that the industrial revolution was desirable and right and a great advance in human progress, but although there

were considerable and well-documented costs to that development, fundamentally humanity benefited and moved forward. We need to be advancing those arguments, not the arguments of people who want to return to some idyllic pastoral age, which was actually never much of an idyll at all, because we have certainly made great progress as a result; and if we are going to do that, we have to say, "Who better to do such deals with than Australia and New Zealand?"

These are countries with which we share huge affinities, connected with families and relatives, and with which we have shared service and security and intelligence relationships over several centuries. They are countries with similar legal systems and similar values that work together in the wider world. There may be some difficulties, and I am pleased about—well, not pleased; in fact I am slightly dismayed, but I suppose I could also take some partisan pleasure in them—the revelations of the utter inadequacies of at least one of the Ministers involved in the trade deals, who made the fundamental error in negotiations—any negotiations—of believing that getting a deal is more important than the contents of the deal. That is a recipe for failure in business, and it is a recipe for failure in government as well. I therefore hope that Ministers may now learn the lessons from that period. It was not even the deal, but the photo opportunity it presented, that seems to have been most important, and we definitely need to move beyond that.

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Does the right hon. Gentleman think that this may also reflect the fact that for many years the UK has not needed negotiating teams to go into the negotiating rooms on behalf of the UK to make trade deals, and that that naivety may in part—along with Ministers' overenthusiasm—have resulted in poor terms in this trade deal?

**John Spellar:** I take the hon. Lady's point about the shortfall in technical skills. The hon. Member for Mole Valley identified certain failings in at least one individual. I am not qualified to comment on that, but I am perfectly prepared to believe it. There was certainly a technical deficit—because trade deals have been undertaken by the European Commission on behalf of all member states—but that was exaggerated, and indeed made far worse, by the obsessive and indeed utterly irresponsible attitude of the Trade Secretary at the time. Unfortunately, the Conservative party then saw fit to put that same individual in as Prime Minister, where those same negative qualities completely imploded the Government and demonstrated why the description of her as a "human hand grenade" was so apt.

There was a discussion earlier about several of the common factors between our countries, and they include labour standards. The developments in Australia are enormously encouraging, because some of the reductions in labour standards that were brought in by the previous conservative Government there are now being rolled back and trade unionism is being encouraged. I am sorry that the Minister for Trade Policy has just left the Chamber. When he was describing the talks with the United States, I thought he missed an opportunity to say that the UK and US trade union movements were involved in those talks in Baltimore and Scotland. I know that was at the insistence of President Biden and

[John Spellar]

the American trade team, but I hope that this Government will have learned the positive advantages of having representatives of the trade union movement involved in those discussions and that they will include them in future discussions with countries that have comparable effective and free trade unions, because that has enormous value in getting the right sort of deal.

The fact that we need trade deals, that we need to have trade, and that Australia and New Zealand will be excellent partners does not exonerate the Government from their inadequate performance, which has been described in several previous debates and again here today. Also, it is not just about getting the deals; it is also about enforcing them. Another area where this Government and others have failed considerably is in allowing China into the World Trade Organisation, with the various qualifications that that required, and then allowing it time and again to breach the conditions under which it joined up, until it became much more difficult to take action because it had grown its economy, quite often by violating those deals as well as by using industrial espionage to steal intellectual property.

I want to touch on scrutiny. I fail to understand the Government's reluctance to face scrutiny on this. They have a big majority, and the farming influence is not so dominant on their Back Benches, but in some of these deals they have a case to make. Given that we are not exactly overburdened with parliamentary business from the Government, because they do not seem to have got their act together, I do not understand why they are having these debates now and not at an earlier stage in order to defend their position—for example, to talk about some of the other benefits of the deals.

Visas for professionally qualified people have been mentioned. I have said in a previous debate that, where there is enough commonality in training, we ought to be asking the professional bodies what additional training an individual might need. They would not need to fully requalify; they would need only to undertake the necessary training to deal with any differences. This would encourage the movement backwards and forwards of professionally qualified people and encourage training in all our countries.

I fully accept that Ministers have a difficult task in remedying some of the deficiencies from the Truss era, but I hope that they will learn the lessons from these agreements and take them forward in future discussions, to ensure that they improve both the process and the substance as they focus on the deals.

Notwithstanding that, I hope both sides of the House—the new shadow International Trade team, as I said back in September, is a great improvement on some of our previous shadow International Trade teams, in having a generally favourable view of trade but a critical view of the detail—can then go forward and, bluntly, not follow those in the Chamber whose only answer is to go back to the EU, which has many of the problems associated with these trade deals. Trade deals are not easy, whoever we do them with. Can we just dump the ideology a bit and focus on the practicalities, for the benefit of our people not just in rural areas, very important though they are, but in our great towns and cities across the country?

5.40 pm

**Anthony Mangnall** (Totnes) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar). I did battle against him in 2017, and he sent me running. I am pleased to be in the Chamber with him to discuss something on which we are of one heart and one mind.

I am partly here as a member of the International Trade Committee. Our Chair appears to have thrown his toys out of the pram and has not come to debate the very thing that he has asked about for the last 18 months. The Committee has done a huge amount of work over the two and a half years in which I have been a member. We have produced reports on scrutiny, on the New Zealand and Australia agreements, on UK Export Finance, on inward foreign direct investment and on digital trade and data. The reason for these reports is because we are signing trade deals at a rapid rate of knots, not too fast, as the Opposition might paint the picture, but steady progress. We are signing deals that will be of huge benefit to the UK service economy, to our producers, to British consumers and to the British public, and we should talk more about that.

The International Trade Committee is attempting to keep up with the Government's ambitious programme to ensure that we are able to produce reports for this House. I agree with every point raised by the right hon. Gentleman on scrutiny. We have to have a conversation in this Chamber about scrutiny, which is not to be feared. If anything, the expertise in this House would be of huge benefit to both the Government and the Department for International Trade. The whole point of the International Trade Committee's work is to be a critical friend by considering what works and what does not work, to try to strengthen the Government's position through our reports and engagement sessions, and by consulting widely with experts across the United Kingdom.

We all wish to see the United Kingdom strike the most effective trade deals, although that might not be the case for SNP Members, who do not seem to support any trade deals at any time. I was accused of having ample dexterity in saying that I want to see scrutiny, but the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), who is no longer in his place, started his speech by saying he is pro-free trade. I have never before heard the SNP give us such a line, because it is clearly not the case. The SNP says it wants to be part of the EU, but leaving the Union of the United Kingdom is the only thing that will cause an economic catastrophe for Scotland.

I welcome the opportunity of this debate to talk about the Australia and New Zealand trade deals. So often in this country we talk about import impacts rather than export opportunities, of which I believe there are many. We must talk them up. We hear the Opposition highlight that Members and Ministers of the Australian Parliament have saluted their trade deal, suggesting that we have got the wrong end of the stick and that Australia has got the best side of this deal. If the Opposition started promoting the positive elements of this trade agreement, we might find that people have a little faith in it. Scratch the surface of the trade agreement, and we will find there are huge benefits.

The International Trade Committee's most recent report made five recommendations. I asked the shadow Minister about the role of CRAg, which was introduced

by the Labour Government in 2010. We need to have an open and frank cross-party discussion about what new system we might be able to put in place. If we are not going to use the mechanism that has been promised, we might as well consider an alternative measure. I ask the Government, with the greatest respect, if we are to ignore having a votable motion, could we at least have general debates during the CRAg process so that we can talk about it before the deal is ratified? That would send a positive message to all of us who return to our constituencies to talk to farmers and businesses that might be concerned. That, at least, would be a simple thing to put forward.

We must also ensure that there is scrutiny and that Ministers turn up on time to the Trade Committee. We have had problems. However, as has been said, the Front-Bench team we have in the Department for International Trade is truly excellent. I have worked with a number of them on a number of occasions and it is reassuring to know that they take these points seriously. I have those conversations with them both in public and in private.

There is a valid point to be made on ensuring that Departments are joined up when it comes to trade deals. That was not always the case. The Committee certainly did not feel it was during the Australia negotiations. It was, however, better on the New Zealand negotiations. On the point about having a joined-up negotiating objective as a one-size-fits-all, I am less than persuaded by that. We have to be flexible in looking at the needs of each and every trade deal we end up signing.

We need to look at where the Australia trade agreement benefits us. As the Minister for Trade Policy, who is no longer in his place, said, 82% of our workforce and 80% of GDP are in financial services. That is where this deal strikes incredibly well and effectively. We will have greater access—more than ever before—to Australian markets. From architecture to law to financial services, we will be on an equal footing. That could increase UK service exports to Australia by £5 billion. Additionally, it cuts the bureaucracy that so many small businesses have been frustrated about.

Mobility offers the opportunity to support economic growth and recovery, and opportunities for people in Australia and people in the UK. It is worth noting that, under the new travel arrangements, which are based on reciprocity, there will be a youth mobility scheme; an innovation and early careers scheme; an exchange pilot; and a working holidaymaker initiative. I go back to what the right hon. Member for Warley said: the purpose is that there will be side initiatives where we can look at how to expand this. Trade deals, once signed, are not static; they evolve over time. We must remind ourselves that what was signed recently does not necessarily have to be the trade deal that we live with for the rest of our lives. We can steadily improve the deals and must look to do so. We should certainly be heading in that direction when it comes to the visa arrangement and shared professional qualifications.

**Deidre Brock:** Does the hon. Gentleman seriously think that that is in any way compensation for the loss of freedom of movement, and of the workers that we were getting from Europe, as a result of the disastrous Brexit deal his Government have negotiated?

**Anthony Mangnall:** We have a trade and co-operation agreement, a free trade agreement, with the EU, which is important to note—and which the hon. Member

voted against. We also have a significant amount of opportunity to welcome people. The whole point is about having control. If we are going to sign up to new relationships with countries around the world, we want to be able to do so through the Commonwealth and through countries that have shared ideas and views about the world, and we should welcome that.

A point was made by a Member from Wales, whose constituency I cannot remember off the top of my head, about our inability to bid into Australian government contracts. I am afraid to say that that is incorrect. Within the terms of the Australian trade agreement, businesses in the UK will be able to bid into Australian government contracts worth up to £10 billion a year. That is the most extensive expansion the Australians have ever agreed in any free trade agreement in the world.

On the point about farming, I bow to the knowledge and experience of the former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), but I was surprised that we did not hear more about the Trade and Agriculture Commission that we set up. I hope that that might be the vehicle by which we can ensure better scrutiny, and better enhancements and support for farming. We need to look at that issue. We have certainly had extensive negotiations in the Trade Committee about how we can use that.

**George Eustice:** Does my hon. Friend agree that, if we were to try to strengthen the Trade and Agriculture Commission, the right thing to do would be to move it within the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and away from the Department for International Trade, so that it could have access to the technical knowledge and expertise that it said was denied it in the first assessment?

**Anthony Mangnall:** I will be in such dangerous territory if I give a straight answer to that—I am looking to see whether the Whip is behind me. I might say that there is significant expertise on the Trade and Agriculture Commission already and it is not for me to discuss how it is structured and in which Department. However, the issue was rightly raised by the former Chairman of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and it gave a lot of hope to many Members with rural constituencies. We should use that Committee, and I know the Government take it seriously when it produces its reports.

We talk at great length about the flow of people, ideas and goods when it comes to the CPTPP. In these fractured and difficult times, it offers huge benefits: a significant opportunity to ensure that we can strengthen our relations in the Asia-Pacific, encourage the diversification of supply chains away from China and encourage greater trading between those countries that share like-minded ideas.

I could go on for a lot longer about the New Zealand agreement, but I will touch on just a couple of things briefly. Not many Members in this debate have mentioned the huge benefits that have been secured in digital trade. If we want to see where the United Kingdom has really led the world, just look at the benchmarking of what has happened in the UK-Singapore digital trade agreement. The terms in the New Zealand agreement are truly extensive. They will make an enormous difference to

[Anthony Mangnall]

countries around the world, and perhaps an enormous difference to CPTPP, which may end up using those terms.

On the environment, some Members have said that perhaps Australia has lower standards. I do not look forward to the moment when Nicola Sturgeon goes on one of her ridiculous trade missions to Australia, after hearing the comments of the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey about Australia and its standards. The New Zealand trade agreement is the first environmentally ground-breaking agreement in a free trade deal anywhere in the world, yet not a single Opposition Member has mentioned that.

**Drew Hendry:** Is the hon. Gentleman denying, for example, the animal welfare issues—how animals are treated differently, how they are raised and how they are transported—and the additions that are used in pesticides and the antibiotics? Is he saying that is not the case?

**Anthony Mangnall:** I am saying that when the hon. Gentleman compares the standards of Australia with those of Brazil, that is a massive insult to Australian markets and farmers. I do not think we should do that. When we compare other countries, we must not talk down our Australian counterparts. We must work with them.

**Drew Hendry:** The hon. Gentleman might want to withdraw that comment because I have not compared Australia with Brazil at any point in the debate or previously.

**Anthony Mangnall:** As I heard it, the hon. Gentleman used other countries as a reference and said that Australia was one of the worst. I am happy to go through the record in *Hansard* to look at that and I will certainly do so tomorrow.

It was also said—the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey said this as well—that we are tying ourselves in knots in having paper documentation in relation to our trade deals. This is exactly the reason the Government are introducing the Electronic Trade Documents Bill, which small and medium-sized enterprises across this country have welcomed.

I have taken up far too much of your time, Madam Deputy Speaker, but the purpose is to state we must look at our trade deals in the round. We must look at them as opportunities to expand. We must ensure that we talk them up, not down, and, above all, we must ensure that all the businesses in our constituencies are aware of how they can use the support from the Department for International Trade to reach new markets. Businesses that go further afield are more resilient in all times—good and bad.

5.53 pm

**Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to see the newly branded hon. Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) in his place. His language is a degree more restrained than I am used to. Perhaps I can speak a bit for him in making the points about scrutiny. Let us be honest about this: parliamentary scrutiny of these two trade agreements has been woefully inadequate. That is because of a lack of commitment by senior Ministers

throughout the process to expose themselves to the Select Committee and, more generally, to scrutiny. That matters enormously. It is also a matter of fact that the process itself is inadequate not simply because of the lack of political commitment, but because there is not the capacity to hold Ministers to account, to hold the Government to account and to hold the negotiators to account.

The right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) made some telling comments. I do not wish to put him in a difficult position but he was forthright in what he said today. He talked about the process and its failure to adequately reflect inter-departmental concerns and the fact that there was some failure in the political process, as proper account was not taken of the multiple needs that a trade agreement should address. That is the source of the concern over how we have operated scrutiny. We know that, post Brexit, the Government were in a hurry to establish that the UK was a nation that could negotiate trade agreements. That is not of itself anything to criticise the Government for. What we can criticise them for is the haste and recklessness with which that process went ahead, and their determination to say, almost irrespective of what trade agreements emerged, that those trade agreements were optimal; clearly, in no sense could anyone put that view forward.

In introducing the debate, the Minister talked about our being at the forefront of international trade policy. That rings very hollow when we know that the protections that the EU gained in terms of its relationship with New Zealand—the trade agreement and so on—were better for the UK agricultural position than those that we obtained as the UK. The idea that we are at the forefront of trade policy is, therefore, bogus and ridiculous. We have to learn the lessons from that. We have to learn we can do better.

One thing that Ministers have to take away from this debate is the need for a genuine trade strategy. On the basis of these two trade deals, it is impossible to see what the UK's trade strategy is all about. I agree with those who said that every trade deal is going to have its own specific characteristics. That is inevitable. Even the New Zealand and Australia trade deals are not the same. It will be very different when we come to the CPTPP negotiations and when we come to negotiate with Mercosur and Brazil—the frameworks within which we operate are bound to be very different.

However, it is possible for the Government to share their overall strategy with the House. Some of the things such a strategy would address are obvious. Earlier, an hon. Member intervened to make a point about food security. In a world that is changing and where climate change is devastating the capacity to produce the food that the world needs, food security for our nation has to be fundamental, yet that is not written into any trade strategy that the Government have come up with. There is a need to balance the advantages and disadvantages not simply for the nation as a whole, but for different parts of the nation. That has to be fundamental. The agricultural parts of this country have very different needs from, say, the service sector of the City of London. It may be that we make great gains for the City and, objectively, nobody can be against that concept, but we will be concerned about the impact on communities if



we see disruption of the employment base and of the capacity of our agricultural areas to operate in the way that we need as a nation.

Where is the strategy that allows us to see the Government's ambitions for regional distribution? We know that there is very little reference in these two trade deals to the impact on Northern Ireland. That is such a serious matter when we are debating—whatever our different views are—the validity of the Northern Ireland protocol. How is the protocol going to be affected by these two trade deals? That is a matter of fundamental importance. But it is simply not there—it is not in these two agreements, or even in the way the Government are prepared to discuss trade policy. Across the piece, we need an international trading strategy that allows us to establish what our basic national interests are, and they are not there in either of these trade agreements.

If we look beyond these agreements, we will hopefully sign over the coming years many different and beneficial trade agreements, but they must be set against the objective standards of how we balance national interests. What is the national interest? Who are the winners and who are the losers? What do we do when there are losers, as there always will be in any deal that changes the terms of trade? On that basis, what do we do to protect the communities that are detrimentally affected by such changes?

Getting into the specifics of the two agreements, one remarkable thing is how much the Government have been prepared to trade away in a way that we did not see from the European Union. We know that the protections that the EU demanded, particularly for its own agricultural base, were very different from those that the UK obtained. Other hon. Members have already gone through the details of the tonnage that would be allowed, but we have ceded control in ways that the European Union simply did not.

I do not want to re-run the Brexit argument, but clearly Britain would have been better off within the European Union and with the EU's negotiating position than with our own. That has to be a fundamental critique of and challenge to the capacity and competence of this Government. A simple conclusion would be, "If we cannot do better, why not?". Ministers have not answered, or even attempted to answer, that in this debate.

Across the piece, we have gained relatively minimal benefits. Nobody can be against the concept of trade deals, but the benefits are minimal compared with what we have given away and what we could have negotiated better. My challenge to Ministers in this case is to own up. They have not done the work they should have done; politics and the need to gain political advantage by seeming to come up with rapid agreements have been put ahead of careful and skilful negotiation.

We need to get back to the fundamentals, because the way these two trade deals have been done cannot possibly be the template for the future. The real challenge is the fact that we need to do so much better in future. If this new grouping in the Department for International Trade are the Ministers we really want there, and are better than their predecessors, the question for them is why they cannot do better, because better they could have done, and better this nation of ours should demand.

6.2 pm

**Sarah Green** (Chesham and Amersham) (LD): It is a shame that this is not the substantive debate, culminating in a vote on a substantive motion, that many have called for, because in the recommendations made and questions posed so far in this debate, hon. Members on both sides of the House have demonstrated the value of proper parliamentary scrutiny of major treaties.

According to the impact assessment of the New Zealand deal, it will have a limited but positive impact on the UK's economy. Understandably, businesses are keen to capitalise on the new opportunities. The Federation of Small Businesses is right to say that for our small exporters—and those wishing to start exporting—to take full advantage of new opportunities, the Government must ensure they are supported with the practical changes that will allow them to succeed. I therefore welcome the Government's commitment to provide "practical advice and support" and dedicated websites for small businesses.

I would, however, like to ask for more detail about the nature of that support. Adapting to changes in exporting to the EU post Brexit is an issue that several local small business owners in Chesham and Amersham have raised with me. They have pointed directly to the inadequacy of Government support services, with one local business telling me at length how it understood the system better than the so-called experts advising it. I hope lessons have been learned and that the support on offer in relation to these new agreements will be of higher quality than previous efforts.

The impact assessment of the New Zealand deal states that the marginal net gains come at the price of a reallocation of resources away from agriculture, forestry, fishing and semi-processed foods. Of course it is unrealistic to expect that every sector will be a winner in every trade agreement, but it is important that we pay attention to those who will not benefit and will potentially even lose out, so that we can support them and the communities that rely on them.

In order to do so, I support the International Trade Committee's call for the Government to alter their economic modelling to provide a more detailed assessment of how deals will impact different sectors of our economy and the diverse regions and nations that make up the United Kingdom. In Wales, for example, the trade deals with Australia and New Zealand may have a devastating impact on its world-class lamb industry. The impact would not be limited to the industry itself, but would also affect the communities underpinned by the lamb industry, including many Welsh-speaking communities.

Indeed, if we are to judge UK trade policy by the two new agreements we have signed so far, it appears that farmers are set to lose out the most. The National Farmers Union warned us that the Australia deal set a "dangerous precedent" for future free trade agreements as far as farming is concerned. The New Zealand deal only furthers those concerns: with the cost of producing lamb 63% lower in New Zealand than in the UK, it is little wonder that our Welsh lamb farmers are concerned about this agreement and the tariffs it eliminates. Taken together, the impact of both deals on UK farmers, who already face rising production and labour costs, will be stark.

[Sarah Green]

One way the Government could provide reassurance is by outlining an overarching trade strategy, as the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) said. Agreements do not exist in a vacuum and nor do their impacts. A clear, overarching trade policy should include a vision of the opportunities that new UK trade deals will bring to all sectors and regions of the country. It must outline our economic ambitions while also including minimum standards on human rights as well as environmental, labour and safety standards.

Importantly, that strategy must also act as a guide for negotiators, setting out a clear benchmark for success in negotiations. We cannot continue selling out entire industries for marginal overall economic gain, nor should we continue negotiating agreements in the absence of a strategic goal, and we must not allow agreements to come into effect in the absence of proper parliamentary scrutiny.

6.7 pm

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): The first thing to say about international trade deals nowadays is that they are not just trade deals. They are comprehensive agreements on how countries will co-operate and how they will grow together. They are dynamic deals that will set the future course of the respective countries. They are, of course, very similar to the deals we had with the European Union in many respects, but with less scrutiny, less oversight and less public participation.

That can be more acutely demonstrated when we compare these trade deals with the deals the European Union is busy getting on with now. We can see that the European Union's deal is much more advantageous to the European side than this deal is to our side. Why is that?

**Anthony Mangnall:** Speak up for this country!

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** My colleague on the International Trade Committee says I should speak up for this country, as if I should be some ambassador for the Government, ignore how they are running down this country and only talk about the good things. I am afraid that is not the role of the Opposition and of Opposition parties. What we do is lay out how we would benefit our country if we were in power, and what we would do better for our country where the Government have failed.

Let us talk about things that could have been included in this deal, but were missed—first, food standards. In this deal, animal and food standards are frozen in Australia, because this deal gives Australian producers a competitive advantage. While they will not go backwards, why on earth should they desire to improve their standards above ours? That gives them no advantage. Rather than saying, “We will slowly reduce barriers as you meet the standards that we are getting to,” it says, “You have absolute access to our markets, and don't worry, you don't need to change your standards either”—that is, apart from some wishy-washy wording about some long-term desire; mañana, mañana. We all know what those clauses mean: nothing. The only thing that matters is hard trade law, hard tariffs and quotas, and on that, we have been let down.

In fact, when we asked the Australian negotiating teams what they thought of this, they said, “All our red lines were met; we compromised on almost nothing. It is a fantastic deal.” Well, yes, it is a fantastic deal for Australia. If one side has all of its red lines met and the other does not, it is clear who the winners and losers are.

We could have gone further on free movement of people. The extension of our current visa arrangements for the free movement of students from two years to three years is pretty pathetic. Free movement should be afforded to countries that are of a similar economic situation to us—that is why we had free movement with Europe—and that have similar flows. We have similar numbers of people going to Australia and of Australians coming to us. The expansion by only one year is pretty pathetic and will not make much difference for most young people, who already had the right to two years and could extend it in Australia if they worked on a farm. It is pretty miserable and unambitious.

The same can be said for climate change. In the Australia deal, the wording is weaker than, and does not go beyond, the Paris agreement. Australia is a country of similar economic and legal profile, and it now even has a Labour Government—unlike us, but not for much longer, I hope—so why can we not negotiate something better? The clauses on climate change are the kinds of things that we would expect from negotiations with countries that are much harder to negotiate with, such as China or India—countries that are much more problematic on climate change.

**Drew Hendry:** The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful point about climate change. Does he not find it incredible that all the concerns that might have been raised about climate change and the Paris agreement were scrubbed in the haste to get the Australia deal through so the Government could meet some arbitrary deadline?

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Exactly. I must wrap up—[*Interruption.*] Oh, I will continue, then. I thought you were giving me the eye, Madam Deputy Speaker.

That is exactly the problem. If we have higher climate change standards, workers' rights or environmental standards, and we have free trade with another country that has lower standards, all we are doing is exporting British jobs, opening the door and saying to companies, “Don't worry about our climate change rules, our carbon trading or the standards we expect you to meet. Go and set up your companies in that other country, and we will still import all the goods and services.” That is an unemployment note for British workers, and the Government are signing it constantly, with country after country, because they are obsessed with getting deals over the line rather than with the quality of those deals.

**Tony Lloyd:** The environment chapter ought to have been capable of actually changing the climate change debate in Australia, so it is disappointing that it has, quite frankly, no teeth whatever. What does that say to countries with which we might want to negotiate to stop deforestation, mining coal and so on?

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Exactly. Australia is a deep friend of ours. I spent hours outside the Australian embassy for the last elections, canvassing and campaigning

for the Australian Labour party, which is now in government—although I do not think that success is all down to me. I regularly meet our counterparts in the Australian Labour party, and I am proud to say that not only are they friends, but my senior researcher is from that party and now works for me. There are strong links between our systems and our people. If, with friends, we cannot negotiate a deal that has teeth on environment and climate, we have no hope whatever when dealing with much more difficult countries.

This is partly because of the Government's refusal to have proper parliamentary scrutiny. First, there was no need for them to trigger CRaG, because the agreement cannot be put in place until we have passed the enacting legislation, which has not even come back for Third Reading. The Government forcing through CRaG without parliamentary scrutiny was just arrogance on the part of Ministers and the Government—there was no other reason for it. They show the same arrogance to the International Trade Committee, which, time and again, they refuse to come and speak to. I cannot ascertain whether it is the arrogance of Ministers or the arrogance of senior civil servants—maybe it is a bit of both—but it is clear that the Department for International Trade has shown in this process that it is not fit for purpose and needs a real overhaul.

I am quite in favour of some of the ideas that the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) set out. We should have a Department of trade, of foreign negotiations, or probably of foreign affairs—a Foreign and Commonwealth Office, one might say—that co-ordinates expertise in other Departments, such as the former Department for International Development. I was in DFID negotiations on the environment and on the Rio process year in, year out, all through our European period, and our colleagues in DFID led many of the discussions on the oceans and biodiversity. It had real expertise in those negotiations. We should have been using it. We have failed in the environmental chapters of this agreement because we did not leverage the fantastic negotiators as well enough as we have in other Departments.

The right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth was also right to say that proper scrutiny in this place can help the Government's hand. I remember when I was a trade unionist, and we would want our members to lay out strong, hard lines to us so that when we went into negotiations with the employer, we were able to say, "Look, I am the reasonable one here—I am trying to get to an agreement—but my members are livid; they are angry; they are fuming. You need to give me a bit more so we can strike this deal and avoid any action." It is the same process in trade deals, but the Government's refusal to use us means that they have sold this deal short.

Finally, I will touch on procurement. In the Trade (Australia and New Zealand) Bill Committee, we heard that some of the wording on procurement puts British companies in a worse position than they are currently, and I will briefly explain why. There is already a global agreement on procurement under which British companies already have the right to bid for procurement contracts in Australia. Those agreements require that if a company has worked up a credible bid that is then rejected, the company can claim certain costs. This trade agreement excludes those particular words. Of course, a company

will probably go to the Australian courts or to our courts, where they will be able to argue their case, but the insecurity of different wording in different agreements now means that although a French company would have a 100% cast-iron guarantee of protection, because it is part of the same global agreement on procurement, a British company would be insecure in that protection.

In some areas, the agreement not only falls short of what we want, but actively sells our country short. That is why the agreement is such a shame; that is why we should have gone further; and that is why, if we had had earlier debates, none of this mess from the bungling lot on the Government Benches would have happened.

6.19 pm

**Richard Foord** (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): Farmers across the UK, but particularly in my part of Devon, are deeply concerned by how the Government have approached these new trade deals. Let us cast our minds back to 2016, when we were told that a veritable land of milk and honey awaited us and that new trade deals would be easy to sign. Since 2016, the Government have signed a number of trade deals, but let us look at the detail of that apparent success. Almost all those deals have been roll-overs aiming to maintain the terms we already had. Only four of the trade deals are new, including the Australia and New Zealand deals that we are discussing today—hardly the boom in export trade we were promised.

The Government's approach during negotiations with Australia and New Zealand seems to have been to sell out British farmers left and right—and then some—to try to clinch a deal. These trade deals are more about attempting to garner positive headlines than supporting our world-leading agriculture and fishing industries. Both deals will see farmers across the west country undercut as produce made to lower standards will be allowed to flow into the UK.

The Government claim they will not water down our food and animal welfare standards—and on paper they may well not—but where does that leave farmers in reality? It will be almost impossible for our farmers to continue to compete on such an unequal playing field, particularly given the increased costs that are making everyone cut back. It is frankly ludicrous to suggest that UK farmers will benefit from these deals when they tie not one, but two hands behind their backs. Add to that the Government's botched implementation of the payments with the new environmental land management scheme, which is already pushing many farmers to the brink with cuts to the basic payments, and we have a recipe for disaster for our farmers.

The upside in exchange for all this pain and misery set to be inflicted on rural communities by both these trade deals is a whopping 0.11% increase to our GDP. That is a drop in the ocean compared with the turmoil it will cause here at home. Many farmers across Devon are already struggling to make ends meet, yet with these deals, this Conservative Government have shown that they either do not get it, or simply do not care. More than 64,000 people across the south-west work in agriculture, and many are seeing their future put at risk owing to botched trade deals such as this. The New Zealand free trade agreement gives the opportunity for tariff-free import volumes to rise to 165,000 tonnes by year 15.

[Richard Foord]

That, combined with 125,000 tonnes from Australia, is almost the entire volume of lamb consumed annually in Britain. As the chief executive of the National Sheep Association said earlier this year,

“neither does it win on our aspiration for high standards, climate change targets, or reliable food security.”

Farmers across my part of the world will never forgive this Government if they continue down this deeply destructive path. As mentioned by Members previously, this debate today is not even a full debate. We are not discussing a substantive motion, as requested by the International Trade Committee, so everything we say here will not prevent the Government barrelling ahead with these plans anyway. We must ensure that this House and its Members have the final say on the trade deals we are discussing, and we must ensure that our aim is always to negotiate deals that protect and support UK farming and fishing, rather than bartering away those arrangements.

6.23 pm

**Gareth Thomas** (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): After a decade of economic mismanagement, with the chaos at the top of the Conservative party and the kamikaze Budget backed so enthusiastically by so many Government Members, and with so many entrepreneurs worried for the future of their businesses, millions facing rising energy bills, weekly shops shooting up in price and rocketing mortgage costs, it was striking that there was not one word of apology in the opening speech from the Minister on the Front Bench, the right hon. Member for Chelsea and Fulham (Greg Hands).

This has none the less been a fascinating debate, not least for the contribution of the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), who made a powerful and devastating speech that blew away the bluster and complacency that has characterised Ministers’ descriptions of the benefits of the Australia free trade agreement. He said that it was

“not actually a very good deal for the UK”,

and that Ministers had given away

“far too much for far too little”.

He underlined those criticisms by going on to point out that unless we recognise the failures of the Department for International Trade, we will not learn the lessons necessary for negotiations with other countries over other free trade agreements, such as, importantly, the CPTPP accession discussions. He rightly noted, as many others did—I will come back to the contributions of others—the weaknesses of the scrutiny process and crucially how it weakens the hand of British negotiators, which is a point we made during the passage of the Trade Bill back in 2020.

We on the Opposition Benches will table amendments on Report of the Trade (Australia and New Zealand) Bill to reflect some of those concerns and to give the House the opportunity to begin to put right some of the weaknesses in the CRaG process.

**George Eustice:** In my contribution, I also pointed out that article 32.8 was a very strong clause in the agreement. It gives any British Government the unbridled right to terminate and renegotiate this agreement at any

future point. Can the hon. Member say whether it is his party’s position to trigger article 32.8 and renegotiate the agreement?

**Gareth Thomas:** We will always want to get a better deal and to seek better trading links between our country and Australia, and I will come on to that point a little further on in my speech.

Let me reiterate that this debate is happening only because all sides of the House have voiced consistent frustration with the failure to have proper scrutiny of the Australia free trade agreement in particular. That point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd), my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (John Spellar) and my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle), as well as by the hon. Members for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall), for Chesham and Amersham (Sarah Green) and for Tiverton and Honiton (Richard Foord).

Back in 2020, the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Chelsea and Fulham, who is not in his place, effectively said “Watch my lips” in the Trade Bill Committee as he opposed more robust scrutiny rules. His approach was one of effectively saying, “You can trust us to give Parliament proper opportunities for scrutiny.” Not surprisingly, his assurances quickly turned to dust. The previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Anne-Marie Trevelyan), ducked scrutiny by the International Trade Committee eight separate times. The Government, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) set out in his opening remarks, triggered the scrutiny period of 21 sitting days for the Australia FTA before the International Trade Committee had even had the chance to publish its assessment, and despite Ministers regularly assuring us that this would not happen.

We know, too, that the last Secretary of State was not alone in wanting to avoid tough questions. The architect of the deal, the right hon. Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss), cancelled meetings with farmers during her leadership campaign to avoid feeling their wrath about the deal she had negotiated. Let me reiterate that we support increasing trade with Australia and New Zealand. With two progressive Labour Governments, who would not want to support stronger ties with both? They are crucial allies and our ties have always been deep. We share security interests, and our culture and values are similar—enhancing our partnerships with both is only to be welcomed.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley underlined, free trade agreements carefully negotiated can open up new opportunities for British business, creating jobs for our constituents and generating vital tax revenues to fund our public services. Well-negotiated FTAs open new routes for supply chains, create better access to crucial raw materials and encourage innovation, but they are not zero-sum games. Time after time, Ministers have failed to be open and honest about which parts of the economy will benefit under their negotiating priorities and which will not.

Under the previous Labour government, trade grew by 10% and exports almost doubled. After 12 years of the Conservatives, trade has grown by just 3% and growth in UK exports is lagging behind virtually every other major nation. We and, given the widespread concern,

the country expected better than Ministers delivered on these FTAs. Ministers do not get a free pass. These deals have gradually exposed a Department for International Trade whose Ministers have lost sight of what is best for Britain.

Exports are fundamental to delivering economic growth and the good jobs that are crucial to tackling the cost of living crisis, yet Ministers pushed through cuts to business groups that support British exporters and prioritised Instagram photos on trade missions over meeting British businesses. We on the Opposition Benches hear time and again the frustration of British businesses, which note the greater help that other Governments give their businesses to export—a point that the former Exports Minister, the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer), made this summer. During the recent evidence sessions of the Trade (Australia and New Zealand) Bill Committee, business bodies repeatedly raised their concerns. To underline those concerns, figures for Germany, one of our biggest export markets, from January to September this year, compared with the same period in 2019, show a 27% increase in US exports to Germany, a 23% increase in EU exports, and just a 2% increase in British exports.

Instead of addressing those concerns and others about the FTAs, Ministers were busy attacking each other. Even for a Conservative party as disunited as this one, it was a new low when the previous Secretary of State for International Trade toured the TV studios accusing the then Minister of State for International Trade, the right hon. Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt), of being lazy and not up to the job. We can only hope that the new ministerial team is willing to learn lessons from how these recent trade deals have been negotiated.

I have to say, however, that the opening speech was not encouraging. It was a speech that Arthur Daley would have been proud of at his best. Apparently the greatest deal in Britain's trading history has been secured against all the odds, yet the reality is that the New Zealand FTA will increase our GDP by just 0.03% and the Australian one by just 0.08%. Given the Conservative Government's disastrous handling of the economy, any help to improve our chances of economic growth is welcome. In particular, progress on digital trade, locking in customs and trade facilitation arrangements that minimise paperwork and the somewhat easier rules of origin for manufacturing goods, notably car parts, are welcome.

The sad truth, however, is that in the rush to get a deal—any deal—signed with Australia, Ministers did not push crucial British interests. Once again, the interests of the Conservative party took priority over the needs of the British people. The National Farmers Union said that the deal does “little for farmers” and

“simply opens up UK markets for Australian produce, whether or not produced to the same standards that are legally required of UK farmers”,

and that

“the UK government has missed the opportunity to reach a genuinely innovative and world-class FTA with Australia”.

The huge giveaway to Australian farmers led Australian negotiators to boast of their success. It is as if Ministers have turned their backs on rural communities and decided that farmers did not matter in these negotiations. There is little on labour rights, even less on human rights and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen, the

hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey and others have pointed out, little on climate change.

The Opposition have been struggling to find things to praise the new Prime Minister for. After all, his is far from an impressive record: billions of pounds-worth of fraud on his watch as Chancellor, and huge tax rises and cuts to public services coming. However, his argument that the Australia deal was one-sided might briefly risk some consensus across the House.

There were other points of detail that Ministers did not bother to prioritise getting right. There is nothing substantive on securing protection for great British brands such as Whitstable oysters, Scotch whisky and Cornish pasties. On steel, the rules of origin that Ministers agreed mean that unlike most modern FTAs, Britain cannot import semi-finished project, roll it in the UK and export it tariff-free to Australia, making it harder for steel made in Britain to be sold to Australia. All the while, there are no similar restrictions on Australian steel entering our markets.

As we heard from the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth and many other Members across the House, this deal could have been much better and Ministers need to learn the lessons from these FTA negotiations.

6.34 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Andrew Bowie):** It is a pleasure to have had the opportunity to listen to this debate, to contribute to it and, indeed, to close it on behalf of the Government, especially as I am doing so as the first Scottish Conservative Minister outside the Scotland Office for some 25 years, since the noble Lord Lang of Monkton, who served as Secretary of State for Trade in John Major's Government.

May I start by thanking all Members for their contributions? It is clear from today's on the whole positive debate that, on the whole, Members agree that the UK's trading relationships with Australia and New Zealand are good for this country and for the world. In particular, the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar) was right: trade has enabled the development of civilisation and human progress, and we need to make the case for it much more strongly. As the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sarah Green) said, the trade deals that we are debating will bring positive benefits to our respective countries and economies. We also heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford), who is a walking example of the positive benefits that antipodean trade can bring to this country.

The agreements will remove tariffs, make it easier for British businesses to invest in Australia and New Zealand and deliver growth to every part of our country. They will also address trade barriers faced by small and medium-sized enterprises, such as lengthy costs and procedures, and allow our citizens to work more freely in both countries, thanks to new environmental commitments for businesses and travel. In short, the deals provide real benefits to real businesses and our respective countries at large.

Before I address the points about scrutiny and environmental protections on which most of the contributions have been focused, let me turn to the

[Andrew Bowie]

contribution by my friend on the Scottish National party Benches, the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry). Time and again, SNP Members turn up to debates on trade deals and ask questions in the Chamber and elsewhere, professing to be friends of Scotland's farmers and to be standing up for Scottish agriculture as champions of rural Scotland. There is just one problem: the record shows that, sadly, contrary to the rhetoric, the SNP are no friends of rural Scotland and Scotland's farmers.

**Drew Hendry:** Is the Minister able to name one single amendment that the Government have accepted from the SNP on any trade deal?

**Andrew Bowie:** I would like, instead, to run through how the SNP are failing Scotland's farmers, given how strongly the hon. Gentleman professes to be championing them. If they were friends of Scotland's farmers, they would have voted with us, as the National Farmers Union of Scotland wanted them to do, on the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Bill. If they were true friends of Scottish farmers, they would have listened to the National Farmers Union of Scotland, which has accused the SNP Government of operating in an "information void" due to the lack of information and slow progress of Scotland's post-Brexit agriculture Bill. They say that they are friends of Scottish farmers, but when did the Scottish Government's own agriculture and rural development board last meet? It was 10 months ago. That is absolutely shameful.

In only the last two months, the SNP has been criticised by Scotland's rural bodies for having no plan for rural economic growth and no plan to support Scotland's pig farmers. Its policies threaten thousands of hectares of good agricultural land. Let us remember, too, that it would take Scotland's farmers back into the common agricultural policy. I suppose that without Westminster to blame, they would need to join the EU in order to have somebody to point the finger at.

**Drew Hendry:** Will the Minister give way?

**Andrew Bowie:** I will not.

The SNP are not champions for Scotland's farmers. They are political opportunists who think that they can still get away with professing one thing in this place and practising another in Scotland, tied as they are to their Luddite partners in Government, the Green party. The SNP is not pro-farming; it is anti-business, anti-growth and, as we know too well, anti-trade.

**Deidre Brock:** Could the Minister explain, in this middle of his diatribe, exactly what he will say to his constituents in his rural constituency about the contribution of the former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), which contained startling revelations that will not please them?

**Andrew Bowie:** In my 1,900 square mile rural constituency I have regular interactions with farmers—probably far more than the hon. Lady has in her Edinburgh North and Leith constituency. I will turn to the comments by the former EFRA Secretary in due course, but we will hear no more from the SNP on what is in the best interests of Scotland's farmers.

Our trade deals balance open and free trade with protections for our farmers. As I have said, I have immense respect for my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State for EFRA. I listened intently to his concerns about the trade deals, but I have to take issue with him and defend officials in the Department for International Trade, all of whom, without exception, are dedicated to bettering the trading relationships for this country. They all, without exception, have this country's best interests at heart and are working day and night for this country.

I also point out that Australian and New Zealand beef and lamb suppliers are already working hard to satisfy demand from the booming Asia-Pacific markets on their doorstep. New Zealand already has a significant volume of tariff-free access for lamb to the UK market, but used less than half that quota in 2020. None the less, our deals include a range of protections that collectively allow us to apply higher tariffs to protect UK farmers for up to 20 years.

**George Eustice:** The Minister is absolutely right that, at the moment, New Zealand uses only about half the tariff rate quota available to it. That being the case, why would it have been such a big deal to require an enduring TRQ of Australia and New Zealand that was generous but within a fixed envelope?

**Andrew Bowie:** My right hon. Friend has an incredible amount of experience in this field. I would be happy to take up the issue with him outside the Chamber following the debate.

Our deals include a range of protections that allow us to apply higher tariffs to protect UK farmers, including tariff rate quotas for a number of sensitive agricultural products; specific additional protective measures for beef and lamb products, which will provide further tariff protections to our farmers; and a general bilateral safeguard mechanism that will allow the UK to increase tariffs or suspend their liberalisation for up to four years in the unlikely situation that the farming industry faces serious loss from increased agricultural imports. On top of all that, there is still the option of global safeguards under the WTO.

I will now turn to the points raised about environmental, animal welfare and food standards. I stress that we will never compromise on these critical protections—

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** You have!

**Andrew Bowie:** No, we have not. That is why our trade deals include specific measures to uphold them.

Before I go on, I must quickly correct the record. Earlier, the Minister for Trade Policy, who unfortunately has a prior engagement in his constituency, said in response to an intervention from the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) that the climate change agreement in the deal was Australia's first. It is not; it is actually Australia's second. It also has an environmental chapter in its agreement to the CPTPP. In addition, the Trade and Agriculture Commission has separately confirmed that our free trade agreements do not require the UK to change our existing levels of statutory protection in relation to any areas.

I now briefly turn to scrutiny, which is incredibly important. Contrary to the description of the right hon. Member for Warley of the scrutiny process, and always remembering that CRaG was introduced by Labour,

the Government have made extensive commitments to support robust scrutiny of all new free trade agreements. These commitments greatly exceed our statutory requirements and we have met every single one.

I hear and understand the concerns of the hon. Member for Rochdale and I accept the challenge to go further and do better, but the Australian FTA was examined by Parliament for more than seven months and the scrutiny period featured reports from three Select Committees. I praise the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Anthony Mangnall) and it is sad that the Chair of the International Trade Committee, the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil), is not in attendance today.

**Drew Hendry:** It is important to make it clear that there have been substantial travel disruption and difficulties from Scotland today, so it is unfair to single out an hon. Member who has been hit by that.

**Andrew Bowie:** I thank the hon. Gentleman; I was about to reference the travel requirements. I was not blaming the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar for not coming, but it is sad. I am genuinely disappointed that he is not here to intervene on me at the Dispatch Box today.

By the end of the New Zealand CRaG period, hon. Members will have had the opportunity to examine the detail of the New Zealand deal for eight months. Of course, His Majesty's Government also welcome the fact that we have a debate on both trade deals today.

It has been a privilege to speak in today's debate. Our free trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand are game-changing deals. They demonstrate that the UK is a confident, outward-looking, free-trading country that is ready to grab the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century, and that we are a nation that is using the power of free trade to the benefit of great British businesses and the wider world—and as the right hon. Member for Warley said, to the benefit of all our people.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the Australia and New Zealand Trade deals.

**Taiwo Owatemi** (Coventry North West) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. In September, I raised the case of my constituent Simon Hagos in the House. The then Minister, the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), assured me that the visas of Simon's wife and child would be expedited, following the Home Office incorrectly applying its own rules. That has not happened. Separately, later that month, I wrote to the Home Secretary about my constituent Said, who remains stuck in Pakistan against his will in perilous circumstances. The Home Office has ignored my repeated efforts to get help for my constituent and I am yet to receive a substantial response.

Madam Deputy Speaker, can you advise me on how I can resolve this serious problem where Ministers make commitments in the House and fail to deliver on them? What tools can I use to get a response from a Minister about an urgent and potentially life-threatening case?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for having given notice of her point of order. As Mr Speaker has said many times, the occupant of the Chair is not responsible for answers given by Ministers. Nevertheless, as Mr Speaker has also said many times, Ministers should follow through on commitments that they make in this House and should respond to correspondence in a timely way, especially when the matters raised are urgent. It would appear that the matters she has raised do have some urgency.

The hon. Lady asks how she can draw her concerns to the attention of Ministers and I think she has just done so by putting her points on the record. I am sure that Ministers on the Treasury Bench will have heard her, and I trust that messages will be passed to the responsible Ministers and that a speedy response will now be provided to her. I am sure that she will continue to pursue the matter. I have every confidence that the Clerks in the Table Office will be able to give her advice on how to do that if she has any doubt.

## Ukraine

6.47 pm

**The Minister for Armed Forces (James Heappey):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the situation in Ukraine.

We are now coming towards the end of day 264 of Putin's illegal, unprovoked and premeditated war on a sovereign nation, so it is worth taking the opportunity provided by this debate to step back and reflect on the devastation that Russia has wrought on that country. Tens of thousands of innocent civilians are now dead or injured. Thousands of schools, hospitals and businesses have been destroyed, while millions of acres of forest have been wiped out. Some 17.7 million people have been assessed as requiring humanitarian help and Ukraine has 7 million internally displaced people. There are a further 7.7 million refugees in Europe—the largest movement of refugees since world war two—some 90% of whom are women and children.

**Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab):** I thank the Minister for giving way so early in his speech. My constituent offered to host a Ukrainian family under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, so it is unacceptable that, three months later, that Ukrainian family are still in Turkey waiting to have their application processed by the Home Office. Will he speak to his colleagues in the Home Office about looking at that case? I am sure that is not the only one in which the Home Office is taking a long time to process refugees' applications—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** Order. That is a very long intervention. If the hon. Lady wants to make a speech, she has every opportunity to do so.

**James Heappey:** In my experience, applications from constituents have been dealt with—after an initial run of concern—reasonably well. The hon. Lady has raised the point, however, and I will make sure to draw the attention of Home Office Ministers to the record of this debate, so that they can get in touch to discuss whatever concerns she has on behalf of her constituents.

Since the start of the invasion, Russia has shown scant regard for human life, but since 31 October, it has sought to deliberately target civilians. Let us be clear: there is no military purpose in launching missile strikes at hydroelectric dams or in targeting the six-reactor civilian Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, which is the largest of its kind in Europe. Indeed, this latest escalation has only had a minor military effect. The reality is that such attacks are only a further illustration of Russian weakness. We know that its forces are being pushed back, we know it has lost more than 25,000 soldiers, with many more injured, and we know its capability is vanishing fast, with almost 3,000 tanks, 4,000 smaller vehicles and more than 5,500 armed troop carriers wiped out.

**Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con):** I totally agree that, from a military point of view, hitting electricity and water, apart from being incredibly illegal, is rather pointless. Does the Minister, however, accept that this is part of Russia's two-pronged strategy? On the one hand, it is now trying—Surovikin is trying—to develop a defensible

line, hence the withdrawal from Kherson, which is not actually particularly militarily significant, and on the other hand, it is trying to destroy Ukrainian will by effectively interrupting supplies of water and electricity. That is, therefore, an important political strategy that it is trying to develop.

**James Heappey:** I agree very much with my hon. Friend. He thinks deeply about these things and he understands well how to assimilate the intelligence that is reported in the media. He is right: there is little military benefit in that strategy. The withdrawal from Kherson, while significant for the Ukrainians, and I will come back to that later, is a consolidation on to a more defensible position by Surovikin. My hon. Friend is also right to say that there is an attempt, through the targeting of civilian infrastructure, to break the Ukrainian will to fight, but I think the whole House will agree that we have seen nothing to suggest that the Ukrainian will can be broken. No matter what Putin tries, the Ukrainian people will continue to stand behind their armed forces and Europe will continue to stand behind Ukraine.

Indeed, so disastrous has been the Russian military effort so far that President Putin must now rely on one of his few remaining international friends and call in from the Iranians Shahed drones. That is further proof that Russia's own defence industrial complex is suffering badly from the sanctions imposed by the international community. Its forces are being attrited to the point where they no longer have the capacity to operate successfully from within their own inventory, so these imports from Iran become necessary. President Putin hopes to break the spirit of the Ukrainian people, but he will fail. Throughout this invasion, the Ukrainian people have shown remarkable resolve.

**Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab):** On the increasing targeting by Putin of civilian infrastructure, including heating systems, when I was recently in Kyiv with other Members, this was talked about by Ukrainian parliamentarians. Could the Minister expand on the effort by the UK to show our support by providing those heating systems, which will be needed because of the targeting of civilian infrastructure?

**James Heappey:** Sometimes interventions take us in a direction we do not want to go, but the hon. Lady could almost see my notes and that is exactly where we go next.

That is why, in addition to providing Ukraine with vital weapons capabilities, the UK has committed £22 million to support Ukraine's energy sector. That includes a £10 million fund for emergency infrastructure repairs and to reconnect households to power. It also includes £7 million for more than 850 generators, which is enough to power the equivalent of about 8,000 homes and will support essential services, including relief centres, hospitals, phone masts and water pumping stations. Approximately 320 have been delivered to Ukraine so far, with the rest to be delivered over the coming weeks and months. Finally, that funding provides a further £5 million for civil nuclear safety and security equipment. The attacks on the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant continue to be a cause for major concern. We support the calls of the International Atomic Energy Agency for a nuclear safety and security protection zone around the plant, including its reactors, nuclear waste, spent fuel pools, and energy and cooling systems. The shelling and military activities near the plant must end.



Of course, there are wider ramifications to Putin's brutal incursion. His decision to use food as a weapon of war has had a global impact, exacerbating economic fragility and food insecurity. Ukraine was one of the world's largest exporters of grain, meeting the needs of hundreds of millions of people. At least 25 African countries import a third of their wheat from Russia and Ukraine. All this underlines the significance of maintaining the Black sea grain deal initiative. Since 1 August, it has ensured ships laden with grain have safe passage through the maritime corridor to the ports of Odesa, Chornomorsk and Pivdennyi. Several weeks ago, Russia capriciously pulled out of the agreement, citing so-called concerns over the safety of ships in the Black sea. I am glad that Russia has now seen sense and resumed its participation in the joint co-ordination centre. I want, in particular, to applaud Turkey and the United Nations Secretary-General for their efforts in brokering that agreement and ensuring its implementation.

**Mr Jonathan Djanogly** (Huntingdon) (Con): Can the responsibility for the grain getting through actually be put down to Turkey's efforts? Is Turkey still going to be helping us and standing firm on that very important issue?

**James Heapey:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right and I believe he may have been on the ground recently to have some of these discussions himself. Turkey is indispensable to the negotiations that need to be conducted to keep grain flowing, and we are very grateful to it for the role it is playing.

As temperatures drop, Putin apparently believes he can chip away at western resolve by forcing up food and energy prices. Our task is to prove him wrong. There are signs that, far from weakening the mood of the international community, it is hardening. Back in March, 141 states condemned Russia at the UN General Assembly; at last month's UNGA, that number rose to 143, or three quarters of the entire UN. Russia's four supporters were Syria, Belarus, Nicaragua and North Korea—with friends like that, Madam Deputy Speaker. The reality for Russians is that they have become pariahs, isolated from the community of nations and unable even to be elected to UN bodies such as the Committee on Non-Governmental Organisations, UN Women and UNICEF boards.

**Catherine McKinnell** (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): I absolutely agree that, as the winter sets in, there are clearly some additional challenges presented. One of those will inevitably be holding together our western unity in the face of rising inflation and a very challenging energy situation. Will the Government comment on what steps they are taking to ensure that the UK does its part, but we manage to stand side by side with NATO allies and other western allies?

**James Heapey:** There are two answers to the hon. Lady's intervention. The first is that the UK, like Governments across Europe, is making a significant intervention to help its citizens with the cost of living. But no matter what Governments in the UK and elsewhere are doing, one should not ignore the fact that millions—hundreds of millions—of people across Europe are grudgingly accepting the increase in their cost of living because they know how important it is to do the right thing and to stand up to the Putin, and that to allow our will to collapse at this point would be to betray the

Ukrainian people and hand Putin the territorial gains he has made so far. The second answer to her excellent intervention is that Putin himself keeps reinvigorating the western alliance. Every time we would think the cost of living pressures or the threat of a nuclear escalation, for example, might cause people to waver, he does something atrocious or his forces do something atrocious that quickly re-emboldens the western alliance and strengthens western public resolve to keep pushing on.

Maintaining the international consensus is vital, and that consensus starts with a recognition of what should be a universal truth: Ukraine has the right to robust self-defence when faced with aggression from another state. Russia's attempts to change Ukraine's borders by force are unacceptable and an egregious breach of the UN charter. Its offers of renewed negotiations are not made in good faith. Indeed, Putin has made it clear that any negotiations will not include those territories he continues to annex illegally. That is why, when the Prime Minister spoke to President Zelensky on his first day in office, he assured him and his people of our continued diplomatic, military and economic support. Together with our partners, we are determined to provide enduring diplomatic, military and economic support so that Ukraine is in the strongest possible position to deliver a sustainable and just peace through a negotiated settlement when the Ukrainian Government choose.

As we enter the long winter the western alliance must continue to hold its nerve. Ukraine remains in the ascendancy as it continues pressing on two axes of advance. It has been putting pressure on Russian defensive positions in the Luhansk oblast and has increasingly threatened Russia's supply and communication routes in the area. Further south, in the Kherson oblast, Ukraine has applied continuous pressure to Russian forces and has carried out strikes on logistics hubs and bridges. Last Wednesday in occupied Kherson, Defence Minister Shoigu ordered his troops to withdraw from the west bank of the Dnipro river in the face of Ukrainian tanks. Kherson city was the only regional capital captured by Russia since the invasion; it is now back in Ukrainian hands. No matter what we may rightly say about the military sense in such a withdrawal, one should not underestimate nor diminish the incredible success of the Ukrainian armed forces in pushing the Russians to need to withdraw in the first place.

But that success in Kherson is only the start of a very long and hard winter. Cold and wet weather will make fighting harder, but as the going gets tough the UK will continue doing all we can to give the Ukrainians what they need. With temperatures likely to sink as low as minus 20°C, we have responded to Ukrainian requests for more cold weather equipment. Last week the Prime Minister announced that Ukrainian recruits leaving the UK will be kitted out for the extreme cold. We are also providing 25,000 sets of extreme cold weather clothing, 20,000 heavy duty sleeping bags and 150 insulated tents to prevent cold-related injuries and ensure troops can operate effectively and efficiently. Other European allies are doing likewise, and all of that—that care for the Ukrainian armed forces as they face the bleak midwinter—is in stark contrast to what the Russians are providing their troops with. I dread to think what Russian families would think if they were to see inside their son's, husband's, boyfriend's or father's rucksacks.

**Liam Byrne** (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): The Minister is right that the capture of Kherson is potentially a turning point for the Ukrainian forces, not least because with longer range missiles supplied to them it might be possible to hit Russian navy targets in the Black sea and therefore begin to eliminate the possibility of Russia using its navy to fire Kalibr cruise missiles into Ukraine against the infrastructure the Minister talked about at the beginning of his speech. Is it now time for us to revisit the supply of longer-range missiles, which we ruled out at the beginning of the conflict?

**James Heapey:** We keep all these things under review, and each time President Putin has ordered an escalation within Ukraine we have looked at what we can do to strengthen Ukrainian capabilities. The reality is that the gains Ukraine has made down towards Kherson have brought the ground lines of communication into Crimea into the range of guided multiple launch rocket systems and high mobility artillery rocket systems. Arguably those ground lines of communication are militarily an equally valuable target set to Crimea itself, if perhaps not quite as provocative—although of course the Ukrainians reserve the right to set their targets, and, as we have seen in recent months, they have done as they need on occasion, and very successfully, too.

We are the largest European provider of military matériel in Ukraine and have to date provided equipment to allow Ukraine to fight back against attacks on sea and land and in the air. The UK has provided a variety of air defence systems including Stormer vehicles fitted with Starstreak launchers and hundreds of missiles. Those are helping to protect Ukraine's critical national infrastructure, including its power plants. Last week my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary announced the provision of almost 1,000 surface to air missiles to help counter the Russian threat to Ukrainian infrastructure. We continue to engage with partners all over the world, looking to buy up whatever supplies we can find of the weapons systems the Ukrainians need most, principally for air defence.

We must think of more than just the here and now, however. One day this war will end and Ukraine will need to be rebuilt: its power and roads restored, bridges re-established, and schools, houses and hospitals repaired. The Kyiv School of Economics puts the cost of direct damage to buildings and infrastructure at some \$127 billion already, so the UK is also providing support for Ukraine's early recovery through the partnership fund for a resilient Ukraine, a £37 million multi-donor fund that the UK belongs to. Through this fund the UK, alongside other countries, has already provided extensive support for the repair of buildings as well as other activities in the Kyiv oblast and other parts of Ukraine. UK Export Finance has committed £3.5 billion of cover to Ukraine for priority projects across the infrastructure, healthcare, clean energy and security sectors, and the UK is supporting the HALO Trust, which so far has de-mined over 16,000 square miles of land in Kyiv oblast so that people will be able to return safely to their homes, agricultural land and businesses.<sup>1</sup> Next year the UK will host the 2023 reconstruction conference to accelerate Ukraine's recovery from the damage caused by Russia's invasion.

The war Russia began has now lasted the best part of a year. Despite overwhelming odds, Ukraine has shown remarkable resilience, and I am proud the UK has

played a major role in helping Ukrainians push back the invaders. As we prepare for the difficult months to come, our resolve will remain unwavering. President Putin has exacted a terrible toll on Ukraine, but he continues to make the wrong calls: far from being ground down, today Ukrainian forces are better equipped and better trained and have better morale. They will win and Putin will lose, and when he does the UK will be there, as we have been there throughout this conflict, to help Ukraine repair, rebuild and renew.

I just conclude by reflecting that thousands of men and women from the British armed forces have been involved in the support of Ukraine over the course of the last year. They have been working phenomenally hard, often in roles that do not catch the public eye. We are very grateful for everything they have done and the sacrifices their families have made in supporting them.

7.6 pm

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): Before I make my remarks, I would like to pay tribute to our armed forces and veterans who came together on Remembrance Day yesterday. I was on Plymouth Hoe yesterday morning, but wherever we were we saw a nation pause, thank those who served and remember those who did not come back and those who were forever changed by war and conflict.

We are now on day 264 of Vladimir Putin's criminal invasion of Ukraine, and with each day it becomes clearer that he is failing in this misguided war. Putin has not achieved his objectives: indeed, he has strengthened the western alliance, and with each of his decisions he further strengthens our resolve.

The Ukrainian liberation of Kherson, a region Russia had illegally occupied for more than eight months, is a testament to the skill, bravery and fortitude of the Ukrainian military and is a significant blow to the Kremlin. The Ukrainian advance comes only weeks after a ceremony in Moscow in which Putin announced the "forever" annexation of Kherson along with the Russian-occupied areas of Donetsk, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia.

Russia's retreat from Kherson is a significant moment in the war, and the withdrawal shines a light on how badly the invasion is going for Putin. He has already forcibly enlisted more than 200,000 new recruits into the Russian army, and with around 100,000 Russian soldiers having been killed or wounded since the war began in February, the casualty rate of poorly trained, poorly equipped troops with low morale remains catastrophic. Body bags and burnt-out tanks are all Putin can offer his people.

As the Ukrainians continue to show incredible resilience in defending their homeland, we must continue to do all we can to support Ukraine both now and in the months ahead. The Minister will know that we on this side of the House fully support the help the Government are providing to our friends in Ukraine, and I want to put on record our thanks to the United Kingdom's armed forces not only for their work supporting Ukraine and co-ordinating supplies of military aid and humanitarian support, but for reinforcing our allies on NATO's eastern flank and training Ukrainian troops here in Britain through Operation Interflex.

On Britain's military help to Ukraine, the Government have had, and will continue to have, our fullest support. We welcome last week's announcement on the provision

1.[Official Report, 17 November 2022, Vol. 722, c. 6MC.]

of further surface to air missiles to Ukrainian forces and welcome the announcement of support to protect and upgrade Ukraine's civilian infrastructure, but given the parameters of the support we want to provide I wish to press the Minister gently but seriously on some of the uncertainties in that. The UK must support Ukraine for the long term, and I believe that there is cross-party support on that, but that means that we must move beyond the ad hoc announcements made by Ministers about donating weapons to being clear about a long-term strategy for military, economic and diplomatic assistance through 2023 and beyond.

**Sarah Champion** (Rotherham) (Lab): And humanitarian.

**Luke Pollard:** And humanitarian support. In August, the Government announced that the UK and its allies would begin to establish a plan of action to support Ukraine into 2023, but we still have not seen one. Will the Minister say where it is and why there is a delay in producing the plan? We are running out of 2022—will the report and strategy be ready by the end of the year? What state is it in now, and is it a costed plan or just a set of ambitions? We ask those questions not to put the Minister on the hook or in a bad place but to press him, because we want to see the support gotten right, and scrutiny and clarity for the United Kingdom will help our allies to ensure that they are equally as robust in supporting Ukraine.

Even before the Russian tanks rolled into Ukraine, Labour had been making the case for an updated integrated review. The Defence Secretary previously argued against that, but now argues for it, which is a welcome U-turn from the Government. I know that the Minister has had a similar change of heart, and that is also welcome. However, the Government have given little signal as to what will be in the integrated review refresh and how it will be updated. I would be grateful if the Minister also set out what he believes needs to be updated in the integrated review. Does the review have clear terms of reference that can be scrutinised? Will he tell us which cuts to the armed forces he now wants to reverse and whether further Army cuts will be halted?

At the last Defence questions, my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) asked a fair question about why the Government are pressing ahead with cuts to our armed forces before the integrated review reports. What happens if the integrated review says that we should have kept the capabilities and equipment that the Ministry of Defence is scrambling to scrap now?

It is no secret that next-generation light anti-tank weapons have been vital to the defence of Ukraine, but the Secretary of State has yet to adequately explain whether a new contract to replenish UK NLAW stockpiles has been signed, and with whom. NLAW production will require old production lines to be rebuilt and restarted. If an order was placed today, how long would it be before a new NLAW rolled off the production line? Would it really be two years away? If that is true, that delay is dangerous and one that the UK can ill afford.

I turn to a technical but serious area that has not been addressed: dual-use technology, which is civilian technology that can have a military application. Last month, the United States imposed a set of new sanctions on Russia targeting a network accused of procuring

military and dual-use technologies from US manufacturers and illegally supplying them to the Russian war machine. The Royal United Services Institute, the UK defence think-tank, confirmed in August that UK components are appearing in Russian weaponry. That can include oscillators and standard crystals. No UK-produced equipment should end up in the hands of Putin and his generals, but it is especially difficult to be sure of that when it comes to dual-use equipment. The House has already passed sanctions on such equipment, but the concern is that western electronics and technologies are still reaching Russian weapon manufacturers. That will be concerning to colleagues, so we need clarity that British firms are not, in good faith, making materials or contributing to the supply chain of western manufacturers whose end products could end up killing Ukrainian civilians.

What steps are the Government taking to identify dual-use technologies that could be used by Putin? What steps is the Minister taking to stop those technologies from getting into the hands of Russia or its agents? Does he feel that the current dual-use technology sanctions are sufficient? What steps can he take, working with our allies, to monitor and shut off possible purchasing routes for Russia of western dual-use equipment like gyroscopes, wi-fi technology, ceramic chips, resistors and semiconductors? This is a complex area, and I realise that I have put the Minister on the spot, with his colleague, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, the hon. Member for Aldershot (Leo Docherty), replying to the debate, so if he cannot set that out, I would be grateful if he put a letter in the House of Commons Library. It is a difficult area but one that we must ensure that we are getting right.

Since the war began, Russian troops have been committing atrocities against Ukrainian civilians. Just as in Bucha, Izium and Mariupol, there is now evidence of Russian war crimes in the Kherson region. We will not know for some time how many civilians the Russians have butchered, but we must be unrelenting in our pursuit of those war criminals until each and every one of them has stood trial for their crimes.

As Ukrainians face the arrival of winter, it is becoming increasingly clear that Putin's strategy is to target civilian infrastructure, including energy and water plants. The Minister set out some support that the UK Government are providing, but what additional missile defence is the UK providing to its allies to protect Ukrainian infrastructure from missile attacks by Russia? What plans does he have to deal with the potential for an additional flow of cold and hungry refugees this winter? The effect of Russian bombardment of civilian infrastructure is already degrading Ukraine's ability to provide clean water and power to all of its population, and that will drive a further humanitarian crisis.

I turn to how we can afford the defence of the UK and our allies in Ukraine. The Government's disastrous mini-Budget cost £30 billion—the equivalent of 60% of the UK's current defence budget, which could have been better spent on hospitals, teachers and the cost of living crisis. That sheer amount of money—abused by the Government—is the cost of 23 brand-new Type 26 frigates. The MOD is the only Government Department in the current spending round with a real-terms revenue cut each year. New figures from the Institute for Fiscal

[*Luke Pollard*]

Studies show that, adjusted for inflation, that is a £2.7 billion real-terms cut to defence spending. At the Defence Committee, the Secretary of State for Defence said that with additional defence inflation, he has £8 billion of additional costs on his budget. If we are to continue to provide support to Ukraine and ensure that we can afford an enhanced forward presence for our NATO allies and our other NATO commitments, we need certainty that funding will be available as required for our armed forces.

I have been re-reading the rather good “Shifting the goalposts?” Defence Committee report, which shows that Labour Governments have always spent more on our nation’s defence than Conservative Governments. Does the commitment to raise defence spending to 3% of GDP by 2030 still exist? Can the Minister see a point where Government defence spending will fall below the NATO 2% of GDP target? Given the Minister’s and Secretary of State’s previous comments on defence spending, can the Minister say whether he and the Secretary of State will still be in their places if Defence funding is cut in the Chancellor’s autumn statement on Thursday?

**Catherine McKinnell:** On defence spending—I do not believe that this has yet come up in the debate—Putin is clearly using propaganda as a serious weapon in this battle, and it is one that we all have an interest in countering. It would be helpful if the Minister, in summing up, could give some reassurance that the UK is committed to the counter-disinformation unit and working in collaboration with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to ensure that we play our part so that this propaganda does not win in Ukraine or elsewhere?

**Luke Pollard:** I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. She is right. Putin has invested heavily in disinformation technologies and resources to spread misinformation and disinformation in social media news feeds right across the world, including here in the United Kingdom. That investment was not made on a whim. It was made against a clear strategy, with the wish being to divide, split and misinform western populations and use our democracy against us. To protect our democracy and our allies, we must be absolutely determined to tackle disinformation, misinformation and those dark cyber-activities online. We are talking about not just state-sponsored hacking and cyber-attacks—that is one end of the spectrum—but all our constituents seeing things on their Facebook news feeds that are deliberately deployed and shared to try to split and degrade public opinion and create the impression that the United Kingdom’s support for our friends in Ukraine is somehow coming from a dark place, when it is not. That means further action to strengthen our work on social media. It means looking at where Russia is investing in disinformation and how we can strengthen our civil society against that in future. I hope the Minister and his colleagues, for instance those looking after the Online Safety Bill, will take that seriously, too. It is not just military grade activity we need to look at; it is everything through to how each of us uses our social media.

To conclude, let there be no doubt that Labour Members share the Government’s resolve to support Ukraine for as long as is necessary to defeat Putin. As

the Ukrainian countryside turns to mud and then freezes over, we are about to enter an incredibly difficult winter, as military doctrine normally suggests, with frontlines frozen and civilian populations suffering further. The Ukrainians are showing incredible resolve in standing up to Russia, but they cannot do it without continued western support. How we use the winter months to prepare for the expected spring offensives—ensuring our supply lines, commitment, resolve and technologies are available to our friends in Ukraine—will be crucial in keeping the pressure firmly on the Kremlin and ensuring that Ukraine wins.

7.20 pm

**Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con):** As we rejoice at the liberation of Kherson, we need to be mindful that Ukraine is still very much a country at war. As Russian Federation tanks rolled across the border on to sovereign Ukrainian territory on 24 February, the world bore witness to an attack against the post-second world war settlement of a magnitude and kind without precedent.

I congratulate the Government on the superb and consistent support the UK has provided to Ukraine, but the situation constantly changes and I believe we now need a rethink on sanctions. I frequently hear people, including UK Ministers, say that this is Putin’s war, not that of the Russian people, thereby laying the blame for an entire nation’s aggression at the feet of one man. This aggression, we must not forget, seeks to erase Ukraine from the map, destroy its culture, and turn back the clock to a period when the Russo-centric Soviet Union dominated eastern Europe and its peoples. Having had the opportunity to visit Ukraine, most recently in September, and speak with some of the brave men and women valiantly defending their homeland, the notion that this is solely Putin’s war is one that I reject. Of course, western-induced regime change within the Russian Federation is not a sound basis for the United Kingdom’s foreign policy, but even if it were I do not believe, as is mooted by some, that new leadership in Moscow would necessarily bring the war to an end. In fact, I believe that the opposite is possible: a new leader trying to burnish their nationalistic credentials by taking even greater destructive and indiscriminate military action. No Putin does not necessarily equate to no war.

**Liam Byrne:** I am grateful to the hon. Member for giving way and it was a pleasure to be with him in Kyiv earlier this year. He is making an incredibly important point, because sometimes we hear our allies say, “We have to make sure that Putin cannot do this again.” Actually, that is the wrong analysis. We have to make sure that Russia cannot do this again.

**Mr Djanogly:** The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and I will try to prove that point further.

Many of those in leadership roles surrounding the current Russian President, such as the Chechnya leader, Kadyrov—who suggested using a tactical nuclear weapon against Ukraine—espouse rigid nationalist views. They should not, and cannot, be absolved from blame for the invasion, as the term Putin’s war may allow. It is also important to highlight that many towns in reoccupied Ukraine now have unmarked graves resulting from murders perpetrated by members of the Russian armed forces:

the Bucha massacre is a poignant example that we all have a duty to remember and reflect on. Reports are also rife of mass rapes, looting, torture, removal of children and confiscation of vital food stuffs—again, all deeds done by soldiers and administrators of the occupying power. It is clear to me that many people of the Russian Federation are up to their necks in heinous crimes committed during the ongoing war against the Ukrainian people, and the individual perpetrators must bear full responsibility and be prosecuted.

A case against those actively engaged in the invasion is clear, but what about the wider Russian people themselves? The problem is that by using the term Putin's war, it is possible to excuse, overlook or ignore that the war, in all its gore and injustice, remains very popular among most of the Russian population. It is not just Putin, his cronies and his oligarchs. Some Russians, a small minority, have laudably taken a stand, memorably and notably Marina Ovsyannikova, who staged an on-air protest in March denouncing the war. Such defiance has, however, been more of an exception than the rule. Indeed, polling from within the Russian Federation continues to indicate strong support of over 70% for both the war and Putin among the populace.

**Bob Seely:** My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech, as ever. The extent to which the Russians support the war is a complex issue. He is not wrong to say that it is still very popular, but I just wonder if there is a slightly more generous way of putting it. There is a hard core against—very brave people, as he has outlined. There is a hard core for—the military bloggers and the nationalist community, who are becoming increasingly concerned. But in the last 20 years, because of the amount of propaganda in Russian society, most Russians know to avoid politics as an issue; they let the people in power get on with things. Does he accept the point that, rather than the war being popular, the agnosticism towards politics means that it is kept away from as a subject?

**Mr Djanogly:** I accept that it is a subject we could go into in some degree, but I would make the point that of those Russians who have been leaving Russia and going to places like Armenia, Georgia or the more than 250,000 who have gone to Turkey, it is by no means proven that they are anti-Putin. In fact, a lot of research says they are going to those countries because either they want to pursue their business activities, which sanctions prevent, or they do not want to be called up on the reserve list, not because they do not like President Putin.

What I am suggesting is that at some point citizens and leaders need to take collective responsibility for the actions of the state and the armed forces that operate in their name. For Russians, I would argue that that time has long passed. If we agree that there should be collective responsibility, we can make the moral case for collective sanctions—economic and travel. Travel restrictions, like those implemented by six EU states, are a more practical way of reinforcing the message of collective responsibility than economic sanctions, which mainly apply only to wealthier people.

As the situation stands, at the end of the war, whenever that may be or indeed before, assets that have been frozen, across the west and other areas of the globe, will be reclaimed by their owners, including here in the

United Kingdom. The public, including many constituents in Huntingdon who I have corresponded with about the situation in Ukraine, naturally assume that a frozen superyacht owned by a sanctioned individual will be sold, with the proceeds used for reconstruction. We are talking about some £18 billion of frozen assets, not including real estate, in the UK alone. That is not, alas, currently the case. If the situation is not remedied, an embarrassing political situation, not to mention a morally dubious one, beckons.

Ministers should be prepared to consider, working with our allies, how frozen assets can be legally seized, sold and the revenue put to work for Ukraine's rebuilding. The World Bank's assessment made in September is that Ukraine will need \$349 billion for recovery and reconstruction. It is worth saying that it is not just a question of law changes, but adopting a more aggressive attitude within the existing system. For instance, when the FBI boarded Mr Kerimov's yacht *Amadea* in Fiji, it looks like the United States used the oligarch's maintenance of the yacht as a criminal breach of sanctions, thereby allowing confiscation. We could and should be more assertive than we are.

As for possible law changes to facilitate confiscation, the first is a revisiting of the Trading with the Enemy Act 1939. During the second world war, that Act allowed the Government of the day to confiscate assets owned by residents of enemy countries in British territories. It focuses squarely on the assets of any person or organisation of countries with which the United Kingdom is at war. Thankfully, there has not been much cause to review it since 1945. An amendment to the definition of war, however, could provide a valuable basis for considering how Russian assets could be seized for the benefit of Ukraine and its reconstruction.

Secondly, Canada's Budget Implementation Act 2022, which was passed in June, includes amendments that allow for the forfeiture of property that is subject to a seizure or restraint order under the Special Economic Measures Act 1992 and the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act (Sergei Magnitsky Law) 2017. That is done under both regimes using forfeiture orders, allowing the relevant Canadian Government Minister to apply to a court to forfeit assets that have already been seized or frozen. A number of safeguards are rightly built into the legislation. For instance, any person who appears to have an interest in the property may be heard by the relevant court.

A further possible avenue that I wish to highlight is one proposed by the Washington DC-based New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, which formulated a multilateral action model on reparations. In the model, the institute draws 13 convincing conclusions that lay the basis for an international, effective and legal reparations and compensation scheme. The model builds on the relatively recent and practical example of the Kuwait compensation fund, which, together with the UN compensation commission, paid some \$52 billion in compensation to 1.5 million claimants over 30 years following the Iraqi invasion in 1990. The establishment of the fund and commission was possible only due to the agreement of those nations with a permanent seat at the UN Security Council. Unfortunately, as Russia is an aggressor in the case of Ukraine, that exact road map cannot be followed. The institute therefore makes the argument for working through the UN General Assembly rather than the Security Council.

[Mr Djanogly]

The avenues that I have highlighted are but a number that are worthy of wider consideration—there are others. It is crucial, however, that the conversation surrounding compensation and reparations now begins in earnest, because just to continue saying, “This is only Putin’s war” is no longer relevant or morally sustainable.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I call the Scottish National party spokesman, Martin Docherty-Hughes.

7.32 pm

**Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP):** First, let me associate myself both with the Minister’s words about the armed forces supporting the training of the men and women of the Ukrainian armed forces, and with the words of the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), about Remembrance Sunday. I am very mindful that my brother, who is a veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan, attended the Cenotaph in Whitehall for the first time at the weekend with former comrades.

It is welcome to be standing here following the statement about the liberation of Kherson. Like so many people, it has been a joy to watch the videos and accounts of the liberation over the weekend. Unfortunately, there is a pattern in this conflict of the elation after the liberation of towns and villages being followed by revulsion and anger as we discover the litany of crimes committed by the Russian armed forces and administrators during their occupation. I shudder to think of what happened to those who were brave enough to resist the invasion during the early days of February, as was so memorably caught on camera for the world to see.

None the less, forcing the invading force off the west bank of the Dnieper should be celebrated for the triumph that it is, along with the liberation of the last remaining regional capital under renewed occupation. The decision of the retreating forces to blow bridges and mine the lines of the withdrawal demonstrates the direction in which they believe the conflict to be moving. We must hope, however, that it can move as quickly as possible in that direction to avoid Kherson facing the same sort of retribution that Russia has visited on the likes of Kharkiv and Mykolaiv.

The fact that the targeting and destroying of civilian infrastructure has become such a feature of the Russian military handbook again demonstrates the weakness of its position and its repeated inability to abide by, as I think the whole House will agree, the key tenets of the Geneva convention—namely, its failure to avoid unnecessary suffering and to distinguish between civilians and combatants. That is as damning an indictment of its “Russkiy mir”, which it claims to be defending, as we are ever likely to see. I am sure that the Minister and others across the House will join me in beseeching the Russian Federation to withdraw from the rest of the country that it has illegally occupied since 2014, so that the suffering does not continue.

The liberation of such a large port also brings into focus, as the Minister touched on, the global consequences of continuing this unnecessary conflict, not only because Kherson’s famous watermelons can now be exported,

but because that applies to a whole host of other agricultural products of Ukraine’s famous black soil. Those grains and vegetable oils have effectively been held hostage by the Kremlin, by Vladimir Putin, as part of a strategy of resource terrorism that seeks to punish some of the poorest people in the world as a way of putting pressure on those who would support Ukraine. As the G20 summit comes to a close, overshadowed by this coercive diplomacy, I am sure we all hope that we will not face the same issue come the next summit.

As we talk about exports, we must also think about the health of the Ukrainian economy as a whole. Let us not forget the importance of providing, as the Minister mentioned, long-term economic guarantees to Ukraine to ensure that it can rebuild when the end of the conflict comes, as it must. The incredible potential that it has hitherto been unable to fully realise can be released only with a generous range of measures and with full integration into western economic networks—as Ukraine would wish—including the European Union.

Regardless of the military and economic support that we give Ukraine and its people, we cannot forget the human element in all this and the fact that those people are fighting for so much more than economic growth or European security; they are fighting simply for the right to exist—that is, the right to exist not only as Ukrainians, but as who they are as people.

I am glad to have the opportunity to acknowledge the contribution made by the LGBTQ+ Ukrainians in this conflict. Their struggle is emblematic of what it is at stake, and not only because Putin and other Kremlin talking heads have specifically made their increasing prominence in that society a major plank of their spurious rationale for invasion. We know very well in this country that the realities of a wartime society can bring about large-scale social change, as previously under-represented groups come forward to demonstrate the role that they can play in society. It is through this conflict that we have seen how LGBTQ+ Ukrainians—known as the Pride brigade—have come forward to serve in their droves at every level.

I am very grateful for the work done by people such as Maksym Eristavi, who has documented the contribution that those Ukrainians have made to the defence of their common homeland. There is evidence that that is changing Ukrainian society for the better. Thanks to Maksym, I found out this summer that almost 60% of Ukrainians now have more positive attitudes to their LGBTQ+ siblings, a massive increase since 2016 when they were last asked the question. These people know what it is that they are fighting for: the possibility to live in a country where they are free from the dystopian control and coercion that we see too often in Putin’s Russia.

Let me bring my remarks to an end by thanking Ministers and the Government for ensuring that Ukraine can continue to push the invaders out of their country. They can be assured of the support from everyone on the SNP Benches, and essentially everyone across the House, in making sure that that continues to be the case. Here is hoping we will be marking the liberation of Ukraine sooner rather than later.

7.38 pm

**Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con):** I will not try the House’s patience for too long; I just want to make some general points.

The Minister was completely right when he said that the Kherson victory was enormously important, regardless of whether it was significant in military terms or symbolically. He made the point that it is difficult for someone to invade a country if they are going backwards, as we can all agree. Although it is symbolically dreadful, I would say that it is not yet a military game changer.

To build on my question to the Minister, the current Russian strategy seems to be two-pronged. First, Surovikin, with his Syrian experience, has said to the Russian Ministry of Defence, “Give me a line that I can hold.” Because Kherson is on the western bank of the Dnipro, it was simply not holdable: it was a death trap and a disaster waiting for the Russian military. By pulling out of Kherson city and going over to the eastern bank of the Dnipro, Surovikin has effectively put the Dnipro river between himself and the Ukrainians.

I lived in Ukraine from 1990 to 1995. For those who do not know the geography of Ukraine, the Dnipro river from south of Kherson all the way up to Zaporizhzhia is 0.5 km at its thinnest. If we add the waterbanks, the Konka river, the marshland and the open grassland, it is a minimum of 3 km wide. Up at Zaporizhzhia, where the nuclear power plant is, it is more of a lake; it is 10 km to 12 km wide. By moving his forces to the eastern bank of the Dnipro, Surovikin has effectively made the Dnipro a considerable buffer between himself and the Ukrainian forces.

Realistically, a Ukrainian advance is not going to happen south of Zaporizhzhia, simply because of the geography—one might as well try to cross the channel. It cannot be done without phenomenal resources. It involves going across significant open territory. The casualty rate, even against forces as disorganised and demoralised as Russia’s, would simply not be acceptable. It would fail, and it would be a significant counter to the Ukrainians. By getting the Dnipro on the right side of him, Surovikin now has a defensible line all the way up to Zaporizhzhia.

The second thing that Surovikin has done is to prioritise the destruction of civilian morale. Sadly, those of us who followed him in Syria know that that is par for the course. One of the really awful and depressing things in Syria was that the Syrians and their backers from Russia, which is one of the five permanent members of the Security Council, prioritised the destruction of civilian targets. Most importantly and most tragically—I have talked to many Syrian doctors about this—the Russians targeted hospitals for destruction. Destroying the hospitals first destroyed popular morale. Men would fight as long as their women and their families stayed, but for that to happen they needed some kind of food supply and they needed hospitals. Destroying hospitals meant that women and children fled. Without the women and children, men were effectively pulled back as well. Destroying civilian infrastructure destroyed morale.

There was another thing that the Syrians and their Russian backers did. For four years Aleppo had been bombed, and for four years it had survived: civilian life, in bizarre and horrendous circumstances, continued. Then the Syrians and their Russian backers used chemical weapons for 17 days and cleared the city. There were four years of bombardment and there were attacks on hospitals, which took a few months to clear civilian populations, but what cleared the city pretty much overnight was the use of chemical weapons.

I raise that point because the Russians are still making accusations against the Ukrainians and the Americans about bioterrorism, and we know that they are still talking about nuclear. The Russians are still holding out the option of using chemical and nuclear weapons. We should not simply dismiss that as bluff. It may well be bluff, but we do not know that—we cannot tell.

Those are the two prongs of the Russians’ strategy: getting a line that they think is defensible, and destroying civilian infrastructure. The current phase of the war started back in September, when I was in Ukraine with several hon. Members present; it is good to see them in the Chamber today. We saw Zelensky on the Sunday, and the Ukrainians were overjoyed because of the collapse of the Kharkiv positions. We were there as it was happening. That was the beginning of the new phase, in which the Russians realised that they could not win. That was the weekend when the Ukrainians thought, “Actually, we can win this war.” It was a very important moment.

By having a defensible line and attacking civilian infrastructure, the Russians bought some time—they probably bought themselves a few months. The next phase of the war will probably take place in the spring, when Russian positions come under significant pressure. If my understanding is correct, they will come under pressure in the south between Zaporizhzhia and Donetsk or in the east around the Luhansk area. The Ukrainians may try a feint to the south while attacking Donbas, because that is where their best armour is. Either way, when the new phase happens, with a spring offensive or potentially a late winter offensive, what we will witness—if we do witness it—will be the collapse of Russian positions.

The critical point for the strategy in the war is not necessarily securing a defeat in Donbas, which would be great for the Ukrainians, but the collapse of the land corridor between Crimea and Donetsk. If that happened, it would be the beginning of the end for the Russians. They could continue to hold the area of Donbas that they seized in 2014, and it would not make much difference; they could keep hold of Crimea, which I think will be last to go; but the destruction of the land corridor will mean the final defeat, or entering the endgame. It will be the beginning of the end for the Russian forces if that land corridor goes.

At that point, Putin will face a series of very important decision points, to use a military term. Does he go nuclear? Does he not? Does he use chemicals? Does he not? Does he blow up the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station? Does he not? Those questions will become critical, because Russian military defeat in war often signals the collapse of a regime. People like the KGB or the FSB—whatever they are calling themselves now—do not distinguish between collapse of the state and collapse of the regime. Collapse of the regime and collapse of the state are not identical, but they are much closer than they would be in our country.

Of the wars that the Russians have fought in the past 200 years, they won the Napoleonic war and world war two, but pretty much every other war they have lost, resulting in the collapse or significant reform of the Russian state. The Crimean war resulted in the end of serfdom. The Russian-Japanese war resulted in the 1905 revolution. The horrors of world war one resulted in the appalling disasters of the Bolshevik revolution. The Finnish war could have gone very badly wrong in 1940. The Afghan war heralded the end of the Soviet Union.

[Bob Seely]

When this war is lost by the Russian state, we will have to start asking ourselves how desperate Putin will be and what will happen internally to Russia. On Wednesday morning, for those who are interested, Navalny's chief of staff Leonid Volkov will be talking to the all-party parliamentary group on Russia about the potential for the collapse of the Russian state.

There are clearly some significant decisions to be made. Internally, Putin has arrested, murdered, killed off and imprisoned many of his opponents—most noticeably Navalny, whose health may or may not be slowly worsening in the penal colony where he is doing nine years. Putin does not face pressure from the democratic bloc, but he does face pressure from two groups and it is worth paying attention to them both.

One group is the nationalist-fascist military blogger community. These are people who have been very vocal; importantly, the state allows them to be vocal because they were significant supporters of the war. We know from reading sites such as Telegram, where they have half a million followers, that they are now despairing and calling for firmer, tougher action. Some public figures, such as Prigozhin, who runs the Wagner mercenary group, and the Chechen head, whose name I have temporarily forgotten, are also outliers in attacking bits of the military, various generals who displease them or the Russian Ministry of Defence. There is a problem building up in the nationalist-fascist community within Russia.

There is also a problem building up with the wives, mothers and partners of soldiers killed and injured. I have met on many occasions the mothers of soldiers in the Afghan war—a wonderful group of people. They fought very movingly for the memory of their kids; it was really sad to see. The number of Russians dead or seriously injured is probably pushing 100,000, which means 100,000 wives, partners, girlfriends, occasionally boyfriends, and mums and dads. That is a significant potential audience. The new soldiers' mums and soldiers' wives have not made common cause with the democratic faction, which is pretty much non-existent in Russia, and they have not yet made common cause with the nationalist-fascist blogger group, which I think would be difficult. Those are the two groups that I think Putin will be looking most nervously at.

Thank you for letting me speak for so long, Mr Deputy Speaker. Let me now sum up the position. We have to start thinking about the endgame, because it will probably begin in the spring. Then we will have to start thinking about what will happen with nuclear decision points, and then we will have to start thinking about, potentially, the failure of Russia and what the disaster of a chaotic nuclear-powered Russia looks like—so there is much to do. I congratulate the Government on almost all they have done. I would just say that I think a bit more integration across Government Departments is always needed and we still do not have that.

When it comes to diplomacy—I asked the Foreign Secretary about this earlier—the United States and the United Kingdom have the best diplomatic networks in the developing world, while Ukraine has very few such networks and they are modest, certainly by comparison with ours. There is much more that the US and the UK can do systemically across Asia and Africa to make sure that we partner with the Ukrainians so that they can

make their case. Those are the nations that are receiving grain from the Ukrainians and they want to know where it is. We must ensure that they know it is the Russians who are the problem in that regard and not the Ukrainians, but those are also the people who are most neutral to what the Russians are doing. We have to start to get them onside and get that community built.

On Wednesday evening this week, the Magnitsky awards will be presented, in memory of Sergei Magnitsky, beaten to death 13 years ago on Wednesday by agents of the Russian state because he was exposed while trying to investigate a \$250 million Russian fraud. We remember people like Magnitsky, but we also remember many of those human rights activists. It would be great to see more non-aligned and neutral countries, and countries in Asia and Africa, bringing in their own Magnitsky laws so that they can start prosecuting these bad people, whether they are in Russia, in Iran or, indeed, in China—but that is a discussion for another day.

7.51 pm

**Sarah Champion** (Rotherham) (Lab): Let me begin by thanking the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely), who always speaks in a measured and informative tone. I always learn from listening to him.

We have seen horrors taking place in Ukraine throughout this year, but, sadly, there has been humanitarian need in the region for much longer. In 2014, Russia's annexation of Crimea heavily affected the east of Ukraine. Since Putin's illegal war began in February, it has led to an explosion in humanitarian need and to Ukraine enduring mass human rights violations. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that there are a staggering 17.7 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and an estimated 6.24 million people internally displaced within Ukraine. The United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine estimates that there have been at least 16,150 civilian casualties, with the majority in the east, but emphasises that the true figure is likely to be much higher.

Evident violations of international humanitarian law have taken place, with Russian forces clearly targeting civilian infrastructure, as we have seen with the bombing of children's playgrounds and supermarkets. Russian forces have hidden landmines across the country, restricting refugees' ability to leave through humanitarian corridors and complicating access for aid workers. In March, the Chair of the Defence Committee, the former Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), and I wrote jointly to the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), to highlight these issues, and I continue to urge the current Prime Minister to ensure that organisations such as the HALO Trust and the Mines Advisory Group receive the funds that they need to clear mines on the ground.

The current picture is extremely bleak, but with winter fast approaching, it is more crucial than ever that aid reaches people who desperately need it. In December, the daytime temperature rarely reaches above zero degrees in Kyiv, so generators, blankets and warm clothes are essential. Women and girls are being disproportionately affected by the conflict, with the UN reporting that girls are at increased risk of child marriage and being forced to leave school as a result of their families' simply trying



to survive. The UK has pledged £220 million in humanitarian assistance to Ukraine since the conflict began, but I continue to express my concern that this aid is not being disbursed quickly enough. In his response to the debate, can the Minister guarantee that aid is reaching local charities and is being distributed in the most effective ways possible?

The conflict has been marked by mass human rights violations by Russian forces, including the widespread, despicable use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. In October, the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine published damning evidence of war crimes, with Russian forces responsible for the vast majority of those crimes. They included the executions of civilians, torture and ill treatment, of which there were consistent accounts, and the use of sexual violence against women and children. The commission concluded that those violations continue to have a devastating effect on victims and survivors, who emphasised the essential role of justice and accountability.

Of the many human rights abuses, notable examples include the massacre in Bucha, during which civilians were rounded up by Russian troops for execution, and the siege of Mariupol, when Russian forces encircled the city, preventing humanitarian supplies from being accessible and bombing a maternity hospital. There have also been reports of rape and torture during the Russian occupation of Izyum. Those responsible for countless and horrifying crimes must be held accountable, and there must be zero impunity for war crimes committed during the conflict.

The events in Ukraine have pulled the importance of a rigorous approach to atrocity prevention into sharp focus. We cannot allow such violations of human rights to occur on this scale, both within and outside conflict. My Committee, the International Development Committee, recently published a report on preventing future mass atrocities around the world, highlighting the need for the UK to develop an atrocity prevention strategy. I urge the Minister to heed our report, and to take urgent action to prevent further atrocities.

We cannot underestimate the value of a strong position taken by the international community on war crimes, with those who have committed crimes being sufficiently held to account. Victims and survivors deserve our support in securing justice and ensuring that these contemptible crimes cannot go on any longer. The UK's support in Ukraine has been crucial since the invasion, but the Government must ensure that we provide joined-up responses to the humanitarian situation in Ukraine, and prioritise assistance for local charities wherever possible. We cannot step away.

7.56 pm

**Dr Ben Spencer** (Runnymede and Weybridge) (Con): It is always a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), and I want to develop some of the points that she made so powerfully about the humanitarian response. I want to talk about the local response and about support for refugees.

It is hard to believe that, for almost the entire year, we have watched the horrors unfolding in Ukraine, unleashed by Putin, and have witnessed an absolutely awful war and senseless bloodshed and violence. We have seen an incredible response from constituents across the country,

and I have seen that particularly in my community, where we have opened our hearts and our homes to refugees in their plight. That is something quite special. There is no more personal response than the support that so many people are giving in opening up their homes to refugees from Ukraine, and I think we should be very proud of that.

Alongside the “big stuff”—the amazing international leadership we have shown in terms of sanctions and the forming of a coalition to support the Ukrainians with military technology, kit and training—there is the domestic “small stuff”. In fact, I think that some of the most powerful support we have given is the opening up of our homes to refugees. I want to send a huge thank you to everyone in my constituency who has done that. I am sure many other Members across the country have thanked their constituents as well.

**Dean Russell** (Watford) (Con): May I echo my hon. Friend's comments? In Watford, we have seen an incredible burst of love and care for Ukrainian people who are over here. Yesterday in St Mary's church, as part of the remembrance ceremony—supported by Luther Blissett, the Watford football legend, and his partner Lauren—a lady in the group read a beautiful Ukrainian poem from the pulpit. It was an incredible moment, bringing home to us the loss of her family back in Ukraine since she has been here, but also the incredible strength that these people are showing by being here and giving support from afar.

**Dr Spencer:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. It builds on a point I was about to make about paying tribute to particular individuals and groups. It is always invidious to do this because there are so many people to single out and so many groups to thank for what they are doing, but I want to raise four areas in my constituency that deserve special attention, in among the work that so many individuals and community groups are doing. One is the Revive café in Chertsey, which has a coffee morning for refugees. One of the key players there is a lady called Lizzie Wayland, who is a member of the Beacon Church, which hosts the cafe. It gives incredible support to people locally.

I also want to draw the House's attention to Lesia Scholey and Councillor Charu Sood, who have set up Weybridge Friends of Ukraine. They have been pivotal in leading support in Weybridge, alongside Elmbridge CAN and the Weybridge community hub. We also have a lady called Olena Melnyk, a refugee from Ukraine who now works in Runnymede Borough Council helping with translation for Ukrainian refugees. I would also like to thank my team in my office who have been incredible in supporting people going through the visa application process and in working on many pieces of casework supporting refugees once they have moved into my constituency.

Building on that spirit, I would like to give my thanks to the Right Rev. Kenneth Nowakowski, the bishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of the Holy Family in London, who came to speak to community groups in my constituency last week. I do not know whether Members have heard him speak, but he is incredible. Without doubt it was one of the best community speech events I have ever been to. He has been central to the refugee response from the start and he spoke about the support

[*Dr Ben Spencer*]

he has set up and the lessons learned, and gave a cautious commentary on what he sees for the future. He made two points in his speech that I hope he will not mind me mentioning. One of them really sent a chill through me. When he visited Ukraine recently, he went to a school and a little boy came up to him, very excited to see him. He said, "Come, come—you have to see our bomb shelter. It's really cool." That sent a chill, but in a sense it is also quite sweet, because it shows the resilience of children and the excitement of how life changes and we have to adjust in the context of conflict.

The other thing the bishop reflected on in his talk was when people can start thinking about forgiveness. Given where we are now, that is very difficult to contemplate, but of course every war ends and things move on. One of the important things that we are talking about today is the rebuilding of Ukraine and what peace will look like. I say this cautiously to the House, because it is a difficult statement to make right now, given where we are and the pain that everyone is suffering, but perhaps these could be the early stages of thinking about the future that we want to have and the future that we can start hoping for as this awful conflict comes to an end.

I would like to thank all the people who came to the event in my constituency: the community groups, the elected representatives and the people who have supported refugees across my constituency. Our communities are precious, and my communities in Runnymede and Weybridge are without doubt the things that make my constituency the best place, in my view—I am sure my colleagues would say similar things about their constituencies—and we need to support them. We need to recognise the incredible work that they do.

**Andy Carter** (Warrington South) (Con): I was not intending to intervene in this debate, but my hon. Friend is making some excellent points. I attended a meeting of Ukrainian family sponsors in my constituency two weeks ago, and the thing I took away from it was the message that we need to encourage the Government to do more to support our fabulous sponsors and encourage them to continue to provide that service. In many cases, they are coming to the end of the six-month initial term, and in parts of Warrington we have high levels of Ukrainian families who are thinking about where they can live next. The sponsors have given up six months and they are thinking about what they do next as well. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government could take a more active lead in supporting and encouraging sponsor families to continue?

**Dr Spencer:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. It is almost as if he had foresight of my speech—which I know he did not—because I am going to go on to talk about the challenges when sponsor-refugee relationships break down. I will come on to that in a moment.

We must all cherish our communities and the support that they are giving. There is something very special about that, and if we do not fight to protect, cherish and thank them, it will be too late and we will lose them. I am sure that that is something that we all share. For a few months now, sadly, we have been hearing in my constituency about breakdowns in the relationships between sponsors and refugees. This is getting more concerning as we approach Christmas. A lot of people,

when they generously offered to take part in the scheme, saw it as only a six-month commitment. It is important to recognise that if some can continue after six months that is fantastic, but for those who cannot, it is fantastic that they have helped out. There should be no animus if people feel that they cannot continue beyond the initial six months.

I have had many conversations with the leader of Runnymede Borough Council, Councillor Tom Gracey, and its chief executive officer regarding concerns about the matching process. Some refugees are not able to be rematched, and Runnymede is going to give them homelessness support. It will help to rehouse refugees locally if they cannot be rematched. The concern is that this will put an additional burden on to the local authorities. I know that the Government have been very generous in their support to local authorities, but this will nevertheless be a challenge, especially in constituencies such as mine where the availability of affordable housing and affordable rents is very much at a premium.

I have a question for the Minister about cases in which a refugee's sponsorship has broken down and they cannot be rematched, and the state effectively takes on the role of sponsoring them through homelessness provision. Under the Homes for Ukraine scheme as it currently stands, the sponsor gets a monthly payment of about 350 quid, so when the Government effectively take over in a state sponsorship role, could the Minister look at the possibility of local authorities getting that sponsorship payment in lieu of the sponsor getting it? That would seem to be a cost-neutral provision—those are at a premium at the moment—to support local authorities when those relationships have broken down so that the homelessness provision does not put them under undue pressure.

**Sarah Champion:** I am glad that the hon. Member has raised that point, because it is key. Is he also aware that the Home Office currently seems to be funding schemes such as these from official development assistance—foreign aid money—but it is able to attribute that only for the first year? I am very concerned that, come February, all the support that we are able to give to Ukrainian refugees here will come to an end. I am interested to see if the Minister has any information about whether the Treasury will step up and fund those people from that point forward.

**Dr Spencer:** I thank the hon. Member for her intervention. Looking back at the past year and the incredible support given to Ukrainians at all levels, I am absolutely confident that the Government will ensure that they are doing their part, but equally I too would be interested to know what the specific plans are. Unfortunately, given where we are at the moment, it seems that this is going to be a long war that will displace people for a long period of time, so it will be interesting to hear about the medium-term and long-term transition plans.

8.9 pm

**Ms Marie Rimmer** (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): It is a pleasure and an honour to follow the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Dr Spencer), who has such wonderful ideas, and my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion).

There have been many excellent contributions today recognising the remarkable Ukrainian counteroffensive, particularly in Kherson. To see towns, villages and people being liberated by Ukrainian forces, children inching out of their hiding places and families being reunited is deeply moving and a testament to the courage and resilience of the wonderful Ukrainian people.

Putin's nuclear and dirty bomb rhetoric and his efforts to intimidate and divide the west are designed to distract from his losses. The best way to see off any escalation in rhetoric is by providing long-term support to Ukraine, for as long as it takes. With Putin and his gang using energy as a weapon, it is essential that Europe sticks together and holds its course in supporting Ukraine, standing up to Putin and working to maintain public support for Ukraine at home and abroad. Now is not the time for diplomatic squabbles with our allies and neighbours. We must support Ukraine for the long term, way beyond 2023—it will be needed.

The Government should set aside individual announcements and instead set out a clear strategy, in concert with our allies and Ukraine, for long-term military, economic and diplomatic support, and for rebuilding all of Ukraine's infrastructure through civic society, charities and volunteers. We must help people rebuild their lives so that we can help to ensure that Putin's invasion really does end in failure.

Make no mistake, Ukraine is fighting this war for our shared values of freedom and democracy. We must never forget that it is fighting a nation's war. We owe so much to Ukraine, its people and its leadership, and we owe so much to our own forces and their families who suffer and worry about them when they are out in that country. Our support must be seen to match their unstinting commitment and suffering. We must thank them all, we must never forget them and we must be there until the end, until we see these people once again living a life worth living.

8.12 pm

**Liam Byrne** (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): It is a great privilege to follow such remarkable contributions. It has been especially heart-warming to hear from Members who have talked about the people sponsoring Ukrainian refugees, because not just across this House but across this country, there is a shared sense that the brave men and women of Ukraine's armed forces are fighting for freedom and to ensure that our values do not perish on the continent of Europe.

As we heard in the American elections, there are those who are beginning to argue that, now advances are being made and now Ukraine has recaptured about half the territory taken by the Russian invaders, it is somehow time to let up, to sue for peace and to question whether we are supplying too much to Ukraine's armed forces. Those voices must be shut down as quickly as possible. Now that Ukraine's armed forces are on the west bank of the Dnieper river, it is possible for them to begin targeting the supply lines into Crimea, which means Crimea suddenly comes into the crosshairs. It is now possible for us to think realistically about a battle of the Black sea in the months ahead.

I offer three thoughts to this debate—one about the military options and two about the political options—and I would be grateful if the Minister took them into account in his winding-up speech.

First, as former general Ben Hodges argued at the weekend, it is now possible for Ukrainian forces not simply to hit the lines of control into Ukraine with HIMARS from the west bank of the Dnieper river but, if we gave them longer-range ATACMS missiles, to extend the ambit of those fires into the Black sea. That would allow attacks on Russian navy assets, from which, let us not forget, Russia has been firing Kalibr cruise missiles at Ukraine's water and electricity infrastructure, which is putting the pressure on morale that we have heard about this evening.

Hitherto, America and, I believe, NATO have said those longer-range fires are off the table. We have heard from the Americans that ATACMS missiles, because they have a range of 300 km and could be fired directly into Russia, will not be supplied to Ukrainian armed forces. We are therefore not equipping the Ukrainian armed forces with the full capabilities we have to offer.

Given the threat we know is coming from Russia, and given the threat we know is posed by the Russian navy in the Black sea, surely now is the time to take away that red line and make a much wider supply of weaponry available to Ukraine's armed forces, so they can begin to double down on the advantage their courage has bought them with so much blood and treasure over the last few months.

Secondly, it is about not just projectiles but politics. There is a lesson to be learned from the way in which we brought Milošević to the negotiating table during the last Yugoslav war. It was very simple: we stated in terms that there would be an almost infinite supply of weapons to back the forces of goodness until he signed up to certain terms and came to the negotiating table. At that point, he knew there was no escape and that the bombardment would continue until he folded his cards. Sure enough, he folded his cards and came to the table, and the Dayton accords followed. Surely that is a lesson we should learn. Surely now is the time when we do not just say that Putin must leave, Russia must fail and Ukraine must prevail. Surely now is the time when we set out in terms the conditions that we are determined to see met and that, until they are met, there will be an infinite supply of weapons from us, as the arsenal of hope in this great conflict.

Those terms are very simple. First, wide blue safe skies across 100% of Ukraine. Secondly, 100% decolonisation of Russian forces from the territory of Ukraine, on 1991 borders—Russia must be removed from every inch of Ukrainian land. Thirdly, we must prosecute Russia for the crime of aggression. There are precedents for this in international law. We know how to do it, the case is very clear and we should make it very clear to Putin that the prosecution will now come. Fourthly, we should be prosecuting individuals for the war crimes of which they are guilty, not just in Bucha but across the black and blood-fouled earth of the territory that Russia has invaded. Finally, we must ensure there is a full exchange of prisoners, and a full repatriation of the up to 2 million people who the Russians moved from their homeland to various parts of Russia.

We know those are the five basic demands of Ukraine's leaders, because many of us were in the presidential palace in Kyiv to hear them from President Zelensky. I do not understand why the Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of State for Defence and perhaps even the Prime Minister cannot set out that there will be an infinite resupply of

[Liam Byrne]

weapons until these terms are met. I do not understand why we are not making that crystal clear to President Putin, to the people around him and to the men and women of the Russian army, who are already fairly mutinous. We must make it clear that we are not going away, we are not backtracking, we are not retreating and we are there with the Ukrainian people and their armed forces until every one of those five objectives is met.

The final thing we should be doing is increasing the political pressure on Putin and those around him. I agree with 100% of what the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr Djanogly) said this evening, but I would go further. We need to ask ourselves in this House today: why are we not proscribing the United party of Russia as a terrorist organisation? Are we seriously saying, here in this House, that that party is somehow better, cleaner than Hamas, Hezbollah or the Basque separatist organisation ETA? Those are all “political organisations”, be that with a capital “P” or a lower case “p”, and we proscribe them for the terrorist organisations that they are. So why are we not taking the United party of Russia through that process and why are we not challenging every member of that party to leave it and leave it now?

**Mr Djanogly:** I totally agree with what the right hon. Gentleman is saying. I believe the Prime Minister referred to Russia as a “rogue state” today or yesterday, and one would have thought that the consequence of that would be exactly what the right hon. Gentleman is saying.

**Liam Byrne:** One absolutely would have thought that, because there is no excuse not to think that. When we put the point to the Foreign Secretary when he came before the Foreign Affairs Committee this afternoon, he did not take it off the table, but nor did he give the Committee a timetable for that action. The hon. Gentleman is right, because not only should we be proscribing the United party of Russia for the terrorist organisation it is, but we should be designating Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism. That is an appellation we have plonked on the Government and state of Iran since, I believe, the early 1990s. We knew even before the invasion of Ukraine that there was a good case for this, because Russia is a sanctuary for the Russian Imperial Movement, which is designated by the United States as a terrorist organisation. Russia has been providing a safe harbour for that designated terrorist organisation for some years, so why are we not going to commence now the business of designating Russia as a terrorist state sponsor?

That has all kinds of implications, not least one of the suggestions that I think the hon. Gentleman was aiming at, which is to begin banning tourist visas for those from Russia immediately. There will always be people in this House who say, “We can’t go to war with the Russian people. We have to accept that there are good people among those tourists.” I hear all of that, but if we are serious about making sure that Russia is not able to do this again, we have to make it clear to the Russian people the way in which we see the sins of their nation and make it crystal clear that they must act within their country to deliver a different kind of leadership in the years to come.

The final piece of the puzzle, of course, is sanctions, and I hope that we will be able to have a longer debate about that when the Economic Crime and Corporate

Transparency Bill comes back for its Report stage. It is ludicrous that the \$45 million yacht, Phi, which the Minister and his colleagues have frozen, is down the road in St Katharine docks as yet unseized. We heard today that Mr Abramovich’s money from the sale of his football club has still not made it to Ukraine to begin with the reconstruction. When are these things going to happen? It is time that we do not simply freeze assets, but start seizing them and rechanneling the money into supplying Ukraine and its reconstruction.

Let me finish with a simple message: we in this homeland of Europe learnt something a long time ago in international relations from the approach the Athenians took to the poor Melians. They were the people confronted several thousand years ago with the message that might somehow makes right. That is not something we subscribe to in this country. This is a country that stands up to bullies and when we see others, like-minded souls, standing up to bullies such as Putin, our job is to back them every inch of the way.

8.23 pm

**Richard Foord** (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): What a powerful speech to have to follow from the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne). I echo the comment made earlier by the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion): this has been a very informative debate. I found the contributions from the hon. Members for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely), for Huntingdon (Mr Djanogly) and for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) really worthwhile listening.

The falling back of the Russian army from Kherson in recent weeks and days presents us with an opportunity to reflect on what the UK and its allies intend will be achieved by our support for Ukraine. To date, our position has simply been that we reiterate our moral and material support, and quite right too. But there have been voices in NATO and here in the UK who have since the spring been urging us to have aims that are independent of those of the Government of Ukraine. I am strongly of the view that as 2022 draws to a close we should not have stated aims that differ from those of the Government in Kyiv.

The Government in Moscow are determined to paint the war as one that Putin did not seek. When addressing the Russian people and extending the mobilisation of Russian citizens, the Russian Government seek to stimulate fear of the west. It has been said several times this evening that the UK supports Ukraine because of our outrage at the invasion, in the 21st century, of a sovereign state that posed no threat to its neighbours. But an additional reason why the UK’s aims and Ukraine’s aims are indivisible is in order to undermine Russia’s claim that this is a proxy war where NATO is using Ukraine to fight on its behalf.

Lord David Richards of Herstmonceux has argued that the UK and its NATO allies should have a grand strategic war aim with a defined end state. He said in April that without such a well-defined end state

“there is a risk that events overtake us in the way that happened in 1914”.

But there are some fundamental differences between now and then. In 1914, the UK intervened directly in support of Belgium and deployed the British Expeditionary Force, whereas NATO Governments have been at pains

to demonstrate our restraint by supplying Ukraine with materiel while avoiding the direct involvement of our armed forces personnel in the conflict.

There are perhaps stronger parallels between the situation we see today and the one that arose in 1916, when it had been rumoured that some in the US were seeking to engage Germany and the entente powers in dialogue, with a view to peace. That was at a time when the aggressor was still in possession of territory that it had acquired directly as a result of its aggression. Britain's then Secretary of State for War, the Liberal Minister David Lloyd George, pointed out that Britain and its allies were only just beginning to see some successes and that negotiating a compromise at that time would serve only to reward aggression. Lloyd George talked about the need to ensure that "military despotism is broken beyond repair."

Last week, it was suggested in the press that some voices in the US might have been leaning on Ukraine to alter its objectives. The US chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, General Mark Milley, said:

"We've seen the Ukrainian military fight the Russian military to a standstill... Now, what the future holds is not known with any degree of certainty, but we think there are some possibilities here for some diplomatic solutions."

When questioned about that, the US national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, said:

"The United States is not pressuring Ukraine... We're not insisting on things with Ukraine."

We should just stand back and reflect that Baron Richards and General Milley have been or are the professional heads of their armed forces, so they have seen enough of war to know that it is a blunt instrument, that it is unpredictable and that it is inferior, in most ways, to diplomacy. They and others are entirely right constantly to ask questions about the NATO grand strategy and whether we might be able to articulate our own end state or see a diplomatic way out.

On this point, I disagree with the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill that safe skies implemented by way of no-fly zones policed by NATO would be the right thing, although that was something Ukraine called for early in the war. I was with him in Kyiv when we heard about the sorts of demands that were being articulated by Ukraine today, and I would agree with him that removing Russia from all of Ukrainian territory was much more along the lines of what is being called for today than anything else.

**Liam Byrne:** I, too, do not believe that there can be a NATO-policed no-fly zone, but what I do believe is that there can be a much a greater supply of air defence weapons that we have and that Ukraine needs.

**Richard Foord:** I thank the right hon. Member for correcting my understanding.

I talked last week to a Ukrainian MP from the sister party of the Liberal Democrats and he told me how we in the west have failed in the past two or three decades to fully understand that the Soviet Union was an empire. He suggested that we never fully appreciated that there was not consent for states to belong to the USSR in the first place and that it had been a Russian KGB-led empire all along, which some in Russia would like to see recreated.

Those are some of the reasons why the west should not at this time seek to have aims that differ from those of the democratically elected Government of Ukraine. Instead, I urge that we act solely in support of our Ukrainian allies. In the 21st century, there is no case for the logic articulated by Catherine the Great when she said:

"I have no way to defend my borders but to extend them."

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** I call the shadow Minister to wind up for the Opposition.

8.29 pm

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I thank colleagues from across the House for their contributions to today's debate. We have had some really fantastic reflections. I also add my thanks to all the United Kingdom troops and officials who are playing such a critical role in supporting Ukraine, particularly as we remembered the sacrifices of past generations this weekend.

The hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr Djanogly), who was in Kyiv with me a few weeks ago, made some very important points. He said that the crimes of the Russian regime go much wider than Putin; I thought particularly of Russia's children's commissioner, who has been effectively justifying the separation and kidnap of Ukrainian children. The hon. Member also made some important points about the seizure and the repurposing of assets. We heard a powerful speech from the SNP spokesperson, the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes), again demonstrating the unity of support from all parties across this House.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely) always makes very important points. His reflections today on the same brutal tactics that we saw in Syria, such as the targeting of hospitals, and his thoughtful remarks on the next stages of the war and the use of our diplomatic networks were very well put. My hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) spoke about mines and unexploded ordnance and the huge challenge that comes with that, the humanitarian need that exists, and the human rights violations that we have seen tragically revealed with each advance.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Dr Spencer) spoke powerfully about the work in our own communities and the support that is being given. Indeed, I have seen that in my own constituency in Cardiff South and Penarth. We have seen a new community centre opening up in Butetown and regular demonstrations and protests, ensuring that people remain engaged with the challenges that will tragically continue for some time and that, importantly, we keep it all on the agenda.

My hon. Friend the Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer) spoke powerfully about the scenes that we have seen in the past few days in Kherson and the need for the UK to have a long-term plan for as long as is needed. Indeed, that was reflected in the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), who rightly said that we must shut down the siren narratives from what he gently called the Putin whisperers—whether that is in the UK or, indeed, among our other allies—and, again, emphasised the need for long-term commitment and long-term supplies for as long as is needed. It was a very powerfully made

[Stephen Doughty]

point. The Liberal Democrat spokesperson, the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Richard Foord), spoke about the importance of aligning ourselves with the requests and demands of the Ukrainian Government. He also gave us some thoughtful reflections on history.

We have had a very useful debate. Today's proceedings are a true reflection of Britain's solidarity with the people of Ukraine, of our collective commitment to Ukrainian freedom and of our unwavering unity in opposition to this illegal war. Indeed, those were points that I and my right hon. Friends the shadow Defence Secretary and shadow Foreign Secretary made on our visit to NATO this weekend. We spoke of not only the importance of our continued support for Ukraine, but our continued support for our NATO allies in light of the threats that we face.

We are now more than eight months into a war that Putin expected to be over in days; instead, we are here. We have seen incredible scenes in the past few days in Kherson, lifting thousands from the yoke of Russian occupation and dealing a devastating blow to Putin, with the price of his miscalculations becoming ever more apparent to his people. Indeed, the scenes we have seen today of President Zelensky in the centre of Kherson are absolutely remarkable. The situation, although obviously very dangerous, is testament to his bravery and determination from the very top. The one thing I saw in Ukraine—from the bottom to the top—was the determination of the entire country to stand together in the face of this barbarous activity from the Russian regime.

I am sure the whole House will agree that, although the façade of Putin's invulnerability is beginning to dissipate as the war falls into further disarray, this is no time for complacency. We have all seen the critical infrastructure that has been destroyed and the damage that has been done. Despite the huge significance of this victory, with communications, electricity, water and energy utilities decimated and, indeed, heinous traps often left by the occupiers, the days ahead will be challenging for the people of Kherson and the other regions that are liberated.

We also know that Russian shells will tragically continue to fall on the city, that airstrikes will continue to affect Ukraine's urban centres—undoubtedly in retaliation for this defeat—and that the days and weeks ahead will be critical in setting the future course of this war. Indeed, on our visit I saw for myself the damage on the outskirts of Kyiv, and again I draw attention to my declaration on that matter.

I want to ask the Minister a number of questions. First, will he say a little more about the support being provided to Ukraine on demining and the removal of unexploded ordnance? That question came up in a number of the contributions. I know we have played a critical role so far, but it will be a very long job.

Secondly, we have heard many comments in the debate about the risks of siren narratives and Ukraine fatigue creeping into the domestic politics of our friends and allies around the world. We saw some of those narratives before the US mid-terms from some elements of the Republican party, and we see them in other countries, too.

We have also seen the Wagner Group not only committing horrific atrocities, but being very clear about what it intends in terms of disinformation and undermining our democracies. Prigozhin said himself:

“We have interfered, we are interfering and we will continue to interfere. Carefully, accurately, surgically and in our own way, as we know how to do”.

through disinformation and misinformation. The Wagner Group openly targeted a number of key races in the United States, and we know what it has done in elections around Europe.

Will the Minister say more about our efforts to counter that disinformation and ensure the robustness of our democratic systems and processes, our media, our elections and our political processes, and what steps is he taking with our allies to do that, not only in this country, but across our global alliances? With the G20 taking place in the coming days and the Prime Minister there in Bali, could the Minister also say what steps are being taken to ensure that support among our allies and partners is as ironclad as it was in February, and that all wings of our diplomatic coalition recognise that we are in this until Ukraine is the victor?

I must also address the attacks on Ukraine's critical infrastructure. We have seen terrible attacks against energy, water and other utilities and the use of Iranian drones. Will the Minister say more about what conversations he has been having with allies and with Israel regarding the wider risks posed by allowing Iran to supply and use that type of weaponry, and what steps we can take together to counter those risks?

I am grateful for the Minister's responses to my questions about the generators we are providing to Ukraine. I understand that 850 have now been provided. I note his earlier comments about support for electricity generation, but what conversations have Ministers had about long-term needs in that regard, and what conversations have we had with UK manufacturers to ensure a joined-up approach to providing power and critical infrastructure to the people of Ukraine?

It is also worth pointing out that Russia's attacks on fuel depots and other utilities have released toxins into the air and groundwater, threatening the environment of Ukraine. In comments at COP today, Ukraine's Environment Minister said that the emissions caused by Russia's actions were equivalent to having nearly 16 million more cars in the UK for two years. Those actions are causing not only death and destruction in cities, but environmental degradation and risk to our climate.

We have heard a lot about the repurposing of assets and compensation. Indeed, during this debate there has been a vote at the United Nations, which made clear that the United Nations believes that reparations should be paid and that there should be mechanisms for ensuring that compensation is provided to Ukraine. Will the Minister say a little about how he sees the diplomatic efforts in that regard progressing?

There are many other concerns that have been raised, including about domestic support. I hope we can have an update soon from the Home Office about the Homes for Ukraine scheme and how our support for refugees will continue. There are many unanswered questions, including about practical things. Many Ukrainians have raised concerns with me about driver's licences and permits,

since they were temporarily allowed not to register. What conversations has the Minister had with Department for Transport colleagues to resolve that issue?

In conclusion, eight months since Putin launched this illegal war, we must remind ourselves of one inescapable truth: for Ukraine, this is a war of necessity and survival, but for Putin, it is a choice—a barbarous choice—and an attempt to erase Ukraine from the map and to fulfil his warped imperial ambitions. That distinction must underscore our continued engagement with allies and partners in emphasising why holding firm, standing united and supporting Ukraine is so critical.

Whether on ensuring that food comes out of Ukraine and that we stand up fully against Russia's attempts to block that, on working at the United Nations, on sanctions, on military and civilian supplies, on macroeconomic support or on building political and diplomatic coalitions, we must stay the course. We in the Opposition are committed to working with the Government in supporting Ukraine in the difficult winter ahead and well into the future, for as long as it takes. Ukraine must win, and with our support we can ensure that this victory ends the Kremlin's cycle of warmongering for good.

8.40 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Leo Docherty):**

I am honoured to wind up this passionate, constructive and positive debate. I am grateful to all who have contributed. I will try to cover off as many points as possible in the brief time I have.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) for pointing out that this is day 264 of this brutal and illegal conflict. Of course, Putin has strengthened, not weakened, the western alliance. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his reassurance of support for the Government's position. He made some interesting reflections on the utility of Operation Interflex and the remarkable training that we are doing, with our allies, for our Ukrainian friends. He pointed out the need for resolve, and we are resolute.

The hon. Gentleman appealed for a long-term plan. I can give him the assurance that we do have a long-term plan. We have announced that, next year, we will match or exceed the £2.3 billion that we have put into military assistance next year. Of course, we will underwrite and grant in excess of £1.5 billion of humanitarian and fiscal aid to our Ukrainian friends through the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

**Bob Seely:** We have been using up our own supplies, so could the Minister reassure us that, as well as giving supplies to the Ukrainians, we are being mindful of our own needs and supply base?

**Leo Docherty:** My hon. Friend will have noted that the Minister for Defence Procurement was on the Front Bench earlier and we were discussing exactly that point.

The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport asked for a refresh of the integrated review. I will not give a running commentary, but we should remember that the integrated review was basically proved right. We are refreshing it—it is an organic, evolving document and it is in good shape. He mentioned NLAW production, which is a valuable point; we are working with industry to ensure that there is a pipeline.

The hon. Gentleman made a valuable point about dual-use technology. I am reassured that our sanctions provisions cover that, but I will look at that RUSI report and ask my MOD colleague, the Minister for Defence Procurement, to reply on that important report.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned war crimes. Two weeks ago, I was at the Hague meeting the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, who has the bit between his teeth. Clearly, he is independent, but we will support him institutionally as much as we can to hold those who are prosecuting war crimes to account not just for reasons of natural justice, but to deter any further possible war crimes.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the humanitarian crisis that will surely emerge this winter. We are pleased to be providing £220 million of humanitarian aid and, of course, 850 generators to keep homes warm. He mentioned the defence budget. I will not speculate from the Dispatch Box about events this Thursday. I know that he will be patient in waiting to hear the detail that will be laid out then.

Moving on, my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr Djanogly) spoke interestingly of his visit to Ukraine. He shared some interesting reflections on the nature of Russian leadership and on the fact that no Putin does not necessarily mean no war—I thought that was a very interesting way of looking at it. He also speculated whether it is Putin or Russia that should be held accountable. He also spoke about the reconstruction effort and the funding thereof. I remind him that we are proudly hosting the Ukraine recovery conference in July next year. Given his long-standing interest in Ukraine, I know that he will take a good deal of interest in that event.

The hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) spoke movingly about accountability and war crimes. Again, I reiterate that I have visited the ICC and our determination and expectation that those who have prosecuted war crimes will be held to account. He set the conflict in a useful global context, which I thought was very interesting, and referred to resource terrorism, which is exactly what the constraints on the flow of grain from the Black sea amount to. He spoke about the existential nature of the Ukrainians' noble struggle, and I was very interested to learn about the activities and operations of the Pride brigade, which is most welcome. I thank him, as ever, for his and his party's ongoing support for the Government's position on Ukraine.

My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely) spoke with characteristic knowledge and insight about the two-pronged approach of the Russian war machine and Surovikin—the use of the Dnipro defensive position on the river, and the abhorrent and entirely outrageous attempts to smash civilian infrastructure, including hospitals. He drew a morbid parallel with Syria, which was interesting, but of course it is deeply worrying. He also raised the terrifying spectre of the use of chemical weapons. I think he is right in his judgment that Putin has bought some time, but is there perhaps some sort of revolutionary endgame—who knows? I thought that my hon. Friend's speculation and the various scenarios he laid out were interesting and based on a deep knowledge of that country, given his former residence there.

**Liam Byrne:** Given that the Minister recognises the risk of Putin damaging Ukrainian civilian infrastructure, why does he argue that we should not be providing longer-range fires to Ukrainian armed forces to counter that?

**Leo Docherty:** All options remain on the table. I note that Ukrainians have, thanks to western support, been terrifically effective in taking down some of the ballistic barrage in defending their skies, but I am not going to rule out anything from the Dispatch Box.

The hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), the Chair of the International Development Committee, made a good remark about the HALO Trust. I can confirm that we continue to support the HALO Trust, which has so far cleared 16,000 square metres of land in the Kyiv oblast and will continue to do so. We have pledged £220 million of humanitarian aid. I assure her that that is reaching the frontline, as it were: the people who need it. We are working with the United Nations, the Red Cross and NGOs. Some 13.4 million people have been helped so far with funds distributed. She also mentioned accountability, and I draw reference to my previous remarks about the International Criminal Court. She appealed for a joined-up approach, which is exactly what we are after. I have not yet read her report, but I look forward to reading it, and I am grateful to her for bringing it up.

My hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Dr Spencer) made a moving speech reflecting on the great compassion shown by his constituents. He referred to the remarkable way they had opened up their hearts and homes. Every Member of this House will have seen that in their own constituency; I have certainly seen it in Aldershot. I second the thanks he put on record to the Revive café in Chertsey, the Weybridge Friends of Ukraine and the Weybridge community hub. He asked a technical question about Homes for Ukraine and the extent to which provision might be made directly to the local authority if it was not going via host families. I have not got an answer right now, but I will ensure that a colleague from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities writes to him, as well as the Chair of the International Development Committee.

**Dean Russell:** May I share the points that colleagues and Members from across the House made about the need to support Ukrainian refugees in the long term, for as long as they need to be here? Will the Minister reflect on how we support their mental health as they deal with crisis from afar? In particular, will he reflect on how Government and local government can give support to support groups that are helping so many at the moment?

**Leo Docherty:** My hon. Friend's intervention is well noted, and I put on record my thanks for what he does as a mental health champion and for his support of our Ukrainian friends in his constituency.

The hon. Member for St Helens South and Whiston (Ms Rimmer) spoke movingly in an appeal for solidarity among the allies on Ukraine. That is what we see on the diplomatic front, on the military front and in terms of reconstruction. I see that visibly and powerfully when travelling and talking to allies right across Europe, and we are bold in our resolve to see this through.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) spoke passionately and laid out three interesting points, first on the military dimension and an appeal to provide long-range fires. As I said, I am not going to rule anything in or out at the Dispatch Box, but all options continue to be under review. I appreciate how he described the Ukrainians' courage as having bought them a huge advantage, and I think that is at the heart of the successful prosecution of their counter-attack. Their courage has bought them significant advantage. He also referred to the utility of having an infinite supply of arms and drew an interesting historical parallel with Milošević. I thought that was interesting in the context of there being an arsenal of hope in the western allies. I thought that was useful and I am grateful.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill referred to political pressure and forthrightly challenged the Government to designate the United Russia party and Russia as a state sponsor of terror. That is an interesting proposition. I will not make a pronouncement about that but I am grateful for the passionate way in which he raised those questions. He also raised some interesting technical questions about sanctions. We are getting after not just sanctioning but seizing and ensuring that things such as the moneys from the sale of Chelsea football club get to those who need it. I am grateful for his interest.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Richard Foord) made an interesting parallel to 1916 and gave some good insights from his discussions with a Ukrainian MP colleague, for which I was most grateful. He made an interesting remark about Catherine the Great's approach to her borders, which is worrying given the imperial parallels that are sometimes drawn by the Russian leadership themselves.

The hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) gave some good reflections on the impressive sight of President Zelensky visiting Kherson, leading from the front as ever. I was grateful for his remarks about that. He speaks from a position of knowledge, having visited Kyiv recently. I am grateful for his constructive and positive tone, as ever. We will continue to support the HALO Trust's effort to continue de-mining. We are working with allies to counter disinformation across the region in all domains. That continues at pace. On the appeal for unity, I think we do have that with our allies. He mentioned drones and Iran; we are getting after that with our very aggressive sanctions policy, but we will look at dual use in that regard.

**Stephen Doughty:** I asked whether the Minister had yet raised that issue with Israel. There are rumours that Iran has been supplying medium-range ballistic missiles to Russia, to be stationed in locations capable of targeting Kyiv.

**Leo Docherty:** My understanding is that that has been, but I will check and write to the hon. Gentleman. I want to be complete in my answer. He mentioned generators; we are getting after that, and 850 have been committed. I should also say that £10 million has today been committed by the Foreign Secretary to the technical reconstruction of power-generating capability. The first £5 million has been committed today but there is a £10 million fund. He mentioned reparations; again, that is something to be broadly considered.



Let me reassure hon. Members that we will not be deterred from supporting Ukraine. I want to draw attention to the fact that a good measure of our resilience and the strength of our alliance is that last month at the United Nations, 143 countries—three quarters of the membership—voted to condemn the outrageous and illegal annexation of Ukrainian territory. That was a measure of the fact that Ukraine is strong because it has many friends. Russia, despite having a very long border, has very few friends. We are proud to stand with our Ukrainian friends for freedom, democracy and the sovereignty of nations around the world. We will proudly continue to stand with them until they are victorious.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** On Thursday, I was privileged to be at a Ukraine fundraiser at St Paul's Church at Wilton Place in London. There was a very Welsh theme—that is why I am looking at you, Stephen—with the London Welsh choir and my good friend, the soprano Rebecca Evans, singing. It was ethereal music for a just cause. I hope that we raised substantial sums of money and I pay tribute to all those throughout the country who are helping to raise funds for the Ukraine cause.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the situation in Ukraine.

## Low Traffic Neighbourhoods: Latchford

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

8.54 pm

**Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con):** I am grateful to secure this debate to discuss the impact of low traffic neighbourhoods in Latchford. I will go on to talk about the practical and environmental impact of these initiatives, or rather the lack thereof, as I will explain in the case of Warrington South, I will focus on my constituents' experiences of the Westy low traffic neighbourhood zone, which was imposed by Warrington Borough Council on people living and working in the Latchford area earlier this year.

Conservative councillors and I have been at odds with Labour over this issue for some time. I have had many meetings with local residents and business owners who have told me that they are angry and simply fed up with the low traffic zone that has been forced on them without proper consultation, and that the council has failed to listen to their concerns about the scheme.

To explain the background to what is happening in Latchford, I will take hon. Members back to 2019—pre-pandemic—when initial consultations took place on a low traffic neighbourhood. As part of the Central 6 Streets masterplan for Warrington, the borough council proposed to implement low traffic neighbourhood zones in Westy, an area of Latchford, and in Orford, which falls in the constituency of the hon. Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols).

After late 2019, nothing happened for almost three years. Then signs began to appear out of the blue. The trial for the low traffic neighbourhoods was due to begin on 20 June 2022 and to last for 18 months. Prior to the scheme's implementation, I had already received many pieces of correspondence from constituents who were concerned about how the LTN would affect traffic routes and congestion, especially by diverting vehicles around two primary schools and through nearby streets.

When I looked closely at the Central 6 Streets masterplan, it was obvious why many constituents were concerned by the lack of communication from the council. Even the dedicated Facebook page had last been updated in 2019. Given that social media are critical for getting the message out to constituents in this day and age, that severe lack of information from the council is quite shocking.

Conservative councillors and I called for planned closures to be put on hold so that concerns about the LTN could be properly addressed before a trial run was enacted. The Conservative group on the council tabled a motion to call for operations to be halted in case the borough council refused to listen and decided to press ahead anyway. It was encouraging to see many local residents taking to the streets and making their voices heard in a well-attended protest outside the council offices when the vote was due to take place. Many people also got in contact with me and borough councillors to warn of the inevitable problems that the LTN scheme would cause, and to urge the council to rethink.

Sadly, it came as no surprise that Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors decided to press ahead with the Westy scheme, despite their decision to pause

[*Andy Carter*]

the equivalent scheme in Orford in Warrington North. In an open letter to Warrington residents, the council leader wrote:

“After carefully considering feedback we have received over the last couple of weeks, we have come to the conclusion that while we will proceed as planned with the Westy scheme, it is only right to pause our plans for Orford, to reflect on the feedback we have received.”

I do not know exactly why the council considered my constituents in Warrington South less deserving of proper consultation about policies affecting their daily lives than those in Warrington North, but there we have it: the council pressed ahead in Warrington South but paused in Warrington North.

The day before the Westy trial was due to begin, Conservative councillors again placed a motion before the full council to call for the LTN to be paused for further consultation with local residents, but again that was simply ignored. A few days after the LTN trial began, I met business owners at their request to hear their take on the road closures and how they were affecting their businesses. I must say that I have never been so depressed and seriously worried by the impact on businesses in an area as a result of changes made by a local council.

Some businesses had suffered a drop in trade so significant that they were already seriously considering closing down. Two businesses that I spoke to had seen takings drop by 40% on the previous week, and after five months, I am afraid that the situation is no better. Local business owners—the people who proudly stand as the backbone of our high streets—who rely on passing trade for much of their income are telling me that they now face closure and redundancies unless the problems with the LTNs are urgently addressed.

Over the summer, I sent out thousands of surveys—one to every household in Latchford East—to ask for feedback on the low traffic neighbourhood, so I could understand and get feedback on the general opinion once the scheme had been brought into effect. I am incredibly grateful that more than 900 households came back to me to share their thoughts, and the results speak for themselves. Since the implementation of the new road layout several months prior, 86% of respondents told me they wanted to return to the old layout, while 87% said they did not support the decision to close Grange Avenue to through traffic.

The most alarming result was that over 85% of respondents reported that their journey times had increased because they were sitting in traffic for longer as a result of a low traffic neighbourhood. As someone who has experienced travelling along Kingsway and Knutsford Road in peak times through Warrington South, I understand their frustration. Increased congestion clearly flies in the face of the council’s own environmental commitments, yet the reality is that an LTN scheme has simply made it worse.

What I really do think is a travesty for local democracy is that 85% of those constituents who fed back to me said that they were not consulted about the road closures prior to their being implemented. I am afraid that it is simply unacceptable to put in place a scheme that is

going to cause so much change and disruption to people’s daily lives, and not have the courtesy to ask for their views on it beforehand.

After I shared these findings with the borough council and an evaluation of the feedback from its own interim survey had been carried out, I received an email from the council saying that it was going to make some changes to the Westy low traffic neighbourhood. I was hoping it would really take account of the points raised by local residents; sadly, it did not. It did not reverse any of the scheme, but simply moved a couple of planters. It means that constituents who have experienced a 10 minutes or sometimes 20 minutes longer journey to get from one end of a road to another are still facing those long delays. What local residents in Latchford made clear to me was that they want Grange Avenue reopened to traffic. This is a simple change that would reduce congestion and reduce journey times, but yet again the council is failing to listen.

I hope I have made it abundantly clear that opposition to low-traffic neighbourhoods is not about blanket opposition to policies designed to protect the environment and improve air quality. The problem we have in Warrington is that when car options are taken away, there are not many alternatives. The overwhelming majority of workplaces in Warrington are on the edge of the town, quite some distance from homes, and the opportunity to use public transport is limited, even though the Government have provided additional funding for buses. The replication of a London-style service is just not there yet. What I see in so many of the surveys that have taken place on low traffic neighbourhoods is that in areas of London where there is good public transport these schemes seem to work very well, but in areas around the UK where there is no alternative they struggle to get traction.

**Dean Russell (Watford) (Con):** I thank my hon. Friend for his generosity in giving way. On his points about buses, I often find the same challenge when there are consultations with bus users about changes to bus routes. Recently I met a community of bus users who told me about the challenges they have found with bus routes that have been changed, but they have not been consulted about what changes there will be to the buses they travel on. I am sure there were consultations, but there need to be more robust guidelines from Government and local government to the bus organisations themselves, so that they have to say, “This route is changing. What do you think about that, how will it change your life and what will be the impact of that?” I think that would go a long way to help reassure people that they are not going to suddenly find themselves without transport to hospitals, to work and in their daily lives.

**Andy Carter:** I am very grateful for my hon. Friend’s intervention. I know he is a fantastic champion for people living in Watford, which is a very similar town to Warrington in that it relies on public transport, particularly for older residents. He is absolutely right that, where changes are made, bus companies often think their message is being delivered to the users, and it simply is not. I think we should encourage everybody involved with delivering public transport solutions to deliver a message time and again, so that that message really gets through to the constituents who need it.

**Katherine Fletcher** (South Ribble) (Con): If these decisions are being taken in isolation, no one is considering the integrated transport aspects—closing a road has a knock-on impact on residents in one way, whereas changing a bus service has an impact in another way. Does my hon. Friend think we actually empower councils to do a good job, or are they just working in isolation to their own specific individual goals?

**Andy Carter:** That is the whole point of this debate: a decision taken by locally elected members to change a road layout or a bus timetable has a huge impact on people's lives. It is so easy to forget that one small decision taken in a town hall at 8 o'clock on a Thursday evening can really have an impact on somebody's ability to get to work on time, or even to get to work. These things are absolutely fundamental to the lives people lead, yet we take decisions without really thinking through the big picture and thinking about how those things play out when looked at as a whole. I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend.

Warrington's road network struggles to cope with traffic because of the funnelling effect of the bridges over the River Mersey and the Manchester ship canal. Those who know the Westy area of Warrington will be aware that it is surrounded by water to the north and south, with the Mersey and the ship canal, and it has been that way for as long as anybody can remember. As I have explained, this LTN scheme simply will not fulfil its stated objectives; on the contrary, it makes air pollution far worse because traffic sits for much longer and does not flow as it once did, and journeys take longer. The council has failed to take into account the proper environmental and logistical impacts of its plans, which is simply bewildering to me and the many residents who have been in touch to talk about this issue.

On top of that, there is a problem with the entire manner in which this LTN scheme has been imposed without proper consultation or due consideration for local people, which angers both them and me. When councils close off roads that residents and businesses have depended on for their throughfare and trade for so many years, it does not take a genius to work out that it is going to have negative impacts in other areas. No hindsight is required here for Labour; this is simply a case of the council putting through a scheme that has not received proper consideration or had the necessary consultation, and it needs to be reversed. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House put it so well in her response to my question a few weeks ago, councillors should take note of what local people are saying, not just because it is their job as representatives, but because local people will more often than not have the best ideas about how to manage particular situations that affect them through their own lived experience.

Before I close I have some questions for the Minister, and I would be very grateful if he could give me some responses either now or in writing later. My constituents are keen to understand what assessment the Government make of the value to be gained from funding when it is allocated to schemes such as the one in Westy. How does the Department for Transport monitor the environmental and air quality benefits in areas where LTNs are introduced? Warrington has some of the worst air pollution levels of any town in the north of England because of the motorway network that surrounds it—the M6, the M62

and the M56 are all nearby—but can we really see whether introducing an LTN will make a difference to the air quality in particular areas if we are not putting any additional equipment in place to monitor what is actually happening there?

When councils make bids for active travel funding, how do the Government ensure that there is some level of joined-up thinking, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher) mentioned, so that where motorists are penalised and are unable to drive on certain roads, suitable alternatives are provided for them so they can still get to work? Are there any penalties for local authorities that apply for trial funding but later realise, having run a trial, that it did not work?

What level of local engagement and, critically, support should schemes have before they are introduced in a local area? If a local authority carries out a survey before introducing a low traffic neighbourhood and sees that people do not support it, is that justification for not going ahead with the scheme, or should it push ahead anyway because it would be good for local people? Finally, will the Minister confirm that the scheme in Westy was put forward by local councillors for central Government funding and not the other way round?

I have been clear in my opposition to the Westy low traffic neighbourhood scheme. I oppose it because my local constituents tell me that it is making their lives more difficult and, as long as my constituents continue to be affected by ill thought out decisions by the Labour borough council, I will continue to hold the council to account in this place and in Warrington.

9.10 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Richard Holden):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (Andy Carter) on securing this Adjournment debate. I also thank my hon. Friends the Members for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher) and for Watford (Dean Russell), who are both local champions for their communities, for raising further important points. I will address one of the main questions asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South at the very start. The scheme in Westy was put forward to the Government by local councillors for funding. I will write to him with a detailed explanation from my departmental officials on monitoring, the nature of funding, how ratios are allocated and so on.

Let me set out some background on where responsibilities for such traffic management issues lie. Managing traffic on local roads is and always has been a matter for local transport authorities. They have a range of duties, powers and responsibilities, and a considerable toolkit of measures that they can make use of. Local highway authorities have a duty under section 16 of the Traffic Management Act 2004 to manage their roads to secure “the expeditious movement” of all traffic. Meeting that duty is by no means easy and is a daily challenge faced by local authority traffic managers and their colleagues across the country. Balancing the different needs of road users and the many and varied demands on roads is complex. The role of the Department is therefore to set an overarching Government policy and provide an enabling framework of legislation, guidance and advice.

The Department has no remit to intervene in matters of local democratic decision making. Decisions on what traffic management measures to provide, including low

[Mr Richard Holden]

traffic neighbourhoods such as the one that my hon. Friend talked about in Latchford—specifically in Westy—are entirely a matter for local authorities such as Warrington to make. They need to be held accountable for them by the local electorate.

Streets and roads make up three quarters of all of our public space and, as my hon. Friend outlined in making his case, how they are designed has a really significant impact on people's lives. The Department has for a long time encouraged local authorities to design their streets in a way that creates a sense of place and puts consideration of the needs of local people first. The “Manual for Streets”, published by the Department for Transport in 2007, provides guidance on that. The design of streets can deliver on a wide range of objectives such as high street regeneration and economic growth, contributing towards net zero, decarbonising transport, and air pollution, which my hon. Friend talked about. We are currently revising the “Manual for Streets” and aim to publish a revised version in early 2023.

There are many good and popular traffic management schemes across the country, many of which are designed to enable local economic growth. Examples include the Waterfront in Ipswich and the centre of Welwyn Garden City. However, others do not seem to have met those high standards. The challenge now is to learn from experience and ensure that all local authorities develop schemes in a way that fully involves their communities and leads to high quality outcomes. Only then will we see the step change in design that we need to help deliver the commitments from “Gear Change” and the overall goal of net zero.

My hon. Friend rightly raised his concerns about engagement with the local council in the planning stages and later on. Engagement should not end there—this is an important point—but should continue, and authorities should continue to monitor how schemes are performing and make changes if they need to.

With regards to Latchford, I agree that any scheme must be developed and implemented after thorough engagement with the community affected. The Department made that very clear when communicating with local authorities about the active travel fund. Community engagement is key. I note that Warrington Borough Council did carry out some engagement on the proposal, but engagement should use objective methods to establish a truly representative picture of local views and ensure that minority views do not dominate. The party political nature of local Members of Parliament should also have no bearing on it. There are many ways an authority can consult and engage. What is important is that representatives of the whole community are engaged. It is for local authorities to decide what methods to use, but, as my hon. Friend has been doing today, they should be held to account for whatever methods they use. Authorities should also be open to continuing to listen and to making changes to any scheme in the light of real-world experience and feedback from local people.

On the impact on journey times in and around Latchford, it is for Warrington Borough Council and its leadership to justify the design of this particular scheme. I understand

that changes to road layouts can cause confusion. Again, while the exact nature of the scheme is a matter for the council, the general aim of low traffic neighbourhoods is to prevent through traffic and rat-running, not to prevent access by car for residents, visitors or essential services. Where they are put in place, that should be kept in mind.

I note the concerns raised about whether low traffic neighbourhoods lead to increased congestion, in particular on boundary roads. It is certainly the case that where a low traffic neighbourhood is poorly designed it can have negative impacts, but well-designed active travel schemes need not cause additional congestion. When part of a well designed network, they can be a far more efficient way of moving people around our town centres—and, indeed, in and out of towns.

**Andy Carter:** I am very grateful for the Minister's response. Does he agree that certain areas are simply not right for a low traffic neighbourhood because of the constraints that exist in them—rivers or other waterways—and that to close rat runs, as the Minister mentioned, is to actually close roads that people use? The speed at which vehicles travel along those roads is perhaps a case for looking at road planning, rather than determining that they are rat runs.

**Mr Holden:** I agree completely with my hon. Friend. This is very much a horses for courses situation. Some areas are suitable for LTNs—he mentioned that in some parts of the country they have been welcomed—but other areas are not, and he is completely right to highlight that point.

Well-designed schemes can help people to move around more efficiently. This, again, is where Active Travel England can help local authorities to ensure that their schemes are properly thought through, including the impact on other traffic in and around their areas.

I thank my hon. Friend for raising this important issue. In short, well-designed schemes can promote better road use, including cycling and walking, and deliver benefits for all road users and local communities. They can make our town centres more attractive and boost local economies, as well as deliver health and environmental benefits. Our updated “Manual for Streets”, together with the work of Active Travel England, will have a role in helping local authorities to design and implement such schemes effectively, learning the lessons of experience in the implementation of existing schemes. What is particularly important is that local authorities listen to their local people and reflect carefully on the views expressed by the residents they serve and their democratically elected representatives. That includes the people of Warrington South, who could not have a more doughty champion than my hon. Friend. I hope that in this case Warrington Borough Council listens to representations and considers them as it takes the scheme forward into the future.

*Question put and agreed to.*

9.18 pm

*House adjourned.*

# Westminster Hall

Monday 14 November 2022

[CAROLYN HARRIS *in the Chair*]

## Early Years Childcare: Staff-Child Ratios

4.30 pm

**Carolyn Harris (in the Chair):** Before I call the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) to open the debate, I wish to make a short statement about the sub judice resolution. I have been advised that the petition being debated today indirectly relates to the death of Oliver Steeper last year. An inquest relating to the death of Oliver Steeper remains open, and a police investigation into the circumstances surrounding his death is ongoing, so Members should refrain from making any reference to those circumstances.

**Catherine McKinnell** (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 615623, relating to staff-child ratios in early years childcare.

It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Ms Harris. The petition, which was signed by more than 109,000 petitioners, states:

“The Government should not reduce the existing adult-child childcare ratios as has been suggested. There are surely better ways to reduce the cost of living—potentially endangering children in trusted care is not how it should be done.”

First and foremost, I thank Zoe and Lewis Steeper, who started the petition and are in the Public Gallery. Zoe and Lewis recently lost their son, Oliver, following an incident that occurred at his nursery. I want to convey my deepest condolences for their loss. On hearing the Government’s proposal to reduce childcare ratios in nursery settings, Lewis and Zoe started the petition to challenge the Government’s thinking. Over 109,000 people agree with them; I am sure that the number is higher, but that is how many people have physically signed their support.

I want to put on record my admiration for Zoe and Lewis for being such powerful advocates on this issue, despite how unimaginably challenging that must be, and for taking the time to speak to me ahead of the debate. I also thank the Early Years Alliance, the National Day Nurseries Association and the Education Policy Institute for sharing their expert insights with me in preparation for the debate.

We all know—I hope it is why we are in this room—that a functioning early years system is fundamental to driving a flourishing society and economy. We need to stop thinking about childcare as some sort of luxury. Instead we should think of it as the foundation of the best start to a child’s life and the best chance for our economy. Quality early education is a key determiner of children’s life outcomes. Access to childcare can also shape parents’ futures, allowing them the flexibility to choose if and when they want to work, yet when we look at which developed countries have the highest childcare costs, the UK consistently ranks among the highest on the list—and parents are really feeling it.

A recent survey by Pregnant Then Screwed found that childcare costs have forced 43% of mothers to consider leaving their jobs and 40% to consider leaving work. Is it not absurd that during an unprecedented cost of living crisis, in which our economy is bumping along the bottom, families with young children cannot afford to go to work? Our childcare and early years system is broken. It needs transforming into a modern, flexible system that will properly deliver for children, parents and our economy.

The Government recognise the issue—or they certainly claim to. In July, the Department for Education published a consultation on its proposals to improve the cost, choice and availability of childcare. Its plans include the relaxation of regulations on the care of two-year-olds in early years settings. Current rules require there to be at least one member of staff per four children aged two. The Government’s proposals would allow one staff member to care for up to five two-year-olds. That change, Ministers have claimed, will save £40 a week on childcare costs, but we have to ask ourselves: at what price? And is that £40 mythical or real?

**Munira Wilson** (Twickenham) (LD): The hon. Lady is making an excellent speech. I add my condolences to the parents of Oliver, who are here; they are very brave for joining us. On the point about the change of ratio increasing affordability, does the hon. Lady agree that 86% of providers say that Government funding for three-year-olds and four-year-olds does not cover their costs anyway, so changing the ratios is a red herring? The savings will not be passed on to parents struggling with the cost of living. More importantly, all the evidence shows—she referenced the Education Policy Institute—that in early years settings, the fewer children to adults, the better the learning outcomes, and that helps to reduce the attainment gap that she talked about.

**Catherine McKinnell:** I agree with everything that the hon. Lady said. She put succinctly what I am about to say at much greater length.

For Oliver’s mum and dad, early years experts, the 109,000 people angry enough about the issue to sign the petition and, I suspect, most parents, these vital regulations help to protect the safety of children. I think everyone will agree that providing childcare comes with immense responsibility. From playtime to lunchtime to cleaning and changing, there are ever-present hazards for children. I am a mother of three, and I cannot imagine safely looking after four two-year-olds, unless they were kept in a contained space, with limited opportunity for physical movement and no opportunity for play, and away from all hazards. Of course, early years staff know the risks, and spend every working hour protecting children from them, but there is genuine apprehension that that may not be possible under the revised ratios.

A sense of acute concern came through to me in conversations that I had ahead of the debate. The warning from early years experts could not have been more stark: deregulating childcare ratios without making significant changes to training and funding will put the safety of young children at unacceptable risk. Staff are reportedly already leaving the sector because of the stress, and the overwhelming sense of responsibility to protect the best interests of children. Relaxing childcare

[Catherine McKinnell]

ratios would heighten the potential for an accident, and increase the chances of an accident leading to an emergency. Parents share that fear.

**Tulip Siddiq** (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): I pay tribute to Lewis and Zoe for their bravery in being here and supporting us. My hon. Friend is talking about the physical danger that children could be in, and I am sure that she is about to get on to the impact on their mental health. I received an email from my constituent Magda, a child psychotherapist. She got in touch when she heard about the debate, because she is extremely worried about the impact that increasing the child-to-adult ratio will have on the mental health of vulnerable young people. Magda says that the plans, which follow a pandemic, lockdowns and a cost of living crisis, are expected to worsen her patients' mental health. That will add to demand at both the private and NHS clinics that she works in. Will my hon. Friend talk about the impact of these budgetary savings on the mental health of our children?

**Catherine McKinnell:** I absolutely agree. I will go into more detail on the potential impact of the changes on the mental health, wellbeing and development of children, but there is a much broader point about the mental health of the childcare workforce, who will have to manage additional stress and responsibility, and of parents, who have expressed their concerns and anxiety about the changes. When a parent puts their child into a childcare setting, they have to be confident that it is right for their child.

In response to a poll conducted by Pregnant Then Screwed about the proposals, one parent—this very much goes to the point that my hon. Friend raised—commented:

“My child has severe allergies and [at] more than the current ratios I couldn't cope with the anxiety of something being missed”. Another shared similar concerns:

“This absolutely terrifies me... I've been so upset thinking about them being busier... what happens if they make a mistake with his food... what happens if they have less time to watch over him as he eats”,

and he gets sick? When parents take their child to nursery, they trust that their child will be provided with the best possible care, and that the whole system will prioritise their child's safety. Parents understandably feel that the proposals risk betraying that trust. Deregulating the childcare ratios would endanger not just children's wellbeing, but the quality of early years provision for many of them. Quality would be subject to a postcode lottery, or parents' ability to pay.

Early education is vital to ensuring that children across the board, universally, have the best start in life. Evidence consistently proves that a child's cognitive development and social and behavioural outcomes are largely determined by the early years input they receive. Quality early years education requires staff to give each child the right care and attention, and to identify their individual needs. It results in children feeling safe, secure, and able to learn. It involves well-managed risk taking, which is inherent in any play-based activity, and allows a child to learn independently, discover, explore and play. However, all these vital aspects of early years learning risk being lost if there are fewer adults per child.

Adults would have less time to pay individualised attention to each child, and that can potentially harm their ability to build strong relationships. Indeed, the Government's own research found that lax ratio regulations would lead to poorer-quality provision. Staff would have fewer opportunities to identify special educational needs, which would lead to later diagnosis and poorer outcomes in later life. The Government's own special educational needs and disabilities review warned against that, and it was highlighted as a specific concern by 90% of National Day Nurseries Association members.

The changes would limit the ability of early education to improve social mobility, and the most disadvantaged children would be the most likely to miss out. We risk creating a two-tier system, in which the families who can afford the least have no choice but to send their child to a 1:5 setting and receive a lower standard of care and education. That is not levelling up.

In its review of “Structural elements of quality early years provision”, the Education Policy Institute was clear:

“The evidence on child to staff ratios is fairly conclusive: having fewer children per staff leads to better children's outcomes as it provides the opportunity for more individualised attention and leads to better teacher and child behaviour.”

We could almost say that it is child's play—it is fairly obvious. In their response to the petition, the Government said they would not compromise on

“high quality early years provision for our youngest children”,

but expert opinion and evidence on this issue is conclusive: changes to early years ratios could put children's development at risk and exacerbate the disadvantage gap.

Petitioners are particularly concerned about the timing of the proposals, given the challenges that young children face as a result of the pandemic—a point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq). Ofsted has repeatedly warned of the serious impact that covid has had on early learning and development in the past two years. Its most recent report showed that children are lacking the expected communication and motor skills, have reduced independence, and are often referred for additional support. Now more than ever, children attending early years settings need more individualised care, support and stimulation, but these proposals will deliver the exact opposite. Is this really the future we want for our children?

We have to recognise the impact that the proposals would have on early years staff. For many years, the childcare sector has been desperate for support in tackling its growing recruitment and retention crisis. A survey carried out by the Early Years Alliance found that eight in 10 providers find it difficult to recruit staff, with over a third of the workforce actively considering leaving the sector. That has directly impacted the availability of childcare, as more settings are struggling to offer their normal sessions and parents are becoming unable to access any services at all. The Early Years Commission found that work demands are a key factor in turnover. Wages are painfully low, averaging less than the minimum wage, and professional development is almost non-existent.

Those who are left in this ever-shrinking workforce are simply exhausted. The Early Years Commission said that early years practitioners are “underpaid, overworked and undervalued”, yet the proposed changes

to the ratios will only increase the demands. Already stretched staff will be forced to care for even more children, with no promise of improved pay, development or better working conditions. It cannot be overstated how damaging that would be for staff morale when the feeling of neglect by the Government is already widespread in the sector.

The change would have devastating consequences for the childcare system. In an Early Years Alliance survey of nursery and pre-school staff, 75% of respondents said that they would likely leave if ratios were relaxed in their setting. Take that in for a moment: three quarters of our early years workforce will potentially be gone. Our childcare system is already on its knees. It is desperate for support and change, and I simply do not know how it would survive the exodus of staff following the Government's proposed change.

Having touched on the main concerns highlighted by parents and providers, I want to reflect on what the Government have to say about the proposals. In response to the petition, the Department for Education said:

"This change would align the English system to that of Scotland."

It emphasises:

"we have no evidence to suggest that the Scottish model is unsafe, and evidence shows high parental satisfaction rates."

It also highlighted:

"England's statutory minimum staff to child ratios for 2-year-olds are among the highest in Europe."

If we take those claims at face value, they appear to be true, but I cannot help but question the Government's sincerity, when they must know they are comparing apples and pears. It is true that, north of the border, only one member of staff is required to be present for every five children aged two, yet those settings are also required to have a lead practitioner who is qualified to degree level, and all other entry-level workers must have the Scottish equivalent of an English level 2 NVQ. Those qualification expectations far exceed those in England, where successive Governments have failed to upskill early years practitioners into a professionalised workforce. Here, childcare providers caring for children aged two are expected to have at least one member of staff who holds a level 3 qualification, and only half of the other staff members are required to hold an approved level 2.

The differences do not stop there. Early years staff in Scotland can expect continuous professional development through the skills investment plans. All staff delivering the funded entitlement of childcare are guaranteed the real living wage. Scotland also has a different curriculum and a different quality framework, and progress is measured against an entirely different set of criteria. As Jane Malcolm from the National Day Nurseries Association says:

"It's like comparing apples to pears—it's a very different system in place to ensure quality for children. It's not just a numbers game."

The Government's cynical attempt to cherry-pick aspects of early years models continues with their reference to Europe; that is another comparison where the headline figures do not reflect the more complex truth. Our child-led, play-based approach to early years provision differs from the adult-led, table-based focus often evident in countries across Europe. Given our greater focus on riskier, play-based approaches, is it not natural that there be a requirement for tighter supervision of children in England?

The system differences continue. Staff in Europe tend to be more qualified—generally to a degree or masters level—and the OECD noted that European settings tend to have a wider team of support staff, who are not included in the child ratios. For example, French settings have additional ancillary staff, who give support on tasks such as food preparation and nappy changing. Those are among the duties that early years staff in England have highlighted as being at greatest risk.

What about a European country that, despite all those considerations, genuinely does have less-regulated childcare? If we look at the example of the Netherlands, in 2005, a series of reforms led to an increasingly deregulated early years system. A major part of those reforms was the relaxation of ratios, although those were for childminders rather than within childcare settings. Nevertheless, the consequences of those changes are worth considering as part of this discussion.

The Institute for Public Policy Research found that the 2005 reforms had variable impacts on childcare quality and actually led to a 43% rise in unsatisfactory providers. The process of deregulation also increased the amount of part-time and lower-paid work, especially among women. Those are all outcomes that I would hope we would be trying to avoid, not exacerbate.

Even if we consider childcare ratios in early years settings, the outlook is similarly bleak. In the Netherlands, only one adult is required to care for eight two-year-olds, a ratio significantly more relaxed than in England, yet one look at worker satisfaction tells us that it is not working either. At the end of 2021, the early years workforce actually went on strike to protest against workload pressure. How did the trade union propose solving the problem? By reducing the number of children per adult and hiring additional staff.

It seems telling that, where we have evidence of a deregulated system, the measures seem to have worsened the problems in childcare service, not improved them. Given that the Government have proved unable to cope with the litany of strikes across our economy already, might I suggest they would want to avoid triggering some more?

Finally, I want to interrogate just one more of the Department for Education's claims, which I am sure the Minister will respond to in due course. It is perhaps the boldest claim, and has been mentioned already—that the reforms could save parents £40 a week in childcare costs. I do not want to bore everyone with the maths that has gone into how that number has been worked out, but it is important to understand where it has come from. It has been calculated on the basis that staff costs per child would be reduced, and that those savings would, automatically, be passed on to parents.

There are, however, a number of assumptions that should be questioned. To begin with, there is the assumption that childcare settings would go ahead and implement the changes; it would happen across the board. However, is that likely to happen? Not all settings will have the physical capacity to increase the number of children under their care. Given that there are also legal limits on the safe space for each child, which the Government have not consulted on, it cannot be guaranteed that all pre-school settings will even have the space to implement the changes. That puts into question the £40 figure.

[Catherine McKinnell]

We also know from the reaction to this petition that the early years sector is opposed to making these changes, and that is reflected in the statistics. Already, around half of providers are not working to existing maximum ratios. Some 74% of providers told the National Day Nurseries Association that they would not implement the reduced ratios, and around nine in 10 pre-schools told the Early Years Alliance that they opposed the principle of relaxing ratios altogether.

The Government might argue that that leaves choice in the system, but the reality is that some providers will feel forced to relax their ratios against their better judgment. Extreme financial pressures are crippling the sector, and it is possible that some settings may have no choice in order to stay open. Even in those circumstances—the very worst-case scenarios—it is unlikely that those savings would be passed on to parents. Indeed, just 2% of nurseries and pre-schools believe that relaxed ratios would lower their fees. Providers are grappling with inflation and the costs associated with a Government that have knowingly underfunded the sector for many years. Many do not have the financial capacity to even open full time. Any improvements to income that relaxing childcare ratios could bring would be spent on maintaining their own survival.

The plans seem completely unworkable to me. They are entirely unsupported. I searched far and wide in preparation for this debate and could not find one expert who thought they were a good idea. I found many experts who tried to work out why it might be a good idea, but nobody who concluded it was. I am interested to hear the Government's presentation of the evidence that suggests it is.

Deregulated ratios are unlikely to be implemented, at least not by choice. If they are, they do not seem set to deliver the Government promise of reduced costs for parents. The Government know that. Indeed, when speaking about the proposals, the former Minister for Children and Families, the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince), said:

“The ratios change in and of itself is no silver bullet or panacea or magic bullet...it is not going to significantly change costs because what we don't expect is settings to routinely or religiously go to 1:5”.

We have to question the point of the proposals if they would not even achieve the Government's stated aim. Are they just a sticking plaster on a gaping wound in our childcare sector so that the Government can say that they are doing something?

As I draw to a close, I want to revisit the subject that I opened with: a childcare system in crisis. Our early years provision is not working. I think we can all agree on that. It is not working for families, providers or our economy. Parents have faced such extraordinary costs that they have been unable to go to work. Providers are being pushed into debt with rising numbers of closures. The overworked and underappreciated workforce is at breaking point, and children risk being denied the best possible early education. Childcare is a vital social and economic infrastructure. It is as important to our country as the roads, rail and our healthcare system, but it is crying out for support. We are in desperate need of a system that truly reflects the modern life of families in this country and meets those demands.

The only solution that the Government have offered does not give much hope for the future. Deregulation of our childcare ratios risks the safety of our children. It jeopardises their development and could engender a workforce crisis bigger than the sector already faces. The proposals are premised on falsehoods and misleading comparisons, and the likelihood that they would even be implemented is doubtful. Despite that, the Prime Minister claimed it is an ambitious plan, but I think most people can see that it is far from that.

The Government should take steps to strengthen our childcare system and improve the quality of early years provision. To try to get rid of standards, or weaken them, is a race to the bottom in which our children will be the biggest losers, and they deserve better than that.

In response to the petition, I have a few questions to put to the Minister. Can she confirm that, within the existing childcare system in England, relaxing childcare ratios as proposed would not put the safety of young children at risk, as parents and expert opinion fear? Can she confirm that any proposals to change childcare ratios will not harm the learning and development of children, as the early years sector and parents fear? Have the Government assessed what impact changing early years ratios will have specifically on children with special educational needs and disabilities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds? Given the responses to the consultation and the petition, will the Government still claim that the changes will save families £40 a week, or will they revise that figure in light of the evidence? Can the Minister provide any analysis about the impact that ratio changes would have on the early years workforce? Finally, if they do push ahead with the changes, will the Government also propose alongside them professional development of our early years workforce, including funding the provision of paediatric first-aid training?

In conclusion, I want to put one final question to the Minister, which comes from Zoe and Lewis, Oliver's parents, who started the petition and are here with us today. It cuts to the chase: would Government Ministers be happy to put their two-year-old child in a 1:5 setting?

4.59 pm

**Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con):** It is a pleasure to see you and your pink hair in the Chair, Ms Harris. It is not often that is said in this Chamber. I thank the petitioners, including a number of my constituents, for signing the e-petition. I thank those in the Public Gallery who have come to watch, and, of course, Zoe and Lewis for being here today. They are very brave.

I speak as constituency MP for Winchester, and in my capacity as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for childcare and early education. I will start with what I always say in these debates: early years education should be thought of and seen in terms of quality, not in terms of quantity. Investment early in a child's life pays dividends later on as they move through the system. The impact upon a child's future is priceless. Internationally, the UK has the second lowest level of Government investment in the early years, but the highest level of investment from parents. Thus, parents have every right to ask for the very best. I know that is what the early education professionals, whom I speak to all the time, seek to provide. I declare my interest in that I am married to an early years worker—so I had better be good.



My view is that increasing ratios would have an adverse effect on that quality. Seeing as the ratios are where they are now, it is incumbent on those who propose to change them to explain why I am wrong in that thesis. The stated intention of the last Prime Minister and the Prime Minister before last to change the ratios—potentially abolishing them altogether—would not, as hoped for, improve flexibility or reduce the cost of childcare. Research from Coram suggests that a full-time nursery for children under the age of two costs almost 66%—two thirds—of a parent's weekly take-home pay in England.

As the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) set out in her excellent opening remarks, if the proposed reforms are to save money for parents in the cost of living crisis—a perfectly sensible and laudable aim—the evidence to back that up has to be laid before us and the Government have to show their workings out. I am not deaf to those arguments; I am perfectly willing to hear them and happy to see those figures—but see those figures, I must.

Early years settings have expressed concerns to me, and to those of us on the all-party group, that the relaxation of staffing ratios raises the risk of accidents for young children due to fewer staff needing to provide the same quality of care to a greater number of children.

**Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con):** I thank my hon. Friend for everything he does for the early years sector. I also give my condolences to Zoe and Lewis for their tragic loss. In my constituency of Chelmsford, people want to have outstanding childcare, and, like others across the country, they care about the safety of their children. As a mother who once had three under four, I know what tight ratios mean. But people are also concerned about the affordability of childcare. Does my hon. Friend agree with me that when looking at the issue of international comparisons on ratios, one should try to compare apples with apples? We have to look at not just the staffing numbers but the investment in qualifications. Does he agree with me that the Minister is right to look at ratios, but needs to ensure that those comparisons are done on a level playing field, taking into account those other considerations too?

**Steve Brine:** I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend, the former Minister. As set out in the opening speech, the situation is very different in Scotland; there are different qualification levels. Also, in Scotland practitioners have to register with the Scottish Social Services Council in order to work in early years, and they have to commit to continuing professional development qualification levels to do that. The hourly rate is also higher. I do think it is different. My right hon. Friend referred to having had three children—I only have two. Yes, it is about the qualification, but it is also simply a numbers game and about having eyes on the child. Our two children are 12 and 15 next week—it is a busy month—but when they were small, my wife and I would divide and rule. We had a 1:1 ratio. When we were looking after their cousins, the ratio went up and it was more challenging. Clearly, I am not suggesting a 1:1 ratio in early years education, but why on earth would we want to go the other way in a setting where children potentially spend seven or eight hours a day for five days a week? I question it but, as I say, show me the money. Show me the evidence, show me the workings out and show me the savings, and then we can make an informed judgment.

There are concerns among providers and parents about settings having the capacity to support children with any additional needs, such as children with SEND, who may need more, rather than less, time with educators. I know the Minister will touch on this issue in her remarks. My fear, and that of providers and parents, is that a further ratio reduction would reduce the capacity and parental confidence even further, potentially driving more exclusion in early years education.

Another point is that current staffing ratios reflect the requirements for facilities and space set out in the Ofsted framework, which is very clear. It would therefore be troubling if the Department contradicted the guidance of the official regulator. If we were to proceed with reducing staff to child ratios, do Ministers intend to consult on changing the Ofsted framework? Of course, that would require a statutory consultation.

I have said that good early years education is vital to supporting our young people to develop, and Ofsted has identified children aged two to three as needing a particular focus on speech and language in order to build necessary communication skills for later in life. More children per staff member can only mean less time per child. Why is that particularly acute right now? Because of the pandemic, young children who started nursery in September do not have the socialisation skills that my children had in the years before they started in early years education, so I would suggest that that is even more important than ever right now.

Let me give some figures. Some 52% of early years staff say their workload and a lack of work-life balance are a cause of stress or unhappiness for them. With the existing ratios, staff are under pressure—I hear that every night at home—and they tell me they are worried about the time they are able to give each child in their care. We face a staffing challenge in the early years sector, and staff are leaving the sector, with many choosing careers in retail with fewer hours but similar, or even greater, levels of pay. Data from the University of Leeds shows a post-pandemic net loss of workers from the sector above and beyond the usual churn of staff, and I often make the point that dog-sitters in my area are often paid more than the people who look after our most precious asset. Dogs are precious too, but they are not our children.

On Saturday I was out in my constituency, talking to constituents. I spoke to a lady in Winchester who said that she was very worried about the nursery round the corner—I will not identify it, for obvious reasons—because it is losing the key worker who looks after her young daughter. It is really disruptive for her young daughter, and she is very worried about it. The nursery is losing that key worker because she is going to work in an office job, as she can get paid better and probably have a lot less stress. This is the reality of life. As the new Minister—obviously, she is a constituency MP as well—gets out and about, I dare to say that she will hear that more and more from the people she meets in the sector.

I would suggest that increasing the number of children each member of staff is working with or responsible for will only increase the pressure and stress within the workforce, and more of these vital workers will leave the sector, which already faces a recruitment and retention crisis. That will drive up costs for parents and exacerbate the financial problems in the sector, with over 84% of providers telling the APPG on childcare and early education

[Steve Brine]

that they expect to operate at a loss or merely break even this year—up from just over half in 2018. Nursery and early education providers said it is more difficult to recruit, and some 20% of childminders told us that they did not think they would be working in the sector in six months' time. Many of those people are concerned about working with new ratios, in what they regard as potentially unsafe conditions.

One nursery worker wrote to me to say that the changes to ratios gave her “nightmares”; she said that the situation was like an episode of “Crimewatch”. Another said that she was “extremely concerned” about the additional pressure on staff, “both physically and emotionally”. I have seen figures that suggest that almost two thirds of practitioners could leave the sector if ratios went in the wrong direction. That is not just a figure; parents across the country will be unable to find good childcare and early education for their children to enable them to go to work and feed the workforce—a challenge in many other parts of the economy. This is not just a childcare story. Childcare is to the economy what social care is to the NHS. If we do not get this right, the economy will slow down, and heaven knows that right now we need the economy to speed up. We need growth.

Staff are referencing workload, stress and burnout as key concerns. I am not defending the current way of working as being perfect—far from it. The all-party group that I chair has for a while been calling for a wholesale review of childcare and early education, and we will write to the new Chair of the Education Committee when they are elected on Wednesday to request that review. I have already spoken to some of those standing for that position, two of whom are in this room.

In conclusion, we do not need a change in ratios. We need a wholesale, fact-based review of childcare and early education that focuses on the workforce, parents and, ultimately—the most important stakeholder—children. Our children deserve nothing less. I have already spoken to the new Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Claire Coutinho), about the issue. I congratulate her on her position. She is a thinker and a serious person, and I really look forward to working with her. I respectfully ask her to meet my all-party group as soon as possible; we look forward to that conversation.

5.12 pm

**Justin Tomlinson** (North Swindon) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Harris.

As a parent myself, my heart breaks for the unimaginable loss suffered by Oliver Steeper's parents. It is every parent's worst nightmare. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), who was passionate in advocating the serious points that drove 109,000 people—a huge number—to sign the petition, which is why so many of us are here.

I believe it is the Minister's debut. There is nothing worse in such circumstances as being asked direct questions, so I thought I would help her by answering one of the key questions put by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North. Would I want my daughters in a setting with a changed ratio? Absolutely not. I very much hope we can get clarity on that point.

I pay tribute to the new Minister, who was kind enough to visit my constituency on Thursday. She came to the fantastic Imagination Childcare nursery in Moredon. The owner, Becky Cruise, and her wonderful team were incredibly proud, because the Minister not only took time to tour all the rooms, and to engage and interact with the children—including decorating biscuits with my daughter Margot, who was very excited to meet one of my London office friends; she also took the time to have a roundtable with Becky and Councillor Jo Morris, who owns the Playsteps Day Nursery in my constituency. Believe me, Jo is a resident expert on all things nursery related. I do not think I have ever been lobbied as hard as I have by her.

The visit was a real opportunity. I have hosted countless ministerial and shadow ministerial visits over the years, but the Minister was genuinely willing to listen, to be challenged and to take points on board. Even though she is so new to her brief, she has complete oversight of the issues, so I am excited to hear her response to the debate—no pressure.

On the visit, we covered challenges and opportunities, including the key matter that we are discussing today: ratios. I echo the comments of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North on the subject; we are in complete agreement. We should simply rule out the changes. Scotland is sometimes held up as some sort of brilliant panacea, but where are the Scottish MPs to advocate how well the change has gone there? That is telling.

I pay tribute to the National Day Nurseries Association. It did some detailed research, which is pretty black and white: 90% of providers find it hard to recruit level 3 staff, and of the staff who are unhappy and thinking of leaving, 52% are thinking of leaving because of the workload. Clearly, if we change the ratios, the workload goes up.

My hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine) was on the money when he talked about how hard it is when two parents are caring for two children. How on earth will nurseries do it day in, day out if we change the ratios? On the nursery visit, we saw that the big challenge comes particularly with those children who are toilet training, which requires them to be taken out of the room. That means that those eyes on the prize are not in the room, and children do not necessarily have set toilet breaks—believe me, I know. It is all about quality, and I cannot see a single argument that changing ratios would improve quality. We all visit our local schools. Primary schools in particular emphasise that the early years are so important for children's expected levels and it is incredibly difficult to catch up further down the line.

The Government have been trying to make a significant positive difference in this area. They have spent more than £20 billion over the last five years, rapidly expanded the 15 and 30-hour term-time free childcare and made crucial changes to universal credit that allow people to claim up to 85% of childcare costs. Those measures have been a real game changer in helping more working parents back into work and providing greater flexibility.

There is still a funding challenge around the fact that, predominantly, nursery jobs are relatively low paid. Therefore, as we have rightly increased the national living wage above inflation year in, year out, it has exceeded the increases in funding that the Government

have provided. That has put real pressure on nurseries, and the rules on how they can secure additional income to balance the books are very strict. That all puts pressure on capacity.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North and my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester highlighted fears of nurseries leaving the sector. I represent a constituency that has a transient population. People tend to move to my constituency, so they do not necessarily have a network of older generations who can step in. Their ability to work and contribute to a growing economy is predicated on access to childcare, which can be difficult. There are waiting lists, and it is not a given that people can secure a place. People can always secure a school place, but that is not the case for nurseries.

We therefore have to get a grip on the funding. The Minister could do some digging in some cupboards, because in 2017 there was an independent review of the cost of childcare and the impact on providers, which was meant to be published but has not yet been seen. That would be helpful in identifying what funding is needed to ensure that nurseries are on a sustainable and positive footing, so that they can remain and, crucially, expand.

We can help on issues around Ofsted. It was highlighted, not unreasonably, that that is a real fear factor for staff. One day every four or five years, the nursery will be reviewed. Not all children perform the tasks that they are presented with on the days when the inspectors come, and that puts big pressure on nurseries. They could have had 364 other days in the year when all those tasks went well and would have looked good to an inspector. The day that the inspectors come can make a crucial difference. In our roundtable discussion, there was a feeling that there needs to be greater consistency, so that when inspectors come everybody knows what is expected and they will be reviewed on that. There needs to be a greater emphasis, or perhaps a sole emphasis, on safeguarding, so that it is the priority. We need to give the whole system confidence that it is consistent and fair, and that those nurseries that are doing an amazing and wonderful job are recognised for that.

We also need to play fair between school-based nurseries and nurseries in independent settings. In questions in the main Chamber, I have raised the fact that standalone nurseries have to pay business rates, yet nurseries based in school settings do not. A standalone nursery is surely an educational setting; it is Ofsted rated. The current situation is inconsistent and unfair. In one nursery I visited, the business rates equated to about £100 per child, which could make a big difference if it went towards providing additional support. It is also a limit on some nurseries' ability to expand, because if someone runs multiple nurseries, the business rates are caught all together and it affects whether they can apply for the discount. Some nurseries seek not to expand to avoid that situation.

Another big ask—I know the Minister is passionate about this point—relates to providing the support that nurseries need. Nurseries are fantastic at childcare provision, but increasingly, with a greater awareness of special educational needs provision and additional support—I say this as a former Minister for Disabled People—they are crying out for advice so they can do it right. The guidebooks do not necessarily give definitive information on every unique set of circumstances. At the roundtable

we held, we heard one example of a delay of six months to get training on the use of EpiPens. In reality, a nursery would either have to take the risk, or say to that child—and crucially, their parents—that they could not take them on for six months because of the potential consequences.

Too often there are backlogs in accessing diagnoses. It is frustrating for nurseries, which, because they work with the children day in, day out, are often the first to identify the additional support that is needed, but are not given greater weight in the process. There should be a two-track process so they could directly feed in and populate much of the evidence required. That would take some of the pressure off the system that is trying to deal with the backlogs.

Finally, both Becky and Jo highlighted that if there were better support, greater consistency, some movement on the funding and we did not go down the ratios path, they would be desperate to expand, because their respective nurseries are full. I return to the powerful point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester: if we are to support a growing economy, we need to make provision for an increasingly flexible workforce. We need people like Becky and Jo, who have amazing nurseries, to be able to expand; we would all benefit from that.

5.22 pm

**David Simmonds** (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Ms Harris. I offer my condolences to Mr and Mrs Steeper. I hope that one of the messages from today's debate will be a recognition that there are many Members of Parliament, including myself, who are parents of very young children and recognise that story as the ultimate nightmare for any parent, and who are therefore committed to helping the Government find a way to address the issue constructively.

I will set out a bit of the context that I learned about during my time in local government as the lead member for children's services. I hope to offer the Minister some constructive suggestions about how the Government might take forward some of the issues raised in the consultation, in the petition and in today's debate.

The guidance on staff-to-child ratios stems from the Children Act. The primary purpose of that legislation and that guidance is managing risk. We need to be cautious about the idea that a ratio of 1:4 equals safe, but 1:5 equals dangerous. Research from the Thomas Coram Research Institute at the Institute of Education highlights that the way in which the ratio is calculated varies quite a lot. Some nurseries do it by dividing the total number of full-time equivalent staff by the number of children on roll; others by the number of staff on shift at a given time, divided by the number of children in attendance at that time; and others based on inspection of how many staff members are visible in a particular space compared with the number of children at a given moment. They are all valid ways of calculating the ratio, but give significantly different variations in the numbers of adults and children who are physically present.

There is a world of difference between some of the staff I met at my children's nursery—which was provided by the London Borough of Hillingdon—who had 30 or 40 years' experience in childcare and had been on every conceivable training course from paediatric resuscitation

[David Simmonds]

and emergency treatment to handling various complex medical conditions, and those who may be doing their first day on the job as a child carer; and many Members have highlighted that point today. Ministers from all parties have been under pressure for many years to make the money go further, but it is right that they consider that context as they look at the issue. This is not as exact a science as some would like to think. Our key approach must be to manage the risks that occur in these kinds of settings, so that children are as safe as possible.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) clearly made the point—it is borne out well by the research—that the money that we spend on the early years has the most impact on a child's outcomes of the money that we spend at any stage of education. When we look at how the funding formula is distributed nationally, it is the opposite way around. We spend most money on the GCSE years, when it has comparatively less impact and benefit for a child; and, relatively speaking, less is spent on support for early years. The data held by the Children's Commissioner—produced by data expert Leon Feinstein—highlights that we can predict a child's A-level results based on their attainment in the early years foundation stage. We have good evidence that this is not merely a matter of supposition, but that there is a direct correlation between the impact of early education and a child's outcomes when they start adulthood.

As we consider possible solutions, the Government must be commended for the fact that, for the first time, we have a comprehensive early years national funding formula, which was introduced in 2017. It seeks to bridge the gap between the day-to-day realities of nursery life in a complex sector—we have private, voluntary and independent providers, as well as the statutory sector in the form of school nurseries—and the desire to ensure that parents generally, but especially women, are able to return to the workforce because affordable childcare is available.

Three elements make up the national funding formula. There is the universal base rate, which is a figure that is determined nationally; that will be challenging, because it is the biggest part of the formula for the Government to look at. There is also an additional needs factor, which reflects the requirements of children with special educational needs and disabilities, and the area cost adjustment, which is designed to take into account the differential cost of providing nursery care in different parts of the country.

As a Member of Parliament representing an outer London constituency, I hear daily from businesses generally, and from nursery providers in particular, that the remarkably high costs of employment make it difficult to recruit and retain the qualified staff they require. Although I recognise the financial challenges facing the Government, if they have an opportunity to look at doing something with the area cost adjustment, I suspect it would make the lives of all Members of Parliament easier when it comes to ensuring that their local nursery and childminder sectors are properly supported. That would be enormously helpful.

It is clear that the way in which the funding is distributed—in particular, the role of early years representatives at schools forums where decisions are

made about dividing up that funding—could be strengthened. The fragmentation of a sector with large numbers of quite small providers means that compared to big secondary schools, for example, it is hard to get people at the table who are real experts in the way that the funding can be distributed. If we can do that much more effectively, the flexibility that exists in the remit of those schools forums would enable a greater degree of support and local nuance to reflect the particular challenges that a community faces in the distribution of funding, especially when it comes to the creation of new provision in response to emerging needs.

The Government have done a great deal with policies such as tax-free childcare and the early years pupil premium to put additional resource into the sector to reflect the complexity of children's needs, although there are more opportunities that are about not just additional resources—strong though the case for them is—but the way in which the money is distributed. Rather than having to consider easing childcare ratios as a way of making the budget go further, we can ensure that the money that is already contained in the early years national funding formula finds its way more effectively and flexibly through the system to support the sector to do the outstanding job we all want to see it do for all our children.

5.29 pm

**Siobhan Baillie** (Stroud) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Harris. I congratulate the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) on her great speech about a fantastic petition. My notes say, "Don't cry," but I might. Lewis, I watched your BBC interview; I know your aim is to enshrine Oliver's memory, and his name will be recorded in *Hansard* repeatedly today. The fact that you are able to find strength from your grief to try to help others is incredibly inspiring.

I have been campaigning on childcare for as long as I have been an MP. I have now bothered three Prime Ministers and four Chancellors, one of whom is now the Prime Minister, and I know they all care deeply about this issue. I want to see action and I do not think it is right to criticise the Government for looking into the issue of childcare ratios, which I will come to in a moment. We are right to reform the childcare system. We are spending £5 billion to £6 billion of taxpayers' money on various different schemes that work for some families but are perceived to be failing for many others.

I am doing some work on the childcare element of universal credit. That needs reform because parents say that they cannot go to work or that it is not worth them going to work. Brilliant mums and dads are really feeling the pinch on the cost of childcare. Parents in the UK currently spend 26% of their entire household budget on childcare, and the proportion is 20% for single parents. The OECD average is 10%, but the UK figure is 26%, whereas in the USA it is 14% and in Canada it is 12%. As I said to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at Prime Minister's questions last week, we have to make the system work and ensure that providers do not go belly up. There are some fantastic childcare providers in Stroud who are incredibly worried at the moment, so it is great to have this debate.

If we are going to change childcare ratios, I want to hear from the Government about the impact on safety. We may not be able to hear about that in full today, not least because it is the debut response to a debate by the Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Claire Coutinho), but what is the safety impact? Show us the evidence. I know she is looking carefully at all the evidence and safety impacts, but will she tell us whether a change to the childcare ratio will reduce fees for parents? Will it increase salaries for early years staff, which is something we desperately need? Will it offer flexibility to providers? We have heard from many providers that they do not want to take up any change to childcare ratios, but is more flexibility good for the sector?

I am concerned about changing ratios now because of the issues we face in the workforce. I want the issue flushed out. It has been going around in circles since at least 2013, when my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss) held the position now held by my hon. Friend the Minister, and we know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) wanted to look at the issue when he was Prime Minister. On the surface, my right hon. Friends are right that England has stricter ratios in comparison to other countries. For children aged two in France and Canada, the ratio is one trained adult to eight children. In Australia, that ratio is one trained adult to five children, and in Japan it is one trained adult to six children. There are no limits at all in Denmark, Germany or Sweden.

As we have heard from other Members, the question is whether other countries have more relaxed ratios partly because their workforce is more qualified. The parents present today have set the challenge of putting safety first. It is wrong to assume that if ratios are relaxed, nurseries in England will suddenly be able to take in more toddlers without employing more staff, because our current workforce do not feel able or qualified to a high enough standard to look after those children.

Also, child-to-staff ratios could not be changed without adjusting the space ratios, as we have heard from a number of Members. Many providers are at capacity with the amount of children they have in the space, so relaxing child-to-staff ratios would not result automatically in providers being able to care for more children. Nurseries would have to look at other premises, and we know the costs they would face to change them.

I have briefings on this coming out of my ears. People really care, and I thank the NDNA, Pregnant Then Screwed, Coram, Mumsnet and all who have been speaking to parents and providers throughout the country for an extremely long time. Gloucestershire PATA, with which I had a Zoom conversation about the concerns for Gloucestershire providers, wrote:

“Having one practitioner looking after four 2-year-olds is already challenging, especially in small settings (which many are in Gloucestershire). This may mean that there are only two practitioners looking after 8 children in a room. The minute that a child within that group needs 1:1 care, one practitioner is occupied and the other required to supervise the remaining 7 children. In the course of a day this may happen many times, with for example a child who misses the potty and needs changing, along with the cleaning of the area where the accident happened, or a child who...needs reassurance... This is in addition to routine nappy changing, preparation of snack and the myriad other tasks which need to happen for the day to run smoothly.”

Earlier, I was preparing to go on the BBC and I was so stressed that my daughter was still in a Halloween costume when I was trying to get out of the house. My hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine) talked about the ability to man-mark of the parent of two children, or even one, and I take my hat off to the early years educators who deal with multiple children.

I want to focus on childcare ratios, because that is the issue of the day. I know the Minister is completely seized of the issue as we have had many conversations, and I constantly take it to Cabinet—to anyone who will listen to me. We need wider reform. My message to parents and everyone present is that the Government’s suggestion to look at childcare ratios was just one part of a wider review of childcare; it was never going to be the only thing. I also think it is right that it is investigated fully, so that we can flush out and understand the evidence, with safety absolutely at the top of the agenda.

Improving childcare is future-building for our society and our country. It is crucial to the economy to get more parents into work, if that is what they want to do, in order to improve the productivity of this great country. We must stop suggesting that childcare and early years are an add-on to education. The Minister is in the Department for Education, and we are talking about year-zero educators in our early years settings. We have to value, pay and champion them as much as we possibly can. I look forward to hearing from the Minister.

5.38 pm

**Mr Robin Walker** (Worcester) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Harris.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) on leading the debate, and the family on showing great bravery in coming forward to champion this issue in the way they have. The circumstances of any death of that nature are deeply concerning and must of course be investigated properly.

I agree with one of the things the hon. Lady said in her opening speech: a functioning early years system is fundamental to our society and economy. I agree profoundly with that. In my time as Schools Minister, I saw the increasing awareness among schools of the importance of the early years support that children were getting, whether in nurseries or school-based settings, and the concern in our primary sector about school readiness, often driven by the circumstances of some of those children who had not had the opportunity to engage with early years provision or to attend nursery. Getting that right is crucial.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North and my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Siobhan Baillie) both made the point about the UK having some of the highest costs for childcare. In that context, I wonder whether the putative figure—even if we accept that £40 per week is right—would make a substantial difference to the overall position. I wholly agree with the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North about one-to-one attention and careful risk management—the careful assessment of risks taken in play. All of those are arguments for having the right ratios. They are also arguments for having better trained staff and for making sure that we reward investment in the professionalisation of childcare, professional development and pathways for progression in early years settings.

[*Mr Robin Walker*]

I was looking, as my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine) mentioned—there is a Select Committee election under way—at some of the past reports by the Education Committee. In its report on tackling disadvantage in early years it discussed a lack of clarity on progression routes and apprenticeships for the sector, and challenged the Government to do more in that space. It talked about the lack of a workforce strategy for early years. I recognise that the Government have invested more in professional development for early years since the report was published, but there is more that can be done and we need to continue to look at that.

I know from speaking to early years professionals in my constituency—there are some brilliant people who work in that space, including Alice Bennett, who runs the Worcester Early Years Centre and started off in a fantastic farm-based early years setting just outside my patch in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin)—that they have a passion for driving continuous improvement in their workforce. As we have heard, in an environment in which early years has to compete with local supermarkets raising wages and becoming more competitive by offering flexible hours, retaining those great professionals is a key challenge, and we must make sure that we can reward the early years workforce appropriately. That is vital.

We have heard a lot about different ratios in different countries. I accept part of the argument made by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North that we should not compare apples with pears. It is important to compare people with similar qualification levels. I remember attending the international summit on the teaching profession and being grilled by many international colleagues about the ratios in England compared with other countries. The general consensus of Education Ministers from other countries was that ours were on the low end. It is important that we do the research to look at the qualification levels that are required and how we get this right.

Part of the Labour Government's original idea for devolution was that we should be able to experiment with different approaches in different parts of the UK, and we should be able to learn from that. I take the point that if Scotland does this with greater assurance and higher qualification levels, we need to look at that before we change the numbers. We should learn from what takes place in devolved parts of the United Kingdom. We should also learn from the approaches taken by our fellow English-speaking countries such as Ireland, Australia and others. We should look at the evidence from those countries.

The Government have invested more in childcare overall, which is welcome. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has suggested that spending on three hours of childcare has doubled since 2009, rising from £1.7 billion to £3.5 billion in real terms. That spending and investment is welcome, but I am concerned about the extent to which that reaches the people who need it most. Responding to the Education Committee's report in April 2019, the Government said that 72% of eligible two-year-olds were taking up the two-year-old offer, and that that proportion had risen from 58%. That is welcome, but it

still means that 28% of the eligible cohort—some of the people most in need of extra support—are not getting it.

There is a disjunction between our two-year-old offer, which is designed to support people most in need of catching up, and the offer for three-year-olds and four-year-olds, which is designed to support people so that they have the best chance of entering the workplace. I understand the history of how that came about and the fact that those initiatives were introduced for different reasons, but if we were starting from scratch we would not design a system with that disjunction. We would design a system to support children and parents with the challenges of childcare. It is important that we take a long, hard look at that, and I hope that, whoever wins the race to become Chair of the Education Committee, it will look at those issues.

Again, it is timely that the Select Committee should look at the wider issue of childcare. I certainly look forward to responding to the letter from my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester. He made a good point about the lack of socialisation of children in lockdown. I know this from my own daughter, who lived at home with us throughout lockdown. After her first day of nursery, she came back and said, "Mummy, daddy, I don't like children". It suddenly occurred to us that she literally had not engaged with any children her own age for a year at the age of two; that is extraordinary. It took her a bit of time, but I am glad to report that she now gets on very well with her peers at school. But this is an area where extra support is needed.

One of my concerns—this is something that I have heard constantly from primary school heads and teachers—is about the speech and language capabilities of children entering primary school. I note that the National Deaf Children's Society and Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists have recently called for more investment in the specialist early years workforce to ensure that we get the right support for those children.

As the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North mentioned, it is particularly important to identify children who have special needs and ensure that they get that early support. The education system as a whole would save enormously from identifying need and making sure that the right supports and therapies are there at the earliest stage. That proper early intervention, which many Members have spoken about over time, makes a difference.

I wholly agree with the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds) about an inverted pyramid of funding in the education system. The amount that we spend goes up as children go through the education system, but the returns on that investment are actually greater the earlier the investment is made. We need to keep looking at that when we look at the funding formula, to ensure that it works properly. I do not entirely share my hon. Friend's views on the area cost adjustment, because I come from a part of the country that tends to lose out as a result of such formula adjustments, but I recognise his point.

We need to look at the pay of early years professionals to ensure we reward their increasing levels of qualifications. We must also take a long, hard look at what we are trying to do through the tax-free childcare offer. In theory, this is a great offer. It is a huge amount of

money that is potentially available to people, but they are not taking it up. They have consistently not taken it up in sufficient numbers to justify it. I sometimes worry that this is a great wheeze for the Treasury. If there is a large amount of money going into childcare but it is not spent, that does not benefit either the system, the childcare advisers or the parents for whom it is intended. The figures I have from His Majesty's Revenue and Customs, which were picked up in a recent report from the Institute of Chartered Accountants, were that less than 22% of eligible families are taking up the tax-free childcare for which they are eligible. I hope that the new Minister, who is a great thinker and will do a brilliant job in this role, is able to challenge her friends at the Treasury on that, to ensure that the money does flow through into the childcare sector.

I am inclined to agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud that it is right that the Government should ask the question about ratios, but we have heard in this debate that there is pretty heavy evidence that the answer may not be changing ratios. It may be looking at other ways to support the sector and to make it more affordable, and at the role that the Government can play in that. I say to the Minister: ask the question but listen to the evidence. Listen to the evidence from the professionals and the people working in early years. Let us make this work for the whole country, for our economy and, most of all, for the children.

5.48 pm

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Harris. I am grateful to the Petitions Committee for securing the debate and to my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) for her excellent opening speech. The high number of signatures on this petition indicates the very high level of concern across the country about the Government's proposals.

I want to pass on my sincere condolences to Zoe and Lewis Steeper on the unbearable loss of their precious little boy, Oliver, and to pay tribute to them for their courage and commitment to campaign to prevent other families from suffering as they have suffered. I hope that you know today that Oliver's name will live long in the memory and that there are many who will work for the change you wish to see on his behalf.

We have had an excellent debate this afternoon with a high level of consensus and I thank all Members who have contributed to it. My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North set out the argument very well, but the Government's consultation includes no plans to increase the training or safety requirements for early year settings. She spoke of the need for young children to receive individualised care and attention, which may be compromised through the proposed measures, and of the impact on staff recruitment and retention, which is pressing in the sector.

The hon. Member for Winchester (Steve Brine) spoke of the need to design policy for early years that delivers quality. He called for the framework to be driven not solely by quantity—although a shortage of places is a problem in many parts of the country—and to firmly place the onus on the Government to explain why relaxing the ratios will not compromise quality and

safety. He cited evidence from the APPG, of which he is the chair, on the concerns of the sector and the risks to staff recruitment and retention from going down this route.

The hon. Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson) spoke about the difficulty that staff will face in safely caring for an increased number of children if the ratios are relaxed. The hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds) spoke about the impact that money spent on children in the early years has on the rest of a child's life, and the need to look at that evidence when designing childcare and early years policy. The hon. Member for Stroud (Siobhan Baillie) spoke of the need for the Government to cite evidence on safety if they go down this route, as well as the policy's ability to deliver cost savings to parents and increase the pay for staff working in the sector—a point that I will come on to. She asked questions about the international comparisons that the Government have cited in their consultation document. Finally, the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker) spoke about the concerns expressed widely in the school sector about the increased lack of school readiness of primary-age children entering reception. He highlighted the disjointed nature of our childcare system, and the low take-up of available subsidised places.

The UK has the third most expensive childcare in the OECD. The cost of childcare is a major contributor to the cost of living crisis for families with children. The average cost of a 25-hours-a-week childcare place for a child under two in England is £140.68. For a three or four-year-old, the cost is £133. Earlier this year, a survey of 27,000 parents found that almost two thirds spend as much or more on childcare than on their rent or mortgage. This is a terrible strain on family budgets, and it is holding back parents, particularly mums. This year, Office for National Statistics data showed that, for the first time in decades, the number of women leaving the workforce to look after family is increasing. For women aged 25 to 34 years, that increase is more than 12%. A survey by Mumsnet just last month found that nearly a fifth of parents have given up or are considering giving up work, because that will cost them less than childcare. Childcare is at its most expensive for very young children, but the costs do not disappear when a child starts school. For parents to sustain a full working day, pre-school and after-school care are needed, and often come at significant cost.

Our childcare system does not work for families as the costs are so high, or for our economy, as it is forcing women out of the workforce. It does not work for providers, either: there was a net loss of around 4,000 childcare providers in the last financial year. The Government should urgently explore how to design a system that delivers for children, is affordable for families and sustainable for providers, and can help to underpin a strong and growing economy, yet so far the only substantive measure that has been mooted, and on which there has been a consultation, is the relaxation of childcare ratios to allow more children to be looked after by the same number of staff. The Government have consulted on changing the mandatory staff-to-child ratio for two-year-olds in early years settings from 1:4 to 1:5, and on increasing the number of children under the age of five who can be looked after by a single childminder from the current maximum of three.

[Helen Hayes]

The justification for the proposals is spurious at best, and at worst completely unfounded. The Government have claimed that the measures could reduce the cost of childcare for two-year-olds by 15%, or £40 a week on average, but that claim has been the subject of a formal complaint by the Early Years Alliance, and the Department for Education has had to commit to not using it again.

The Government cite the example of Scotland and other European countries, including the Netherlands and France, which have 1:5 childcare ratios. However, as we have heard, none of those is a like-for-like comparison. Scotland has higher-quality assurance standards around staff training. In the Netherlands—its relaxation of ratios was praised by the UK Government—the reforms increased the cost for parents and taxpayers, and the quality of provision fell. The Dutch Government subsequently abandoned the policy. In France, early years settings use ancillary staff for tasks such as nappy changing and food preparation, and they are not counted in the official ratios.

There is wide consensus among parents and childcare providers that relaxing ratios will not address any of the pressing challenges facing the childcare sector. There is no evidence that relaxing ratios will reduce the cost for parents. A survey by the Early Years Alliance in May found that just 2% of nurseries and pre-schools, and 2% of childminders, said that relaxing the ratios would enable them to lower fees for parents. That is little surprise, given that so many providers are in a financially precarious state and the level of closures is so high.

The consultation covers only the staffing ratios; there is no comment made on other requirements that determine how many children can be cared for in any given setting, such as the requirement for a certain amount of space per child, or the number of toilets. Even if providers want to take advantage of a relaxation of staffing ratios, many would face important practical considerations that would prevent them from doing so.

Most importantly of all, relaxing the ratios will increase the risk of a reduction in the quality and safety of provision. Parents have expressed their anxiety about the safety of settings in which staff attention would be stretched thinly across many children; as many a parent of a two-year-old has said, looking after them requires us to have eyes in the back of our head.

Parental anxiety is understandably particularly high among the parents of children with serious allergies and other medical conditions, and the parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities. The policy also has the potential to make settings less inclusive; when settings face the risk of stretching staff more thinly, they may decide that they cannot meet the needs of children who require extra care and attention because they have an allergy, a medical condition or an additional need.

I welcome the Minister to her place, and I recognise that she is very new in post. Today, she has heard ample evidence that relaxing ratios would not deliver the Government's stated objective of reducing the cost of childcare to parents, but would risk the quality and safety of childcare in some settings. She has heard that the suggestion that this policy simply replicates the situation in Scotland and other European countries is incorrect. She has heard that a vast majority of parents

and childcare providers are opposed to it, and that Members from across the House share those concerns and have expressed their opposition. I therefore hope that she will confirm that the Government are abandoning these proposals and will turn their attention instead to a serious plan to reduce the cost of childcare for parents, to developing a workforce plan for early years, and to ensuring that every child can access a high-quality early years place, so that they can build a strong foundation for their formal education.

We owe it to Zoe and Lewis to take their concerns about safety seriously after the unbearable pain that they have suffered. We owe it to every child and family in the country to deliver a childcare system that works for them. In doing so, we will build a firm foundation for a thriving and fair economy.

5.59 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Claire Coutinho):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Harris. I thank the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) for opening this important debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee. Before I respond, I extend my gratitude to Zoe and Lewis for starting the petition. I cannot imagine what you have been through; the death of a child is one of the worst tragedies any of us could endure. I send you my deepest sympathies.

I also put on record my gratitude to all the staff working in settings across the country. Just last week, I was with my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson) at Imagination Childcare, and we saw the brilliant work that staff do there to give children the best start in life. Their skills and experience are vital. I know the last few years have been challenging, and I look forward to working with all such staff in the months ahead, as we look at this important area.

The Members who spoke in this debate are some of the most experienced on this subject in Parliament, and I have been having conversations with some of them for, quite literally, years. I look forward to seeing what we can do together, and I thank everyone for their important contributions. We can be proud of the standard of childcare in this country. At the end of June 2022, Ofsted reported that 96% of our early years childcare providers had been judged good or outstanding at their last inspection. That is down to the hard work of practitioners. I thank them again; that is something that we can be very proud of.

I will start by setting out some of the work that we are doing today. We have consulted on a number of changes that will provide the sector with more flexibility and autonomy. We have spoken a lot about changing the ratios for two-year-olds so that it is in line with the ratio in Scotland—I will come on to that. We are also looking at flexibilities for childminders when it comes to siblings and related children, and strengthening the requirements on supervision while eating, which is particularly relevant in the light of the issues discussed today. The consultation closed in September; we are looking at all the responses, and will publish a response in due course. I will come on to some of the evidence that people have asked about.

At the heart of this debate sit safety and quality; I assure everyone that they will be integral to the proposals we put forward. We are already taking steps in this area.



We have been working with the NHS, the Food Standards Agency and the Department of Health and Social Care on increasing awareness of choking prevention in early years. We have also published dedicated food safety guidance for practitioners in our help for early years providers, through our online support platform. We have consulted on strengthening the supervision while eating requirements in the early years framework. Practitioners will need not just sight or hearing of children while they are eating, but sight and hearing.

We are also increasing the number of early years providers who have paediatric first-aid training. All level 2 and 3 trained staff, since June 2016, have had to have valid paediatric first-aid training to be counted in the ratios. Ofsted, in carrying out its inspections, is reporting on those safety requirements as well.

The subject of the workforce was raised powerfully by Members from across the House, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), chair of the APPG for early years and childcare, and my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker). From what I have seen, recruitment and retention is undoubtedly an issue, and supporting the workforce is a priority for me and the Department. We are spending an extra £180 million on qualifications and training. I spoke to the amazing Becky and Joe from Imagination Childcare just last week, and for a practitioner, feeling valued, and training and work progression, are really important. This is not just about funding; it is also about staff feeling valued for the work that they do. We gave 2,700 early years professionals bespoke training in response to challenging behaviour arising from the pandemic. Over the next two years, we aim to give 10,000 more staff the latest training in early communication in language and maths, which has been mentioned today.

I also wanted to address the point about SEN, which I am really passionate about; I am a former Minister for disabled people, as is my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon. We are funding the ability of 5,000 early years practitioners to gain an accredited special educational needs co-ordinator qualification, but also making sure that providers have a sense of the interventions they can make at an early stage. I am passionate about NELI, the Nuffield Early Language Intervention, which is doing great work on communications development at an early stage; we have rolled that out to two thirds of primary schools, and it is having a great effect. We will also provide support and guidance through our experts and mentors programmes, as well as our stronger practice hubs. The point about giving providers flexibility, so that they feel their expert judgment is valued, is interesting. I have followed up on the question of how we make sure that these conversations with Ofsted are more of a dialogue, so that people feel there is an ongoing conversation on improving practice, rather than us having a box-ticking exercise.

My hon. Friends the Members for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds), and for Stroud (Siobhan Baillie), are rightly questing for evidence. It is right that the Government should look at the issue of childcare ratios. Ratios were set out in the 1980s, and we are looking at how they work in practice. We are taking evidence. As hon. Members are aware, we have held a consultation, but we have also looked at the impact, and we will set out that evidence alongside the results of our consultation. Safety has to be paramount in what

we try to do, but it is also important that we look at the affordability of childcare, and at giving providers flexibility, and making sure that staff feel that their judgment is trusted. In that context, it was right to carry out the consultation, and, of course, we will come forward with the results of that consultation, and the providers' impact assessments, which we did alongside it.

In summary, I thank the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North for securing this debate. This is a really important and emotive issue that matters to so many families across the country. I want us to get this right, and to look at the issue carefully. I thank all hon. Members who spoke for their contributions.

6.7 pm

**Catherine McKinnell:** I thank the Minister for that response. It did not necessarily answer the question, or give a firm response to the petitioners, but I am heartened to hear that there is a listening tone on this issue, because it is so important that it is looked at in the round.

I thank everyone who contributed to the debate; I know it means a huge amount to those who signed the petition, and to Zoe and Lewis, that people have taken part. It is notable that there has been a huge amount of challenge and constructive feedback, in particular from Members on the Government Benches. An important election is due to take place for the chairship of the Select Committee on Education; I want to put on record that whoever is elected—I think only one Member who is in the running is not present—the Petitions Committee is very keen to work with the Committee when petitioners come to us with complex petitions that need thorough investigation and would benefit from the focus of a Select Committee inquiry. We are always very keen to work across Parliament, using all the resources we have, to represent our constituents and, in this case, the petitioners, who want a constructive, listening debate in Parliament on these important issues.

It is good that the Government have acknowledged that there is clearly an issue, but I have great doubts about the claim that they have an “ambitious” plan for childcare. That was the word that the Prime Minister used at the Dispatch Box last Wednesday, but if what the Minister has just outlined is the Prime Minister's idea of an ambitious plan, it does not feel very ambitious—no offence to the Minister. It feels like tweaking the edges—a sticking-plaster approach to the gaping wound in our early years sector, which desperately needs wholesale reform and review. The data shows a decline in women staying in the workforce for the first time in decades, so we are going in the wrong direction. The clock is ticking backwards, particularly for women; there is a 12.6% increase in the number of 25 to 34-year-olds falling out of the workforce. In the words of Pregnant Then Screwed, “That isn't just a glass ceiling, that's a push off the career cliff for mothers.”

That is what the childcare system is leading to for women.

According to the Women's Budget Group, 1.7 million women are prevented from working the hours that they would like by the cost or unavailability of childcare. It estimates that that costs £30 billion to our economy every year. That would go some way to filling the big black hole; we will hear announcements on Thursday about how it will be filled. In fact, £30 billion is the size of the black hole left by the previous Prime Minister, so fixing the childcare system would go some way towards

[Catherine McKinnell]

improving our public finances. It would be far from being money wasted; it would be money well spent if we want a thriving economy.

I do not want to put words in their mouth, but the petition was started by Zoe and Lewis because they are horrified by the proposal put forward by the Government. They are determined to make sure that the Government listen to the evidence and look at this issue properly, rather than giving the knee-jerk response of saying, “We’re doing something to bring down the cost of childcare.” We have seen evidence that the proposal will not deliver the cost savings to parents that have been proposed, and have not seen any evidence that it will not increase risks to children. Fundamentally, that is the message that Zoe, Lewis, all the petitioners, and all the childcare providers that do not welcome the proposal want the Government to hear.

I was asked, “What happens now?” This is the moment when the petitioners have been heard and the Minister has responded. We do not have the answer yet. I guarantee

the Minister that every single one of those 109,488 petitioners, Zoe and Lewis, all the childcare providers and, quite frankly, every parent in this country will be watching, waiting and looking very closely at the proposals that will be put forward. They will be looking for the evidence base for anything that the Government seek to do, because nobody in this country would benefit from a race to the bottom for our children, our childcare and our early years system. I really hope we get better proposals from the Government as a result of the consultation, and as a result of today’s petition.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered e-petition 615623, relating to staff-child ratios in early years childcare.

6.13 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*

# Written Statements

*Monday 14 November 2022*

## BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

### Product Safety: Transitional Provisions

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kevin Hollinrake):** I have today laid before Parliament the draft statutory instrument Product Safety and Metrology (Amendment and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2022 and an accompanying draft explanatory memorandum. The instrument will provide businesses with additional time to transition to the post-exit independent UKCA regime, providing businesses with flexibility and choice on how to comply with product regulations.

We are committed to doing all we can to provide flexibility for industry. These measures intend to reduce immediate burdens and costs for businesses, in light of current cost of living and global supply chain challenges, whilst maintaining high standards of product safety.

The main purposes of this instrument are to:

Extend acceptance of certain products meeting EU requirements and markings on the market in Great Britain for a further two years, until 31 December 2024. This intends to provide businesses with flexibility and choice on how to comply with product regulations.

And, as previously announced on 20 June 2022, but with updated timelines:

Provide that where manufacturers, or other relevant persons, have acted under EU conformity assessment procedures by 31 December 2024, that action will be treated as having been taken under the UK conformity assessment procedures until the expiry of the certificate, or until 31 December 2027, whichever is sooner. This is intended to reduce immediate costs associated with third-party retesting and recertification and make the transition to UKCA compliance easier for businesses.

Extend existing labelling provisions for UKCA marking, importer information and responsible persons' information until 31 December 2027. This is intended to reduce costs and burdens associated with fulfilling labelling requirements.

There are different rules for medical devices, construction products, cableways, transportable pressure equipment, unmanned aircraft systems, rail products, cosmetics and marine equipment. There are also different rules for Northern Ireland.

The statutory instrument will be made using powers under section 8 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. Further details about the changes and their effects are contained in section 7 of the accompanying draft explanatory memorandum. The draft of this instrument and the accompanying draft explanatory memorandum can be found on gov.uk.

My officials will continue to engage with industry closely to provide businesses with support, and to understand how to take a pragmatic approach to improving regulation to the benefit of businesses and consumers. This will include continuing to review the UK regulatory framework to understand how we could reduce costs and burdens for businesses in the longer term.

[HCWS366]

## FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

### The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

**The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell):** I would like to update the House on the UK's contribution to the Seventh Replenishment of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (the Global Fund).

The Government have no doubt of the huge value and importance of the work of the Global Fund. The Foreign Secretary, the Chancellor, and I, have therefore very carefully considered our pledge to the seventh replenishment, balancing the needs of the fight against the three diseases with the many other demands on the aid budget. I would like to reassure the House that we have maintained communication with the Global Fund throughout.

UK resilience, prosperity, and security depends on achieving our global health goals and supporting other countries, especially the least developed, to do the same. Countries with better health systems and healthier people are more likely to be stable and prosperous. The covid-19 pandemic has shown how health emergencies can reverse countries' economic and social progress—and how global health is a field where international co-operation is vital.

The UK is a leader within this. We joined with others to create the Global Fund because we refused to accept the loss of millions of lives every year to diseases that were both preventable and treatable. It has proven its successful three-way partnership model between the private sector, civil society and governments and we are proud to have contributed over £4.4 billion to the Global Fund, and as third largest donor, to have been an important part of its success. Together we have cut the mortality rate of the three diseases by more than half, helping to save 50 million lives, while improving access to prevention and treatment, building the strong and inclusive health systems that underpin all health services, and helping countries respond to the covid-19 pandemic which threatens all these hard-won health development gains.

However, a child still dies of malaria nearly every minute. Nine out of 10 Commonwealth citizens still live in malaria endemic countries. AIDS is still the leading cause of death for young women across our Commonwealth and tuberculosis is a top leading infectious disease killer globally.

We remain committed to the mission of the Global Fund. The UK will therefore contribute £1 billion to the seventh replenishment of the Global Fund, helping to save over 1.2 million lives and partnering with others to support implementation of its new strategy. This pledge is drawn from our current ODA allocation and, as well as helping to save lives and prevent over 28 million new cases and infections, this funding will also help to build strong and inclusive health systems and support countries to prepare for and prevent future pandemic threats, helping to build a better and safer world for everyone. It will make an important contribution to our priority of ending the preventable deaths of mothers,

babies and children, helping to provide medicine for 170,000 mothers to prevent transmitting HIV to their babies.

The Global Fund is without question one of the most highly efficient and effective global health mechanisms in development. We owe it to both UK taxpayers and the communities it serves to demonstrate how and where the Fund performs with full openness and transparency. I will therefore be drawing up a UK-Global Fund performance agreement to help to reassure our taxpayers and professional interests that a strong and sustained focus on UK priorities such as strengthening health systems and putting health equity, gender and human rights are at the very core of the Global Fund's work.

We are proud of our record in global health. We have for decades worked at home and abroad to strengthen health systems, to improve nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, champion sexual and reproductive health and rights, improve access to vaccines and fight infectious diseases. We are one of the largest donors to the international covid-19 response. We are a long-term funder of innovation, developing new technologies, generating the evidence to enable delivery at scale and promoting access for those who need it most.

I would like to thank Members across both Houses of Parliament for their invaluable advice, interest, and support on this investment.

[HCWS364]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Irregular Migration: Small Boat Crossings

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman):** Today I am updating Parliament on an innovative arrangement between the UK and France to strengthen our bilateral partnership to tackle illegal migration at the shared border, with a focus on small boats crossings.

Since the bilateral arrangement reached in July 2021, the UK and France have been working to reinforce our collaboration to address illegal migration. This new arrangement builds upon the successes we have had over the last year.

In 2021, our joint efforts saw more than 23,000 dangerous and unnecessary crossings being prevented. To date in 2022, over 30,000 crossing attempts have been prevented.

Joint working between UK and French officers has secured more than 140 convictions connected to people smuggling since the start of 2020—and these criminals now face a combined 400 years behind bars.

The UK-France Joint Intelligence Cell has so far dismantled 55 organised crime groups and secured over 500 arrests since its inception in 2020.

However, the number of attempted and successful crossings continues to rise. To that end, the UK and France will intensify co-operation with a view to making the small boat route unviable, save lives, dismantle organised crime groups, and prevent and deter illegal migration in transit countries and further upstream.

The UK and France will adopt a more integrated and effective approach. Our new partnership with France is underpinned by a set of shared joint strategic objectives and a joint operational plan and builds on the shared commitments under the Sandhurst Treaty.

Our joint plan signifies a step-change in our joint ambition and co-operation to prevent dangerous crossings and further risk to life. Under the plan, for the first time, UK officers will join French law enforcement teams as embedded observers, sharing real-time information.

The UK has pledged a financial investment of up to €72.2 million—around £62.2 million—in 2022-23 to France to assist in the delivery of our joint plan. The objectives of our joint plan are part of a multi-year strategy that considers other innovative steps that can be taken to address illegal migration at a bilateral and multilateral level. This new partnership recognises the importance of co-operation with other neighbouring countries and European partners on a 'whole of route approach'. The UK and France have committed to work together to tackle the rise in illegal migration from Albania and will maintain regular dialogue to respond effectively to new and emerging migration challenges.

A copy of the joint statement which sets out further details on this partnership will be published on the [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) website and will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS365]

# Petition

*Monday 14 November 2022*

## OBSERVATIONS

### BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

#### Energy crisis support for small and medium sized businesses, the public sector and charities

*The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,*

Declares that businesses, public sector organisations and charities are facing unprecedented energy costs which will have dire and serious consequences for staff, customers and beneficiaries; notes that the Energy Bill Relief Scheme is an effective price cap and has been pledged for a six-month period, and that a price cap for domestic energy consumers under the Energy Price Guarantee has been pledged for a period of two years; and further notes that eligibility for the Energy Bill Relief Scheme is restricted to businesses, public sector organisations and charities who have fixed contracts agreed on or after 1 April 2022, as well as to deemed, variable and flexible tariffs and contracts.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to match the Energy Price Guarantee period for domestic consumers of two years for small and medium sized businesses, public sector organisations and charities, allowing certainty and stability in their dealings and further urges the Government to extend the eligibility criteria to allow access to the scheme for businesses, public sector organisations and charities who may have agreed their energy contracts prior to the 1 April 2022.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Anne McLaughlin, *Official Report*, 22 September 2022; Vol. 719, c. 923.]

[P002768]

*Observations The Minister for Climate (Graham Stuart):*

The energy price guarantee (EPG) and energy bill relief scheme (EBRS) will be in place from 1 October 2022 until April 2023, to support domestic and non-domestic energy customers.

Looking beyond April, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have agreed that it would be irresponsible for the Government to expose public finances to unlimited volatility in international gas prices. A Treasury-led review has been launched to consider how to support households and businesses with energy bills after April 2023 and will report in January.



# Ministerial Corrections

Monday 14 November 2022

## EDUCATION

### Draft Social Workers (Amendment and Transitional Provision) Regulations 2022

*The following is an extract from the debate on the draft Social Workers (Amendment and Transitional Provision) Regulations 2022 in the Seventh Delegated Legislation Committee on 9 November 2022.*

**Claire Coutinho:** The Government consulted on the draft changes to Social Work England's regulatory framework from 23 March to 11 May this year. We received 48 responses from a range of interested stakeholders, including service users and social workers. I am pleased to share that each proposal received broad support, with approval ranging from 67% to 94%.

*[Official Report, Seventh Delegated Legislation Committee, 9 November 2022, Vol. 722, c. 3.]*

*Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for East Surrey (Claire Coutinho).*

An error has been identified in my opening speech on the draft regulations.

The correct contribution should be been:

**Claire Coutinho:** The Government consulted on the draft changes to Social Work England's regulatory framework from 23 March to 11 May this year. We received 48 responses from a range of interested stakeholders, including service users and social workers. I am pleased to share that each proposal received broad support, with approval ranging from **68%** to 94%.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Engagements

*The following is an extract from Prime Minister questions on 9 November 2022.*

Q5. [902142] **Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Prime Minister remember back in February, when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, that I informed him that, due to his incompetence in that job, the children in my constituency were going to bed that night with no food in their tummies and no heat in their homes? What will he now do as Prime Minister to make sure that, in every community in our country, children are not in that situation in this hard winter ahead?

**The Prime Minister:** The absolute best way to ensure that children do not grow up in poverty, which is something that none of us wants to see, is to ensure that they do not grow up in a workless household. The record under these Governments is that 700,000 fewer children are growing up in workless households. That is because Conservative Governments create jobs for people, and that is the best anti-poverty strategy that we have.

*[Official Report, 9 November 2022, Vol. 722, c. 254.]*

*Letter of correction from the Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak):*

An error has been identified in my answer to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman).

The correct response should have been:

**The Prime Minister:** The absolute best way to ensure that children do not grow up in poverty, which is something that none of us wants to see, is to ensure that they do not grow up in a workless household. The record under these Governments is that **600,000** fewer children are growing up in workless households. That is because Conservative Governments create jobs for people, and that is the best anti-poverty strategy that we have.





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**not later than  
Monday 21 November 2022**

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