

**Wednesday
25 January 2023**

**Volume 726
No. 107**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 25 January 2023

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[Mr SPEAKER in the Chair]

Oral Answers to Questions

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

The Minister for Women and Equalities was asked—

Workplace Inequality: Gender and Race

1. **Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): What steps the Government are taking to tackle (a) gender and (b) racial inequality in the workplace. [903305]

13. **Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): What steps the Government are taking to tackle (a) gender and (b) racial inequality in the workplace. [903317]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Kemi Badenoch): As part of our strategy to tackle violence against women and girls, we have committed to strengthen the protections against sexual harassment in the workplace. That includes taking forward two legislative measures as part of the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Bill, introduced by the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse). Furthermore, in our landmark inclusive Britain strategy we committed to publishing guidance on ethnicity pay reporting for employers. That will be published soon and will support employers to identify and tackle unfair pay gaps in their workforces.

Carol Monaghan: New data published by the Ministry of Defence earlier this month showed that in the year to September 2022, more women left the armed forces than joined. Given the string of sexual abuse and harassment allegations that we have heard, that data is concerning but hardly surprising. What is the Minister doing to ensure that women are safe in the armed forces and that the pervasive attitude of misogyny in the armed forces is tackled?

Kemi Badenoch: The hon. Lady is right to raise that serious issue. My colleagues in the Ministry of Defence take it very seriously and have a strategy and a plan to tackle it. As I mentioned in respect of sexual harassment in the workplace, we have many measures to look into what is going on. We are concerned about women leaving the workplace, and this Government will do everything we can to make sure that women are encouraged to stay and thrive in their workplaces.

Stuart C. McDonald: The Scottish Government are encouraging employers to report on ethnicity pay gaps—a policy supported by the Women and Equalities Committee—but the Scottish Government do not have the powers to enforce that policy. Is the Minister willing to have a conversation about the transfer of those powers, so that we can all learn lessons from the results?

Kemi Badenoch: We have no plans to devolve equal opportunities policy. Quite a lot of work is being done on ethnicity pay reporting. It should not be made mandatory. It is different from gender pay gap reporting, because it covers more than two separate categories. I am happy to write to the hon. Gentleman with more detail on the work that we are doing, but we will publish guidance for those companies that want to carry out ethnicity pay reporting in due course.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): Gendered abuse, harassment and bullying in the workplace is wrong, but it can happen anywhere. Does my right hon. Friend agree that when there is gendered abuse, bullying and intimidation in this Chamber, we should make sure that action is taken to stamp it out?

Kemi Badenoch: I completely agree. This is a very serious issue. We are all aware of allegations that have been made against Members in this House. I know that you care very much about this issue, Mr Speaker. This is a place where we have freedom of speech and freedom of expression. We condemn any Member who tries to intimidate, harass or abuse other Members of Parliament when they are simply representing their constituents.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): On racial inequality and discrimination, a previous Home Office report looked at hate crime in terms of Islamophobia and antisemitism. The statistics and figures were absolutely appalling, with a high number of incidents. The Government removed the independent adviser on Islamophobia, Qari Asim. He apparently did not have any terms of reference for two years. Given the Government's commitment to tackle Islamophobia and intolerance, what is their strategy?

Kemi Badenoch: The Government have a strategy to tackle anti-Muslim hatred. I recommend that my hon. Friend raises this issue with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, who is responsible for that portfolio as part of the communities strategy.

Mr Speaker: I call the Scottish National party spokesperson.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): This week, the UK Government rejected outright five recommendations of the Women and Equalities Committee on menopause and the workplace, and they are not committing to any new work in response to the report. The Chair of the Committee, the right hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), described the Government's progress as "glacial" and their response as "complacent". She pointed out the missed opportunity to protect vast numbers of talented and experienced women from leaving the workforce. Will the Minister change tack? Will she commit finally to acting on

menopause and the workplace? If she will not, will she commit to look again at why devolving employment law in Scotland matters so much, so that we can do that work?

Kemi Badenoch: I would ask the hon. Lady to read the women's health strategy, in which she will see that the menopause is a priority area. The Select Committee has made recommendations, which we have considered carefully, but there is no point in the Government having a strategy if they are simply going to accept recommendations from elsewhere that do not conform to it. The best thing for her to do would be to work with the Government and look at the good work we are doing on tackling issues around the menopause.

Gynaecological Care: Waiting Lists

2. **Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): If she will hold discussions with her Cabinet colleagues on NHS waiting lists for gynaecological care. [903306]

The Minister for Women (Maria Caulfield): Tackling NHS waiting lists, including for gynaecology, is a priority for the Government, which is why we are spending £8 billion on clearing our backlog. For gynae procedures specifically, we have opened 90 surgical hubs, 90 community diagnostic centres and women's health hubs, which will all help to tackle gynaecology backlogs.

Emma Hardy: Some vaginal mesh-injured women have been left waiting four years for mesh removal, and I have already highlighted women's concerns that the surgeons they go to for mesh removal are trained only in implanting the mesh and not in removing it. These women fear that, once again, they are being used as test subjects. When will mesh-injured women get the redress that was recommended in Baroness Cumberlege's review, "First Do No Harm"?

Maria Caulfield: I thank the hon. Lady for her work in this space. I recognise that while we have set up nine specialist mesh centres to tackle mesh removal and seen a number of women come forward and receive their surgery, there are still a number on the waiting list. I am meeting some of the campaigners on mesh removal next week. We were at the Health and Social Care Committee hearing just a few weeks ago, and I heard some of their concerns then. I recognise that there is still progress to be made in this space.

Mr Speaker: We now come to the shadow Minister, Anneliese Dodds.

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): NHS England figures show that in October 2012, 15 women had been waiting over a year for gynaecological treatment. Can the Minister tell the House how many women had been waiting for that long in October last year?

Maria Caulfield: As the shadow Minister will know, there is a backlog of procedures in all four devolved nations of the United Kingdom for clinical reasons, rather than political reasons. We have made huge progress in clearing the two-year backlog, with the majority of those patients now having had their treatments. We are

on track to meet the target for the 18-month backlog in April, and we will then focus on those who are waiting a year.

Anneliese Dodds: I regret that the Minister did not directly answer my question—perhaps it was because she is aware of the appalling scale of the backlog. As of October last year, 38,000 women had been waiting over a year for treatment. That is 2,500 times more than 10 years ago. On top of that, less than half of women are up to date with cervical screening in some areas. Do women suffering in pain now just have to accept long waiting times and low screening rates under the Conservatives?

Maria Caulfield: Isn't it sad that this is turning into a political football, when there are clinical reasons why backlogs have accumulated over the two years? Perhaps the shadow Minister will look at Wales, where Labour has been in charge for 20 years and where the performance is worse than in England.

Maternity Outcomes: Migrant Women

3. **Taiwo Owatemi** (Coventry North West) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to reduce disparities in maternity outcomes for migrant women. [903307]

The Minister for Women (Maria Caulfield): The MBRRACE report shows that women from black, Asian and mixed ethnic groups have worse maternity outcomes. That is why NHS England has published the equity and equality guidance for local maternity services, supported by £6.8 million of investment to focus on actions to reduce the disparities.

Taiwo Owatemi: Last year, the Government's maternity taskforce pleaded with the Government to provide better maternity care for migrant women, but eight in 10 refugee and migrant women are still waiting more than 10 weeks to get their first antenatal care. That is compounded by the fact that black women in this country are still four times more likely to die from childbirth. Can the Minister let us know when the taskforce will finish its inquiry and when the Government will start delivering better maternity care for women in this country?

Maria Caulfield: I thank the hon. Lady for highlighting the work of the maternity disparities taskforce, which this Government set up. I have been working with its co-chair, Professor Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent, and our next meeting will focus on some of the actions to tackle this issue. From October last year, each local area has produced a local maternity equity and equality action plan, targeting specific communities within the area to try to improve outcomes. I encourage all Members to look at their local action plan, and if they have concerns that it will not meet those needs, they should please come and see me. I am very happy to work with Members on this.

Gender Pay Gap

4. **Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesei** (Slough) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help close the gender pay gap. [903308]

15. **Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help close the gender pay gap. [903319]

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Kemi Badenoch):

It was a Conservative Government who introduced gender pay gap reporting in 2017, to motivate employers to look at their pay data and improve workplace gender equality. To accelerate progress, we are supporting legislation that enhances flexible working, extends redundancy protection for those on maternity leave, introduces carer's leave and strengthens protections against harassment in the workplace.

Mr Dhesi: The gender pay gap for full-time employees was 8.3% in April 2022, which was sadly up from 7.7% the previous year. Worse still, Labour's analysis has uncovered that the gender pay gap for black African women is an appalling 26% when compared with the average male worker, and the figures for Bangladeshi and Pakistani women are 28% and 31% respectively. Rather than watch as the situation deteriorates, what urgent steps are the Government taking to deal with these dreadful disparities?

Kemi Badenoch: I do not recognise any of the hon. Gentleman's statistics. With all due respect, I have seen all sorts of Labour analysis that misuses and abuses statistics to the point where we honestly cannot take it seriously. If he does have real evidence, I am keen that he sends it for the equality hub to analyse. Those figures do not represent anything we have found across Government.

Ellie Reeves: Closing the gender pay gap would add £600 million to the UK's economy by 2025. Labour has a plan to do this by requiring large firms to publish gender pay gap plans, permitting equal pay comparisons, extending statutory maternity and paternity leave, and strengthening protections for pregnant women. Will the Government finally accept our proposals?

Kemi Badenoch: I am afraid that the Government will not accept those proposals. The hon. Lady conflates equal pay and gender pay gap reporting, which are not the same thing. This is an area that has a lot of nuance, and Labour needs to do a little more homework.

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the most effective ways to close the gender pay gap is to support women who are returning to work after pregnancy? Will she therefore use her good offices to encourage cross-Government work to improve the affordability and availability of childcare for new mothers?

Kemi Badenoch: Both sides of the House can agree that more support and more work is needed on this issue. Childcare is one of the reasons why women leave the workplace, and we are doing everything we can to support women to have appropriate childcare arrangements.

British Sign Language

5. **Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con):** What recent progress she has made in implementing the British Sign Language Act 2022. [903309]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): I thank my right hon. Friend for her important work in delivering the Act. Work continues across Government to ensure that the Departments named in the schedule to the Act are

aware of their reporting duty. They will report on their use of BSL in public communications at the end of the first reporting period on 28 June.

Chloe Smith: I welcome that update. Will the advisory board be on track ahead of that first statutory reporting date? When will the statutory guidance be commenced? Furthermore, will my hon. Friend commit to the Government's major public broadcasts being fully accessible?

Mims Davies: My right hon. Friend will be pleased to know that the first meeting of the Departments driving the Act is due to take place in mid-February. It is vital that the 20 Departments listed in the schedule deliver the commitments. The advisory board will be the first dual-language board advising His Majesty's Government, which demonstrates our commitment to the deaf community. It will form the vital guidance on the Act, and it will rightly look at BSL for major public broadcasts, which many of our constituents want to see and have asked for.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): What discussions has the Minister had with her colleagues in the Government Communication Service about ensuring that BSL interpretation is provided for Government announcements and media events, and about the importance of not relying on written documents as an adjustment for deaf people?

Mims Davies: I thank the hon. Lady for her interest. The British Sign Language advisory board is being established to advise the Government on that implementation. Among the people giving advice will be BSL signers, and the majority of the members will be deaf BSL users who have lived experience and want Government communications to be accessible. I am proud that the Department for Work and Pensions has accessible jobcentres, and the same is needed for major Government announcements.

Child Poverty: Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Children

6. **Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab):** If she will make an assessment of the implications for her policies of trends in child poverty levels for black, Asian and minority ethnic children. [903310]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): The Government are committed to a sustainable long-term approach to tackling poverty and supporting families on lower incomes. To help people progress, the Department for Work and Pensions provides a range of support for anyone at any age, career stage or background to move forward and be better off. As well as one-to-one support with their work coach, jobseekers can access sector-based work academies, the restart programme and the Work and Health programme.

Catherine West: The Jesuits said, "Give me a child until he is seven and I will show you the man." That means that the impact of what we do in helping children under the age of seven will create a more just future. What urgent action will the Government take to address

deep poverty affecting 46% of black, Asian and minority ethnic families? Is there extra funding that can be given to schools and put into our teaching to support children under the age of seven in black, Asian and minority ethnic communities?

Mims Davies: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. As an MP who has won an award for focusing on disadvantaged groups, there is no doubt that she has interest in this area. At 70%, the ethnic minority employment rate is at a record high. We know that work is the best route out of poverty, and that mentoring, support and being able to see role models are absolutely key. I commit to continuing to work across Government with those disadvantaged groups to make sure that that focus is rightly on them.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) asked about deep poverty among minority children. I shall repeat the point again: black, Asian and minority ethnic households are twice as likely to be in deep poverty, struggling to afford everyday basics such as food and energy. That is 46% of ethnic minority children living below the breadline. Is the Minister proud of her Government's record, and will she answer the question that was put by my hon. Friend?

Mims Davies: I refer the hon. Lady to my previous answer. We do know that work is the best route out of poverty and the best way to tackle those deep-rooted disadvantages. I recently joined a No.10 roundtable on a mentoring and support pipeline to help understand what is holding people back. No one should be left behind because of their postcode or their background. Mentoring circles at the DWP can make a real difference, particularly to young people who are looking to progress from that deep disadvantage.

Gender Pension Gap

7. **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): What recent assessment she has made of the implications for her policies of the gender pension gap. [903311]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): The primary causes of the gender pension gap are due to the historical inequality of the labour market. This includes differences in working patterns and earnings for men and women. The Government have taken key steps, such as the introduction of shared parental leave, mandatory gender pay gap reporting, and an effort, as we have heard already today, to tackle the root causes of this problem for women. I know that the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Laura Trott) is looking directly at this issue for women as well.

Patricia Gibson: It is bad enough that women born in the 1950s were robbed of their pensions, but, more generally, the gender pension gap is significantly larger than the gender pay gap and applies to a significantly large proportion of women in the UK, with retired women more likely to be poorer and more likely to rely

on pension credit. That is a problem that persists. Will the Minister urgently address the issue, particularly the injustice suffered by WASPI women, or will her Government just ignore women being poorer in retirement?

Mims Davies: I assure the hon. Lady that we will not be doing that. We monitor pension contributions and participation by gender, and publish data regularly through our workplace pension participation and savings trends publication. Key to this matter is our funding of returner programmes, which supports those who have taken time out of the labour market for caring responsibilities. Finally, pension sharing on divorce is an option that can help women if a marriage or civil partnership has broken down. As I have said, this is a focus for us all.

Topical Questions

T1. [903320] **Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Kemi Badenoch): The Government will publish a draft Bill setting out our approach to banning conversion practices, which will go for pre-legislative scrutiny in this parliamentary Session. We are committed to protecting everyone at risk of those practices from harm and we are clear that the legislation must not affect the ability of parents, teachers or counsellors to have open, exploratory and even challenging conversations with young people.

Cat Smith: Has the Minister had sight of the Health and Social Care Committee's report into the Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review and, particularly on paragraph 53, what conversations might she be having with Treasury colleagues to support women seeking redress?

Kemi Badenoch: I thank the Health and Social Care Committee for its IMMDS follow-up report. Our sympathies remain with all those women affected by sodium valproate. Patient safety is our top priority and we are committed to improving how the system listens to people, which is why I have asked the Patient Safety Commissioner, Dr Henrietta Hughes, to look into redress schemes. I am not committing to any specific next steps today, but the Minister for Women will provide an update in due course.

T5. [903326] **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): Does my hon. Friend—[*Interruption.*] Cheers from the Opposition? That does not happen very often. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, whether they live in Land's End or John O'Groats, it is important for every citizen to know their rights and for those rights to be implemented on a clear and consistent basis so that no one is discriminated against?

The Minister for Equalities (Stuart Andrew): My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The United Kingdom has some of the strongest equality legislation in the world, and rightly so. We continue to ensure that all those rights are protected. Under the Equality Act 2010, any person who is subject to discrimination can personally take their case to court to seek a remedy.

T2. [903321] **Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): [R] Despite the 11th-hour response to my letter about the hormone replacement therapy repayment certificates, which arrived in my inbox just an hour ago, there still appears to be some ambiguity about what the certificate will cover. In her letter, the Minister says that changes to the drug tariff are being finalised to add “eligible items”, with no indication whether that will cover all HRT products. For the benefit of women across the country and as a matter of urgency, can the Minister please provide a comprehensive list of eligible products?

The Minister for Women (Maria Caulfield): I thank the hon. Lady for her work in this space. I responded to her letter last week as quickly as possible and I am glad she has received the response. I just want to confirm that from April the HRT prepayment certificate will be available to women—at £18.70 for a whole year—saving women hundreds of pounds on HRT prescriptions every year.

T6. [903327] **Laura Farris** (Newbury) (Con): I am pleased that the Government are reinstating protection against third-party harassment in the workplace, but employers are frequently confused when confronted with conflicting views on sex and gender. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the Equality and Human Rights Commission will be publishing detailed guidance to explain how employers should treat protected beliefs on sex-based rights?

Kemi Badenoch: The Government will be supporting the Equality and Human Rights Commission in developing a statutory code on workplace harassment. We will be working closely on that. The Government are also preparing their own practical guidance for employers on preventing sexual harassment in the workplace, which should address the very issues my hon. Friend just raised.

T3. [903322] **Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): A Citizens Advice report published in the past two weeks shows that 600,000 households were moved to prepayment meters. There are bound to be many vulnerable and disabled people who have been moved on to prepayment meters in that time. Can the Minister say what she has been doing to ensure that that practice ceases and to protect those people in future?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mims Davies): I believe that issue is going to be discussed further between the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Department for Work and Pensions, which provides support. I am very proud to be bringing forward the next stage of the household support fund and the cost of living payments. I urge anybody who is concerned about making payments to contact their energy supplier, to use the benefits calculator on gov.uk and to look at the support for the cost of living from the household support fund through their local authority.

Nicola Richards (West Bromwich East) (Con): The Wagner Group is reported by the UN and others to be committing atrocities, including rape, against women and girls in Ukraine on behalf of its Russian paymasters.

Will the Secretary of State raise that with Cabinet colleagues and urge the Government to proscribe the group as a terrorist organisation?

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): The UK condemns Russia’s use of Russian-state proxies such as the Wagner Group in Ukraine and globally. While the mercenaries operating in Ukraine in support of the Russian invasion are present in other conflict settings, including Mali and the Central African Republic, and are continuing to bring us huge challenges, we continue to work with the Ukrainian Government on tackling conflict-related sexual violence, including through UK expertise to support the investigations through the Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group. We will not stop providing that support.

T4. [903323] **Rushanara Ali** (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): The average cost of a full-time nursery place for a child under 2 when there is no Government support is about £14,000 a year, and it is much more in London. Can the Minister get her Government to put in the investment needed to fix the broken childcare system so that more mothers can return to work, particularly those who are single parents and struggle to return to work because of the lack of affordable childcare?

Kemi Badenoch: This is, as I mentioned earlier, an issue that the Government are working very hard on. I will raise it with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education, who can write to the hon. Lady and address those concerns more fully.

Mr Speaker: Order. Before we come to Prime Minister’s questions, I point out that a British Sign Language interpretation of proceedings is available to watch on parliamentlive.tv.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [903270] **Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 25 January.

The Prime Minister (Rishi Sunak): Can I start by wishing everyone a happy Burns night, especially those celebrating in Scotland?

As we prepare to mark Holocaust Memorial Day, I am sure the whole House will join me in paying tribute to the extraordinary courage of Britain’s holocaust survivors, including 94-year-old Arek Hersch, who is here with us today. This Government will legislate to build a holocaust memorial and learning centre next to Parliament so that the testimonies of survivors such as Arek will be heard at the heart of our democracy by every generation to come.

This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Margaret Ferrier: Shockingly, one in six women in the UK has experienced economic abuse. This is not just about money, but about restricting access to other resources such as food, housing or work. It is a lesser

known aspect of coercive control that affects my constituents, the Prime Minister's constituents and those of every Member across the House. What plans does the Prime Minister have to review in detail the way that Government Departments and policies can be exploited by abusers, and to ensure that those loopholes can be closed?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady raises an important point. Let me assure her that the Government are committed to tackling violence against women and girls. That is why we passed the landmark Domestic Abuse Act 2021, introducing new offences such as coercion and coercive control, stalking and others. We will continue to do everything we can to ensure women and girls feel as safe as they deserve and rightly should be.

Q2. [903271] **Marco Longhi** (Dudley North) (Con): Although I was disappointed that Dudley did not make the final cut in the latest levelling-up funding round, I am of course pleased that we received the £25 million towns deal, the brand new Duncan Edwards leisure facility, and a transport interchange project that has been secured since my election in 2019. But our high street is on its knees, so will the Prime Minister meet me and Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council to discuss our levelling-up bid and how we can ensure success in the next round?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is a great advocate for his constituents. I am delighted that, thanks to his efforts, Dudley has received £25 million from the towns fund. I know that there will be disappointment about the levelling-up fund, but all bids, including that made by Dudley Council, can receive feedback to be strengthened for future funding rounds. I would be very happy to meet him to discuss it further.

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

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): This week, we will remember the 6 million Jews murdered in the holocaust and all those scarred by genocide since as we mark Holocaust Memorial Day. We must all commit, across this House, to defeat prejudice and hatred wherever we may find it. To work for a better future, we must find light in the darkness.

May I also join the Prime Minister in wishing everyone a happy Burns night?

Zara Aleena was walking home from a night out with her friends when she was savagely attacked, assaulted and beaten to death. Zara was a brilliant young woman; a trainee lawyer with a bright future. Her killer is a violent, racist, woman-hating thug, not fit to walk the same streets. But that is precisely the problem: he was free to walk the same streets. The inspectorate report into her case says that opportunities were missed by the probation service that could have prevented this attack and saved her life. Does the Prime Minister accept those findings?

The Prime Minister: This was a truly terrible crime. As the chief inspector has found, the failings in this case and others were serious and unacceptable. In both of the cases that are in the public domain, these failures

can be traced to failings in the initial risk assessment, and that is why immediate steps are being taken to address the serious issues raised.

Keir Starmer: I am glad the Prime Minister accepts those findings. The report also says that staffing vacancies and excessive workloads contributed to those fatal failures. It makes it absolutely clear this was not a one-off. As the report says, these are "systemic issues" in the probation service. They are clearly ministerial responsibilities. Does the Prime Minister accept those findings as well?

The Prime Minister: Let me outline for the right hon. and learned Gentleman exactly what steps we are taking, and that is to ensure that mandatory training to improve risk assessments is being put in place. We are mandating checks with the police and children's services before a probation officer can recommend to the court that a convicted offender be given an electronically monitored sentence, and we are implementing new processes to guarantee the swift recall of offenders. The action we are taking is already making a difference, as we see, for example, in the reduction of the number of electronically monitored curfews being given by the courts.

Keir Starmer: It was Barking, Dagenham and Havering that tragically and fatally let Zara down, but across the country, probation services are failing after a botched then reversed privatisation and after a decade of under-investment. It is yet another vital public service on its knees after 13 years of Tory Government. I spoke to Zara's family this morning. It is hard to convey to this House the agony that they have been through. They say that the Government have blood on their hands over these failings. The Prime Minister has accepted the findings of the report. Does he also accept what Zara's family say?

The Prime Minister: My heart of course goes out to Zara's family. The right hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned accountability. The probation service has taken action where failings have been found and where that has been appropriate. With regard to the overall service, there is now £155 million a year of extra investment that we are putting in to the probation service so that we can deliver better supervision of offenders. There has also been an increase in the number of senior probation officers, but one of the other things we must remember, if we do want to increase the safety of women and girls on our streets, is that we need tough sentencing, and that is why this Government passed the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, which he and his party opposed.

Keir Starmer: In the light of the case of Zara, I really do not think the Prime Minister should be boasting about the protection he is putting in place for women. I am not going to take lectures from him about that.

Does the Prime Minister agree that any politician who seeks to avoid the taxes they owe in this country is not fit to be in charge of taxpayer money?

The Prime Minister: I am pleased to make my position on this matter completely clear to the House. The issues in question occurred before I was Prime Minister. With regard to the appointment of the Minister without Portfolio, the usual appointments process was followed.

No issues were raised with me when he was appointed to his current role. Since I commented on this matter last week, more information has come forward, which is why I have asked the independent adviser to look into the matter. I obviously cannot prejudge the outcome of that, but it is right that we fully investigate this matter and establish all the facts.

Keir Starmer: The Prime Minister avoided the question. Anybody watching would think it is fairly obvious that someone who seeks to avoid tax cannot also be in charge of tax, yet for some reason, the Prime Minister cannot bring himself to say that or even acknowledge the question. Last week, the Prime Minister told the House that the chair of the Tory party had addressed his tax affairs “in full” and there was “nothing” to add. This week, after days of public pressure, he now says there are serious questions to answer. What changed?

The Prime Minister: I know the right hon. and learned Gentleman reads from prepared sheets, but he should listen to what I actually say. Since I commented on this matter last week, more information, including a statement by the Minister without Portfolio, has entered the public domain, which is why it is right that we do establish the facts. Let me take a step back. Of course, the politically expedient thing to do would have been for me to say that this matter must be resolved by Wednesday at noon, but I believe in proper due process. That is why I appointed an independent adviser and that is why the independent adviser is doing his job. The Opposition cannot have it both ways. The Leader of the Opposition and his party chair, the hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds), both urged me and the Government to appoint an independent adviser, and now he objects to that independent adviser doing their job. It is simple political opportunism and everyone can see through it.

Keir Starmer: We all know why the Prime Minister was reluctant to ask his party chair questions about family finances and tax avoidance, but his failure to sack him, when the whole country can see what is going on, shows how hopelessly weak he is—a Prime Minister overseeing chaos, overwhelmed at every turn. He cannot say when ambulances will get to heart attack victims again. He cannot say when the prison system will keep streets safe again. He cannot even deal with tax avoiders in his own Cabinet. Is he starting to wonder if this job is just too big for him?

The Prime Minister: The difference between the right hon. and learned Gentleman and me is that I stand by my values and my principles, even when it is difficult. When I disagreed fundamentally with the previous Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), I resigned from the Government, but for four long years, he sat next to the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) when antisemitism ran rife and his predecessor sided with our opponents. That is what is weak: he has no principles, just petty politics.

Q4. [903273] Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con): For our most vulnerable children, school is often their principal place of safety as well as education, but as reported in my review of school exclusions for the Government in 2019, the unacceptable and illegal use of off-rolling is still shutting a worrying number of children out of the

classroom, out of learning and out of the protection they need from gangs, violence and domestic abuse. The Department for Education has done some impressive and excellent work to address this terrible practice, but what more can my right hon. Friend do to ensure that we permanently exclude off-rolling from our schools?

The Prime Minister: My hon. and learned Friend raises an important issue. The Government are clear that off-rolling is unlawful and unacceptable in any form, and the Department for Education continues to work with Ofsted to tackle it. Where Ofsted finds it, it will always be addressed in the inspection report and it could also lead to a school's leadership being judged inadequate.

Mr Speaker: We come to the SNP leader.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): Let me start by echoing the sentiments of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in relation to Holocaust Memorial Day—truly horrific crimes that we must never forget and endeavour to ensure are never repeated.

May I send my heartfelt thoughts, and indeed I hope those of all across the Chamber, to the firefighter who is in a serious condition following the blaze in Edinburgh just a few days ago?

May I ask the Prime what advice he would have for individuals seeking to protect their personal finances? Should they seek out a future chair of the BBC to help secure an £800,000 loan, should they set up a trust in Gibraltar and hope that HMRC simply does not notice, or should they do as others have done and simply apply for non-dom status?

The Prime Minister: Let me share in the hon. Gentleman's expressions of sympathy to the families concerned and to the firefighter who is currently in hospital. I am sorry to hear that, and I wish him a speedy recovery.

I am proud of this Government's record of supporting the most vulnerable in our society: this winter, helping all families—£900—with their energy bills; raising the national living wage to record levels; and ensuring that our pensioners get the support they need. That is what this Government are doing to ensure financial security in this country.

Stephen Flynn: I am not sure what question the Prime Minister thought I asked, but that certainly was not it. Let us be clear about this: this is now a matter of the Prime Minister's own integrity and accountability. After all, when there were questions about the Home Secretary and concerns about her role in relation to national security, he chose to back her. Now, he is choosing to back the chair of the Tory party, despite a £5 million penalty from HMRC, and of course he is seeking to protect the former Prime Minister despite his cosy financial relationship with the chair of the BBC. Is it little wonder that people in Scotland may well consider the Tory party to be a parcel of rogues?

The Prime Minister: What I am standing up for is proper due process. That is why we have an independent adviser. It is right that the independent adviser conducts his investigation. That is how we will ensure accountability, and that is what I will deliver.

Q9. [903278] **Rob Roberts** (Delyn) (Ind): Despite having less than 5% of England's population, Wales has almost 40 times more people waiting more than two years for NHS treatment—a sad case of “devolve and forget”, unfortunately, which does a disservice to my constituents in Delyn. Will the Prime Minister confirm that the UK Government remain concerned about the healthcare of the people in Wales, and with north Wales health board having been in “special measures” for eight years, can he come up with a way of putting the Welsh Labour Government in it too?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman highlights, the NHS right across our Union is facing pressure because of some of the challenges of flu and covid in particular causing high bed occupancy this winter. We are focused on delivering on the people's priorities and bringing down the backlog. We have currently already eliminated waits of over two years and, as the hon. Gentleman says, there is more to go. That is why our investment this week into mental health treatment will ensure that we can ease the pressure further in A&E, and I continue to deliver that across the country.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): I echo the comments of the Prime Minister in relation to Holocaust Memorial Day, and as we think of the situation in Ukraine, we also extend our best wishes to President Zelensky on his birthday.

Freedom of religion or belief is important in this country. Isabel Vaughan-Spruce was praying silently outside an abortion clinic in Birmingham when she was arrested and questioned by the police, not about her written or spoken words, but about her thoughts. We value freedom of religion or belief in this country. Will the Prime Minister commit himself to examining the laws of the United Kingdom to ensure that this country remains a beacon for freedom of religion or belief across the world?

The Prime Minister: Of course we believe in freedom of religious expression and belief in this country, but we are also balancing that with the rights of women to seek legal and safe abortions. That is currently being discussed in this Parliament. These are always matters of a free vote, and I know that Members will treat them with the sensitivity they deserve.

Q11. [903280] **Dr Liam Fox** (North Somerset) (Con): Innocent civilians are being murdered in Ukraine on Putin's orders as we speak, and as we sit in a warmed House of Commons, families are freezing because their electricity has been cut off by Russian forces. Putin believes that Ukraine is more important to him than to the free world, and is moving to a full war footing. Ukrainians must make gains on the battlefield, and the next six months are crucial. They need a full range of weapons—air defence, artillery, longer-range missiles, and tanks—and enough to make a real difference. The UK has shown great leadership on this issue, so may I ask my right hon. Friend to use every means at his disposal, domestic and international, to honour the courage of the people of Ukraine, and to defend the whole world order, because ultimately that is what we are talking about?

The Prime Minister: I have made it clear that the UK and our allies must accelerate our efforts to ensure that Ukraine wins this war and secures a lasting peace. Last year the United Kingdom provided £2.3 billion in military aid to Ukraine, the largest package of support of any European nation, and we will at least match that again this year. As my right hon. Friend knows, last week I announced that we would gift many battle tanks as part of the next major package of UK support to Ukraine, and I am pleased that our friends and allies are preparing to follow our lead.

Q3. [903272] **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Ind): Mr Speaker, London has it all: prime property, shopping, schools, and even the perfect time zone for money laundering. While there has been movement with Russian oligarchs, it is not just them, and we know that there are relatives of regimes that Members across the House condemn that are running bogus Islamic centres as fronts to stash their dirty cash, among other things. When will the National Crime Agency be adequately financed, so that we can be a world leader in anti-corruption, as we promised in 2016? Or is there a lack of political will to upset the apple cart?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady should know that we are currently in the process of legislating the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill, which puts in place many more measures to allow us to tackle some of the issues she raises. It also introduces the economic crime levy, which will provide considerably more funding to tackle economic crime in the UK.

Q12. [903281] **Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): The trans-Pennine rail upgrade is under way, which is good news, with stations in Slaithwaite and Marsden getting improvements. Not such good news are the dozens of daily rail service cancellations by TransPennine Express, which are causing absolute misery for my constituents who are trying to get to work, to college, or to visit family and friends. The franchise is up in May. Does the Prime Minister agree that enough is enough, and that if TransPennine Express does not get to grips with this we need to strip it of the franchise and get in somebody who will deliver reliable rail services for my constituents?

The Prime Minister: We have been clear that the current service is simply not acceptable. Rail North Partnership is working with the company on a service improvement plan, and my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department for Transport, (Huw Merriman) is having weekly meetings with them. As my hon. Friend points out, the TransPennine Express contract expires in May, and while there are currently discussions about that new contract, if Ministers conclude that the operator cannot be turned around, other decisions may be made.

Q5. [903274] **Olivia Blake** (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab): Refugees and campaigners are gathered today outside Parliament to highlight the impact of the hostile environment—from Rwanda, to deaths in the channel and the latest scandal of missing children—on people in the migration and asylum system. Rather than cruel gimmicks such as Rwanda, is not the best way of deterring child crossings, saving lives and breaking the business model of criminal gangs the introduction of safe and legal routes to claim asylum?

The Prime Minister: This is about fairness. It is about fairness for those who seek to come here legally, and it is about fairness for those who are here and our ability to integrate and support those we want to. What we will do is break the cycle of criminal gangs who are causing untold misery and leading to deaths in the channel. That is why we will introduce legislation that makes it clear that if you come here illegally, we will be able to detain you and swiftly remove you to a safe third country. That is a reasonable and common-sense approach that the vast majority of the British public support.

Q13. [903282] **Sir Oliver Heald** (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): The Prime Minister will be aware of my concern that mental health patients should not be forced into accident and emergency departments when what they really need is specialist care. Will he say more about the extra money that is being made available for urgent mental health care facilities and what impact he thinks that will have on the treatment of mental health patients and the general situation in A&E departments?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right. People in mental health crisis deserve compassionate care in a safe and appropriate setting. Too often, they end up in A&E when they should be receiving specialist treatment elsewhere. This week's announcement on mental health ambulances, crisis cafés, crisis houses and mental health urgent treatment centres will ensure that patients get the vital help that they need while easing pressures on emergency departments and freeing up staff time. He is absolutely right to highlight the issue. Our announcement will make a major difference.

Q6. [903275] **Tulip Siddiq** (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): This week, as a trustee of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, I was honoured to hear from Lia Lesser, a holocaust survivor who came to this country by herself at the age of eight because her parents believed that the UK was a safe haven for vulnerable children. I also read the Government's own statistics that say 200 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children were missing from hotels in the UK. Ministers have admitted that they have no idea about the whereabouts of those children. Does the Prime Minister think that the UK is still a safe haven for vulnerable children?

The Prime Minister: Over the last few years, the United Kingdom has opened up its hearts and homes to hundreds of thousands of people from Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine and Hong Kong and provided refuge and sanctuary to many children in that process, but the reports that we have read about are concerning. Local authorities have a statutory duty to protect all children regardless of where they go missing from, and in that situation they work closely with local agencies, including the police, to establish their whereabouts. That is why it is so important that we end the use of hotels for unaccompanied asylum seekers and reduce pressure on the overall system. That is what our plans will do.

Sir James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): Constituents in Southend and Rochford very much welcome the energy bills support scheme, which has helped 99% of households around the United Kingdom with rising fuel prices despite Putin's barbaric war in Ukraine. Will the Prime Minister assure my constituents

and the House that he is committed to continuing to help with the cost of living not only this winter but next winter?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right about the Government's commitment to support all families with the cost of living: this winter, about £900 of support. Next year, as the energy price guarantee evolves, it will still be there with about £500 of support for families. That comes on top of record increases in the national living wage, worth about £1,600, and supporting our pensioners and the most vulnerable by inflating their benefits and pensions with inflation.

Q7. [903276] **Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): In 2021, the Government enabled Yevgeny Prigozhin, the former chef to Putin and founder of the Wagner Group, to dodge UK sanctions to pursue a case in London against British journalist Eliot Higgins, who had exposed his link to the Wagner Group. Prigozhin believed that silencing Higgins would get his sanctions lifted. The overriding of UK sanctions was approved by the Treasury when the Prime Minister was Chancellor. Prigozhin's English lawyers wrote that serving notice on Higgins "will require Treasury approval". What values did the Prime Minister apply when he allowed a Putin warlord to use our courts to try to silence a British journalist and undermine UK sanctions?

The Prime Minister: I am proud of our record in leading when it comes to sanctioning those people connected with the Putin regime. I think, at last count, we have sanctioned over 1,000 people and frozen tens of billions of pounds of assets. I am aware of the case the hon. Gentleman has raised, and we are looking at it. There is, as he knows, the Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation, which deals with the licensing situations in these matters, but I am happy to get back to him on the specific case that he raised.

Nicola Richards (West Bromwich East) (Con): May I echo my right hon. Friend's comments on the importance of Holocaust Memorial Day and welcome his renewed commitment today regarding the holocaust memorial and learning centre? Will he join me in encouraging Members from across the House to sign the Holocaust Educational Trust's book of commitment, which will be in Parliament today and tomorrow, and pledge to remember the holocaust, fight antisemitism and support the important work of the Holocaust Educational Trust?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend. As I said earlier, we will legislate to help build the holocaust memorial and learning centre next to Parliament to serve as a powerful reminder of the holocaust, its victims and where prejudice can lead if unchallenged. I also join her in thanking the Holocaust Educational Trust for its fantastic work and in encouraging all Members to sign the book of commitment, as I will be doing later today.

Q8. [903277] **Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): A week ago my constituent Alireza Akbari was executed by order of the regime in Iran. In the three years preceding and the days following his murder, the UK Government made little effort to protect the life or protest the death of a British national. Tomorrow Mr Akbari's family and I meet the Foreign Office

Minister, Lord Ahmad. They want to hear what help the Government can offer them at the time of their greatest suffering. Today this House wants to hear from the Prime Minister what sanction he will impose on the regime beyond the trifling steps taken so far. First and foremost, will he show some courage, follow the lead of the United States and the European Parliament and proscribe the entire revolutionary guard corps as a terrorist organisation?

The Prime Minister: The regime is prolonging the suffering of the family, and it is sadly typical of its disregard for basic human dignity. I spoke about my views on Iran when I was before the Liaison Committee, and Iran must now provide answers about the circumstances of Alireza Akbari's death and burial. We have actually pressed the Iranian regime formally through their chargé d'affaires in London and the Foreign Ministry in Tehran, and we will continue to do so until the family get the answers they deserve. We have also sanctioned several people connected with the case.

Sara Briteliffe (Hyndburn) (Con): I thank the Prime Minister and the Chancellor for visiting Hyndburn and Haslingden last week to hear about the transformative difference that the levelling-up funding will make. This is a historic investment, with over £40 million secured. Does he agree that we are delivering on exactly what was promised in 2019 to the areas that were most forgotten, such as Hyndburn and Haslingden? Will he visit once works are completed to see the difference himself?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is a fantastic champion for her local community, and the results showed when the Chancellor and I were lucky enough to visit her last week. As she and many of the people we spoke to pointed out, this was an area that had been forgotten and neglected for decades, but it is this Government who are putting in the investment, spreading opportunity, making jobs and making sure that people can feel enormously proud of the place they call home.

Q10. [903279] **Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Prime Minister realise that most people in my constituency think it is his role to keep our country safe? Is he aware that in all the years I have been in Parliament, I have never heard of a situation where our Army and armed forces are so run down that the Chairman of the Defence Committee and the Secretary of State for Defence both say that our armed forces have been hollowed out and are unfit to put a division into active service? What is he going to do about that?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman seems to forget the fact that we have invested an extra £24 billion in our armed services. That is a record uplift in defence spending and ensures that we are one of the leading spenders on defence in NATO. We will continue to ensure we have one of the best-equipped fighting forces anywhere in the world. As we can see from the recent announcement on tanks, we continue to lead the world when it comes to standing up for not just our safety, but the safety of our allies around the world.

Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): As a former firefighter, I am sure the whole House will pray for the firefighter in Scotland who is today fighting for his life. Our emergency services go one way, into the danger, while we go the other way. Our thoughts and prayers should be with them.

Dacorum Borough Council, the Conservative-led council in my constituency, has done a fantastic job of building new houses, including social housing and council houses. Can the Prime Minister assure me that we will not be pushed into the green belt any more than we already have been and that we can protect the Chilterns in my constituency?

The Prime Minister: I join my right hon. Friend in praising his local council for ensuring we build homes in the right places so that our young people can fulfil the dream of home ownership. He is also right to say that this Government will always protect our precious green spaces. The recent changes in our planning reforms will ensure that we can protect the green belt everywhere. His local community and others will benefit from those protections as we keep our local areas beautiful.

Q14. [903283] **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): UK in a Changing Europe reports that, at the end of 2022, 60% of voters said their cost of living had increased and 38% said that their personal finances had been negatively affected by our not being a member of the European Union. The Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts a 4% reduction in GDP, only two fifths of which has already happened, so surely the Prime Minister will agree with me, the electorate and the experts that Brexit has served only to exacerbate the cost of living and economic challenges facing these islands?

The Prime Minister: Russia's illegal war in Ukraine and the impact it has had on energy supplies has nothing to do with Brexit. What we are doing is ensuring that we can support families with those cost of living pressures. That is why we provided £900 of support this winter for energy bills, and that is why we are increasing the national living wage to record levels. We will continue to stand behind Britain's families until we can bring inflation back down to where it belongs.

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): I know the Prime Minister will share my concern at the news this morning that 730 people may lose their jobs at the 2 Sisters chicken factory in Llangefni, one of the largest employers on Ynys Môn. What support can the Government offer both to my constituents who are affected by this devastating news and to the wider the community at this difficult time?

The Prime Minister: I am very sorry to hear about the job losses my hon. Friend raises. My thoughts are with those affected and their families. I know how distressing that will be for them. I am pleased to say that the Department for Work and Pensions has procedures in place to support communities when situations like this arise. We will work very closely with her to do what we are doing everywhere across the country, which is providing good well-paid jobs for everyone, because that is the best way to build a happy and secure life.

Q15. [903284] **Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): Exercise is essential for both physical and mental wellbeing, but with spiralling energy costs many venues, such as the Freedom Leisure centres in my constituency, are struggling to cope. While some sectors will receive extra support, the sport and leisure industry will not. If the Prime Minister agrees with me that the sector is vital to the long-term health of our communities, why are his Government not providing it with the financial support it needs to thrive?

The Prime Minister: Of course I agree with the hon. Lady that exercise and leisure centres are important. That is why we provided significant support to them during covid and beyond. With regard to energy prices now, the Chancellor set out the new relief scheme that will run after the current one expires. It provides considerable support to all sorts of organisations up and down the country. I am sure it will benefit many businesses and organisations in her constituency.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I understand that the case referred to by the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) is currently before the courts. It is therefore covered by the House's sub judice resolution and should not be referred to in this House. It is, of course, open to any Member to ask that I waive the resolution in a particular case, but that has not happened in this case and therefore it should not be discussed at all. I will leave it at that.

Olivia Blake: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Does it relate to Prime Minister's questions?

Olivia Blake: Yes, Mr Speaker. My apologies: I forgot to refer the House to my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests on the support that I receive from RAMP—the Refugee, Asylum and Migration Policy project—and my co-chairship of the all-party parliamentary group on migration.

Mr Speaker: Thank you.

Wagner Group: Sanctions Regime

12.40 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs if he will make a statement on reports that the UK Government assisted Wagner Group head Yevgeny Prigozhin in circumventing the UK sanctions regime.

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (James Cartlidge): The war in Ukraine, as we all agree, is a barbaric, illegal incursion into a sovereign nation by another. It has resulted in tens of thousands of deaths, mass displacement and an ongoing humanitarian catastrophe.

We will always stand up for our friends and allies, and we are proud to have led the world's response, in partnership with our allies, in supporting Ukraine in its fight against Putin's aggression. We will deliver tanks to roll back any Russian advance, we continue providing aid to help Ukrainians as they defend their homeland, and we have unveiled the most stringent sanctions on any country at any time in our history. We want to use economic sanctions to starve Putin's war machine and put direct pressure on every individual involved in the decision to go to war and continue to make war on Ukraine.

In response to the question that has been asked today, I should say that it is a long-standing custom that the Government do not comment publicly on individual cases. It would not be appropriate to break that custom, even in a case as serious as this one, in which there is obviously public interest. However, I want to outline the general approach taken to date by the Treasury's Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation in cases in which persons designated under sanctions seek licences for legal fees, and how that has been followed, and the strong constitutional reasons for that.

Within the sanctions regime broadly, because everyone has a right to legal representation, it is possible for frozen assets to be used to pay for that legal representation. OFSI grants licences to allow sanctioned people to cover their own legal fees, provided that the costs are reasonable. To be absolutely clear, decisions on the issuance of licences for legal fees are largely taken by OFSI officials in line with standard practice. The principles and guidance for assessing these applications are long-standing and have been published for a number of years. Applications are assessed solely on a costs basis.

As the UK is a country with checks and balances, it is right that the relevant court, rather than the Government, should decide the outcome of a case on the substantive merits. However, I can confirm that in the light of recent cases, and related to this question, the Treasury is now considering whether this approach is the right one and whether changes can be made without the Treasury assuming unacceptable legal risk, while ensuring that we adhere to the rule of law. In advance of that, I know that the entire House shares the same goal: to support Ukraine and see all those behind the invasion punished for their complicity. The Government will continue to take a hard line on all those responsible.

Mr Lammy: I think the whole House will be shocked at the evasiveness that we have just seen from the Minister, given the seriousness of this case.

For years, the Labour party has been calling for the Government to clean up the London laundromat effectively and stop London homes being used as bitcoins for kleptocrats. For months, the Opposition have stood shoulder to shoulder with the Foreign Office in co-ordinating sanctions against Putin and his inner circle. But yesterday we found out that the Treasury, which was then under the leadership of the current Prime Minister, issued special licences that allowed Yevgeny Prigozhin to circumvent sanctions issued before Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine.

The Government appear to have granted a waiver for a warlord that enabled him to launch a legal attack on a British journalist. This is a perfect example of a SLAPP—a strategic lawsuit against public participation, designed to silence critics through financial intimidation.

Prigozhin is one of the most dangerous and notorious members of Putin's inner circle. The Wagner Group, which he leads, is responsible for appalling atrocities in Ukraine and around the world. If the now Prime Minister's Treasury had any hand in alleviating pressure on Prigozhin, I am sure every hon. Member would agree that that would be absolutely unconscionable. I ask the Minister to answer these questions for the benefit of the whole House. Did a Minister authorise the granting of a licence or exemption to Prigozhin? When did Ministers become aware of this incident and what actions have they taken? Will the Minister commit today to an independent investigation of this controversy? Will he commit to urgently review the law regarding SLAPP suits so that oligarchs and warmongers cannot bully and harass journalists and critics? When will the Government introduce restrictions on the provision of legal services to Russia, as the European Union already has?

James Cartlidge: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman: he takes us back to when I stood opposite him in our Ministry of Justice days.

I am not being evasive: I am standing in front of the House of Commons to answer the question. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the Prime Minister, and he is right that my right hon. Friend was Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time. I shall explain the process. I am not going to comment on the individual case, but without prejudice to it and talking about the general situation that pertains to how OFSI considers such cases, there is a delegated framework whereby decisions on legal fees for persons designated under all the sanctions regimes are routinely taken by senior civil servants. I want to be clear on that. We are not aware of any case of legal fee decisions under any of the sanctions regimes being taken by a Minister. I want to be clear with the House on that.

The point about SLAPPs is really important. I was at the Ministry of Justice when it was a live issue. It was first raised in a Backbench Business Committee debate by my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), in conjunction with the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), and I responded to that debate for the Ministry of Justice. Let me set out what we are doing. We have been clear as a Government that SLAPPs represent a clear abuse of the legal system, as they rely on threatening tactics to silence free speech advocates who act in the public interest. That is why it is often called lawfare. We

ran a call for evidence on strategic lawsuits against public participation and libel reform from March to May 2022 in light of reports that Russia and its allies might be funding litigation against free speech in the UK. We published our response to the call for evidence on 20 July 2022, having closely analysed 120 responses from media, legal and civil society professionals, and we are committed to tackling SLAPPs.

I can confirm that targeted anti-SLAPP reforms will include a statutory definition of SLAPPs, an early dismissal process and costs protection for SLAPPs cases. The Government have committed to primary legislation to make those reforms a reality as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): I understand that the decision was made by civil servants. Will my hon. Friend commit to considering whether we need to introduce ministerial oversight and how quickly that should be done? It is gravely concerning that no civil servant thought that this might need political oversight or some sort of political intervention. Will my hon. Friend also consider the proscription of the Wagner Group, which is a state terrorist organisation responsible for war crimes around the world?

Finally, I have been disappointed by the Government's response to my multiple written questions about the Wagner Group and the new centre it has set up in Serbia—it is an enormous installation. We are seeing heinous activities in the Balkans, especially around the illegal Republika Srpska day that took place. So my asks are introducing ministerial oversight; looking at the Wagner group in Serbia and putting pressure on the Serbian Government; and finally proscribing that organisation.

James Cartlidge: My hon. Friend the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee speaks with great expertise on these matters. She makes some points that are for other Departments to consider, but I will ensure that they are fed back. On the point about the specific process in relation to OFSI, I will not comment on the individual case, but there is a general point about seeking clarification. I can confirm that we will undertake an internal review to see how such cases are considered in the future, and we will say more on that in due course.

Mr Speaker: I call the Scottish National party spokesman.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Despite the Minister's gymnastics on this issue, it is clear that there are still serious and systemic links between the UK Government and Russian political elites. In 2021 the operations, tactics and human rights abuses of the Wagner Group were well known, and the EU and the UK imposed sanctions on Yevgeny Prigozhin, as the Wagner Group leader, for that reason. These revelations present a serious and immoral disregard for human rights obligations and due process at the heart of the Minister's Government, and all this took place on the current Prime Minister's watch, as he was Chancellor at the time.

Will the Minister tell us what advice, legal or otherwise, prompted the Treasury to make Prigozhin's activities possible? It is not beyond his capability—legal or otherwise—to tell us who made the decision to override

that. What actions will his Government now take to ensure, as a result of these revelations, that the Prime Minister's promised

"integrity, professionalism and accountability at every level" will be followed through?

James Cartlidge: I think that the hon. Gentleman submitted a similarly worded urgent question this morning, and obviously I respect that point, but there are no gymnastics here; I am merely setting out the position.

The hon. Gentleman asked about legal advice and so on. Within the sanctions regime broadly, because we are a country with the rule of law and everyone has a right to legal representation, it is possible for frozen assets to be used to pay for that legal representation. This is about sanctioned individuals. The Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation grants licences to allow sanctioned people to cover their own legal fees provided that the costs are reasonable. I should make it clear that decisions on the issuance of licences for legal fees are not, and should not be, political, and are largely taken by officials in line with standard practice. As I said a few moments ago, we are not aware of a case relating to legal fees under any of the sanctions regimes in which a Minister took the decision.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): I welcome the Minister's assertion that there is to be a review of this approach, but I ask him to make it quick. Even the Treasury's press release today indicates a level of misunderstanding on the part of the officials, claiming a fundamental or absolute right to legal representation. Of course you have a right to representation if you are defending yourself in court, but there is no fundamental right to use legal representation to destroy someone else and shut down free speech.

James Cartlidge: As my right hon. Friend knows, I responded to his Backbench Business debate. He has been incredibly consistent in calling for actions on these points, and I respect that very much. However, I do think that the right to legal representation is a fundamental tenet of our democracy, which can mean—I am not commenting on the specific case—that individuals whom we find distasteful have a right to legal representation. Let us not forget that even at the Nuremberg trials, people who had committed the most heinous crimes in the history of the western world were legally represented.

Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab): I have to say that I had never seen such a case of lack of professionalism, lack of integrity and lack of accountability as this one. It absolutely astounded me: I thought it was unbelievable.

Let me say to the Minister that in terms of the way in which such matters are decided, this is not an isolated case. Petr Aven, for instance, has been given a licence, and according to the press it is thought that he will be able to spend up to £600,000 a year on so-called household expenses which include buying and selling Bentley cars and other luxuries. That is just outrageous. By the time the sanctions stop, the resources—the sanctioned assets—will have disappeared.

Let me also say to the Minister that this issue of individual confidentiality does not play here. The Foreign Office publishes a list of the names of the individuals concerned. I therefore think that we have the right to

[*Dame Margaret Hodge*]

know what went wrong in this particular case, and that the Minister should report to Parliament. I welcome the fact that a review of the OFSI regime is taking place, but that too should be reported to Parliament.

Finally, may I ask the Minister for a commitment that the legal fees general licence will not be rolled over beyond its expiration date of 27 April 2023?

James Cartlidge: I have previously answered an urgent question, tabled by the right hon. Lady, on a matter relating to dividends in Russia, and—again—I respect her consistency in respect of a range of points that relate to this issue in one way or another. However, as she knows, I cannot go into the details of the specific case that she has mentioned. There are all kinds of reasons for that, and I think it important that we preserve it. I may be wrong, but I suspect that it would continue under any future Government, because there is very good reason for it. That is why we talk about the sanctions regime in aggregate rather than discussing individual confidential cases.

If we take the overview, we see that this country is doing everything possible. Our position on Ukraine is that we are not directly deploying our armed forces into the theatre, so we have to use every other lever at our disposal, including sanctioning more than 1,200 individuals and 120 entities and freezing assets worth £18 billion. It is a very ambitious sanctions regime, and we should be proud of what we are doing as a country to support Ukraine. We have played a key role in helping it to withstand the Russian invasion, although of course we recognise there is more to do.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I am not going to talk about any individual case. I know that the Government are doing very good work on the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill and the Bill of Rights, and—certainly on this side of the House—we all support that and recognise its importance.

I want to talk specifically about the SLAPPs primary legislation and where it will be. If it is to be in the Bill of Rights—as has now been indicated to me—rather than being a separate law, that may limit the scope of what we can do about SLAPPs. It may not cover all the stuff that is needed to cover the SLAPPs and the lawyers who engage in this practice, the SLAPPers. We need separate primary legislation, a SLAPPs Bill like the ten-minute rule Bill that I introduced yesterday. A gold-standard, best-practice SLAPPs Bill has been written for me, which the Government can take on or allow me to introduce. It covers a little bit of privilege, it covers the private investigator market, and it is broad enough to cover all the abusive SLAPP practices that will not be covered in the Bill of Rights. Will the Government please consider this course of action, as the most sensible course to ensure freedom of speech and a free media?

James Cartlidge: My hon. Friend speaks with huge passion about these matters. Only yesterday, as he said, he presented a ten-minute rule Bill relating to this issue. He will appreciate that there are issues relating to parliamentary time, and that this is above my pay grade. I feel very strongly that we have done as much as we can on SLAPPs, but we want to go further, because we need legislation. I said at the end of the Backbench Business

debate—my hon. Friend, of course, spoke in it—that I had heard what was said, and that we would now act. The Ministry of Justice took that forward; we had the call for evidence, and we have responded to it. At present, however, our position is, I am afraid, that we will commit ourselves to primary legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows. I cannot say more than that at this moment, but I am aware of how strongly my hon. Friend feels about the issue.

Sir Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I am sorry, but this is so complacent, and the Government have been systematically complacent about the issue of sanctioning individuals for the last three years. The Foreign Office was not prepared: it did not have a proper sanctions regime in place. We are sectioning only 20% of the people who have been sanctioned by the United States of America, although I have no idea why. Then we allow people to sidestep sanctioning. What the Minister is saying today is basically endorsing what the Treasury did in relation to this particular case, which gives a green light to those people to do it again and again and again. Alisher Usmanov, for instance, is sidestepping sanctioning by a completely different process.

It is time the Government decided as a whole that we are going to do this, and we are going to do it properly. I actually think that we should listen much more to our Back Benchers, because the whole House is united around this and the Government are too complacent.

James Cartlidge: The hon. Gentleman is wrong to say that I am endorsing any particular action. I have made it very clear that I am not commenting on a specific case. What I have said relates to the general regime that pertains, and is without prejudice in respect of any specific case. The hon. Gentleman also said that we were not prepared. He may not be aware of Operation Orbital, but we have been training Ukrainian soldiers since 2015: 22,000 Ukrainian soldiers.

Sir Chris Bryant: We are talking about sanctions.

James Cartlidge: Well, I am talking about Ukraine, because I think that that is the key issue here. It shows we were preparing for what happened, although, obviously, the situation was unprecedented when Ukraine was invaded. We are clear about the fact that our officials and Departments worked as fast as possible to bring forward an ambitious range of sanctions—which of course happened in March last year when the Prime Minister was Chancellor—and they are having a significant impact on Russia and its economy.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): Although we cannot discuss a specific case, “Wagner Group” is written on the Annunciator and I wanted to add a further question about the regime that we are operating within the Treasury. I urge the Minister to go further than he committed to doing in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns), the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, because the Wagner Group is clearly such an evil organisation and what it is doing in Ukraine and across north Africa is so evil. Will the Minister today, from the Dispatch Box, ask OFSI officials to have a red flag system whereby anything related to the Wagner Group is flagged up individually to the Minister responsible?

James Cartlidge: My hon. Friend speaks with the expertise of her position as Chair of the Treasury Committee, and I hear what she is saying. I have said that the internal review will take place. She is more than welcome to write to me in her capacity as Chair about that, and I will reply in due course.

My hon. Friend makes the point that this question is about the Wagner Group but that we are saying that we are not commenting on the cases of specific individuals. As a Government, we are absolutely clear:

“The Wagner Group is a Russia-based private military company”.

It has organised the recruitment, co-ordination and planned operations of mercenaries participating in military operations in Ukraine. It is responsible for engaging in and providing support for actions that destabilise Ukraine and undermine or threaten the territorial integrity, sovereignty or independence of Ukraine.

That is why the most important question is: what are we doing to support Ukraine? Opposition Members have mentioned the Prime Minister, so let us talk about what he did as Chancellor. He was the one who put in place £2.3 billion of military support for Ukraine, which helped the Ukrainians to defend themselves against Russia so that the fight is still being fought to this day.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): This is outrageous. The Minister has just confessed to the House that sanctions implementation is out of ministerial control. The result is that a waiver was issued for a warlord to sue an English journalist in an English court.

Let us just be clear about the sanctions indictment that this Government issued on 31 December 2020. We sanctioned Prigozhin because he was operating

“a deniable military capability for the Russian State.”

Ten months later, civil servants under the Minister’s control signed off £3,500 for business-class flights, £320 for luxury accommodation at the Belmond Grand Hotel Europe, £150 for subsistence and more. Let us be clear about what the leaked emails from that conversation show. They show that Prigozhin’s lawyers wanted to sue Eliot Higgins and Bellingcat because

“public rebuttal of the article...is one of the reasons for his sanction designation”.

The Minister signed off money for a warlord to prosecute an English journalist in an English court, to undermine the sanctions regime that he is responsible for. This is outrageous and it has to change now.

James Cartlidge: The right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that I did not, in any way, confess that Ministers have no control over the sanctions regime. What I stated very clearly is that in respect of OFSI consideration of legal fees under the sanctions regimes, these decisions are routinely taken by senior civil servants under a delegated framework. That is simply a statement of fact. On the claims for travel and other expenses, let us be clear: under the legal expenses derogation, OFSI is only permitted to issue a licence where the costs, including those relating to disbursements, have been deemed to be reasonable. OFSI therefore scrutinises the hourly fees charged by fee earners, the hours incurred and any other associated costs. It is the responsibility of the applicant to demonstrate to OFSI’s satisfaction that this statutory reasonableness test is met. If it is not satisfied, OFSI will not be able to issue a licence.

Sir John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that this is just the latest example of a dodgy Russian oligarch or similar using legal action to attempt to shut down legitimate journalism? I strongly welcome what he has said about the Government’s intention to act against SLAPPs, but will he commit to publishing the detail of that legislation as soon as possible? Will he look for a means by which it can be introduced, as my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely) said, as a stand-alone Bill, which would be preferable? If that is not possible, will he look to use other vehicles, possibly relating to human rights? The media Bill might well provide a vehicle for acting to protect journalism. We need this legislation as fast as possible.

James Cartlidge: I absolutely hear what my right hon. Friend is saying. He is another colleague who has spoken consistently on these points. He knows that when I was at the Ministry of Justice we acted quickly to bring forward measures on SLAPPs; first, we had the call for evidence and then we gave our response. He will appreciate that the parliamentary timetable is above my pay grade, but I hear what he says and I will ensure that, in considering the passage of that legislation, the appropriate stakeholders will respond to him. In the meantime, I want to be clear that SLAPPs are something on which we want to see progress.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): Let us remind ourselves who we are talking about here: the head of the Wagner Group, which is responsible for egregious human rights abuses not just in Ukraine, but in Mali, Sudan and Syria. Absolutely it should be proscribed, and quickly; today is President Zelensky’s birthday and what better gift could we give him? This review is going to take time, so will the Minister assure the House that in the interim a Minister will look at every case until the regime is cleared up? Will the results of this review come to this House so that parliamentarians can scrutinise it? Clearly, the Treasury and the Ministers have not been getting this right, have they?

James Cartlidge: I say to the hon. Lady that she has many ways at her disposal to scrutinise the Government: as she knows, we have Treasury questions coming up; there are Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office questions; we have recently held debates on Russia, including the one on Russia’s strategy; and a number of statutory instruments have been passed in relation to the sanctions regime. I am sure there will be many other opportunities to scrutinise the Government. As I say, we have only recently taken the decision to hold this internal review, but I will say more on it in due course.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I am sure that all my constituents would regard the Wagner Group as an evil organisation, and its activities in Ukraine, the middle east and Africa are abhorrent. I am sure that my constituents would also support its proscription. In the meantime, will the Minister tell my constituents how many Russian individuals and entities have been sanctioned, what is the value of those sanctions, and what is the value of the economic sanctions that have been imposed against Russia?

James Cartlidge: I totally agree with my hon. Friend, as we all do, about the nature of the Wagner Group. That is not the point. We do have to have due process,

[James Cartlidge]

because of the right to legal representation. I believe that, to date, we have sanctioned about 1,200 individuals and 120 entities, and the latest figures show that more than £18 billion of Russian assets have been frozen by our sanctions and that three quarters of foreign companies have reduced operations in Russia. Of course we have no quarrel with the Russian people, although this will have an economic impact. As I said, we are not taking a direct military posture in Ukraine, but we are doing everything else we can, which is why we have to use every tool at our disposal, including a strong economic sanctions package.

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): The Minister has said that it is officials who would routinely take these types of decision, but I hope he will agree that we cannot ever allow it to become routine for us to allow some of the very worst sanctioned individuals to weaponise British laws to go after British journalists. He said that we are going to have a review

“in the light of recent cases”.

Will he confirm whether he is looking into others?

James Cartlidge: Although I cannot comment on individual cases, I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady that we should be looking at lawfare. We will be bringing forward that legislation. I do think we have acted quickly on that, but of course it is a complex area of law that we need to get right. She reinforces the point that many colleagues in all parts of the House want to see that legislation come forward, and I have very much noted it.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): As a former Minister for sanctions, I agree with the Minister that the UK had led the world in taking a firm, decisive, co-ordinated sanctions approach with our international partners to bring individuals to account for what is going on in Ukraine. This case highlights an issue relating to the granting of licences for legal fees, so how many such cases are there overall? We have sanctioned more than 1,000 individuals, but how many legal licences has the UK granted overall? We co-ordinate our sanctions approach with the United States and the European Union, so how many licences have they given? In this case, was there any co-ordination input from our counterparts in the US? I agree with the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee that things should be referred back to the Minister for decision, rather than having it delegated to an official. What exact date are we looking at for the review?

James Cartlidge: My hon. Friend has expertise as a former sanctions Minister. Obviously, I cannot speak for the United States Government but only for ours. I do not have the exact figures, but I will look into it and write to him. To be absolutely clear, I stated a fact when I said that decisions specifically on legal fees under the sanctions regimes are routinely taken by senior civil servants. I said that I was not aware of any case where the Minister had taken a decision. But under our constitution, I am standing here because, ultimately, Ministers are responsible for Department and Government policy. Nevertheless, it is entirely right to make a point

about how these things work operationally. As I said, that is correct. It is a delegated framework for decision making.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): It seems that the Wagner Group is yet another example of the litany of disaster that sustains what seems to be Londongrad. On the back of this appalling situation, can the Minister update the House on when the British Government will not only introduce legislation on limited partnerships but bring about the review that he talks about?

James Cartlidge: The hon. Gentleman talks about Londongrad; he knows that we are taking extensive measures on economic crime. Let me say to the Members of the Scottish National party who come every time and lecture us on the sanctions regime and so on that the greatest gift we could give to Putin would be for this country to engage in unilateral nuclear disarmament. It is the most extraordinary position to be lectured by the SNP on standing up to Russia, because if we took its advice and adopted its policy, we would undermine NATO and all our efforts to defend ourselves.

Sir James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): Unfortunately, the Government's response to the Wagner Group has been inadequate, in part because the matter falls between the FCDO and the Treasury. A number of colleagues, including the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns), have called for that organisation to be proscribed. Others, including me, have done so for different reasons, whether it be Serbia, Africa or another conflict area. Will the Minister bring together the two Departments, and look at proscribing the organisation and at the impact that will have on the efficiency of the sanctions regime?

James Cartlidge: My hon. Friend has considerable experience as a Foreign Office Minister. He will be aware of how these things work. I am happy to give that reply. I believe that the decision would be for the Foreign Office, but he is right that we must work across Government, and I will write to him on that point.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): As well as the Wagner Group's murderous activities in Ukraine, I am aware, as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for Africa, of its activities across that continent. It has mercenaries in Mali, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Mozambique and Libya. It is targeting civilians, actively spreading disinformation and propping up autocratic regimes, all to defend Putin's footprint and ambitions in the continent. Is the Minister saying that it is acceptable for someone to make money from those evil activities, be sanctioned and then get a licence from the British Government to evade those sanctions in order to defend themselves legally? Regardless of what he is saying, what message does that send to our allies across the world?

James Cartlidge: Of course we are not saying that. We are saying that, whether we like it or not, there is a principle under democracy and the rule of law of the right to a defence. Therefore, we have a system in place under the sanctions regime to consider applications for legal fees to be paid from frozen assets. That is a statement of fact on how the system works.

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): We are continuing to sidestep sanctions. It is disgraceful that the Minister continues to defend that at the Dispatch Box. What message does it send to Ukraine and our allies that our own Treasury is helping one of Putin's notorious warmongers evade sanctions? If he cannot tell us the number of exemptions and waivers that have been given to individuals, can he find out and commit to come to this House and publish those numbers?

James Cartlidge: The message to Ukraine is that this is a country that believes in the rule of law and democracy. That is why we support Ukraine. That is why the Prime Minister was in Ukraine recently, confirming that we will do everything possible to support them. That is why this country has made a greater contribution to support the brave people of Ukraine than any other country, bar the United States.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I do not know if the Minister has had the chance to read Oliver Bullough's book "Butler to the World". There is a copy in the Library if he has not. I recommend it to him because it lays clear Britain's role in facilitating this kind of lawfare. Oliver Bullough has asked:

"What chance have British journalists got when even our own government is prepared to roll the pitch for oligarchs keen to sue us?"

James Cartlidge: I repeat my earlier point about the actions we are taking on SLAPPs. We have already had the call for evidence and we will bring forward primary legislation.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Are the Government serious about tackling the use of SLAPPs? Threats of libel action by the Conservative party chairman over his tax affairs, use of the non-disclosure agreement by the Justice Secretary to silence journalists, and the Home Secretary's attempt to stop the BBC reporting serious domestic violence by an agent of the security services when she was Attorney General, suggest that they prefer concealment over transparency.

James Cartlidge: Yes.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): The approach the Government are taking, case by case they will not deal with specifics, is just an excuse not to answer questions on specific examples that we raise in this House. I know that the bar is very high, but there can be few of Putin's allies more notorious than Yevgeny Prigozhin. How can the Minister come to the Dispatch Box and say that the decisions were made by a civil servant? How can there be no red flag on the file of someone of such notoriety to say, "Speak to a Minister"? When are you going to get on and do the job you were put there for?

James Cartlidge: The reason that we do not comment on individual cases is well-established. I expect that it would be exactly the same under any other Government. To be clear, the UK sanctions regulations do not exclude payments for any particular legal services from that permission. Excluding such payments can give rise to issues about access to justice. OFSI does not consider it appropriate for HM Treasury to effectively decide whether a case has sufficient merit to be permitted to proceed by

deciding whether to issue a licence permitting legal fees to be paid. Such an approach would raise considerable legal concerns.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): The Minister has been asked on a number of occasions how many exceptions and waivers there have been over the last two years. The House is united. This is not a party political issue. We just demand that he answer that question. If he cannot do it now, can he provide the House with details in writing?

James Cartlidge: I said to the former sanctions Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti), that I would write to him. I will be happy to share that with other colleagues who have asked what information we are able to publish. I will look into that and write to colleagues who have raised that point.

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): It is very difficult to believe that a regime exists now where civil servants can make this decision, especially in the case of Yevgeny Prigozhin. Anyone with a passing relationship with a newspaper would have realised that enabling that to happen would compromise their Ministers, yet they did not have such discussions. Can the Minister assure us that he will review that? I do not want to hang a civil servant out to dry, but somebody needs to take responsibility for the decision. Does he find it a coincidence that, when one of the worst commercial war criminals went to find access to justice, he turned up in London?

James Cartlidge: I have merely stated the fact, and it is the case, that these decisions are routinely taken by senior civil servants. I also said that we are ultimately responsible. We, as Ministers, are accountable to Parliament. That is why we will conduct the internal review.

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): I would be grateful if the Minister could outline to us what it is about billionaire Russians such as Yevgeny Prigozhin and others that make this Government feel that they need special licences so much that they are able to dodge sanctions.

James Cartlidge: To be clear, we do not make any of these decisions with prejudice to the legal case that the individual is pursuing. They have a right under our law to have legal representation. What we have here is a process for considering applications to use frozen assets to fund legal fees in specific cases.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I recognise that the Minister has responded and tried to address the questions. We recognise that the Government have at least made some efforts to do so. But in this urgent question the House has identified an anomaly concerning the Wagner Group, which, as everyone has said, is responsible for some of the most brutal crimes across the middle east and Africa. The House wants urgency—that is what we are all asking for. Can the Minister indicate the timescale for that to happen? When will the Wagner Group find that the loophole that it has identified can be closed?

James Cartledge: This is not a loophole in relation to the Wagner Group. We are clear on all the issues about the Wagner Group. We have acted against it in so much as it is part of the military effort in Ukraine and we have supported Ukraine as far as we are able to, in supporting that military effort. What we are talking about here is a specific point, which is that there is a right to legal representation, so we have a process in place under the sanctions regime to consider applications to use frozen assets to fund legal fees, but as I have said, we will be reflecting on that and reviewing that process.

Mr Speaker: That completes that urgent question. Those who need to leave, please do so before I start the next one.

Energy Bills: Self-disconnection

1.20 pm

Kenny MacAskill (East Lothian) (Alba) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State to make a statement on the levels of self-disconnection from power sources and on Government support for energy bills.

The Minister for Energy and Climate (Graham Stuart): As I set out to the House on Monday, the Government recognise the importance of protecting customers, including those on prepayment meters. This weekend, the Secretary of State set out a five-point plan on prepayment meters. He wrote to energy suppliers, calling on them to take every step to support consumers in difficulty, particularly those who are at risk of self-disconnection. The Government want to see a much greater effort from suppliers to help consumers in payment difficulties, including offers of additional credit, debt forgiveness or debt advice. As the hon. Member for East Lothian (Kenny MacAskill) will be aware, Ofgem, as the independent regulator, is in a position to direct suppliers in a way that the Government are not.

The Government understand that this is a difficult time for many families. That is why we have put in place unprecedented cost of living support. It is easy to take that for granted, but it is extensive. It includes the £400 discount under the energy bills support scheme, which has been appearing on electricity bills since the October bills arrived this winter, as well as the energy price guarantee, which does not need any form of application process and directly subsidises energy bills for the typical family this winter to the tune of an additional £900, with equivalent support in Northern Ireland. The Government are also committed to supporting those households without a relationship to a domestic energy supplier with a £400 discount under the energy bills support scheme alternative funding, with eligible households able to apply from 27 February.

It is critical that this support reaches consumers, which is why the Government have also urged suppliers to take action on increasing the number of vouchers being redeemed under the Government's energy bills support scheme and why we have published a list of supplier redemption rates. We want to encourage suppliers to compare themselves with their rivals and look to do as well as the best, showing which ones are meeting their responsibilities and which need to do more.

There are also established industry rules and processes to reduce the risk of self-disconnection. Suppliers are required to have conversations with customers in arrears to set up a suitable debt repayment plan, taking account of their ability to pay. It is vital that these rules are followed. The Secretary of State wrote to Ofgem to ensure that it takes a robust approach to compliance. In response, Ofgem is reviewing supplier practice, and a key area of its review is the suppliers' approach to self-disconnection.

But this is continuing work. This afternoon I will be meeting energy suppliers, Ofgem, Energy UK and Citizens Advice to ensure that they hear from the Government, the hon. Gentleman and all hon. Members that there is a strong urge in this House to do everything we can to protect everyone this winter, and most of all, the most vulnerable.

Kenny MacAskill: A parliamentary answer on Tuesday disclosed that around 66,000 households in Scotland and 660,000 across Britain had self-disconnected from smart meters in the third quarter of last year. Self-disconnection is a euphemism for simply being unable to afford to heat or power your home. It is as pernicious as the term “collateral damage” is in war. Those afflicted by self-disconnection and all its misery are also civilians, but we are at peace, not war. These figures are for a quarter before prices rose and temperatures dropped. They are also only the tip of the iceberg. The numbers are far greater, as these figures do not cover those on legacy prepayment meters, the numbers of which are substantial, with almost 2 million in the UK and 300,000 in Scotland. They apply to those that operated before smart meters were brought in and they will substantially increase the numbers so tragically afflicted.

In an energy-rich country, fuel poverty is an obscenity. Given this heartless cruelty in a cold winter, will the Minister, first, end the forced installation of prepayment meters forthwith? Secondly, will he immediately abolish the perverse higher standing charges and tariffs for prepayment meters? Thirdly, will he as a matter of urgency bring in a social tariff for the poorest and most vulnerable?

Graham Stuart: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his questions. He rightly raises the issue of those who are self-disconnecting. I think we can be proud of the fact that the numbers of people who were physically disconnected from power and heat last year were in single figures. The installation of prepayment meters has to be an absolute last resort. We must insist that people do not end up being physically disconnected from an energy supply. It is important to highlight that all suppliers are required to offer emergency credit when the meter runs out. This should give consumers enough time to top up their meters. Traditional meters have an automatic setting that allows for a set amount of emergency credit to be used after the customer is notified that the topped-up credit has been used.

As I have said, we are committed to having the right regime in place. In 2009, there were issues around the additional costs of prepayment meters. Ofgem had responsibility for supervising that at that time, as it does now, and it looked into the issues and brought in a regime to ensure that any costs and charges were commensurate with the actual costs of delivery. To a certain extent that has all been superseded by the energy price cap brought in by this Government, which limits the amount that anyone can charge for their energy.

Sir James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): It is excellent to have such a high-calibre Minister in such a crucial role. At Prime Minister’s questions I raised the issue of the energy bills support scheme, which has helped 99% of my constituents. I am interested in the report that identifies the worst and best performers on prepayment vouchers. The Minister said that he was going to meet some of those people today. Will he name and shame—and praise—people on that list and try to get those right at the bottom at least up to the median level, if not into the top quartile?

Graham Stuart: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words. We are absolutely focused on that, and we all have a role to play in increasing awareness of the vouchers, which are so valuable to people. We want to

see more being redeemed, and the numbers are going up consistently. We have published the list of suppliers and we have already brought them together so that they can share best practice. I wanted to publish the list so that it could be seen not only by the House but by the suppliers’ chief executive officers, who I hope will talk to their teams about why they are lower down the list. If all of them, all of us in this House and everyone in the voluntary and other sectors and in local authorities do everything possible to raise awareness, we can lift the number of people who get that help, to which they are entitled.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): I call the Opposition Front-Bench spokesperson.

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): One way or another, there are more than 3 million households on prepayment meters. With the rapid rise in prices and the continuing energy crisis, they are now all at risk of unseen disconnection, because they simply cannot afford the huge bills and constant meter top-ups they are facing. Energy companies know this, and they do not want to be saddled with account customers in distress, so we have seen 500,000 warrants obtained, particularly over the last year—18% up on previous numbers—to drive customers in trouble with their accounts into forcibly having prepayment meters installed in their homes, whether they want them or not. Customer disconnection is then not the problem for the energy company or the Government thereafter. For most customers, the energy companies can simply change the supply of smart meters from credit to prepay without a warrant being issued.

What are the Government doing about all this? Polite letters are not enough. Will the Minister now enforce measures to ensure that the energy companies stop issuing warrants and switching smart meters to prepay mode while prices remain high and the energy crisis continues? What are the Government actively doing to seek out and help those who have self-disconnected and are now energy destitute?

The Government have said, and will no doubt say again today, that help is on its way in the form of Government support for energy bills, yet precisely the customers most likely to self-disconnect are getting much less help than they should. As the Minister has said, 30% of the vouchers available to customers on prepayment meters remain unclaimed, for a variety of reasons. And the alternative help scheme devised for those who indirectly pay their bill, whether they live in park homes, communal buildings or district heating schemes, has simply not arrived. It was expected in December and then January, but we now hear it will not be active until the end of February—five months after account customers started to get assistance.

What are the Government doing to ensure that vouchers get through and are claimed by prepay customers, and that barriers to claiming are overcome? Why is the alternative help scheme so consistently delayed? Do the Government just not care about help for those living in park homes and other tenures, or are they incompetent in organising that help in a timely way?

Graham Stuart: Those who know the hon. Gentleman will know he is normally better than that. He knows, because we talk about it, just how hard the Department

[Graham Stuart]

is working to make sure we get these things in place. We are proud that we got the EBSS discount out to an unprecedented 29 million people. I make no apology for prioritising getting the bulk of it out there.

The EBSS alternative funding sounds simple, but it is not. It is a novel scheme with ambitious timescales. It is a complex cohort with a range of different energy arrangements, including off grid, direct to commercial and via intermediaries. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) chunters from the Front Bench, but she should recognise the complexity of this challenge.

When we were looking at February delivery for the portal, I challenged it. A few days ago, I met the four pilot local authorities, which are across the devolved nations of Great Britain, to talk about the situation. We must make sure that we sort out all those complexities because, if we do not get it right first time, the pilot authorities say it would delay payments to consumers. My priority is to get funding to people as quickly as possible.

Where people are not already receiving the main EBSS, we have to look after public money by making sure their bank accounts are verified and legitimate, and that they live at the address. Those records are held across Government, local authorities and banks, so a complex case-management system is required. Local authorities need to be able to access the system securely, which requires multi-factor authentication, and some local authorities do not have the ability to implement that quickly. Robust fraud checks are necessary in an application-based system, to which there is no alternative for this group. Each iteration of the application process needs to be tested.

I am confident that we will have the portal up by or on Monday 27 February. We will work with local authorities, upon which we rely, and I thank the four pilot authorities and other local authorities. We need to make sure that their staff are trained, that the complexities are dealt with and that they have a robust system, so that they can swiftly process applications and make sure families get the money they so direly need. I fully accept the point about the need for speed.

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): This Government have given huge energy bill support to businesses and households this winter. Although I fully understand the complexity of the situation for park homes, what reassurance can my right hon. Friend give to the multiple residents who have contacted me, from Mill on the Mole near South Molton and from Berrynarbor Park near Ilfracombe, that everything possible is being done to get energy payments to them as rapidly as possible? MPs know where their park homes are. If there is anything I can do to deliver this support locally, I would be more than happy to assist.

Graham Stuart: My hon. Friend is right that identifying the location of park homes might sound relatively simple, and I hope I have made it clear that there are levels of complexity that have to be dealt with. We are doing everything possible to ensure this is done as quickly as possible. Because of council tax bills, this is the busiest time of year for the local authority staff who deal with this. We must have a system that stands up, is robust and delivers on time.

As might be expected, I pushed back in every way possible to see if we could open the portal in January, but we could not do so without risking the confidence and support of those local authorities. We will make sure that we have it in place and that we deliver it in the right way.

For months, my hon. Friend has rightly made sure that my focus has remained on this issue by reminding me of her constituents and their need for this help.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): I call the SNP spokesperson.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Come April, 8.4 million households will be in fuel poverty—that is almost a third of all households—and talk of capping average bills at £2,500 or £3,000 a year means nothing to people who cannot afford to pay their bill or top up their meter. People on prepayment meters are penalised with higher standing charges, so those who either choose or are forced into not using energy build up debt from these standing charges. Imagine getting into debt despite not using energy.

These people are more likely to have disabilities or suffer ill health. They are more likely to die prematurely and to have mental health issues due to the struggles of daily life. I do not know what their life is like, and I know for a fact that the Government cannot claim to understand what their life is like. We now need a proper social tariff and a further energy bill support package as a priority.

Much more needs to be done to ensure the vouchers are redeemed, rather than the Government just asking the companies to publish data and urging them to do more. The Government need to put in place a temporary ban on the forced installation of prepayment meters. Is it not a disgrace that energy-rich Scotland's Union dividend is people who are unable to turn on their gas when Scotland is a net exporter of gas?

Graham Stuart: The hon. Gentleman said this support has absolutely no meaning, or something close to it. The meaning for those on benefits has been £800 of additional cost of living support, on top of the £400 EBSS support and the £900 of support organised through the Treasury. This is real support. The cheap rhetoric we have heard from the Scottish nationalists might be typical, but even so it is disappointing.

The hon. Gentleman says we need to do more than just urging suppliers to do more and to publish data. There is an application. People have to take up their vouchers, and they have to use them. I am all ears to any contribution he would like to make on how to build that up, because the whole of society—families, community groups, MPs and political parties—has to get the message out to people about these vouchers. I am confident that they are being sent out by the suppliers, so we have to encourage people to cash them in at a time when they need them most. There is always a danger that the people who need it most—we do not have the data—may be the ones least likely to use it. *[Interruption.]*

The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) can make cheap points and shout at me from a sedentary position, or he can engage seriously and properly by trying to do everything possible to get a system that makes sure people get the help they deserve.

That is what I want. If he thinks there are any practical steps that we should be delivering immediately, he should say so.

We have said that we will look at a social tariff and at how vulnerable people are looked after, but we have to look at it in a considered manner. I am proud of the support that the Government have put in place, and I believe it stands up internationally. We are determined to support people, particularly the most vulnerable, so that they do not suffer at a time of extreme energy stress.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Across the country and in the Kettering constituency, everyone should be benefiting from the energy price guarantee, which saves the average household £900 this winter on their bills. Everyone should be getting the £400 energy bills support scheme in £66 or £67 monthly payments. Those in bands A to D households should receive £150 council tax rebate. What extra are the Government doing for the 8 million lowest income households, most of whom are on universal credit, pensioners and disabled people who are most likely to have need for prepayment meters?

Graham Stuart: As my hon. Friend will be aware, there is a series of programmes to support people in those positions, and £800 for all people on benefits in addition to the sums that he has already itemised for the House.

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab): The Minister prays in aid the money that is being given to households across the country, and I acknowledge that that is a significant amount of money, but it is not working, is it? One prepayment meter is issued every 10 seconds. Millions of people live in fuel poverty. My constituent, for example, is disabled and trapped in his house. He had a prepayment meter imposed on him, but no voucher. He was left in freezing cold conditions in the run-up to Christmas. That just is not acceptable. I am afraid to say that polite letters from the Secretary of State or cups of tea this afternoon with the Minister will not hack it. Does he agree that it is time that the Government took legal powers to intervene directly in the energy market in order to protect the people of this country?

Graham Stuart: That kind of crude socialist intervention in the market would be counterproductive, and it would be typical of measures that come from the Labour party. Its members go in with high talk of helping the weakest and poorest and they come up with policies that have exactly the opposite effect.

Sara Britcliffe (Hyndburn) (Con): I wish to follow on from some of the questions regarding the £400 payment for park homes. Although I understand the complexities of the issue, will the Minister set out how, once this scheme goes live, he will communicate with the residents of park homes so that they do access the portal? Furthermore, will there be an alternative way to access the application process rather than just through an online portal?

Graham Stuart: I thank my hon. Friend for her extremely pertinent question. We will be promoting through a whole array of groups and, of course, local authorities are key partners in that. We will be looking

for support from colleagues across the House, from local authorities, and from the voluntary sector. We have also been doing a larger-scale public communications exercise than the Department has ever previously engaged with. In answer to her final question: for those who are not easily able to access the Government portal, there will be a telephone support service as well. Again, this will be an application-based system. We will not get to 100%, but I hope that we can work constructively. All ideas are welcome so that we do everything we can to maximise the take-up and make sure that people get the support to which they are entitled.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): My constituents living in houseboats and on heat networks have been left out in the cold for months without support or information. This is despite repeated assurances from the Minister about the vital £400 from the energy bills support scheme alternative funding. Applications for that were promised to be opened by the end of January, yet, yesterday, in a private briefing for Members, the Minister revealed that the earliest that the applications would be open is the end of February, with money not coming through until the end of March. Yesterday, he also replied to a written question in writing to a Member of this House that the scheme was still going to open in January. Does the Minister accept that his answers to Members of this House have been misleading and that he has broken promises to off-grid customers? What on earth is he doing to ensure that my constituents and people up and down this country get the support they need in the freezing cold right now?

Graham Stuart: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I think she will find that the letter stated that the Government had announced that the scheme would open in January, which was true—we did announce that we aimed to open it in January. The pilot and engagement with local authorities has shown that we need to delay that to February, so I organised briefings yesterday afternoon to make sure that all Members of the House had heard about that. I am also seeking to notify the House as quickly as possible by writing to Select Committee Chairmen and others to let them know. We are doing everything possible to make sure that we have a robust system in place. I set out that this is a novel system: it is complex and it does rely on local authorities. It was after personally meeting representatives of those pilot local authorities that I came to the decision. I felt that this was the right thing to do to ensure speedy delivery of this support to her houseboat owners among others. It is also worth noting that they have seen support if they come through a commercial supplier of electricity through the energy bill relief scheme, but I want to see them get their £400 as well, and I want a system that works, is effective and is as quick as possible.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): The Minister appeared to say in answer to an earlier question that no one should be physically disconnected from their energy supply. If I heard that correctly, and if that is indeed the Government's position, does that extend to people on prepayment meters who cannot connect themselves to their energy supply because they simply do not have the money to top up the meter? If that is the case, I would be interested to hear what further action he will take to prevent that happening in all cases.

Graham Stuart: The point about a physical disconnection—I think that there may have been only one in the UK last year—is that it differs from what happens with a prepayment meter. By having a prepayment meter, no matter what pre-existing debts someone may have, as soon as they have money to put credit on, they can recommence their energy supply. Physical disconnection is when a person is literally cut off and then has to re-apply to get their supply back. That is an alternative that I do not want to see. The prepayment system is an absolute last resort for those who run up large energy bills, do not engage with the supplier and show no sign that they will pay. Those people must be able to do something and the installation of a prepayment meter, if absolutely necessary, as a last resort and under warrant if they will not engage in any other way, means that household still has access to energy, so long as they put some credit on. That is a lot better than bailiffs and a total physical cut-off. We can be proud of the fact that we do not have people cut off from their energy supply, although, admittedly, as the right hon. Member says, they have to put money on the meter in order to be able to access it.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I have had many emails from people who live in Dalmarnock and are served by a communal heating system operated by Switch2, which is not currently under Government regulation. These residents have received a letter informing them that the price per kilowatt hour is going from 11p to 32p, with additional standing charges. Will the Minister tell me what support these people can expect from the Government? At the moment, with the lack of legislation and the lack of eligibility for other schemes, they are left with heating that they cannot afford.

Graham Stuart: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. If she will follow that up with some details, I will happily write to her and come back on the specific points she has raised.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I genuinely appreciated the Minister coming to meet us yesterday to discuss these issues, but he will have seen the shock and disbelief in the room when he made his announcement, not least as he wrote to me just last week to say that the scheme would open in January, and I have been asking him about this since October on behalf of constituents in Sully who are affected. Nearly 1 million people across the country have had no form of support, in lots of different types of building, as he well knows. Can he be absolutely clear: when that portal opens on 27 February, how long will it take for those people to get the payment? Are we talking about a month, two months, or will they have to wait until the summer? What advice can he give them in the interim? Should they allow debt to build up? Should they turn off their heating? What should they actually do, and what should the management companies do, particularly in communal buildings, which potentially owe significant amounts, with residents having not paid their Bills? What is his advice to them?

Graham Stuart: The decision was made yesterday and I was able to brief colleagues, including the hon. Gentleman—I thank him for attending the meeting—yesterday afternoon, so I have tried to move as quickly as possible. Of course, until a decision is made, Government

policy stays as it is until it is changed, and that explains the letter. I certainly hope that the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) would accept that I was not being disingenuous. We moved to communicate as quickly as possible once the decision had been made.

The payment will go through local authorities. Much as I would love to give a definite date, it depends when people apply. We will be encouraging people to apply from 27 February—if that is when the scheme launches—and then local authorities will be carrying out their verification. We will triage that first, to minimise the imposition on local authorities, but they will have to go through a process to get the payment out. That means I cannot give a definitive date, much as I would like to, and much as the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) is right to suggest that it would benefit people to know when they will get the support to which they are entitled. I hope he understands that, administratively, if I gave a date there would be a risk that I would be back before the House again to explain why, in some cases, it was not delivered. We will do it as quickly as we can but, having talked to the pilot local authorities, they feel that we are taking the most robust approach with the best chance of getting the payment out as quickly as possible.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): For those who are getting support for alternative fuels, what reach does the Minister expect the scheme to have for those whom the Government have identified as relying on alternative fuels, and how long does he expect it will take for the remainder to get their money?

Graham Stuart: Following this urgent question, I will seek an answer for those on alternative fuels who are in the majority group; it might be where we are at in our data development, but I have not seen a number on that. If I can access that, I will write to the right hon. Gentleman, and I will seek a way of sharing it with the House. Most people will be paid automatically with a credit to their energy bill, which will be ready at the beginning of February. I suppose that may not appear on the bill until March, but we will have that up and running automatically for those with an energy bill. We hope to use the same portal that is being used for the EBSS £400 alternative fuel payment, and to open it very shortly after the opening of the EBSS alternative portal. When I have further specific dates that I can share, I will do so.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): A number of constituents have got in touch with me from Castle View House, where several flats are sub-metered. They are desperate, and have been for some time, for payments to get through the door. I know that right hon. and hon. Members across the House also have constituents in that situation, many in park homes. I was not at all convinced by the Minister's answer that the portal will be open on 27 February and the scheme will be in operation. What guarantee is there?

Graham Stuart: The hon. Gentleman is quite right to highlight the residents of Castle View House and the park home residents in his constituency, who are waiting and expecting to hear that they will get the support to which they are entitled. I am confident that we will have the scheme open on or by 27 February, and I and my

teams will do everything to make sure that happens. We are working through local authorities, so we must ensure that we have all the procedures—some of which I touched on—properly worked through, and that we have local authority staff trained up so that they can then process the payment. I am afraid that is as far as I can go right now. It is a novel system; those working in local authorities on council tax are used to collecting money in rather than putting it out, but we are doing everything we can and I am grateful for the work of local authorities for the commitment they have shown, at a really busy time, in Wales, Scotland and England to try to make sure the payment is delivered.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): Up to 170 park home households in Frogmore Home Park, Newlands Park, Highview Park and other areas of my constituency are still waiting for their £400 energy support payment. I first raised the issue of my park homes with the Minister seven months ago, and only last night, by chance, we discovered that the scheme would not be open by the end of this month. There are freezing temperatures this week. We cannot wait another month for the Government to get around to setting up a portal, which will then take much longer to release the funds. I suggested to the Minister last night that he immediately empower local authorities to distribute emergency funds to those households. Will he do that today?

Graham Stuart: The hon. Lady has passionately espoused the interests of her constituents over a considerable time, and I share and understand her frustration. She did not find this out yesterday by chance, but in a briefing with me that was arranged for Members right across the House. I am absolutely focused on making sure that the portal opens on or before Monday 27 February, and that we then get the money out to those who are entitled to it, with due protections for public money as well as a focus on delivery for them.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): Wales has a smaller population than Scotland, yet the number of smart meters disconnected in Wales is consistently higher. In quarter 3 last year it was 75,000 disconnected in Wales, compared with 66,000 in Scotland; in Q2 it was 80,000 compared with 69,000; and in Q1 last year it was 60,000 compared with 50,000. I am indebted to the hon. Member for East Lothian (Kenny MacAskill) for enlightening me on these figures—perhaps the Minister can also enlighten me on why they are like that.

Graham Stuart: I am meeting suppliers this afternoon, and I will be pressuring them and continuing to talk to them about ensuring that they do everything possible to support people and provide them with emergency credit, repayment programmes and everything possible to avert their getting in a position where they have to have forcible implementation of prepayment meters, and to look after those who are on them and ensure that they are in a position where they can continue to access their heat and light.

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): Next week I am launching the all-party parliamentary group on prepayment meters, and one of the first things we were looking at is so-called self-disconnection. Given that I wrote to the Secretary of State in September

expressing my concerns about this issue and have received zero response; given that the Government have twice tried to block my Pre-Payment Meters (Self-Disconnection) Bill, which seeks to outlaw self-disconnection; and given that I have had no response from BEIS to my debate in this Chamber on more general issues around prepayment meters last December, which was supported across the House, I ask the Secretary of State to commit today to meeting the APPG as a matter of urgency. We have been waiting long enough. The Minister can use terms such as physical disconnection all he likes, but the impact is the same: if people cannot access gas and electricity, they are stuck, and in 2022 somebody on a prepayment meter was disconnected from their energy supply every 10 seconds.

Graham Stuart: I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for her focus on and proper championing of this issue. I am not the Secretary of State but, as the Minister for Energy and Climate, I will instruct my office to reach out to hers and try to set up a meeting with the APPG sooner rather than later.

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): The Minister can be in no doubt about the strength of feeling on this, because we are going to have to go back to our constituents—who, we having shared with them his own words, were expecting the alternative fund at the end of last year and then in December—and disappoint them again with the news that it is not coming in January. He said that local authority capacity issues are part of the delay in rolling out the payment, so what consideration has he given to supporting local authorities with additional resources so that they can roll it out faster? As I shared with him yesterday, a member of police staff has told me that she cannot afford to put her heating on. We need to make sure that people, including dedicated public servants, can stay warm, so how can we get it rolled out?

Graham Stuart: I do not think I identified capacity issues as such; it is more about a set of complex issues that need to be resolved and then, having resolved them, providing suitable guidance for local authorities so that they are in a position to make the payment. I did say that it is challenging times for local authorities, because they are also doing council tax, but I am not hearing from them that there is some quick fix. We need people who are already trained to be able to use the systems, and it is through those systems that we will be able to ensure that the payment goes out. We are working with local authorities on the pilots, and I am grateful for their help in shaping the system and the guidance that will go to the other local authorities across the country.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): The Minister must realise that promises of reviews by Ofgem into the activities of energy companies will come far too late for people who are struggling now to pay their bills—indeed, who cannot get anywhere near paying them. I am already waiting for a promised meeting with Ministers about the malpractice of overpayments being routinely kept by energy companies when they are consumers' money, and direct debits having shot up well above the level at which they should be. The Minister has the power to turn up the heat on Ofgem: will he do it?

Graham Stuart: I meet Ofgem regularly—we will be meeting again this afternoon—and those are precisely the kinds of conversations we have. Ofgem is working hard on coming down on the suppliers and it has looked into making sure that suppliers do not build up unjustified credits. I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but it is Ofgem's role as the independent regulator to supervise, regulate and ensure that the licence conditions under which suppliers operate are fulfilled. We are doing everything possible to ensure that we hold Ofgem's feet to the fire while it holds suppliers' feet to the fire.

Helen Morgan (North Shropshire) (LD): People who live in marinas and on houseboats are sub-metered, and in my constituency, they are often off the gas grid. Not only do they use prepayment cards—so they self-disconnect when they cannot afford energy—but they are being charged a pass-through commercial rate, often with 20% VAT added on. They have not had help with their heating or their electricity, and they are self-disconnecting. Does the Minister accept that offering money in the spring, when those people have already gone through a terrible cold winter, is just too late?

Graham Stuart: I share the hon. Lady's frustration. Obviously we would have liked it to get to them sooner, but I have laid out the reasons why it has not. If their electricity is supplied by a commercial supplier, the energy bill relief scheme has been directly reducing their bills through that supplier. We have put in place legislation to require those Government interventions to be passed on to the end recipient.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): The Minister mentioned in his initial reply the energy price guarantee, which has, of course, been extended until March 2024 for gas customers. There has been no further announcement, however, for those who use alternative fuels—oil, liquefied petroleum gas or wood pellets—to heat their homes. Can he give the House assurances that he will put pressure on the Treasury to make an announcement about next winter for households that use alternative fuels?

Graham Stuart: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we will look carefully at the cost pressures across different markets, as we did when we came up with the alternative fuel payment, which was originally £100 before we doubled it to £200. I know that that is making a difference in Northern Ireland, and it will make a difference in rural areas around the UK.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Government and the Minister very much for all the help that they have been able to give businesses and households—there is much to appreciate, and we need to put that on record.

Just this morning, a number of businesses back home in Newtownards town, which the Minister visited last week, have informed me that they are seeking small business support. They say that they have turned their lights off, that they are supplying thermals for staff to keep warm, and that they cannot afford the current prices. Some have informed me that they face bankruptcy. Would the Minister consider a small business relief fund that could be applied to businesses throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland?

Graham Stuart: It was a pleasure to see the hon. Gentleman in his constituency last week; to meet community organisations there, including the Consumer Council, which hosted us; and to learn about the situation for people in Northern Ireland who are struggling with their energy bills. He is right to highlight the fact that businesses and others are struggling. That is why we brought in the EBRs, and why we will have the energy bills discount scheme from April. We will keep that under advisement.

Of course, in Northern Ireland—more than in the rest of the UK—many companies use alternative fuels, and we are, again, working on ensuring that we put support in place as soon as we can. But because of the nature of that, there is no central database, and we have to manage public funds. It sounds simple—if I were in opposition, I would probably shout at the Government to get it done, because it sounds so easy—but it turns out that it is complex. We are working as hard as we can to put those schemes in place a place even though energy is devolved and we should not have any responsibility at all—we have stepped up because we have had to, and we will continue to do so in this particular area. I very much hope to see the institutions restored in Northern Ireland and the Northern Irish people served by the people they elect.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): There really cannot be any justification for the premium charges that are associated with prepayment meters. The energy companies are getting cash up front from customers before any energy is used. As I said to the Minister on Monday, they must be able to bank that and earn interest on it, as with those who accumulate credit balances and usually pay in arrears. Perhaps he can raise that point with the companies when he meets them this afternoon. Will he let us know what their response is in the letter that he promised me on Monday?

Graham Stuart: Ofgem is responsible for regulating that area. As I understand it, Ofgem looked into it in 2009 and made some changes then. It required suppliers to make cost-reflective charges only—charges had to be based genuinely on the additional costs of delivery—but that has, to a certain extent, been obviated by the energy price cap, which has put a tariff limit on what any company can charge. I will make sure that I get a letter to the hon. Gentleman on this topic.

BILLS PRESENTED

NATIONAL PARKS (CAMPING) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Richard Foord presented a Bill to provide for a right to camp in National Parks; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March, and to be printed (Bill 235).

GENERAL ELECTION (PUBLIC SUPPORT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Richard Burgon presented a Bill to provide for a mechanism for an early general election to be held in certain circumstances, where the public has demonstrated support for such an election; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 17 March, and to be printed (Bill 237).

First-Aid (Mental Health)

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

2.5 pm

Dean Russell (Watford) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make mental health first-aid part of first-aid training requirements; and for connected purposes.

This is my second attempt to bring this Bill to the House, and as before, I will speak about the sensitive topics of mental health and suicide, share the scale of public support through the excellent “Where’s Your Head At?” campaign, outline the economic and business benefits, and share why the Bill will bring hope to those who are struggling to cope in times of difficulty. Ultimately, at the heart of the Bill is a simple request: to create parity between mental health and physical health first aid in the workplace.

There is no doubting that the world has changed, not only in post-covid era but through the rise in technology, the relentlessness of social media, and an “always-on” culture. Our working environments are shifting rapidly but we, as humans, have not changed. We still have emotions; we still feel love and loss, happiness and grief, and joy and pain. We have goals and ambitions, and hopes and expectations. Sometimes they can be overwhelming, and at times we can find it hard to express how we feel. When we feel vulnerable, we may find it hard to know who to speak to when times are tough.

In my previous attempt to introduce the Bill, I spoke about the impact of hearing, as a teenager, my sister sob when she heard the news of a friend’s death by suicide. To frame the importance of this Bill, I ask those listening to think for a moment about someone they may have lost in their own lives. What would we all give to hold a loved one’s hand just one more time, to hear them knock at the door just once more, or to have just one more conversation? What would we give to have that loved one here today?

As I have said before, if suicide were a virus, we would be on the hunt for a vaccine. If loneliness were a disease, would we not search for a cure? At the extreme end, we are talking about saving lives with this Bill. The House of Commons Library reports that in 2021 alone, 6,319 deaths by suicide were registered in Great Britain. Although suicide rates have declined over recent decades, and, thankfully, the 20th-century stigma and shame around mental health have shifted, there is always more to do. That is why I am backing “Baton of Hope”, a new charity campaign that is part of a growing movement aspiring to a zero-suicide society. Achieving that will not be easy, and of course we cannot bring back those we have lost, but with early intervention and—through the Bill—the right signposting at the right time, we could prevent the loss of others.

The Bill is not just about preventing suicide, as important as that is. It is also about reflecting the reality of modern society, especially post covid. There is no doubt that mental health issues are on the rise. Stress, depression and anxiety have become the leading cause of lost working days since the 1990s. Let me share some data. The Centre for Mental Health estimates that 10 million more people will need mental health support as a direct result of the pandemic. That growing need was perhaps

reflected most strongly this week, when it was announced that £150 million of additional funding for mental health services was going into the system. I was pleased that Watford General Hospital in my constituency received £355,000 for mental health services to support my constituents and those across west Hertfordshire.

According to the British Safety Council and the Health and Safety Executive, nearly 1 million workers who suffer work-related stress, depression or anxiety will lose an average of 18.6 days a year. That is in the context of 17 million days lost due to poor mental health in 2021 and 2022. That brings me to the all-important business benefits of this Bill.

According to a 2022 report by Deloitte on mental health at work, the cost of mental health to UK businesses is a staggering £56 billion a year. According to GoodShape, a business in my constituency that partners with leading organisations to track and improve the wellbeing of staff, 54% of workers who take more than two days of leave due to mental health-related absences will go on to leave their job. The Deloitte report also indicates that the return on investing in staff is good, with £5 back for every £1 spent, so it cannot be argued that the investment is not worthwhile.

A pre-pandemic report indicated that a new thing called presenteeism, where employees are physically at work but not productive, was costing UK employers up to £29 billion a year. Where presenteeism relates to mental health, it can have a more detrimental impact on absences. Ensuring mental health is firmly on the business agenda is not a burden, but an investment that ultimately benefits a business’s bottom line. There is real public support, too, thanks to the work of Natasha Devon and “Where’s Your Head At?”, for which I am proud to be an official ambassador. More than 200,000 people signed a petition supporting the principles behind this Bill way before I joined Parliament.

I have seen the benefits directly myself. In my constituency of Watford, I set an ambition to train 1,000 people in mental health first aid awareness, which I originally anticipated would take about a decade to achieve. Incredibly, we have just reached the 600th person trained by that programme, thanks to the incredible support of Camelot and the Watford and West Herts chamber of commerce. Many more are trained locally through other schemes, too, and that is because there are now many more providers of mental health first aid and mental health first aid awareness training. Some, such as the Mental Health First Aid England group, which helped with some insights for my speech today, offer many other courses, and Departments offer free courses, which are available to many.

I would not seek to limit the options or be too prescriptive, because workplaces are diverse. From offices to hair salons, and from construction sites to supermarkets, each worker is different. Behind every statistic is a person with family and friends. They are our mothers, our brothers, our sisters and our fathers. They are the veterans and the volunteers. That is why I believe the power in this Bill lies in making sure it is flexible enough to work for all. We spend so much time in the workplace, yet we cannot always be ourselves when we are there. It can be hard to show our true face when times are tough, because we aim as always to be professional.

People do not wear bandages to show where they have anxiety and depression. Many learn to hide their pain in fear of damaging their career. Many learn to

[Dean Russell]

smile, when really they would like to run a mile to escape the situation they find themselves in. I must be clear that mental health first aiders are not expected to be counsellors or psychologists, but just like physical first aiders, who are not expected to be paramedics or surgeons, this Bill will simply mean that workers have someone to signpost them to the support and help they need when they need it.

Before I conclude, I take this short opportunity to say to anyone listening to this speech who may be having difficulties right now that tough times can pass. Sometimes the mind can be a cruel echo chamber full of unwanted thoughts and hurt. Speaking can be a powerful release valve, reducing the pressure and stress. Please ask for help if you need it. It is not a weakness to ask for help; it is a strength.

To the Minister sitting on the Front Bench, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), I say that I truly hope the Government will also have the strength to back this Bill. Yes, I am back for a second time. Unfortunately, I never give up, and I will not give up on this Bill. Even if I did, there are so many more behind me who would want to make it happen. This is not a request that will go away, and I will be back again if needed. This Bill would make a small change with a massive impact. I humbly request that it be given due consideration and passed into law.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Dean Russell, Andy Carter, Jonathan Gullis, Jim Shannon, Virginia Crosbie, Dr Neil Hudson, Nick Fletcher, Lia Nici, Siobhan Baillie, Sarah Atherton, David Duguid and Debbie Abrahams present the Bill.

Dean Russell accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 February, and to be printed (Bill 236.)

Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill

[2ND ALLOCATED DAY]

Further consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee

[Relevant documents: the Eleventh Report of the Treasury Committee of Session 2021-22, Economic crime, HC 145; and the Government Response, Session 2021-22, HC 1261; the oral evidence taken before the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee on 8 November 2022, on Fraudulent company registrations: Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill, HC 862; the letter from UK Finance to the Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee relating to Fraudulent company registrations and the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill, dated 21 December 2022; and the letter from the Minister for Business, Energy and Corporate Responsibility to the Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee relating to the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill, dated 28 December 2022.]

New Clause 14

APPROVED REGULATORS: INFORMATION POWERS RELATING TO ECONOMIC CRIME

- “(1) The Legal Services Act 2007 is amended as follows.
(2) After section 111 insert—

“PART 5A: APPROVED REGULATORS: INFORMATION POWERS

111A The Law Society’s information powers relating to economic crime

111A The Law Society’s information powers relating to economic crime

- (1) The Law Society may, by notice, require a person falling within subsection (3) to—

- provide information, or information of a description, specified in the notice;
- produce documents, or documents of a description, specified in the notice.

(2) The Law Society may only exercise the power in subsection (1) in relation to information or documents which the Law Society considers it necessary or expedient to have for the purposes of, or in connection with, the performance of its regulatory functions for purposes relating to the prevention or detection of economic crime.

- (3) The persons are—

- a solicitor;
- an employee of a solicitor;
- a body recognised under section 9 of the Administration of Justice Act 1985;
- an employee or manager of, or person with an interest in, such a body;
- a licensed body;
- a manager or employee of a licensed body;
- a non-authorised person who has an interest or an indirect interest, or holds a material interest (within the meaning of Part 5 of this Act), in a licensed body;
- a person who was, but is no longer, of a description mentioned within any of paragraphs (a) to (g).

- (4) A notice under subsection (1)—

- may specify the manner and form in which the information is to be provided or document produced;

- (b) must specify the period within which the information is to be provided or document produced;
- (c) may require the information to be provided, or document to be produced, to the Law Society or to a person specified in the notice.

(5) The Law Society may pay to any person such reasonable costs as may be incurred by that person in connection with the provision of any information, or production of any document, by that person pursuant to a notice under subsection (1).

(6) The Law Society, or a person specified under subsection (4)(c) in a notice, may take copies of or extracts from a document produced pursuant to a notice under subsection (1).

(7) In this section “economic crime” has the meaning given by section 179(1) of the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023.

111B Enforcement of information powers relating to economic crime

(1) If a person refuses or otherwise fails to comply with a notice under section 111A(1), the Law Society may apply to the High Court for an order requiring the person to comply with the notice or with such directions for the like purpose as may be contained in the order.

(2) On an application under subsection (1), the High Court may order a person other than the person to whom the notice was given to provide information or produce documents specified in the notice, if the High Court is satisfied that there is reason to suspect that the information or documents have come into the possession or custody or under the control of that other person.

(3) Section 111A(4) applies in relation to an order under subsection (2) as it applies in relation to a notice under section 111A(1).

(4) An order under this section may direct the Law Society to pay such reasonable costs as may be incurred by a person in connection with the provision of any information, or production of any document, by that person pursuant to the order.

(5) A person may take copies of or extracts from a document produced to them pursuant to an order under this section.

111C Provision of information relating to economic crime by other persons

(1) The Law Society may apply to the High Court for an order requiring a person who does not fall within section 111A(3) to—

- (a) provide information, or information of a description, specified in the order, or
- (b) produce documents, or documents of a description, specified in the order.

(2) The High Court may make an order under this section only if it is satisfied—

- (a) that it is likely that the information or document is in the possession or custody of, or under the control of, the person, and
- (b) that it is necessary or expedient for the Law Society to have the information or document for the purposes of, or in connection with, the performance of its regulatory functions for purposes relating to the prevention or detection of economic crime.

(3) Section 111A(4) applies in relation to an order under this section as it applies in relation to a notice under section 111A(1).

(4) An order under this section may direct the Law Society to pay such reasonable costs as may be incurred by a person in connection with the provision of any information, or production of any document, by that person pursuant to the order.

(5) A person may take copies of or extracts from a document produced to them pursuant to an order under this section.

(6) In this section “economic crime” has the meaning given by section 179(1) of the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023.

Other approved regulators: information powers relating to economic crime

111D Order to confer information powers on other approved regulators

(1) The Lord Chancellor may by order amend this Part so as to—

- (a) provide for sections 111A to 111C to apply in relation to an approved regulator other than the Law Society as they apply in relation to the Law Society, and
- (b) specify the persons to whom notices under section 111A(1) may be given by that approved regulator.

(2) The Lord Chancellor may make an order under this section in relation to an approved regulator only if—

- (a) the Board has made a recommendation in accordance with section 111E in relation to that approved regulator, and
- (b) the persons specified in the order to whom notices under section 111A(1) may be given by that approved regulator are the same as those persons specified in the recommendation.

111E The Board’s power to recommend orders under section 111D

(1) The Board may recommend to the Lord Chancellor that the Lord Chancellor make an order under section 111D in relation to an approved regulator.

(2) A recommendation must specify the persons to whom the approved regulator should be able to give notices under section 111A(1).

(3) A recommendation may only be made with the consent of the approved regulator.

(4) Before making a recommendation under this section, the Board must publish a draft of the proposed recommendation.

(5) The draft must be accompanied by a notice which states that representations about the proposed recommendation may be made to the Board within a specified period.

(6) Before making the recommendation, the Board must have regard to any representations duly made.”

(3) In section 206 (parliamentary control of orders and regulations), in subsection (4), after paragraph (n) insert—

“(na) section 111D (order to confer information powers on other approved regulators);”.—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)

This new clause would allow the Law Society and any other approved regulators specified by the Lord Chancellor to obtain information or documents for exercising their regulatory functions for purposes relating to the prevention and detection of economic crime.

Brought up, and read the First time.

2.16 pm

The Minister for Security (Tom Tugendhat): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 1—*Disclosure of information in the public interest likely to be relevant to the investigation of economic crime—*

“(1) It is a defence to an action based on the disclosure or publication of information for the defendant to show that—

- (a) the disclosure or publication complained of was likely to be relevant to the investigation of an economic crime, and
- (b) the defendant reasonably believed that the disclosure or publication complained of was likely to be relevant to the investigation of an economic crime.

(2) Subject to subsection (3), in determining whether the defendant has shown the matters mentioned in subsection (1), the court must have regard to all the circumstances of the case.

(3) In determining whether it was reasonable for the defendant to believe that the disclosure or publication complained of was likely to be relevant to the investigation of an economic crime, the court must make such allowance for editorial judgement as it considers appropriate.

(4) For the avoidance of doubt, the defence under this section may be relied upon irrespective of whether the statement complained of is a statement of fact or a statement of opinion.”

New clause 2—*Economic crime: power to strike out statement of case for abuse of process*—

The court may strike out the whole or part of any statement of case which can be reasonably understood as having the purpose of concealing, or preventing disclosure or publication of, any information likely to be relevant to the investigation of an economic crime.”

New clause 3—*Home Office review of the Tier 1 (Investor) visa scheme: publication*—

Within a day of the passage of this Act, the Secretary of State must publish in full the findings of the Home Office review of the Tier 1 (Investor) visa scheme which relate to economic crime.”

New clause 4—*Offence of failure to prevent fraud, false accounting or money laundering*—

“(1) A relevant commercial organisation (“C”) is guilty of an offence under this section where—

(a) a person (“A”) associated with C commits a fraud, false accounting or an act of money laundering, or aids and abets a fraud, false accounting or act of money laundering, intending—

(i) to confer a business advantage on C, or

(ii) to confer a benefit on a person to whom A provides services on behalf of C, and

(b) fails to prevent the activity set out in paragraph (a).

(2) C does not commit an offence where C can prove that the conduct detailed in subsection (1)(a) was intended to cause harm to C.

(3) It is a defence for C to prove that, at the relevant time, C had in place procedures that were reasonable in all the circumstances and which were designed to prevent persons associated with C from undertaking the conduct detailed in subsection (1)(a).

(4) For the purposes of this section “relevant commercial organisation” means—

(a) for the offence as it relates to false accounting and fraud, “relevant commercial organisations” are defined as—

(i) a body which is incorporated under the law of any part of the United Kingdom and which carries on a business (whether there or elsewhere),

(ii) any other body corporate (wherever incorporated) which carries on a business, or part of a business, in any part of the United Kingdom,

(iii) a partnership which is formed under the law of any part of the United Kingdom and which carries on a business (whether there or elsewhere), or

(iv) any other partnership (wherever formed) which carries on a business, or part of a business, in any part of the United Kingdom, and

(v) for the purposes of this section, a trade or profession is a business;

(b) for the offence as it relates to money laundering, “relevant commercial organisations” are defined as—

(i) credit institutions;

(ii) financial institutions;

(iii) auditors, insolvency practitioners, external accountants and tax advisers;

(iv) independent legal professionals;

(v) trust or company service providers;

(vi) estate agents and letting agents;

(vii) high value dealers;

(viii) casinos;

(ix) art market participants;

(x) cryptoasset exchange providers;

(xi) custodian wallet providers.”

This new clause introduces a new criminal corporate offence for failure to prevent fraud, false accounting and money laundering, by aligning it with other corporate criminal offences.

New clause 5—*Identification doctrine*—

“(1) A body corporate commits an offence of fraud, money laundering, false accounting, bribery and tax evasion where the offence is committed with the consent, connivance or neglect of a senior manager.

(2) An individual is a “senior manager” of an entity if the individual—

(a) plays a significant role in—

(i) the making of decisions about how the entity’s relevant activities are to be managed or organised, or

(ii) the managing or organising of the entity’s relevant activities, or

(b) is the Chief Executive or Chief Financial Officer of the body corporate.

(3) A body corporate also commits an offence if, acting within the scope of their authority—

(a) one or more senior managers engage in conduct, whether by act or omission, such that, if it had been the conduct of only one representative, that representative would have been a party to the offence; and

(b) the senior manager who is responsible for the aspect of the organization’s activities that is relevant to the offence — or the senior managers collectively — fail to take all reasonable steps to prevent that offence being committed.”

This new clause reforms the “identification doctrine”, so that a body corporate commits an economic crime offence where the offence is committed with the consent, connivance or neglect of a senior manager or senior managers.

New clause 6—*Failure to prevent fraud, false accounting or money laundering: individual liability*—

“(1) A person (“S”) commits an offence if—

(a) at a time when S is a senior manager or corporate officer of a corporate body (“C”), S—

(i) takes, or agrees to the taking of, a decision by or on behalf of the corporate body as to the way in which the business of the corporate body is conducted, and

(ii) fails to take any steps that S could take to prevent such a decision being taken;

(b) at the time of the decision, S is aware of a risk that the implementation of the decision may lead to the commission of an offence of money laundering, fraud, false accounting, bribery or tax evasion; and

(c) the implementation of the decision causes C to commit such an offence.

(2) For the purposes of this section—

(a) an individual is a “senior manager” of a corporate body if the individual plays a significant role in—

(i) the making of decisions about how the entity’s relevant activities are to be managed or organised, or

(ii) the actual managing or organising of the entity’s relevant activities;

(b) “officer”, in relation to a body corporate, means—

(i) a director, manager, associate, secretary or other similar officer, or

(ii) a person purporting to act in any such capacity;

(c) in paragraph (b)(i) “director”, in relation to a body corporate whose affairs are managed by its members, means a member of the body corporate.

- (3) A person guilty of an offence under this section is liable—
- on summary conviction—
 - in England and Wales, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months (or 6 months, if the offence was committed before the commencement of section 154(1) of the Criminal Justice Act 2003) or a fine, or both;
 - in Scotland, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum, or both;
 - in Northern Ireland, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum, or both;
 - on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 7 years or a fine, or both.”

This new clause introduces direct criminal liability for corporate officers who take a decision, or fail to take a decision, that knowingly results in an offence being committed.

New clause 7—Whistleblowing: economic crime—

“(1) Whistleblowing is defined for the purposes of this section as any disclosure of information suggesting that, in the reasonable opinion of the whistleblower, an economic crime—

- has occurred,
- is occurring, or
- is likely to occur.

(2) The Secretary of State must, within twelve months of the date of Royal Assent to this Act, set up an office to receive reports of whistleblowing as defined in subsection (1) to be known as the Office for Whistleblowers.

(3) The Office for Whistleblowers must—

- protect whistleblowers from detriment resulting from their whistleblowing,
- ensure that disclosures by whistleblowers are investigated, and
- escalate information and evidence of wrongdoing outside of its remit to another appropriate authority.

(4) The objectives of the Office for Whistleblowers are—

- to encourage and support whistleblowers to make whistleblowing reports,
- to provide an independent, confidential and safe environment for making and receiving whistleblowing information,
- to provide information and advice on whistleblowing, and
- to act on evidence of detriment to the whistleblower in line with guidance set out by the Secretary of State in regulations.

(5) The Office for Whistleblowers must report annually to Parliament on the exercise of its duties, objectives and functions.”

New clause 21—Civil recovery: costs of proceedings—

After section 313 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 insert—
“313A Costs orders

(1) This section applies to proceedings brought by an enforcement authority under part 5 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 where the property in respect of which the proceedings have been brought has been obtained through economic crime.

(2) The court may not make an order that any costs of proceedings relating to a case to which this section applies (including appeal proceedings) are payable by an enforcement authority to a respondent or a specified responsible officer in respect of the involvement of the respondent or the officer in those proceedings, unless—

- the authority acted unreasonably in making or opposing the application to which the proceedings relate, or in supporting or opposing the making of the order to which the proceedings relate, or
- the authority acted dishonestly or improperly in the course of the proceedings.”

This new clause extends the cap on adverse costs introduced by the first Economic Crime Act (Transparency and Enforcement) 2022 for Unexplained Wealth Orders, to all civil recovery orders.

New clause 23—Review of measures to prevent proceeds of economic crime entering the UK economy—

Within six months of the passage of this Act, the Secretary of State must lay before Parliament the report of a review of what further regulatory measures could be taken to prevent the circulation in the UK economy of the proceeds of economic crime controlled by individuals or entities subject to sanctions.”

This new clause creates an obligation for the Secretary of State to report to Parliament on the merits of further regulatory measures for preventing the circulation in the economy of the proceeds of economic crime controlled by individuals or entities subject to sanctions.

New clause 25—Report into effectiveness of Act in addressing economic crime involving sanctioned individuals—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within six months of this Act being passed, lay before Parliament a report of a review into the effectiveness of the measures in this Act in addressing economic crime involving designated persons.

(2) The report must consider the case for further legislation to make provision for the seizing of assets of a designated person where there is evidence that the designated person has been involved in economic crime.

(3) In this section, “designated persons” has the meaning given in section 9 of the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018.”

New clause 27—Compensation for Victims of Economic Crime—

“(1) The Secretary of State must, no later than 90 days from the date on which this Act comes into force, publish and lay before Parliament a strategy for the potential establishment of a fund for the compensation of victims of economic crime.

(2) The strategy may include provisions on the management and disposal of any assets realised by the government, or any body with law enforcement responsibilities in relation to economic crime, under relevant UK legislation.”

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to prepare and publish a strategy on the potential establishment of a fund to provide compensation to victims of economic crime.

New clause 30—Assets of Iranian officials obtained through economic crime—

Within six months of the passage of this Act, the Secretary of State must lay before Parliament the report of a review of regulatory measures to prevent the circulation in the UK economy of assets of Iranian officials which have been obtained through economic crime.”

New clause 31—Fund for the purposes of tackling economic crime—

In the Companies Act 2006, after Part 29 insert—

PART 29A

ECONOMIC CRIME

993A Fund for the purposes of tackling economic crime

“(1) The Secretary of State must by regulations establish a fund for the purposes of tackling economic crime.

(2) The regulations must specify the purposes for which the fund may be used, including funding the activities of law enforcement agencies in tackling economic crime.”

New clause 32—Review of definition of cryptoassets—

Within 18 months of the passage of this Act, the Secretary of State must lay before Parliament the report of a review of the adequacy of the definitions of cryptoassets contained in this Act.”

New clause 33—*Economic Crime Committee of Parliament*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must by regulations establish a body to be known as the Economic Crime Committee of Parliament (in this section referred to as “the ECC”).

(2) The ECC will consist of nine members who are to be drawn both from the members of the House of Commons and from the members of the House of Lords.

(3) Each member of the ECC is to be appointed by the House of Parliament from which the member is to be drawn.

(4) The ECC will have the power to meet confidentially.

(5) The ECC may examine or otherwise oversee any regulatory, enforcement or supervision agencies involved in work related, but not limited to—

- (a) tax avoidance and evasion by corporations;
- (b) illicit finance;
- (c) anti-money laundering supervision;
- (d) tackling fraud;
- (e) kleptocracy and corruption; and
- (f) whistleblower protection.”

This new clause would oblige the Secretary of State to establish an Economic Crime Committee of parliament to examine and oversee regulatory, enforcement and supervisory action against economic crime.

New clause 39—*Duty to report on economic crime resourcing and performance*—

“(1) The Director General of the National Crime Agency must—

- (a) prepare a report on the resourcing and staffing of its work to counter economic crime, and its performance tackling economic crime, and
- (b) send it to the Secretary of State as soon as practicable after this section comes into force.

(2) The Director General must prepare and send to the Secretary of State further reports on these topics annually.

(3) Each report must include, in particular—

- (a) a report of the total annual budget and number of staff allocated to economic crime for each unit within the National Crime Agency,
- (b) a report of the number of investigations, arrests, prosecutions and convictions relating to economic crime for each unit within the National Crime Agency, and
- (c) a report of other relevant data including, but not limited to, cases per year broken down by both type and outcome; number of restraint or confiscation orders obtained; and value of assets confiscated.

(4) Reporting under subsection (3) must provide a breakdown between domestic economic crime and international economic crime. Reporting on international economic crime under subsections (3)(b) and (3)(c) must provide a breakdown by the income classification of the countries affected.

(5) The Director General must publish every report under this section—

- (a) as soon as practicable after they send it to the Secretary of State, and
- (b) in such manner as they consider appropriate.”

Section 6 of the Crime and Courts Act 2006 currently places a duty on the Director General of the National Crime Agency to make arrangements for publishing information about the exercise of NCA functions and other matters relating to the NCA, and publish information in accordance with those arrangements. This new clause inserts a new section that places a specific duty on the Director General to prepare an annual report on the NCA's resourcing and performance relating to economic crime. The section stipulates the minimum information that the Director General must include in the report.

New clause 40—*Report into options for corporate liability for economic crime*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must produce a report on corporate criminal liability for economic crime offences.

(2) The report must consider the merits of different models for corporate liability in respect of economic crime, including but not limited to—

- (a) the respondeat superior model; and
- (b) the failure to prevent model, insofar as it has not already been introduced by the enactment of this Act.

(3) The report must be laid before Parliament within six months of this Act being passed.

(4) In this section—

“the respondeat superior model” means a model for corporate criminal liability in which an entity is guilty of an offence if an employee or agent commits an economic crime offence—

- (a) in the course of their employment or agency, or
- (b) with an intent to benefit that entity;

“the failure to prevent model” means a model for corporate criminal liability in which an entity is guilty of an offence if a person associated with that entity commits an economic crime offence, intending—

- (a) to confer a business advantage on that entity, or
- (b) to confer a benefit on a person or other entity to whom the associated person provides services on behalf of the entity with which it is associated, except that the entity shall not be liable where the conduct was intended to cause harm to that entity,

unless the entity can prove that it had in place such prevention procedures as were reasonable in the circumstances, or that it was reasonable not to have any such procedures in place;

a person is “associated with” an entity if they are a person who performs services for or on behalf of that entity, including in, but not limited to, the capacity of an employee, agent or subsidiary.”

Government amendments 44 to 49, 57 and 58 to 100.

Tom Tugendhat: It is a pleasure to see you in your place, Mr Deputy Speaker, and it is the first time I have had the privilege of speaking under your chairmanship on these matters. It is also a pleasure to see so many of the usual faces on this matter. Many of us have gone over these questions in Committee and, actually, in the many years beforehand in various different ways, so it is an enormous privilege to be here. It is particularly a privilege to be speaking after the Minister my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) did such a brilliant job yesterday. I am only picking up where he left off, so I am afraid the second act will not be nearly as compelling as the first.

All those who participated in the Bill Committee gave enormous insights into various different perceptions of how we should be thinking about economic crime and corporate transparency. We have had many interesting debates, and I thank enormously those who have taken part in the various different ways. The fact that we have a two-day debate on Report speaks pretty clearly about the significant size and complexity of this Bill.

Yesterday, we debated parts 1 to 3, which cover Companies House reform and corporate transparency. Today, we turn our attention to parts 4 to 6. The clauses in part 4 create new powers that allow law enforcement to more quickly and easily seize and recover cryptoassets. The creation of the civil forfeiture power for cryptoassets will mitigate the risk posed by those who cannot be

criminally prosecuted, but who use their funds to further criminality or for terrorist purposes. This did not prove to be particularly contentious in Committee.

In part 5 of the Bill, we are making it easier for businesses to share information more effectively with each other and with law enforcement to prevent and detect economic crime. We are also creating new exemptions to reduce unnecessary reporting by businesses carrying out transactions on behalf of their customers. We are also giving frontline legal services regulators enhanced enforcement powers to support them as they uphold the economic crime agenda within their regulated community.

I will briefly summarise the amendments we have tabled relating to parts 4, 5 and 6 of the Bill. Many of them address the debate that took place in Committee and will ensure that the Bill works as intended. I should acknowledge that the amendments are perhaps slightly greater in number than we would have liked. The vast majority—amendments 51 and 57 to 100—are minor technical or consequential amendments to ensure that the detail of the cryptoasset measures will work effectively and can be used as soon as possible. That reflects the technical detail of the subject area and the need to make the changes work for each of the jurisdictions of England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland that are covered by the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.

I now turn to the more substantive Government amendments. New clause 14 allows the Solicitors Regulation Authority to proactively request information from its regulated community for the purpose of monitoring compliance with the economic crime regime. It will enable the SRA to monitor and detect breaches of the rules and legislation related to economic crime, including offences related to money laundering, terrorist financing and sanctions.

Government amendments 44 to 47 to clauses 171 and 172 concern information orders. They seek to clarify the cases in which the information order power can be used and to provide clarity to operational partners about how they should be used. They will ensure that the power can be used only for the criminal intelligence functions of the National Crime Agency, and that when assessing a request for information from a foreign intelligence unit, the NCA must be satisfied that the information would support the FIU's intelligence function.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): On the SRA, will the Bill address the strategic lawsuits against public participation that we have been discussing for the last couple of days, or does it purely concern money laundering and other offences unrelated to SLAPPs?

Tom Tugendhat: The Bill is concerned only with economic crime and corporate transparency, and the regulations will cover only that. Many Ministers, including the Lord Chancellor, have spoken about SLAPPs—I will touch on them later—but the reality is that they require a separate jurisdiction and a separate Bill.

Government amendments 48 and 49 concern information sharing. In Committee, Opposition Members rightly pointed out that our proposed definition of large accountancy firms did not include insolvency practitioners, auditors and tax advisers. I thank them for that. These amendments will rectify that omission by expanding the scope of the indirect information sharing clauses to include those sectors.

In addition to the Government amendments, several other amendments on a broad range of topics will be debated today. As in Committee, I look forward to what I anticipate will be a lively but extremely well-considered debate. The contributions of all hon. Members who participated in earlier debates have helped to shape the Bill into an effective tool to tackle illicit finance and ensure that the UK is a great place to do legitimate business.

I know that there are places where hon. Members would like the Bill to go further and do more. Indeed, I am as keen as many of them to solve some of the outstanding problems that we all wish to address, but we need to ensure that those ambitions are delivered in the most effective way and that we use the appropriate legislative vehicles to ensure that they have the desired outcome. Limiting the scope to just economic crime can, in several cases, create more problems than it solves, and I assure right hon. and hon. Members that I have strenuously tested what can be effectively delivered within the scope of the Bill.

Dame Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab): Will the Minister expand on that interesting point? How would any of the amendments on SLAPPs, a duty to prevent or seizing assets limit what could be done in future?

Tom Tugendhat: The question is at what stage do we bring a Bill forward—do we wait for it to be perfect or do we bring forward what we can get at a certain point? The right hon. Lady raises some interesting points. She knows my views on SLAPPs; indeed, in a former incarnation, I may have expressed them extremely clearly. She knows that we share views on asset seizures too. I should point out, however, that no common law jurisdiction has successfully solved the question of asset seizures, although many of us have tried and, indeed, some of us are in conversation with others to try to work out ways of doing it—forfeiture and seizure are not quite the same thing.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Tom Tugendhat: I will give way; I should have known that I was lining that up.

Mr Djanogly: Yes, because my right hon. Friend touched on asset seizures and tempted me. Of course, Canada has enacted an Act of Parliament that provides for freezing orders to be translated into seizing orders at the request of the Attorney General of Canada.

Tom Tugendhat: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, but he is also no doubt aware that there is much discussion in the Canadian legal community about whether those orders will be challenged in different ways and how exactly they will work. There is still a serious debate about the nature of translating from forfeiture to seizure.

Mr Djanogly: My right hon. Friend is generous in giving way again. All this law is new: our unexplained wealth orders were new, and they have been questioned in the courts, so that is not the question. The question is whether we have the guts to stand up and move on this issue, as the whole western world wants to see.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Tom Tugendhat: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, but I note that some hon. Members cheering would also cheer the provisions of the European convention on human rights that guarantee the right to private property and many of the areas that cause the difficulties that the UK has and Canada does not.

I do not deny that there is an enormous question for debate here and that many hon. Members would like to move quickly to seizure on many areas, but sadly, that may take a bit longer. One thing on which we all agree is that the UK's place as a rule-of-law jurisdiction and as a home for justice, not just to ourselves but to many others around the world, is essential to our prosperity and to liberties around the world. It is therefore important to ensure that we correctly transfer from forfeiture to seizure, and recognise the rights and limits that we should respect.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): I salute the Minister's leadership on much of this agenda when he was a brilliant Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee. He will not, however, want to go down in history as the Minister for mañana. In his responses to the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr Djanogly), he has said that the timing is not right and we must wait for future Bills. Can he put our minds at rest and give us a sense of when we might expect a Bill to come forward to address the concerns of the hon. Member for Huntingdon?

Tom Tugendhat: The right hon. Gentleman is extremely kind about my former work and, typically, slightly less so about my current employ. He can be assured that, no doubt, it will be temporary, as it is for all occupants.

That matter has seized my attention and has been of some interest to me in further discussions in different areas. I will not put a time on it, because it is not my ministerial responsibility; the right hon. Gentleman will know from his time in Government that talking across other Ministers' briefs does not always help to advance the case. I assure him, however, that it has come up frequently in conversation with an intent to bring something forward. As I said, the Lord Chancellor has spoken about it to highlight that it is an area where various elements of change are necessary, so I look forward to hearing the proposals as they come forward. I certainly do not think that the matter can wait. We have sadly seen SLAPPs used against such inspiring examples as Eliot Higgins and Catherine Belton, who have stood up for justice in this country and around the world.

Bob Seely: Will the Minister give way?

Tom Tugendhat: I will not, because I am going to close.

Despite all the areas that we could have gone into, and would like to go into at a different time, the Bill is closely focused on economic crime and corporate transparency for the purpose of passing a series of measures that are essential to ensure that we keep our country safe and our economic jurisdictions clean.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): We on the Opposition Benches have been clear that the Bill is long overdue. It has been painful to witness London becoming the world's laundromat for dirty money with the National Crime Agency calculating that £100 billion of illicit finance

flows through the UK every single year. Add to that the Government's abject failure to properly scrutinise the issuing of golden visas to Russian oligarchs—seven now-sanctioned Russians were awarded such visas even after the invasion of Crimea in 2014—and we see a pattern emerging of Ministers failing to treat economic crime with the seriousness it deserves.

This legislation, which is finally wending its way towards the statute book five years after it was promised—and, let us face it, was only brought forward in response to Putin's invasion—is a step in the right direction that we on these Benches support. However, it still falls short in a number of areas, as I will cover in my remarks.

2.30 pm

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): On golden visas, I think the hon. Member will agree that the response we have had so far is unpalatable. I look forward to speaking to new clause 3, which I hope we will be able to divide on later, so that we can get to the bottom of that.

Does the hon. Member agree that the whole point of sanctions is that they are actually adhered to and that the Government do not in any way allow them and their effect to be diluted? There is the case of current Conservative party treasurer Mohamed Mansour, who owns a company called Unatrac that sells Caterpillar equipment to Russia in contravention, it would seem, of one of the sanctions we have set. Is he aware of that case, and what would he urge the Government to do about it?

Stephen Kinnock: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. The new clause on golden visas that she mentioned is spot-on, and we are very happy to support it. I am afraid there are a number of examples of the role Russian money is playing in the Conservative party, including the one she mentioned. I do think that that has acted as a constraint on the kind of action the Government could and should have been taking for many years now, and I really hope Ministers will start to wake up to that reality.

The public need to know that the Government and parliamentarians are taking this issue very seriously indeed, and I am proud of the way that Labour Front Benches—including my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra), who is alongside me on the Front Bench—and others have sought to work constructively with the Government to improve this legislation. Members of the Bill Committee considered the Government's proposals in great detail during 19 sittings, covering hundreds of pages of legislation and amendments. Both the quality and the tone of the debates were of the highest standard, reflecting not just the widespread interest in these issues across the House, but the depth of knowledge and expertise in a wide range of areas. In that regard, I must pay tribute to my right hon. Friends the Members for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) and for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne). The Committee benefited greatly from their thoughtful and well-informed contributions, which I have no doubt will be shared more widely in this debate.

It is therefore profoundly disappointing that, in Committee, there was little in the way of movement from the Government, even in areas where they struggled to find fault with our amendments and new clauses. While I welcome the constructive tone that both Ministers

brought to our debates in Committee, the disappointing fact remains that every single effort by Opposition parties to strengthen the Bill met with resistance from Ministers, and every Opposition amendment pressed to a vote was defeated. As a result, the Committee stage amounted to little more than a litany of missed opportunities, forcing us to return to these arguments once again in this debate, and no doubt we will have to do so during the Bill's remaining stages.

That point is illustrated by the first amendment on today's selection list, Government new clause 14 on information-sharing powers. The new clause seeks to expand access to information relevant to economic crime enforcement efforts, but focuses only on the Law Society and

"any other approved regulators specified by the Lord Chancellor". Put simply, local authorities need these powers, too. Tackling economic crime is a huge challenge for councils due to the lack of licence they have to act on their own intelligence about crime in their local areas.

Councils want to play their part in cracking down on illicit wealth as it manifests itself in their areas. For instance, I have heard at first hand from Westminster City Council how it is battling a growing number of shop fronts—so-called American candy stores—on Oxford Street in particular, that are being used to channel illicit finance, but the process for taking meaningful action against these illegal practices is simply too slow, and as a result it is a gift to the criminals. Disappointingly, following opposition from Ministers to amendments we tabled in Committee that sought to expand powers for local authorities to enforce economic crime laws, there are still no specific provisions to enhance the ability of councils to act.

Moving on to the many important amendments tabled by Front and Back Benchers on both sides of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill again raises the issue of strategic lawsuits against public participation—or, as they are commonly known, SLAPPs. This has, of course, been a deeply troubling issue for a very long time. SLAPPs are defined as

"a recognisable and pernicious form of litigation which seeks to silence, intimidate, and harass opponents", and they

"are designed to silence criticism and investigation conducted in the public interest."

Those are not my words, but the Government's own definition. Others refer to this practice as lawfare.

We have in the past seen this practice used by the lawyers of Russian oligarchs against investigative journalists seeking to uncover corruption, but we now know that these tactics have also been used by not one, but two Conservative party chairmen in recent years. In March 2019, I wrote to the right hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Brandon Lewis) when he was chair of the Conservative party with my concerns regarding the origins of a £1.8 million donation from Ehud Sheleg, who was then the treasurer of the Conservative party, to the Conservative party. I was sent a reply by the right hon. Member threatening to sue me for libel. He might even have got away with it had one of Mr Sheleg's donations not later been flagged by Barclays bank to the National Crime Agency because, in its view, it originated not from Mr Sheleg's bank account, but from the bank account of his father-in-law, a former pro-Putin Russian politician. That is lawfare in action.

But there is more—this time from representatives of the current Conservative chair. Members may have heard his name, as he has been in the news quite a bit recently. In July 2022, Dan Neidle, a former head of tax at Clifford Chance who now runs Tax Policy Associates, accused the then Chancellor of the Exchequer of providing unsatisfactory answers about his tax affairs. What happened next? Mr Neidle received a letter from the law firm Osborne Clarke, representing the right hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), demanding that he withdraw his claims. That was a truly audacious approach and move, one might say, given what we now know about the former Chancellor's tax returns. The bottom line is that we have a Government who claim to be committed to tackling SLAPPs, while Ministers are actively using the practice to their own benefit. It is little wonder that legislative progress has been somewhat sluggish, and that the speed of action on the part of the Government does not reflect the urgency and gravity of the issue.

New clauses 1 and 2, in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill, would provide a much-needed shot in the arm to efforts to resolve the endemic use of SLAPPs in British courtrooms. New clause 21, tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking with cross-party support, addresses the related issue of costs orders, which clearly form part of the legal architecture that is all too easily exploited by criminals to exert a chilling effect on critics and journalists reporting in the public interest. New clause 7, tabled by the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mary Robinson), would incorporate much-needed protections for whistleblowers into the Bill. All of those Back-Bench amendments have the wholehearted 100% support of the Opposition.

After months of consultation on SLAPPs, the Ministry of Justice published a response, which confirmed that "the Government intends to pursue legislative reform at the earliest opportunity."

That was back in July last year. If there has been any meaningful progress since that time, it has not been apparent to me, to my right hon. and hon. Friends or to any other Members who have signed these new clauses, so I ask the Minister: how much longer will it take for the Government to act decisively on this issue?

In new clause 3, as has been mentioned, the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) raises the important issue of the tier 1 investor—or golden visa—scheme, which was closed down last year amid much ignominy arising from its extensive use by Russian oligarchs and other kleptocrats. In April last year, I wrote to the then Home Secretary to call for the publication of the Government's internal review of the scheme without delay. In that letter I said:

"It is simply not enough that the scheme is now closed and a small number of oligarchs sanctioned; politicians and the public alike must be able to understand the findings of the report and learn the lessons."

Here we are more than nine months later, and that argument still holds true. It is deeply regrettable that the Home Secretary is refusing to publish the report in full.

New clauses 4, 5 and 6 on corporate criminal liability point to another of the Government's missed opportunities. There is a well-established and proud tradition of groundbreaking UK law on holding company executives to account for misdeeds committed in their names, or in the names of corporations they are responsible for

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running. A precedent was set by the Bribery Act 2010, which was passed by the last Labour Government. The Government built on that example in the Criminal Finances Act 2017 by introducing new corporate criminal offences related to failures to prevent the facilitation of tax evasion both in the UK and overseas. Extending those “failure to prevent” offences to a wider range of economic crimes is the logical and natural next step. New clause 40 provides a starting point for reforming the law in that area, and would require the Secretary of State to publish a report, setting out the various options by which a new offence might be introduced. New clauses 4 to 6 would go further still, by taking forward specific proposals within the Bill. The Opposition are more than happy to support those measures, and I pay tribute to the right hon. and learned Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland) and the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill) for their leadership on this important issue.

Even as we support these reforms, it is important to remind ourselves that new laws will not necessarily be game changers in themselves. These laws, like any others, will be only as useful as the willingness and ability of this or any future Government to enforce them. Legislation without implementation is not worth the paper it is written on—[*Interruption.*] The Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) is nodding, because we heard that from him frequently in Committee.

John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con): I thank the shadow Minister for giving way—I have an enormous amount of time for an awful lot of what he does and says. I want to challenge him a little on whether these potential changes about the duty to prevent might be more effective and game changing than he is describing, because not only should they reduce the burden of criminality, which is reducing our economic performance and our productivity as a nation, but they could be quite deregulatory. They sweep away a raft of largely ineffective and deeply costly measures, and replace them with something that is simpler and easier to comply with, but more effective at the same time.

Stephen Kinnock: The hon. Gentleman speaks with great knowledge on this issue, and he is right that we need a streamlined, simple approach that clearly places responsibility and liability where they need to be. That is smart regulation. Over-complicating regulation is precisely where the lawyers, fixers and those who so often facilitate this illicit activity find their niche, and how they exploit it is their leverage. Let us make this a game-changing Bill, along the lines that he suggests, and let us hope that the Government’s scale of ambition matches his and that of other hon. Members across the Chamber.

As far as the record of this Government goes, the evidence is hardly encouraging, with just 168 prosecutions and five convictions brought against companies by the Serious Fraud Office between 2016 and 2021, and increasing reliance on US-style deferred prosecution agreements that fall well short of providing full accountability for corporate criminal behaviour. I pay tribute to the work of my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington

South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), who has set out detailed plans to reverse the SFO’s loss of senior staff and expertise, transform the agency’s approach to prosecutions, and allow more of the proceeds of successful cases to be retained by the SFO, as part of a renewed crackdown on corporate malfeasance under the next Labour Government. Labour’s blueprint is there, and Labour Members would be delighted to see the Government adopt it when addressing this issue.

Other new clauses tabled by Back-Bench Members address additional areas that the Government could and should address, but that unfortunately they have not addressed in the Bill. New clause 23, tabled by the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr Djanogly) is one example. Its call for a review of the need for further regulations

“to prevent the circulation in the UK economy of the proceeds of economic crime controlled by individuals or entities subject to sanctions”

is welcome, as is new clause 25, tabled by the right hon. Member for Stevenage (Stephen McPartland). If I were to raise any slight criticism, it would be that the new clauses fall a little short of what is needed, but Labour supports them nevertheless. Specifically, both new clauses fail to mention the enormous and central role that is played not just by the UK, but by individual Crown dependencies and overseas territories in enabling—and all too often actively facilitating—global flows of illicit finance, and the ill-gotten assets of kleptocrats and crooks.

2.45 pm

That issue was addressed in yesterday’s debate by the Opposition in new clause 26 on beneficial ownership registries. The fact that we are still dealing with local administrations in overseas territories that are dragging their feet on the introduction of these registers, while the Government look on in apparent admiration of their supposedly sincere efforts, is deeply frustrating. Labour Members will keep pressing the Government to take the action that we all know is necessary and long overdue.

The other point worth making about reporting requirements of the kind envisaged by new clauses 23, 25, 30, 32, and 39 is that they sometimes amount to asking Ministers to mark their own homework. We should not have to rely on the willingness of future Ministers and Secretaries of State to provide an impartial, balanced view of their own record. For that reason, the Opposition’s new clause 33 calls for the establishment of a joint parliamentary committee on economic crime. The Intelligence and Security Committee provides a useful model, with its special powers to review sensitive or otherwise confidential material, and that is worth the serious consideration of Ministers.

Perhaps the most gaping hole in the Bill, at least in its current form, is the total omission of any measures to provide support and redress for victims of economic crime. To say that that is a missed opportunity understates the issue. Given the scale on which such measures are needed, and the overwhelming weight of evidence about the need for new measures, that gap in the Bill is baffling. The Opposition’s new clause 27 represents the first of many steps that the Government ought to take as a matter of urgency to fill those gaps. It calls for a strategy to be published, setting out a range of specific policies to improve access to justice for victims of economic criminals, both in the UK and internationally.

Liam Byrne: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making such a brilliant speech. Among the greatest victims of economic crime right now are the people of Ukraine. One virtue of his own proposal and the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr Djanogly) is that they propose a shift not just to freezing assets, but to seizing assets and recycling them into the reconstruction of Ukraine. Surely we should legislate for that work now and crack on with it forthwith.

Stephen Kinnock: As always, I agree absolutely with my right hon. Friend's views on the matter. That cannot be beyond the wit of this place or the Government. I know there are legal complications around property and international law, but those are not insuperable. We cannot allow them to be insuperable because, with every day that passes, the people of Ukraine are suffering, and the barbaric acts of Vladimir Putin and his regime are not being held to account in a way that would contribute to the massive reconstruction effort that will be required for Ukraine. It is absolutely right that the person guilty of the crime should pay for the crime and that has to be the fundamental basis of our approach. We need urgency on this in the G20, the G7, and the United Nations. We need Ministers to get a grip of this issue so that we can do justice and deliver for the people of Ukraine, which we must do with great urgency.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Kevin Hollinrake): New clause 27 is interesting. It is about setting up a fund for compensation of victims of economic crime. We have heard estimates that economic crime costs UK citizens £200 billion to £300 billion a year. How much will this cost and who will pay for it?

Stephen Kinnock: The Minister tempts me to write Labour's manifesto right here at the Dispatch Box. It is an issue of principle: how will we ensure that victims of economic crime are compensated? Clearly, we cannot finalise in the Chamber today the quantum of that amount, but we did raise that in Committee and are open to discussing it with the Government. We hope that they will be open to having that discussion in the fullness of time.

Kevin Hollinrake: Will the hon. Member confirm that he is expecting the taxpayer to contribute to the fund? Is that what the new clause would effectively lead to?

Stephen Kinnock: No. This is based on a fund that is generated through fines and through accountability for those committing the crimes. It is along the lines of what I said about Ukraine: the people who commit the crime, rather than the victims, should be paying for the crime. How will we address that question now? If the Government think that the current system is absolutely fine and that there is justice and equity in the system, the Minister should come to the Dispatch Box and say that. However, if he thinks that there is a clear, principled and moral argument in favour of ensuring that the people who commit a crime should be made to pay for it, and that that should contribute to the compensation, we can have that conversation.

Liam Byrne: Is my hon. Friend scandalised as I am that at the moment only 40% of fines from economic criminals are recycled back into the business of tackling economic crime, whereas in the United States it is 100%?

Stephen Kinnock: That is precisely the point. There is an opportunity to generate revenue that could be deployed to address the causes of the problem. It is a win-win. We have criminals. We need to crack down on those criminals. We need to ensure that the agencies are given the resources to do that. It is the criminals who should be paying for that process. That seems logical to me.

Dame Margaret Hodge: Further to that point, does my hon. Friend agree, and I hope that the Government agree, that if they were more assertive in pursuing the people who enable economic crime and those who commit economic crime, more fines could be generated, which they could ringfence for a fund to be used in part to compensate victims of crime? It need not be a burden on the taxpayer and it could be a just way of ensuring that the victims of economic crime do not suffer inappropriately.

Stephen Kinnock: Again, my right hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head. We need a war chest and that should be built up on the basis of moneys paid by criminals. That war chest should also be looked at and used, where possible, to support the compensation of innocent victims of economic crime. The new clause is a two-pronged attack on the issue. The opportunity is there because the better we get at going after these criminals, the more we will have coming into the war chest.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I am convinced by my hon. Friend's argument, but one thing worries me. Having the resources would be good, but having the determination to deliver on the policy is more important. I have had a long-running campaign over the years to improve the efficacy of the Serious Fraud Office. We need a fundamental change in our attitude to how we deliver these policies.

Stephen Kinnock: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As I mentioned earlier, my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury has set out a clear and detailed blueprint for how we need to boost the institutional capacity, human resources capacity, financial capacity and firepower of the SFO. The blueprint is right there. I very much hope that the Government will look at it and perhaps even adopt it. Of course, if they do not, we will soon have a Labour Government who will.

The Opposition's new clauses on victims intend to go much further than victims of economic crime in the UK alone. It is our hope—in government, it will be our intention—to work with our allies and partners internationally to provide robust mechanisms for the seizure of proceeds of corruption, kleptocracy and other crimes under international law, and to use such assets to provide funds for the reconstruction and other forms of financial redress to victims—in Ukraine, for instance—of the criminal acts of dictators such as Vladimir Putin.

For months, we have had nothing but warm words from the Government on such proposals. We know that there have been international discussions, including with our G7 partners and our allies in Ukraine, but we need more than warm words and vague promises of jam tomorrow. While Ministers stall on this issue, we are increasingly at risk of being left behind by our allies in the US, Canada and elsewhere, who are already taking the actions that we want to see in the UK. New clause 27

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would therefore direct the Secretary of State to publish a strategy for using the proceeds of crime to compensate victims, and to do so within 90 days of the Bill receiving Royal Assent.

We welcome the Bill, but it is a great shame that the Government are failing to take more substantive action in the crucial areas that I mentioned. The Bill is a step in the right direction, but, as it stands, it lacks ambition and is therefore a missed opportunity. I hope that Conservative Members will support our amendments today, so that we can finally begin to clean up our country's reputation as the go-to destination for dictators, oligarchs, kleptocrats and gangsters, and for their dirty money.

Sir Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): I draw hon. Members' attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

This issue has been a concern of mine not just for months but for many years. Anybody who has even a passing acquaintance with the issue at hand will know that its history is somewhat tortuous. A series of options were set out comprehensively in a Law Commission report published in June last year, which I commend to hon. Members. However, there is much that predates that. Indeed, much that has happened in the last few months in this place—in both Houses—reinforces the thrust of the argument that I seek to advance by way of new clauses 4 to 6, which stand in my name and those of many other right hon. and hon. Members, from all parties in the House, to whom I am extremely grateful.

In 2015, my party's manifesto rightly committed the Government to make it illegal for companies to fail to put in place measures to prevent economic crime. It would be unfair to say that nothing happened. We had the Criminal Finances Act 2017, which created a new offence of failing to prevent tax evasion. That was a development on the failing to prevent bribery offence contrary to section 7 of the Bribery Act 2010, which opened the door to the development of the principle across a range of criminality in this space.

Subsequent to that, the Ministry of Justice launched a call for evidence in early 2017 on corporate liability reform for economic crime. However, it is right to say that progress on that was exceedingly slow. It was not until November 2020, when I was serving as Secretary of State, that it was agreed across Government that the Law Commission would be given the task of examining the issue and producing a report. It was right to acknowledge at that stage that there were a number of potential models that could be deployed here, and it was important for an independent body such as the Law Commission to look at different jurisdictions, as of course it did. It looked in particular at the United States, Canada and Australia: common law jurisdictions that have long been wrestling with the same challenges that we face. To differing effect, they have brought in and deployed their own particular regimes. More on that slightly later.

What is clear is that there is very much consensus in this place on the need for reform of corporate criminal liability. The Treasury Committee's report of February last year urged the Government

"to act quickly in bringing forward any legislation flowing from the Law Commission's review."

In June, the Foreign Affairs Committee talked about "reform of outdated and ineffective corporate criminal liability laws",

and, in October, the Justice Committee spoke in similar terms. Finally, a report from the House of Lords Fraud Act 2006 and Digital Fraud Committee in November said:

"Reform of corporate criminal liability will be essential in order to maximise the impact of the Fraud Act and other legal tools going forward...to hold corporates across all sectors to account and to inspire behaviour change."

3 pm

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) for his kind words about me, and I have read new clause 40. I say gently to the Labour party that we do not need six months for a further discussion of this issue. We have a wealth of documentation, which is spread around me on the Bench, including the Law Commission report—I have it here because I believe in primary sources and I am trying to be faithful to it—which comes to the view that the Government should pursue options to create further offences of failing to prevent. Page 119 states:

"any decision to introduce new 'failure to prevent' offences needs to be considered alongside the issue of retention or reform of the identification doctrine."

That relates to new clause 5, which I will speak to shortly. The report goes on to say:

"If the identification doctrine is retained as at present, the case for new failure to prevent offences, is inevitably more compelling. We therefore consider that 'failure to prevent' offences are an option for reform, but note that the evaluation of this option must take place alongside the evaluation of the options for reforming the identification doctrine."

I will now direct my remarks to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Security. The Government were given that challenge back in June, and I strongly submit that it is vital that they rise to it and deal with the identification doctrine in the Bill. That could deal not just with the offences I mentioned in my proposal, which I have been very specific about, but has wider ramifications for other aspects of criminal liability. It is highly germane to new offences under the online harms Bill that is going through Parliament at the moment.

I have not sought to be overly ambitious in my proposal. I have confined it to offences that can be described under the genus of economic crime. I have tried not to use such terms in legislation, because I readily accept, as the Law Commission said, that the definition of economic crime is somewhat broad—hazy, perhaps—and does not descend to the detail of existing criminal offences, be they offences under the Fraud Act 2006; the offence of false accounting, which is a well-known offence under the Theft Act 1968; or the offence of money laundering, introduced by the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. I have therefore resisted the temptation to be too vague.

I commend the Government's economic crime action plan of 2021, which I think I helped sign off. Rightly, the action plan describes economic crime as a

"broad category of activity involving money, finance or assets, the purpose of which is to unlawfully obtain a profit or advantage for the perpetrator or cause loss to others."

It is important that we put this in context and look at what the action plan is saying. It goes on:

“This poses a threat to the UK’s economy and its institutions and causes serious harm to society and individuals.”

I strongly agree. There is no such thing in this sphere as a victimless crime. We are all the victims of this behaviour, whether we are investors, consumers or taxpayers. Everybody is diminished as a result of such behaviour. It damages and undermines the reputation of our country.

Liam Byrne: The right hon. and learned Member is making a brilliant speech, and the proposals he is stewarding are incredibly important. Did he hear the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation’s evidence to the Bill Committee, when he said very clearly that economic crime is a national security issue? That is exactly the argument the Minister for Security made when he was Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee—*[Interruption.]* I am told he still makes that argument today. That underlines why the right hon. and learned Member’s proposals are so important, not least because we have become the country of choice for corporate structures set up to launder billions of illegal money.

Sir Robert Buckland: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. Jonathan Hall, the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, was absolutely right. Indeed, his evidence echoed the Government’s own statement in pursuance of the action plan. The action plan says that it covers criminal activity that

“poses a risk to the UK’s prosperity, national security and reputation.”

That is the point. The policy direction the Government have adopted in recent legislation—most notably in legislation to protect industry from takeovers from parts of the world that we regard as a potential threat to this country—increasingly includes economic security as part of the wider national security agenda, and that is absolutely right.

This debate is happening in the context of a world where the old order is changing and giving way to forces that we cannot control and that we should rightly be suspicious about. Therefore, although we want a vigorous, lively, free market economy in this country, we need to be ever more vigilant about ensuring that its boundaries are policed effectively. I will say more about the prosecution of these offences, because it is, shall we say, a vexed question, and there are right hon. and hon. Members here who have direct experience from their work of the evidential challenges that prosecutors face day in, day out.

I do not want the Government to adopt new criminal offences only to find that their use becomes sporadic or ineffective. However, the offences I propose help to further drive a culture of compliance and lawfulness where corporates behave responsibly. There are examples of previous legislation that we can point to that have driven that culture forward positively. I think of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, which the Under-Secretary of State has used as an example, and he was absolutely right to do so. As a result of the passage of that legislation, we saw a dramatic drop in the number of industrial accidents. Why? Because employers were enjoined to take the issue damn seriously. If they did not, there would be liability at the end of it.

Mr Djanogly: Has my right hon. and learned Friend also considered the Bribery Act, where a similar set of procedures was forced on corporates, with dramatic results?

Sir Robert Buckland: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Of course, he was a Minister in the Ministry of Justice when the Bribery Act was brought into force at the end of the 2005 Parliament, and he has direct experience of this issue. He is absolutely right that the Bribery Act has been of huge value. In fact, under the regime of deferred prosecution agreements that the Government brought in in the early part of the last decade, of the 11 DPAs that have been made by the Serious Fraud Office with corporates, nine were for “failure to prevent offences”—failure to prevent bribery—and just three were for the offence of fraud. That accounts for 90% of the £1.7 billion in revenue that the SFO has brought in through DPAs. It is clear that that has been an important step change in the way we deal with wrongdoing or indeed the threat of wrongdoing.

For people who think this is some sort of academic exercise, I draw their attention to the LIBOR scandal and the forex rate rigging scenario. There was no bringing to account of anyone involved—there was impunity. That is not good for the rule of law or the economic wellbeing of this country. If we want people to invest in the United Kingdom—we do and we have excelled in direct foreign investment over generations—then they need to have the confidence that if there is a problem, there is redress of grievance, accountability and a way of recouping the loss or making sure their investment is safe. That is what I believe the new clauses go to.

We have been careful in the test we wish to apply to the “failure to prevent” offences that form the subject of new clauses 4 and 6. It was tempting to follow the recommendation in the report by the House of Lords’ Fraud Act 2006 and Digital Fraud Committee, chaired by my noble Friend Baroness Morgan of Cotes, to apply the wider test contained within the Criminal Finances Act 2017 relating to failing to prevent tax evasion. That would not require an intention by the corporate or the individual to confer a benefit on the company or a benefit on a person to whom the suspect—the defendant—is providing services on behalf of the company. I have sought not to go that far, but to replicate the Bribery Act test, which is the intention to confer a benefit. It is important that when we seek to draft legislation, we are as mindful as possible of not widening it to an extent that could in many ways create further unfairness. We have an obligation to ensure that balance is maintained.

I have set out three separate offences in the provisions: fraud, money laundering and false accounting. I think fraud and false accounting are probably self-explanatory, but the Government might have a bit of a question about money laundering. They might be thinking about the 2017 money laundering regulations, and regulation 92 in particular, where there is already a corporate offence where, with the consent or connivance of an officer of the company, an offence is committed or an offence is attributable to neglect on their part. What I would say gently to the Minister is that I do not think that cuts it. It still leaves significant evidential and prosecutorial challenges. The Financial Conduct Authority has, I think, used it vanishingly rarely. Therefore, I urge him very strongly to look carefully—I hope he will accept

[*Sir Robert Buckland*]

the thrust of my argument, even if he cannot accept the detail of my new clauses today—at bringing forward provision that covers money laundering as well as fraud. That would be my strong exhortation to him today.

Dame Margaret Hodge: I want to add to the excellent speech that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is making and to thank him for it. In the Barclays case, there was an attempt to prosecute both Barclays bank and individual directors of Barclays bank. There was an unsuccessful appeal against Mr Justice Jay's decision, in which the SFO argued that the dual rulings would allow directors to "insulate themselves from liability" and make such alleged offences "impossible to prosecute". Later, Ms Osofsky, who runs the SFO, said she felt herself completely hamstrung by the directing mind principle. She told parliamentarians in evidence that "I can go after main street but I can't go after Wall Street."

In other words, she could prosecute small companies, but not corporates with layers of control.

Sir Robert Buckland: The right hon. Lady leads me to the thrust of my argument on new clause 5, which is the identification doctrine itself. She deals with the precise point of the doctrine. In the Barclays case, Mr Justice Jay at first instance was widely seen as having defined it by a narrow interpretation—I do not criticise the learned trial judge, but many people saw it that way—but the decision was upheld on appeal. With a real-life set of facts, a trial judge made a ruling that had quite important consequences for the law.

3.15 pm

But this issue is not new. The principle was set out in the *Tesco Supermarkets Ltd. v. Nattrass* case 50 years ago. The directing mind and will principle, which is how it was described in the *Tesco* case, now needs to be revisited. That is why I have sought, in new clause 5, to look carefully at options 2A and 2B in the Law Commission report. In particular, in the wording of the new clause we have sought to look at other types of liability, most notably the 2007 corporate manslaughter provisions, to ensure that we are faithfully replicating what is already an established principle in statute. I do not seek, through new clause 5, to suggest that there need be a choice for the Government, so that if the Government reform the identification principle the need for "failure to prevent" offences falls away. The two should go hand in hand. Perhaps I depart slightly there from where the Law Commission placed its emphasis in its report.

As the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) says, it is a pretty rum situation when the public prosecutorial authorities of England and Wales are telling us repeatedly that there is a problem with the identification doctrine. Indeed, as she said the current director of the SFO put it in very eloquent American terms. Sir David Green, the former director of the SFO, has said on many occasions that, particularly given the sometimes byzantine structures of very large corporates, he views the concept of directing mind and will as somewhat confusing and very difficult to understand, let alone to present to a jury. I therefore think that the time is now for reform of that identification principle.

There is some concern that a change in the identification doctrine in criminal law could potentially go on to have effects across the piece and create some contradictions

with civil law itself. The Law Commission addressed that point. It took that view that changing the basis of criminal liability in those terms would not have extensive consequences for civil law. I will set out why it said that, because it is important and no doubt Government officials will be giving it some consideration.

John Penrose: I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on making a powerful speech in favour of his new clauses, several of which I have signed. Before he moves on, may I press him on the point about this being a slightly rum affair? I think that was the phrase he just used. It is rum because we have two options set out by the Law Commission—as well as many other analyses—neither of which are being taken into the Bill. There are two good options, and they are being completely ignored. Also, at least one of the two Ministers on the Front Bench has repeatedly—and rightly, in my view and that of many other people—been a dedicated advocate of precisely the ideas my right hon. and learned Friend is putting forward in his new clauses, yet they are still not in the Bill. How much more rum can it get?

Sir Robert Buckland: I was going to spare the blushes of the Minister for Security, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) and the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), but my hon. Friend has said it for me, and he is right. They know that what I am saying does not just have force, but that they agree with it. That will no doubt carry great weight—

Tom Tugendhat: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Sir Robert Buckland: Of course.

Tom Tugendhat: What I am enormously enjoying in this Session is the way in which Bills are being picked up and put down by different Ministers. When they are on the Front Bench, they do one thing; when they are on the Back Benches, they say another—sadly, that is the nature of our current political system. It is taking a little while, I admit, for many of us to realise quite how long it can take to get things through in government. Those who have been in government for many years are sharing their knowledge very generously.

Sir Robert Buckland: Well, my right hon. Friend must speak for himself. I will tell the House a story: I remember when the present Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wyre and Preston North (Mr Wallace), held the office of Minister for Security, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling now enjoys. We used to have cross-governmental committee meetings—this was during the Government of my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May)—and I remember having a very fierce argument with a very senior permanent secretary at the Treasury about this very issue. I will not name them, because that would be wrong, but they told me that there was concern about the proliferation of criminal offences in this area because somehow it would add more of a regulatory burden to business. I disagreed hotly with that civil servant then, and I disagree hotly now.

The Minister for Security now has a great opportunity. It is a great privilege as a Minister to get on with a job that others would have wished to finish. We have passed the parcel to him, and he can open it and enjoy the gifts within.

John Penrose: My right hon. and learned Friend is being very generous with his time. May I say very gently that the anecdote that he told just now and the intervention that the Minister for Security has just made both come under the category of explanations, rather than justifications, for where we now find ourselves? The Bill is here, now. What has been said explains why we are here, but they do not justify why this stuff is not in the Bill.

Sir Robert Buckland: Well, I am trying to be the diplomat and the reasonable interlocutor here. My hon. Friend is playing the bad cop with the Minister, and I am trying to play the good cop. I know that the Minister will eventually yield to that persistent approach; I hope that it will be done in a way that is neither oppressive nor unreliable.

Liam Byrne: I am incredibly grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his generosity in giving way. We appear to have an overload of rumness here.

Stephen Kinnock: Gallons of rum.

Liam Byrne: Yes. It is unusual for unity to break out on both sides of the House and on the Front and Back Benches. Given that ubiquity of unity, what, in the right hon. and learned Gentleman's analysis, is the problem that is preventing these proposals from becoming the law of the land?

Sir Robert Buckland: I think that there are two things: time and capacity. I do not criticise officials. I have never believed in doing so: it is a bad Minister who blames their officials, just as a bad workman blames his tools. Officials have a lot of work to do under immense pressure, and obviously they want to get it right. I want to get it right, too—we all do—but the Bill might be our last chance to do so in this Parliament. My goodness me, if we cannot get it right here, the Government are really going to have to get it right in the other place.

Let me deal further with the identification doctrine. Opposition new clause 40, which is very well worded, alludes to the US concept of respondeat superior. In effect, it is a wrap-all approach to vicarious liability that captures the acts or omissions of even very junior members of a corporate, which can lead to that corporate being liable. In some ways that has proved advantageous to prosecutors in the US: they have been able to identify more junior officials in corporates and, in effect, get them to co-operate with the authorities, which has opened up evidence that might not otherwise have been available.

The Law Commission looked at that approach. It also looked at what I might call the corporate culture approach in Australian Commonwealth law, and at Canadian legislation on the acts and mental states of senior managers. The Law Commission said—rightly, I think—that neither the US approach nor the Australian approach would be right for our jurisdiction.

The wording of my new clause 5 reflects the Law Commission's recommendations in two ways. First, as the Law Commission's report sets out, it would allow conduct to be

“attributed to a corporation if a member of its senior management engaged in, consented to or connived in the offence.”

Senior management is defined as

“any person who plays a significant role in the making of decisions about how the whole or a substantial part of the organisation's activities are to be managed or organised, or the actual managing or organising of the whole or a substantial part of those activities.”

We have taken the Canadian approach.

Sir Geoffrey Cox (Torridge and West Devon) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I am intrigued by and have a great deal of sympathy with my right hon. and learned Friend's amendments. As he knows, we discussed the issue when we served as Law Officers together. In the light of the Law Commission recommendation from which he has just quoted, I wonder why his new clause 5 includes the

“neglect of a senior manager.”

It seems conceptually a rather odd proposition that a fraud could be committed by neglect. The Law Commission did not go that far. Why has my right hon. and learned Friend included that provision?

Sir Robert Buckland: That is a fair question. What I seek is to tease out from the Government the juxtaposition with the money laundering regulations. My right hon. and learned Friend will remember my making mention of regulation 92 of the Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing and Transfer of Funds (Information on the Payer) Regulations 2017, which uses the word “neglect”. To be frank, I think that there is a problem with that, but it is important for us to tease out from Ministers a way to find a wording that is comprehensive.

Sir Geoffrey Cox: I have enormous sympathy with my right hon. and learned Friend, who is doing the House a service by bringing these amendments to its and the Government's attention. However, is it not reasonable—Opposition new clause 40 has this purpose in mind as well—that there should be quite a detailed consultation within the financial services industry and among any other commercial organisations that might be affected? New clause 5's use of the word “neglect” creates an extraordinarily broad possibility for the application of the criminal offence.

I know what my right hon. and learned Friend is doing, and I applaud it. However, it seems to me that it is reasonable to require of the Government that they get it right, but, as the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) said, that must not become an excuse simply to say “mañana” and kick this into the long grass.

Sir Robert Buckland: I am always grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend; I greatly enjoyed our time working together as Law Officers, and I yield to no one in my respect for him. He is right to make that point. I think I couched my remarks in a way that was faithful to the Law Commission's options, which say that the Government do not necessarily have to do it all—there is a choice here, potentially. On a wider basis, I think

[Sir Robert Buckland]

that the identification doctrine needs to be looked at. There could be an opportunity for further refinement, perhaps in the other place, and for provision to be made that refers specifically to the offences that I list in new clause 5.

Let me take my right hon. and learned Friend's point in the spirit in which he made it, and build on it. New clause 5 includes the specification in Law Commission's option 2B that an

"organisation's chief executive officer and chief financial officer would always be considered to be members of its senior management."

We have sought to be faithful to option 2B.

Dame Margaret Hodge: I am sorry to interrupt the right hon. and learned Gentleman's excellent speech again, but does he share my view that we are past the stage of consultation? There has been a lot of consultation on the issue, from 2015 to 2017 and up until the Law Commission's proposals in 2022. Choices now have to be made. The opportunity must be grasped to legislate on this issue, on which there is such wide consensus and such strong feelings.

Sir Robert Buckland: If not now, when? I entirely agree.

I had not quite finished outlining the Law Commission's point correctly refuting, or at least addressing, the perception of any problems with a knock-on effect on civil law liability. It sets out the case very well, giving two basic reasons why it does not think that there will be extensive consequences.

First, the Law Commission rightly says that in civil law, vicarious liability or liability for negligence will very often apply to civil disputes between companies and third parties even if the identification doctrine test threshold is not met, so those very important parts of civil liability will not be undermined.

3.30 pm

Secondly, many civil cases in which the identification doctrine is invoked involve matters of liability existing between culpable directors—usually people who have gone—and those now running the company. Culpable directors often try to invoke the doctrine of illegality to try to seek some form of immunity or to resist any liability. That is usually dealt with under the doctrine that if someone has behaved fraudulently they cannot use that as a means of evading liability. That is right. We should not baulk, therefore, at addressing this issue head on.

In new clause 6, I seek to introduce new concepts of "failure to prevent" an individual liability. It is important that we make sure that when corporates are prosecuted it does not become a binary choice. Prosecutors should not seek to focus exclusively on the corporate at the expense of bringing individuals to book. I am afraid we have seen numerous examples in recent years of individuals who have escaped with impunity, rather than being held to account for their wrongdoing. I repeat all the arguments I have made about the international reputation of this jurisdiction, which is so important for our economy. Nothing under the sun is totally new: the language in new clause 6 is taken from section 36 of the Financial Services (Banking Reform) Act 2013, and we have taken

the definitions of an "officer" in a corporate from the Online Harms Bill—that Bill keeps popping up in ways that people may not expect.

All these issues are inextricably linked. Let us view this issue not as some arcane question of criminal liability, but as a reputational issue, an economic issue, a security issue and an issue that matters for the future life and health of our society. If we are to make this work, it is essential that we give prosecutors the tools that they need to do the job. I have long been a supporter of the Roskill model, the Serious Fraud Office and the way that it has sought to prosecute crimes, but I am worried that the current structures do not allow us to put the focus on fraud that we need to maintain and enhance. Gone are the days, when I was not even a young barrister but still a law student—I am much younger than perhaps I look—of the big corporate prosecutions in the 1980s that occupied suites of rooms in Chichester Rents. In those days we made a virtue of going after the big boys and girls and making sure that they were brought to book. That seems to have gone out of fashion, and I do not think that is a good thing. Things are slipping through the cracks, whether it be what might be regarded as minor fraud or even major fraud: we are not giving them the seriousness they deserve.

We need to look again at the architecture of the prosecution of fraud. Indeed, Clare Montgomery KC spoke eloquently about this in the media the other day. She is a very experienced and senior prosecutor. I am where she is: after many years of thinking that the SFO was the right model, I am no longer so sure. We need to start a proper and mature debate about the mechanism and framework for prosecution in England and Wales. That is why the idea of a Committee commends itself to me and, I hope, to right hon. and hon. Members. A Joint Committee of both Houses considering this in proper time might produce a mature set of recommendations that could lead to an improvement in the practice of these measures. The House is littered with good intentions. We pass legislation with the best will every year, but we are constantly disappointed when it is not utilised properly. It is our responsibility as legislators to make sure that those who are given the job of carrying out legislation are able to do so in a way that restores our public reputation.

My exhortation is twofold: if the Government cannot accept the amendments, they should bring measures forward in the other place to make sure that the thrust of this reform will happen, and for the Government to work with me and other right hon. and hon. Members to help us improve the way in which we deal with the prosecution of fraud in this jurisdiction.

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

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the expertise of the right hon. and learned Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland), who outlined in great detail the significance and importance of the new clauses. Yet again, the House has the opportunity to get it right, and to get it right now, today, rather than at some point or when parliamentary time allows or after consultation or in due course. Why not do it today?

I have heard no arguments from Ministers in Committee, on Second Reading or here this afternoon to excuse why it cannot be done today, now, with the new clauses that have been so diligently and expertly proposed by right hon. and hon. Members. As I said yesterday, these are cross-party new clauses. They are the most widely supported new clauses I have seen, and there is no reason why the Government cannot accept not only the proposals from this side of the House but the diligent work of their own Back Benchers on the new clauses. It makes absolute sense.

I support the Government amendments before us, both the correcting ones and those that allow Scottish Ministers and their responsibilities to be added to the Bill. It is good that they have been brought forward now, although I am slightly wary that that happened at such a late stage and that the problem had been missed. Regardless, I am happy to see them today. I also support the amendments on information sharing between agencies, which make sense.

I am, however, concerned that the Government will not accept the “failure to prevent” amendment. As I said in Committee, when the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) was a Back Bencher he was very supportive of the “failure to prevent” provisions, right up until 13 October 2022, when he said:

“Of all the measures we have talked about today, this would have the biggest effect in terms of cutting down on economic crime, because lots of our financial organisations are complicit when it suits their interests to be so.”—[*Official Report*, 13 October 2022; Vol. 720, c. 310.]

There is nothing in the Bill that would change that situation, but the new clause would. As I pointed out in Committee, now he is not just the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton but the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. He has argued for a “failure to prevent” economic crime offence not just on 13 October last year, but on 7 July 2022, on 1, 22 and 28 February 2022, on 2 December 2021, on 9 November 2021, on 22 September 2021, on 18 May 2021, on 9 November 2020, on 25 February 2020, on 19 July 2019, on 23 April 2019, on 18 December 2018 and on 9 October 2018. Given that the hon. Gentleman has spent his parliamentary career arguing for this, it beggars belief that now he is a Minister with the power to implement it, he is not actually doing so.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): These are very important points. Given their importance, should the Minister not put down his phone and listen to what my hon. Friend is saying?

Alison Thewliss: One Minister is on his phone and the other—the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton—is sitting at the back of the Chamber having a gab. This is not ideal, but perhaps the Minister has already heard what I have to say and does not want to hear it again.

“O, wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as others see us!”

Tom Tugendhat: It is not the first time I have heard this speech.

Alison Thewliss: It is not, and it certainly will not be the last. It could be if the Minister accepted the amendments, but he is not going to do that, and he will keep hearing this speech until he does: that is the truth of the matter.

As other Members have said, there is a precedent for a “failure to prevent” measure. It is in the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Bribery Act 2010, so the concept already exists, and there is no reason why it cannot be applied today. Even if the Government are saying, “We want to extend it to other areas”, that should not limit us today, when the Bill gives us the opportunity.

I also support new clauses 4, 5 and 6. The right hon. and learned Member for South Swindon made an important point about what senior managers have to do, which is also relevant to the Online Safety Bill. I rather like the definition of an offence committed with “the consent, connivance or neglect of a senior manager.”

All those things contribute to economic crime. This is, if you will, a sin of omission, and we should take the opportunity to tighten up these loopholes. It is one thing to know about something that is happening, it is another thing to look the other way, and it is another thing not to do your job properly and allow that something to happen. This would cover all those eventualities.

New clause 7, in the name of the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mary Robinson) deals with whistleblowing. It is an excellent new clause which would enhance the Bill and offer protection to the very people who flag up these economic crimes. Whenever I think about whistleblowing, I remember a little cartoon that I saw many years ago showing a man sitting at a computer terminal in an office with a sign above his head saying, “Congratulations Frank, whistleblower of the month.” I understand that the cartoonist was Bill Proud. Every time I think about that, I think about the lack of protection offered to whistleblowers, and how much more the Government could be doing to ensure that those who do speak up are protected.

The organisation Protect says that it has offered advice on whistleblowing to 2,500 people a year, and that of those who have contacted it about their experiences, 65% have suffered some kind of detriment as a result of their whistleblowing. There is no incentive for many people to speak out when they see something wrong. They feel that they will lose their job or their promotion and will have to work somewhere else, and also that this might follow them around if they are seeking references for a new job. There is a real problem here, and the Government could, if they wished, deal with it in the Bill: it would make sense for them to do so.

I also support the cost cap suggested in new clause 21. Bill Browder spoke about this issue very powerfully during the Public Bill Committee evidence sessions. The balance is completely skewed to the side of the criminals and away from the Government, and away from the prosecutors and the agencies who want to take on these crimes but simply cannot afford to do so. Bill Browder said:

“What I have learned is that the law enforcement agencies effectively refuse to open criminal cases unless they are 100% sure that they can win without any tough fight on the other side.”—[*Official Report*, Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Public Bill Committee, 25 October 2022; c. 65.]

And what we have learned, even just this week, is that the other side can afford anything that allows them to support their case. Indeed, that was made clear in the exchanges on the urgent question on the Wagner Group earlier today. The other side are very well set up financially: they can afford the very best lawyers, while the prosecutors sit there with nothing in their armoury to take on these

[*Alison Thewliss*]

oligarchs and kleptocrats. That is not acceptable, and a cost cap such as the one suggested in new clause 21 would go some way to addressing it.

Bill Browder has also talked powerfully about the Magnitsky case. He produced a load of evidence about money that been stolen and laundered, being put through various accounts. He had traced all the money, some of which had ended up in the United Kingdom. When he presented the case to prosecutors, to the National Crime Agency and to various other agencies, they all refused to take it on. A crime has been committed, and we know who committed it and where the money ended up, but prosecutors here do nothing about it because it would cost them money that they might never see again. As a result, crimes go unprosecuted in the United Kingdom. It is unacceptable that, by failing to take on new clause 21 and other such measures that would cap costs, the Government are allowing this to continue.

I would support further measures on sanctions. Further to the urgent question, monitoring of sanctions and their effectiveness needs to be a lot tighter. Any sensible sanctions scheme would not have waivers for warlords.

I very much support the new clauses on the proceeds of crime and compensation for victims, for the people of Ukraine and indeed for the people of Iran, as has been suggested by the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran). Those measures are important. There are schemes such as the financial services compensation scheme, but in many cases that does not fully compensate, or compensate at all, those victims of economic crime. Appropriate compensation should be given, given the real and devastating effect that financial crime can have on our constituents. People who feel that they have been duped will carry that around for a long time, so compensation is important, and there is real need for finance both to fight the war in Ukraine and to rebuild that country thereafter.

3.45 pm

The hon. Lady's new clause 39 on reporting on economic crime to this House is important, as is the new clause from the official Opposition on having a Committee of this House to deal with economic crime. At the moment, this is spread too far across too many Committees and there is no accountability to one place in the House on all the aspects of economic crime. The Treasury Committee, of which I was a member, produced a good report and other Committees—some Members here are former Chairs of those Committees—have produced excellent reports on these things, but there is no gathering mechanism to put all these different aspects of economic crime in one place and to be accountable for them. Given the scale of economic crime across these islands, a Committee that had that specific job would be important; it would be significant to have somewhere where all that information could be stored. The members of that Committee could also take evidence in private, if that was appropriate, from the agencies involved, if that was not to be done in public.

There is an awful lot more the Government could and should be doing in this Bill. It is an opportunity that should not pass us by. It is Burns night, so I shall finish with a wee bit of Burns that seems topical, given the discussion:

“Far be't frae me that I aspire

To blame your legislation,

Or say, ye wisdom want, or fire,

To rule this mighty nation.”

There is a lot more the Government could be doing. Let us get this done and get it right this time.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): I am going to be brief and speak simply to new clauses 1 and 2, which stand in the name of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), in my name and in the names of a number of other long-standing defenders of justice in Britain. The new clauses, in effect, make SLAPPs near impossible where they are used to protect economic crime. The provisions are far too narrow, by the way, but that is what the Bill demands. I will leave it to him to explain the mechanism, but I want to talk for a couple of minutes about how important this is and how we got to where we are today.

The issue dates back to about 2000, or perhaps a bit earlier, when London had become liberalised and the Putin oligarchs and others, including some Chinese people, were looking for places to hide their ill-gotten gains and behaviour. London was a wonderful target for that. There were vast flows of money in which they could hide the billions they were stealing from the Russian people and others.

At the time, there was pretty slapdash corporate admin—we were talking about that yesterday in respect of Companies House—and, I say this quite brutally, the complete feebleness of the British establishment, by which I mean everybody: both parties; and the agencies tasked with controlling this, the Serious Fraud Office, which has been a waste of space, and the NCA, which has not been good enough. It was created to tackle this but has not been good enough. All those things were happening. I say to the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) on the Opposition Front Bench that it goes wider than the Conservative party. It starts with Blair/Brown and goes on to Cameron/ Osborne. All of them made mistakes. The golden visa that the hon. Gentleman talked about was created just as we were rushing into the collapse of western financial capitalism under the previous Government. We were too soft—

Stephen Kinnock: The right hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. I agree that the creation of the scheme was under the new Labour Administration, but the point I made in my speech was that a number of those golden visas were given after the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014. He is right that successive Governments are guilty of naivety and complacency, but there is a point in 2014 when we really needed a different approach.

Mr Davis: There is no doubt that the more recent you are, the more salient the case. Frankly, I can remember being ashamed of a British Prime Minister hosting Putin at the Olympics only a few years after Litvinenko was murdered in our country in the most cruel and overt act of state terrorism. Neither Government dealt with that. Cameron's action was grotesque in the extreme, but neither Government dealt with it. Similarly, both Governments kowtowed to China after Tibet and all the rest of it. That has been done too many times. It is the entire system, not just one Government or another.

London is a fabulously attractive place for the Russians or the Chinese. If you want to be somewhere else than Russia, this is the place to be. We have facilitated that at every turn. Here comes the issue to which SLAPPs relate. We have a legal system that is probably the most brilliant in the world in delivering fair outcomes and good justice, but it is also phenomenally expensive, which means it is one-sided in its operation between an oligarch and an ordinary citizen, journalist or whoever they may be.

In conjunction with that are the things that flow from it, such as the behaviour of solicitors, to some of whom my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely), who is not in his place, gave a fair old pasting yesterday, but one that was deserved. The private investigators industry, unregulated, undertakes crimes to gather information for use as weapons against other people. Our courts—not uniquely, but outstandingly—allow that information to be used. In each individual case that might be the right decision, but the collective effect of that is to suck criminally based information into our system and therefore engender and help the industry.

All that is why new clause 1 and 2 are vital. That all had the effect of creating a vast, possibly unintentional institutional cover-up for criminal activity: money laundering, fraud and concealment of evil actions abroad. Let us bear in mind that some of the oligarchs we are talking about are murderers. The system murders people. It is evil activity. That is why new clauses 1 and 2 are incredibly important.

What the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill is proposing in new clauses 1 and 2 is a second best option. We already heard the best option in earlier interventions: a freestanding Bill immediately, because this is happening now. There are court cases going on as I stand here in which people are having their lives destroyed by SLAPPs. The next best is to have it in the Bill of Rights, but we know that that is way down the timetable, for all sorts of reasons. We may not see it before the next election, in which case we will have lost two more years.

The new clauses amount to a way of dealing with this criminal—or near criminal—activity in a way that is not susceptible to a finely turned piece of law. I listened with fascination to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland) on that point. Getting that right is difficult; getting this right is not, because the greatest enemy of evil is a free press. In our country in the last couple of decades we have allowed our free press to become gagged and crippled. If we can take that gag away and remove those bonds, we will suddenly expose all the things that we need to deal with. We will see the weaknesses I talked about—the SFO and the NCA—and put them right, one by one. That is why we should support new clauses 1 and 2. I talked before about the weaknesses of the SFO and the NCA. We will see those weaknesses and we will put them right, one by one. That is why we should support this measure today.

Dame Margaret Hodge: I shall be very brief, because I took a lot of time in the House yesterday. I strongly support many of the new clauses being moved by Back Benchers across the Chamber today. If I can just say something about politics, this heartens me and shows that there are ways in which we can work together to pursue the national interest across the political divide.

It breathes a bit of confidence and life back into the political process that we have all chosen to join in our careers, so I commend those individual Back Benchers who have put themselves forward and who are speaking today.

The proposals from the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mary Robinson) on strengthening the support for whistleblowing are hugely important. Whistleblowers are an essential part of our armoury in the fight against money laundering and fraud, and we know that, despite all the legal rights, they are not protected. People lose their jobs, their families get destroyed and they are left penniless. Therefore, the establishment of a capability that will do nothing other than protect and promote whistleblowers in the crucial work they do is really important, and I hope that it will be adopted.

The importance of legislating to tackle the abuse of our legal system by oligarchs and others, which the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) has just talked about so eloquently, is also really important. I want to be blunt about this and say to those on the Government Front Bench that, if they do not accept this new clause, they will not get a Bill during this Parliament. I bet that is right, so for heaven's sake let us use this opportunity to get this bit of legislation in. It does not cover everything we would like it to cover, but it will have an impact. It will also give us the experience to see whether we have got the legislation right. I am sure that all the lawyers who helped to draft these new clauses put their best brains into them, but if they have not got them right, we will be able to learn those lessons when we come to extend these measures beyond economic crime.

The right hon. and learned Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland) made an excellent contribution on the reform of criminal corporate liability, and I want to say something about that. It is not that we want to suddenly bang up a whole load of lawyers, accountants, companies, service providers and all those people who we know are the ones that facilitate or collude with much of the economic crime that takes place. Only the best preventive mechanism that we can think of will force a change of behaviour, and we are not doing that on the back of hope; we are doing it on the back of reality. We know from the Bribery Act 2010 and from the regulations on tax evasion and on health and safety at work that putting this sort of liability on individuals and corporations is the only way to transform behaviour. Last week's amendment to the Online Safety Bill by the Conservative rebels showed the mood of the House, and I would urge Ministers to think about that. The mood of the House is to use this effective tool to try to transform behaviour in all spheres of life, whether in relation to online harms or to economic crime.

I hope that we will hear from the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr Djanogly) soon on the issue of “freeze not seize”. I know he is going to make a number of propositions, and I hope he will not mind if I say something about this. We have been working with an extensive group of lawyers to see whether we can move to a position where we do not just freeze the assets but seize them in order to repurpose them and, particularly in the current context, use them to support the reconstruction of Ukraine. We have finally got a chink in the armour in that regard, but let me say something else first. The lawyers we have talked to work with non-governmental organisations in this field, and the

[*Dame Margaret Hodge*]

advice they give is always going to be slightly different from the advice that comes from the lawyers working in the Government service. I think we bring a new perspective, and I urge Ministers to listen to what we have to say. The chink is worth examining at this stage, even if we do not go for the further propositions, to show that we mean it when we say that we want to seize this money.

Tom Tugendhat: If the right hon. Lady can come up with a way to seize assets and use them for the purposes we have been discussing—notably for the reconstruction of Ukraine, but for other purposes, too—I am all ears. I have had long conversations with the representatives of Governments around the world, and I am yet to hear an idea that works. If she has one, I am happy to hear it.

4 pm

Dame Margaret Hodge: This is not our idea. It comes from a recent seminar we held with lawyers who support the Royal United Services Institute and Spotlight on Corruption. I will leave it to the hon. Member for Huntingdon to expand on it, but I think it is a very interesting chink that we can exploit, although it is not the total answer.

A draft Bill is being prepared by another group of lawyers, but I do not think we can add it to this Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill. I am sceptical that we will find a chance to introduce the draft Bill in this Parliament, but I assure the Minister that we will pursue it after this Bill has passed. I just hope the Government examine the chink we have identified and run with it.

New clause 21 on cost caps, which stands in my name, is part of the way in which we could better fund the enforcement agencies in their fight against economic crime while also preventing economic criminals from exploiting our legal system. At the moment, we have a “loser pays” law, which has two consequences. First, when our enforcement agencies embark on litigation and lose, there is a massive cost to the public purse. We saw that with the unexplained wealth order against Kazakhstan’s Nazarbayeva family. Subsequent investigative journalism suggested that the family told mistruths to the court, but that has never been rectified. Nevertheless, the costs vary from £1.5 million to £2 million.

The SFO took a similar case against Serco involving prisoners who were—I have forgotten the word.

Tom Tugendhat: Tagged.

Dame Margaret Hodge: I thank the Minister. I am having a senior moment.

The SFO had clearly prepared the case badly, but there was a discovery point that got the litigation thrown out of court, and a huge sum was claimed in costs. The cost to the public purse is enormous.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): I understand the right hon. Lady’s point about the cost to the police and other authorities of failed investigations but, in my experience, much of the problem stems from the division of the spoils in those cases that succeed in

securing the proceeds of crime. As she will know, the money is divided between the Treasury, the Home Office and the police.

When I was at City Hall, we tried to cut a better deal in which the police would effectively recover the full cost of a prosecution, and any profit would then be split, so that pursuing such prosecutions would be costless to the police. Tim Godwin was then deputy commissioner of the Metropolitan police, and his view was that the police would then have a strong case to invest even more in this line of investigation, and they would therefore have more success and there would be more money to go around for everyone. It is not necessarily the case that legislation will solve the problem. It is more to do with the deal between the police and the Government.

Dame Margaret Hodge: Indeed, and we considered an amendment in yesterday’s debate to address that specific issue, so that any funds arising from a confiscation order, or other such order, could be enjoyed by the enforcement agencies themselves, which would provide an additional incentive. We discussed last week’s Danske Bank settlement of criminal issues in the United States, from which the enforcement agencies received \$2 billion. Just imagine the amount of enforcement activity that could be funded from that fee. We are timid in that regard, so I completely concur with the right hon. Gentleman on that.

The other argument in relation to cost caps is that the fear of facing huge costs if one fails in a case provides a disincentive to the enforcement agents to pursue as vigorously as one would like economic crime prosecutions. The Minister has said to me previously that there is no evidence to back that up, but I just do not buy that. A proper analysis of how people in the NCA, the Serious Fraud Office and other agencies think before they decide to pursue a prosecution would very quickly reveal that there is a disincentive. It is for those two reasons that we considered cost caps. The US is our model. Each party bears its own costs, which is much more effective. We heard figures yesterday—I will not repeat them because I have to get on—that the US gets much more money in and it does not cost as much to its enforcement agencies.

Those are the things that I wanted to cover. I hope that, in summing up, the Minister will please give us some concessions. I urge him to reflect on the degree of unanimity across the House and on the very senior figures on his own Back Benches who have chosen to work, in particular, with members of the two all-party groups to reach consensus. We do argue these things out. We come to a view after an extensive debate on a subject; it is never an open and shut case. Back Benchers are in a better position at present than those on the Front Bench, so I ask the Minister to listen to us because we may just be right and it would be good if there was a concession on something.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): I rise to speak to new clause 7, which is in my name, and the names of Members across the House. It would require the Secretary of State to set up an office for whistleblowers within 12 months of the Bill receiving Royal Assent, and as chair of the all-party group for whistleblowers, I wish to register my interest.

The office for whistleblowers would be an independent body, which reports to Parliament and would have three main duties: to protect whistleblowers from detriment resulting from their disclosures; to ensure that these disclosures are investigated; and to escalate information and evidence of wrongdoing that is outside its remit to the appropriate authority, including regulators or, if appropriate, the police.

I thank the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge), who introduced this new clause at Committee stage and spoke to it robustly and with the knowledge and passion of someone who has been pursuing this for many years.

Despite a complete lack of reference in the Bill, whistleblowers and whistleblowing have a pivotal role in the fight against economic crime. Indeed, when this proposal was debated at Committee, the right hon. Member for Barking referenced her time as Chair of the Public Accounts Committee and noted that all the work that the Committee did on economic crime came from whistleblowers, and yet, in a Bill that seeks to tackle economic crime, whistleblowers are not referenced.

One statistic that has been shared many times when debating this subject in Parliament is that 43% of economic crime is detected and exposed through whistleblowers. However, in his response to the Committee debate, the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) noted that he believed that about 100% of economic crime detection could be attributed to whistleblowing. Once again, that appears to be confirmation that, if we want to know where an economic crime is being committed, it is most likely to be a whistleblower who exposes it.

The objectives of the office I propose in this new clause would be to encourage support and advise whistleblowers, providing a safe place to share information and acting on evidence of detriment to the whistleblower. We simply must protect whistleblowers who speak out, risking retaliation, as we have heard, harassment and losing their job—or, in the case of serious organised crime, possibly a much worse outcome. The office will enhance protections of those who whistleblow, while at the same time incentivising such disclosures by providing a safe space to share information.

There is evidence that an office for whistleblowers does incentivise disclosures. In 2020, the International Bar Association measured countries with whistleblowing legislation against a list of 20 best practices. The UK met just five of the 20. Meanwhile, the United States, where an Office of the Whistleblower sits within the Securities and Exchange Commission, met 16 of the best practices. That office received 12,300 disclosures in 2022, nearly double that of 2020, and, as its chief stated:

“The significant increase in the number of whistleblower tips and awards since the program’s inception shows that the program, with its enhanced confidentiality protections, is effectively incentivizing whistleblowers to make the often difficult decision to come forward with information”.

This is a cross-party, cross-departmental issue. Whistleblowers are to be thanked for, among many things, uncovering waste in our public services, highlighting poor or dangerous medical practices and conduct, and revealing the laundering, funnelling and theft of vast amounts of public and private money. When people steal from the public purse, it is society that suffers and

our constituents who pay the price. According to law firm Pinsent Masons, His Majesty’s Revenue and Customs received nearly 14,000 tip-offs regarding misuse of the covid furlough scheme. In just one case, £27.4 million of taxpayer money had been falsely claimed by a fraudster who, despite never having been to the UK, registered four companies in London and claimed furlough for more than 2,700 non-existent employees. Some £26.5 million of public money was recovered as a result, in a case that also reinforces the importance of Companies House reform.

We have heard details of the Danske Bank money laundering scheme in previous debates, so I will not delve into the details again, but in that case we know that criminals took advantage of UK limited liability partnerships. That is why the reforms at Companies House and to limited partnerships are needed. However, once again, it was a whistleblower who brought that \$230 billion economic crime to light, halting the stream of illegal Russian money laundering. Without him, it might never have been uncovered and might have continued for years.

That was before Putin’s illegal invasion of Ukraine, but we know that illicit finance helped to fund the war and will continue to fund it, unless it is stopped. I welcome the swift action the Government have taken to tackle the scourge of financial crime, first by passing the Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Act 2022, then by introducing the Bill we are debating today. However, while the Government have introduced measures that will go far in preventing economic crime, as it stands, neither piece of legislation supports those very people who are key to its detection.

Having spoken to many dozens of whistleblowers over the years, I know that someone who reports wrongdoing can risk jeopardising their reputation, their career, their mental health, their wellbeing and that of their family. It is not a decision made lightly. Whistle-blowers who expose economic crime must balance the risk to themselves in the name of doing what is right. That should not be the case.

4.15 pm

The UK was once a world leader in whistleblowing protections, and we were the first EU country to introduce whistleblowing legislation—the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. That was seen as a landmark moment for whistleblowers, with protections for workers in employment tribunals and an expectation that wrongdoing would be addressed. However, as I have previously outlined in this place, PIDA applies in reality only to some employees—not contractors, not trustees and not volunteers—and it does not cover those connected to financial crime who may wish to disclose information. In addition, although workers can bring claims to an employment tribunal, just 4% of whistleblowing claims are successful. With results that low and potential risks so high, how can we expect the public to have confidence in the system? That is why we need to take measures to protect and support whistleblowers, which will in turn encourage people to speak up and report economic crime.

I do not intend to press the new clause to a vote, but I note that the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton, intervened on Second Reading to express his wish for whistleblower provisions

to be introduced to the Bill. By supporting the new clause, the Government would be doing exactly that, and I hope that they will feel able to do so.

Layla Moran: I rise to speak to the Liberal Democrat new clauses tabled in my name, with a particular focus on new clauses 3, 30, 31 and 39. Before I come to those new clauses, I put on the record my support and thanks for the many varied new clauses that we have been discussing, including those tabled by the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mary Robinson), the right hon. Members for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) and for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), the right hon. and learned Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland) and many others.

In their breadth and depth, those new clauses reflect my own somewhat conflicted feelings about where we are with the Bill. On the one hand, it is very clear that we are much further on than a year ago, which is surely a good thing. That has come off the back of strong cross-party working, and I echo what the right hon. Member for Barking said earlier about that restoring faith in the democratic process. If only our constituents could see that we do work together and that it results in positive things.

However, it is also fair to say that we still have much to do. I know that those are not just my thoughts, because they have also been expressed by the former Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), who is now the Minister for Security. Indeed, in a sense, he and others are the great hope—the men on the inside who we hope are going to push much of what we want to see. I hope that they are hearing yet again in this debate, and in the hopefully very brief Third Reading debate later, just how much further we want to go. Notwithstanding that positive movement in the right direction, I am worried that we have started to back-pedal in some areas.

One of those areas is golden visas, which new clause 3 would address. Let us look at them in some detail. Tier 1 investor visas were the “blind eye turned” route straight into the UK that was used and abused by so many of Putin’s cronies, not to mention kleptocrats from other regimes. They were a golden ticket—quite literally—to come to the UK and launder money with barely any scrutiny or transparency. Recognising that, the then Conservative Home Secretary instituted and launched a review, and the promise was that the findings would be published. For a long time, I—and others, I am sure—had been tabling and asking questions of the Home Office to show that we had not forgotten and that the delay was inexcusable.

So imagine my delight when, the week before last, Members saw a written ministerial statement in the name of the Home Secretary entitled “The Tier 1 (Investor) route: Review of operation between 30 June 2008 and 6 April 2015”. My heart leapt for joy. Finally, five years on, were we going to get the answers that we sought to questions such as: to what extent had Putin’s cronies managed to embed themselves into the UK economy or even into the upper echelons of British society, and I include in that politics? How many of the golden visas issued went to Putin’s cronies or their family members? What other countries were these visa holders from? Crucially, where are these people now?

How many of them are still in the UK? How many of them have acquired citizenship, and what have the Government done about that?

Given that we waited five years, and given that the Government and successive Ministers had promised from the Dispatch Box that we would get some or all of those answers, we were entitled to a substantive response. When the review was published, my heart sank, because instead of what they had promised, the Government published what they termed a “summary” of the recommendations—not even the actual recommendations themselves, but a summary. Furthermore, the summary frankly told us nothing that we did not already know. It is galling that we still do not know how many people have exploited this system. The statement did not even give us a number or a rough ballpark figure for golden visa holders who had been identified as a risk. The Government admitted that they had identified a “small minority”, but given that 6,000 visa holders were being reviewed—a figure that, by the way, we already knew before the publication of the statement—what is the figure for that small minority? Is it in the tens, hundreds or thousands? I think that anything under 3,000 would still qualify, so what is it?

We know that 10 oligarchs who were sanctioned held golden visas. In March, Liberal Democrat colleagues in the other place found out it was eight—presumably the difference is that we have sanctioned more people since then, so the number of people on the list who are sanctioned increases, and I can understand that, although confirmation would be helpful. That shows the Government can be specific when they want to be, so why can they not be specific on this? The statement does not say very much about how many acquired British citizenship, what nationality they were or what will happen to them now, beyond very broad generalities.

Furthermore, the bit that worries me most is that in the words of the Home Office, this written statement was its “final response”. Following my point of order that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, graciously answered in the House on the day of the statement’s publication, I wrote again to the Home Office to ask, “When are you going to do this? Why have you done this?” It said that was its substantive response, and “we will not be commenting further”.

I sincerely hope, especially given the comments that the Minister has made in the past, that he will do the House the courtesy of giving us an answer or explanation for what on earth happened here. I seem to remember—it might even have been in the first week after his being appointed, and we were all very excited about that—that he confirmed from the Dispatch Box that the information would be released, and then it was in written statements later that the tone and the words changed. What happened? We deserve to know the answers.

I am afraid to say that from where I sit, the whole thing stinks. It undermines much of the good work we are doing here to try to get transparency. Sunlight is the best disinfectant. After years of the Government saying that they would do this, for them to back-pedal stinks of a cover-up. I am not accusing the Minister of doing that, but I think we can legitimately suggest that it could be perceived that way, and that undermines everything else we are doing. I sincerely hope, should we be allowed to divide on the new clause, that Members will come with us through the Lobby and do what the Government said they would do in the first place.

Alison Thewliss: The hon. Lady is making some excellent points about the golden visas. Does she find the lack of curiosity from the Government about these golden visa holders and what they have been up to as remarkable as I do, when compared with some of the difficulties that our constituents have in asking for something as simple as a visitor visa to have their granny come over and visit from Iran?

Layla Moran: I thank the hon. Lady for her point, which is well made. The thing is that the Government were curious, and they did this review, which is sitting there. That is clear—the one thing that the written statement confirmed was that a review had been done and recommendations had come from it, but all we got was a summary of the recommendations. What I take from that is that they were curious and they found out, but now they do not want to tell us. What on earth happened? It is not a good look.

To move on from golden visas, we desperately need to see more action in a number of other areas to ensure that we properly tackle economic crime, particularly by kleptocrats. It is right that we focus on Russians, but it is worth saying that the Bill will apply to many other flavours of kleptocrats and bad people. As other hon. Members have said, this could be our last chance for many years to get this right, so we should consider how else it might apply. Last year, for example, Hong Kong Watch highlighted concerns about the dirty money that Hong Kong officials had gained through corruption and that has now been spent by the families of officials in the UK, including on property. I raised those concerns at the time and I will continue to press Ministers on them.

I tabled new clause 30, about Iran, to show how important it is to focus not on a single country, but anywhere there are human rights abuses. Anoosheh Ashoori made the point that

“there are a large number of children and relatives of the regime that, like the Russian oligarchs, like living the high life here and have assets here.”

Why are we not pursuing them? The new clause asks the Government to use existing legislation to do an audit and report back to Parliament. We should apply the Bill to as many places as it can be effective.

All that takes resourcing—a familiar refrain in the House—which is addressed by new clause 31. Frankly, resourcing is a lacuna in this Bill and its predecessor. I was encouraged by the number of amendments on establishing an economic crime fighting fund, which shows that it is clearly the shared will of hon. Members on both sides of the House that we put the resourcing and money behind this legislation to ensure that it is done properly. The Liberal Democrats wholeheartedly share that commitment. I say to the Minister that that money would not be frittered away; it would be an investment, because if we fund the agencies properly, they will start to bring the money back in. We know the exorbitant amount that we think we are losing to economic crime, so any investment in getting some of that money back would surely be good.

In conclusion, I urge Ministers to take note of the willingness of hon. Members on both sides of the House to act, and to take heart from it. There is much more to be done. I hope that the Bill is the next chapter, but not the last, in the House's fight against economic

crime in this country. I sincerely hope that Ministers will continue to work with us in our common aim of bringing about transparency and light to tackle this once and for all, so that we are never again left in this embarrassing position.

Mr Djanogly: I rise to speak to new clause 23, in my name and those of the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) and 17 other hon. Members on both sides of the House, for whose support I am grateful. This comprehensive Bill is significant in its scope and its intention to counter fraud, which is wholly welcome, but new clause 23 speaks to its lack of focus on the proceeds of economic crime, which are the proceeds resulting from acts committed in the UK and overseas.

Such proceeds have circulated in the national economy, largely unimpeded, for too long, and a host of existing limitations and issues, such as the lack of proper financing for related law enforcement bodies, which has been much discussed over the last two days, have a compounding negative effect. Unfortunately, those limitations are all too frequently at the expense of and to the detriment of hard-working and honest taxpayers in all our constituencies—not least mine—and those who often stand to benefit are the criminals and those sanctioned for reasons related to foreign affairs. Tackling that issue is the primary motivation behind the new clause.

More broadly, like-minded countries are increasingly focusing on this area, including our fellow parliamentarians in Canada. In June last year, they made technical yet significant changes to their economic sanctions legislation, including the Sergei Magnitsky law regime. Effectively, those changes allow existing sanctions for freezing assets to be converted into orders for the seizure of those assets. Similar measures are being considered by the European Commission, in other European capitals such as Tallinn, and in the United States. Unless our regulatory measures vis-à-vis the proceeds of economic crime are reviewed and strengthened, the UK risks falling behind, which I believe would be both morally and politically unpalatable.

4.30 pm

I also believe that new clause 23 speaks to the wider lack of a much-needed national conversation about such proceeds, where they are held, why they are in the UK and, crucially, what the potential benefits of clamping down on them could be. It would, I suggest, be to the clear benefit of the taxpayer, but also crucially to those elsewhere in need of financial reparations such as in Ukraine, if the proceeds could be seized, repurposed and put to work. I say this recognising that in September it was estimated by the World Bank that at least \$349 billion would be needed for Ukraine's reconstruction, and one can only imagine that the figure is now much more significant.

It is, however, important to recognise that it is not enough for measures to be simply passed into law; their implementation must be backed, supported and seen through. The American authorities have provided a notable example of one such action that I thought would be of interest to the House. In May last year, a \$300 million yacht, the property of a sanctioned Russian oligarch, was seized by Fiji at the request of the United States in a joint law enforcement operation. This followed

the issuance of a seizure warrant that declared the yacht in question to be subject to forfeiture based on probable cause of violations of US law, including money laundering and conspiracy. In other words, it was not the asset-freezing sanctions themselves that enabled seizure, but rather the active enforcement of the breach of such sanctions.

Such violations and action should not, however, be looked at in isolation. Instead, they should be considered in the wider context of international affairs—namely Russia’s brutal, illegal and ongoing invasion of Ukraine. Co-ordinated through the US Justice Department’s KleptoCapture taskforce, the seizure of the yacht in question sent a blunt message that, in the words of the FBI director, Christopher Wray, those who contribute to the advancement of Russia’s malign activities will be sought and

“brought to justice, regardless of where, or how, they attempt to hide.”

This is a message—a strong message—that cannot be ignored or overlooked.

This yacht seizure was a clear example of the rigorous enforcement of the law, and one that I believe should be emulated here in the UK, with related regulatory measures subsequently strengthened on top. The recent arrest of another oligarch in London on suspicion of money laundering in breach of asset-freezing sanctions was a step in the right direction. The problem in the UK, however, is that the criminality of breaking sanctions attaches to the quantum of the breach, not to the overall value of the amount sanctioned. For example, if a sanctioned oligarch were to be found with a carrier bag full of sanctions-breaching cash, that cash amount is all that is liable for confiscation, not his wider sanctioned wealth.

This was why we attempted to table a cross-party amendment—the so-called chink in the armour amendment, as described by the right hon. Member for Barking. It proposed, in short, that non-disclosure of all assets by a sanctioned individual would itself be a criminal offence, and that the total frozen amount could be subject to seizure as a penalty for such an offence. Of course, this is a much lighter step than providing, as in Canada, for the Attorney General to be given the power to convert freezing orders into seizing orders, and I also tried to table such an amendment, by the way. Unfortunately, these proposals were deemed to be out of scope of the Bill, which is why we are only debating the broader terms of new clause 23.

However, given that this Bill follows on from the Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Act 2022, which involved fast-tracking sanctions laws in response to the invasion of Ukraine, it does seem slightly ironic to me that updating that sanctions regime falls outside the scope of this follow-on Bill. None the less, I of course accept the House’s ruling on that issue, but I implore the Minister and the Foreign Office who lead on this issue to stop passing the buck between Departments, as we keep seeing, and to listen to the majority of hon. Members across all parties who feel that Russia and Russians as the aggressors must pay for their barbarity and devastation of Ukraine, and not leave it up to British and western taxpayers to foot the Bill for Ukraine’s reconstruction.

New clause 4, which was so powerfully and expertly introduced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland),

would create an offence of failure to prevent fraud. That important proposal attempts to close a large gap in our existing fraud legislation book. I go back to 2010 when, as shadow Solicitor General I led for the then Conservative Opposition on the Bribery Act, which we also did once we came into government. Working on a cross-party basis, we added into that Act the concept of senior managers of a venture being liable for bribery happening at the coalface, if they could not show that they took all reasonable steps to prevent that bribery from happening. Before that, prosecutors had to prove at each layer of management that those above them, the so called “directing minds”, were guilty of the crime. In practice, that was almost always impossible with larger companies—my right hon. and learned Friend explained this at some length earlier so I will not go into great detail. As he said, that Act focuses the minds of those in management, especially in big companies, so that they think carefully about the processes they have in place, and regularly review such processes. Such an approach also states that inaction is not acceptable, let alone an excuse.

The resulting new bribery law was considered a great success. I recall a discussion about a decade ago with the then SFO director, Sir David Green, who was publicly advocating for the same change to be made for the offence of fraud, and I note the SFO’s current director is saying exactly the same. To put that in context, the main fraud prosecutors in this country have consistently been saying for more than a decade that they need this legislation in order to do their jobs properly, yet here we are some dozen years later, and it still has not happened. I am frankly amazed by that, and I am not quite sure why it has not happened. I heard from my right hon. and learned Friend the history of how the measure was delayed, but I am still not sure why it was delayed. I recall the now Lord Chancellor talking of consulting on this issue back in 2016, so again—why the inaction?

Together with other right hon. and hon. Members I got a letter dated 20 January from Ministers from the Home Office and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy saying that they are “carefully assessing options”. Does that imply another dozen years of assessing something that we all know needs to happen? If we are to be serious about combating fraud, we must get on with this. If the Government are not happy with the wording in new clause 4, they should come up with their own wording. Fraud now constitutes just under half of all crime committed in the UK, and we must be doing more to counter it at all levels.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I have now to announce the result of today’s deferred Divisions.

On the draft Environmental Targets (Biodiversity) (England) Regulations 2022, the Ayes were 302 and the Noes were 166, so the Ayes have it.

On the draft Environmental Targets (Woodland and Trees Outside Woodland) (England) Regulations 2022, the Ayes were 302, the Noes were 166, so the Ayes have it.

On the draft Environmental Targets (Water) (England) Regulations 2022, the Ayes were 300, the Noes were 170, so the Ayes have it.

On the draft Environmental Targets (Fine Particulate Matter) (England) Regulations 2022, the Ayes were 301 and the Noes were 170, so the Ayes have it.

On the draft Environmental Targets (Residual Waste) (England) Regulations 2022, the Ayes were 301 and the Noes were 170, so the Ayes have it.

[The Division list is published at the end of today's debates.]

Liam Byrne: It is a pleasure to speak to new clauses 1 and 2 in my name and those of many others, and it is a pleasure to follow so many excellent contributions to the debate. I hope it has become clear that there is a wide and deep cross-party consensus about the need to take this overdue Bill and repower it with not only good laws but proper resourcing so that we can begin to ensure that economic criminals in this country are put under rather more pressure.

A lot is in a name, and the Bill's name is the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill. As the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mary Robinson) pointed out, what is crucial to ensuring the corporate transparency we need to police economic crime is information. Much of that information comes from whistleblowers and, crucially, from courageous journalists who are prepared to take tremendous risks and go to tremendous lengths to pursue the truth, publish the truth and hold the guilty to account.

The challenge we have is that we know we cannot police economic crime without such transparency, but that old advice to journalists to follow the money in pursuit of the truth is becoming almost impossible because our courts—English courts, London courts, which were sanctuaries for justice for 1,000 years—are becoming the strike point of choice for oligarchs around the world to intimidate, to cow and to deter journalists from publishing the truth with the threat of sky-high legal costs. My friend the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), who is not in his place, and I, together with the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely), have been pushing this argument for almost a year. Yesterday, the hon. Member for Isle of Wight presented to the House a first-class private Member's Bill, which I was proud to sign. I commend the Minister for the work that he did when he was Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee on ensuring that the cancer of strategic legal action against public participants is something that we know about and are collectively determined to act on.

Within the sub judice rules and exemptions that govern the debate, I can talk about some of the evidence that we now have on the record. There are now so many cases that it has become clear that there is a playbook for oligarchs. It is a playbook that all of them know and all of them follow. It is a playbook that is now predictable, and it is a playbook that we must draw to a close. We could draw it to a close this afternoon by agreeing to the amendments that we have tabled with cross-party support.

The first step in the playbook is to target the individual. Do not target the company, because companies are strong and individuals are weak. That is exactly why Arron Banks went for Carole Cadwalladr. He did not want to go for *The Guardian* or the Scott Trust; he wanted to go for an individual journalist. That is exactly why Prigozhin, as we now learn, decided to target Eliot Higgins and not Bellingcat, because of course an individual

is always more vulnerable than a corporate organisation. In most of these cases, we see an oligarch taking aim fair and square at an individual and not the corporate organisation behind them to maximise the power of intimidation.

Secondly, having identified the individual, the task is to maximise the intimidation. Let us look at what Tom Burgis had to go through when he was writing his book about the Eurasian Natural Resources Corporation. The bad guys whom he was trying to expose actually went to the lengths of tapping his phone and bugging him. They must have done—that was the only way in which their investigators could turn up to a secret meeting that he was having with former Government officials in a car park. Those are the lengths that these people will go to.

Thirdly, there is the business of exaggerating the claims: taking some aside in a bit of written material and exaggerating it ridiculously to try to multiply legal costs. We saw that in particular with Mr Abramovich in his case against Catherine Belton and HarperCollins. It was a ridiculously exaggerated claim. Of course, the objective for Mr Abramovich was not to win his case. All he sought to do was maximise the legal costs for HarperCollins and Catherine Belton.

We see that now in a case in the Royal Courts of Justice, which I will not name but which I sat through a couple of weeks ago. That case is so thin. It entails an oligarch basically trying to claim that a number of emails that have been sent are in effect tantamount to a publication. Even though he is unable to name and specify the harm that has been done, he is seeking to bring a case for defamation. It is the flimsiest of cases anyone could imagine, yet hundreds of thousands of pounds have now been racked up in legal costs in an attempt to intimidate someone out of telling the truth.

Step four is to co-ordinate with others, which we saw in particular with Mr Abramovich, who decided to round up a number of his old mates to try to bring some kind of collective action—not just in this country, by the way, but in other countries such as Australia. That was a way to double the legal costs and maximise the pain against Catherine Belton and HarperCollins.

Then we have the attempts to rack up costs even though the grounds may be as flimsy as anything. Forensic News, for example, is being sued by Walter Soriano. Forensic News has a total of 12 subscribers in this country, yet Walter Soriano has been allowed to prosecute the case because of those 12 subscribers. Why could he possibly be doing that? Is it, as the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden described, because our legal costs are so high that the pain can be maximised by bringing a case here?

We see the same in the case referred to by my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) of the former rulers of Kazakhstan, who have brought a SLAPPs case against the Bureau of Investigative Journalism and openDemocracy. That was because openDemocracy had the temerity to expose the \$8 billion siphoned off through Jusan Technologies, which is somehow now claiming that its economic interests in the UK have been damaged and therefore it is entitled to bring a case in the Royal Courts of Justice. As a result, openDemocracy and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism are forking out thousands of pounds to defend themselves against this onslaught.

[Liam Byrne]

The situation we now have in this country is so appalling that, as we heard in the urgent question this afternoon, we have the spectacle of a Russian warlord being licensed by His Majesty's Treasury to fly his lawyers to London to polish a case to sue an English journalist in an English court in order to undermine the sanctions this country has imposed on him. That is how ridiculous, corroded and broken our system has become. An exemption was licensed by a servant of the Crown to spend thousands of pounds flying lawyers to service the needs of the head of the Wagner Group in St Petersburg and to refine a lawfare case in an English court.

Layla Moran: The right hon. Member is making his point powerfully. Does he not agree that they are laughing at us, surely? We impose sanctions, yet this still happens. We are talking about the head of the Wagner Group—a group that is operational in many countries across the world. Are we seriously meant to believe that he had no access to money in any other jurisdiction anywhere else in the world—that he had to access his British pounds in order to instruct lawyers to do exactly as the right hon. Member has described? The whole thing is farcical, is it not?

Liam Byrne: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. Here we are, licensing a warlord to draw down funds and move them into the NatWest bank account of a London law firm to prosecute a case that undermines the sanctions we imposed on that warlord in the first place.

Let us briefly go through the timeline of the case because it is so important and illustrative of just how broken the system has become.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I commend my right hon. Friend for the work he has done consistently over a long period on this issue. It is important to highlight the scale of the problem in London. Is it not true that there are more SLAPP cases being taken in the London courts than there are in Europe and America put together? Does that not illustrate the scale of the problem and the urgency with which we need to deal with it?

Liam Byrne: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I said earlier that London is now the preferred strike point for oligarchs in intimidating journalists. When the Foreign Policy Centre, whose work I must commend, surveyed investigative journalists, it found that three quarters of them had suffered some kind of legal attack to silence them. The UK legal system accounted for more of those legal actions than the United States and Europe put together. That is how bad this has now become. That is how rotten our system has now become. That is why it is so outrageous that the head of the Wagner Group was given the licences. Let us be clear about this guy. This is someone who has been running mercenary operations in Sudan, Mozambique, Syria, Central African Republic, Libya and Mali—and, of course, his forces have now been redeployed to the theatres in Ukraine.

It was in August 2020 that Eliot Higgins and Bellingcat began running a series of stories that exposed the barbarities of the Wagner Group in Africa, including offences such as the murder of CNN journalists. It took the British Government and the Foreign Office until

31 December 2020 to put sanctions on Prigozhin, even though, by the way, he had been sanctioned much earlier in the United States for the quiet sin of running troll farms intervening in the American presidential campaign. None the less, we got around to it at the back end of 2020. In the citation for sanctions, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office wrote that Prigozhin was providing

“a deniable military capability for the Russian state”.

That feels quite a big sin to me, running a deniable military capability for the Russian state. That sounds like a pretty good reason for sanctions. That sounds like a pretty good reason for not offering carve-outs to sanctions to undermine them in British courts.

When Mr Prigozhin found out about the sanctions he was not very happy, so he sought to undermine them by suing Bellingcat, or Eliot Higgins in an English court. He had a choice and in fact a debate: “Do we do it in a Russian court, a Dutch court or an English court?” The conclusion was to go for Eliot Higgins in an English court. To prosecute the case, he had to fly the lawyers out to St Petersburg, so the Treasury licensed £4,788.04 to help make that happen: over £3,500 for business class flights, £320 for accommodation at the Grand Hotel Europe Belmont, £150 for subsistence—that'll buy a pretty good dinner—£200 for PCR testing and £400 for express visas. That is what servants of the Crown, under the supervision of Ministers of the Crown, signed off.

The discussions went a bit like this. “What are the objectives here, Mr Prigozhin? Well, we think that, rather than seeking damages, what we really need is to get Mr Higgins for defamation because that is how we undermine all those irritating articles” that led to the sanctions against Mr Prigozhin. Literally, we enabled the enablers. We enabled the cash flow of a Russian warlord to prosecute an English journalist in an English court. And that is why we have to act. No one in this House today thinks that this is okay. The Minister for Security does not think that it is okay. All of us here think it has to stop, but if it is to stop, we have to take aim at the original sin: the fact that it is courts in this country that are being used by oligarchs around the world to silence journalists.

Our new clause, which has drawn cross-party support today, is very simple. It would not stop all strategic legal actions against public participants, but it would stop anybody attempting to silence journalists who are trying to reveal economic crimes. It is within scope; I am grateful to the Clerks for their work helping to refine it and make it good. I know that the Minister will say, as he said in Committee, that this is not the right Bill for it, or that it would not solve all the problems, but that is an argument for making the perfect the enemy of the good.

We have heard the Lord Chancellor talking about his ambition to change the law, but we have also heard that he seeks to do so through the Bill of Rights. The dogs in the street know that the Bill of Rights Bill is dead. It is not coming back to this House any time soon, yet today—this week, next week, next month—journalists and indeed ex-Members of this House are in court, having to pay legal bills because we allow oligarchs to abuse our courts. Let us at least make progress now.

I say to the Minister: please do not be the Minister for mañana. Please be the Minister who did not make the perfect the enemy of the good. Please be the Minister

who seeks to do what he can with what we have, where we are, today. We could use this Bill to make progress. Why do we not seize that opportunity with both hands?

I am very grateful for the concerted campaign by Members across this House. I will end by saluting the courage, fortitude and determination of so many good journalists in this country. Oliver Bullough, who wrote the brilliant books “Moneyland” and “Butler to the World”, makes an excellent argument in his *openDemocracy* article today. He says that journalists going into the business of tackling economic crime have an uphill struggle as it is, with a lot of barriers in their way. They have a pretty difficult job, and the knowledge that the British Government are on the side of the bad guys does not make that job any easier. It is time that we put the force of the state and the force of the Crown behind the good guys for once—and that means agreeing to our new clause today.

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne). I applaud his commitment and thoroughness in the work that he has done.

I rise to support new clauses 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 21. Economic crime is usually committed in the shadows, yet its impact is as clear as day: there are the American candy stores down Oxford Street, there are thousands of empty flats in London and—closer to my home—in Liverpool and Manchester, and we know how dirty money laundered here has financed the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The crimes that the Bill aims to prevent are so often shrouded in secrecy. The Bill is necessary, as we can all agree, but the Government need to do it right. They need to accommodate sensible amendments—notably those investigated and researched by groups such as the all-party parliamentary group on anti-corruption and responsible tax, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) has led tirelessly. Indeed, the Minister—the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake)—co-signed the manifesto on which many of today’s amendments are based, so I would expect him to support them. I urge him to do so.

New clauses 1 and 2 are crucial to getting a grip on the London laundromat. Journalists are the fourth estate in our society. They investigate and shed light on the secrecy that surrounds economic crime, yet only this week it was reported that journalist Eliot Higgins was hounded by a British law firm that was given permission by the Government to work on behalf of the murderous and barbaric Wagner Group. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill has clearly outlined what has come out today and what he has been researching.

Wealthy oligarchs cannot be allowed to use English courts to threaten journalists with huge legal costs. If these wealthy individuals are able to abuse their wealth and power, no light will be shed on the secret world of economic crime.

5 pm

New clauses 4 to 6 aim to introduce a corporate offence of failing to prevent economic crime. They are critical to removing the veil of secrecy. Fraud, false accounting, money laundering, bribery and tax evasion are witnessed by finance directors, accountants and chief executives.

Whether they are willing participants, trying to keep quiet or, crucially, failing to take action, it must be a crime. Ignorance or neglect cannot be a defence, but it is not only senior management who should be held responsible. If senior management were involved, or knew and did nothing, the corporation must be liable. After all, a business is the people who work for it. Corporations are not faceless bodies. Putting the responsibility on the individual and the corporation will help to create a culture of transparency, which is one of the core purposes of the Bill—to bring economic crime out of the shadows.

New clause 7 covers whistleblowers, possibly the most important issue of all. As I have said, the best way to prevent economic crime is by removing the veil of secrecy. Whistleblowers provide the sunlight to do just that. Economic crime is not committed by faceless organisations, it is committed by people. If the Government introduce the protections for whistleblowers outlined in new clause 7, they will help law enforcement to do its job. Having laws in place to prosecute economic crime will do little unless whistleblowers can alert law enforcement agencies, but it is important to remember that whistleblowers are people and they have families and livelihoods to protect. Far too many lives have been shattered by a failure to protect whistleblowers. If the Government want to remove the veil of secrecy surrounding economic crime, protecting whistleblowers simply must be part of the strategy.

The past year has put a spotlight on the work that my right hon. Friends the Members for Barking and for Birmingham, Hodge Hill, my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Sir Chris Bryant) and many others have done to put a spotlight on economic crime. Russia’s actions towards Ukraine have brought about the political will and urgency to get this Bill passed. The oligarchs, dictators and their supporters have had their money here for decades. The Bill needs to make sure that Britain is not a safe haven for economic crime. The veil of secrecy must be lifted and it must never return. It is not who we are. Britain should be playing no part in propping up their regimes.

I urge the Government to use the good will they have on this Bill and to support the new clauses I have mentioned. They should not waste this opportunity. The new clauses are bipartisan and based on evidence and politics. It is sickening and heartrending to see what is going on in Great Britain, America, China and Russia. Around the world, people are asking, “What is going on? What are politicians doing?” Many of us are ashamed and cannot hold our heads high. I urge the Government to give the public something worth having. The Bill gives us huge opportunities. I know the people on the Government Front Bench, I know where their hearts are, and I ask them to be brave, to use this opportunity to the maximum for today and tomorrow—it can be finalised in the future.

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

Hon. Members: Minister!

Tom Tugendhat: My apologies, Madam Deputy Speaker. For some reason I was under the impression that the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) would be speaking first.

Stephen Kinnock: No, no!

Tom Tugendhat: Oh, are you ducking out? Very well.

Stephen Kinnock: I will be back for Third Reading.

Tom Tugendhat: It is always a joy to hear from the hon. Gentleman.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I think I should explain, for the benefit of *Hansard*, that the shadow Minister will be coming back on Third Reading. It is customary to go straight to the Minister, given that he moved the motion for the lead new clause.

Tom Tugendhat: I thought that we were to have the joy and the privilege of hearing from the hon. Member for Aberavon, who can never say too much in this Chamber, or indeed anywhere else—which is lucky, because he very rarely says too little.

It is a huge pleasure to have been here this afternoon. Members in all parts of the House have made extremely powerful points, but I will touch on just a few of them, because many have been covered at length and in detail on numerous other occasions. If Members will forgive me, I will deal straight away with a few of the matters that I think require immediate attention.

I thank my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland) for tabling new clause 6 and for the way in which he has approached the area of corporate criminal liability, in which he and I agree that reform is required. That is why the Government commissioned a review by the Law Commission, which my right hon. and learned Friend cited and which showed a definite need to clamp down on economic crime conducted by commercial organisations. We have been working closely across Government and with prosecutors in carefully considering its recommendations and how improvements can best be made. It is vital that any reform can be used by law enforcement agencies, does not duplicate what already exists and avoids placing unnecessary burdens on legitimate businesses, but we must also operate within the constraints of the Bill.

I share my right hon. and learned Friend's passion for change. I am immensely grateful for his thoughtful input, and I greatly value my engagement with him, and with other Members, on this issue. I can assure him that the Government intend to address the need for a "failure to prevent" offence in the other place, and I would welcome further discussion with him about the most effective way in which that can be done.

Sir Robert Buckland: I am extremely grateful for what my right hon. Friend has said, but may I gently press him on the issues of "failure to prevent", fraud, money laundering and false accounting offences—I accept that they may well have to be separate—and a further discussion on the identification doctrine? If so, I will not need to press my new clauses to a vote.

Tom Tugendhat: My right hon. and learned Friend is certainly more learned than me, and I will certainly be listening to his views. There are a number of areas that I am sure we will be able to discuss, and I am sure we will reach a conclusion that is acceptable to all sides.

Dame Margaret Hodge: I am grateful for the assurance that an amendment will be introduced in another place, but may I also have an assurance that it will cover both corporations and individual directors?

Tom Tugendhat: The right hon. Lady knows very well that I would find it impossible not to listen to her. I look forward to seeing how we can return to this issue. The Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), will no doubt wish to have a strong input as well, so I shall say no more at this stage.

Let me now touch on the question of whistleblowers, and pay enormous tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mary Robinson), who has been a friend of many of us for a number of years since she was first elected and who has championed, consistently and clearly, the need for an office for whistleblowers. She is absolutely right: what the country needs is an office for whistleblowers, and what we need to do is ensure that we have the updates to the legislation that she so correctly highlighted. The establishment of such an office would, however, be a significant undertaking. It would have major financial applications owing to its size, it would require significant staffing, and, as matters stand, it might duplicate the role of regulators without the same level of sector expertise. I know that my hon. Friend had the opportunity to meet my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State earlier this week to discuss her new clause and plans for the review, which I understand will be set out soon, I hope that the meeting was constructive.

Mary Robinson: I have indeed had a meeting with the Under-Secretary to discuss this. There is a long way to go on it and I am steadfast about setting up the office for whistleblowers. However, the conversations have been constructive, I am grateful to Ministers and I will not be pressing my new clause to a vote.

Tom Tugendhat: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that and to the Under-Secretary for having had those conversations. He knows my support for her interest in this important matter.

Clearly, many amendments have been tabled today. The last point I wish to make before we move on to Third Reading is that the Government listened an awful lot on this Bill. Many of us, including myself and the Under-Secretary, who have been taking it through this place, have been listening extremely carefully, for many reasons. One of those reasons is that we picked this up, as many people do, a long way down its process of drafting and through its progress through this House. No doubt there are areas where all of us could tweak, adjust, test and push, but we think that the Bill offers major progress on the situation where we began; I am delighted that that point was shared across this House. So although there are areas where we could have further discussion—I am sure the other place will have criticisms and comment, and we will have improvements and additions—we feel that this Bill, as it stands, is a vast improvement on where we are. Although there is progress to be made, and there always will be, we believe that the Bill marks a useful point of progress for our country in fighting economic crime.

Question put and agreed to.

New clause 14 accordingly read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 3**HOME OFFICE REVIEW OF THE TIER 1 (INVESTOR) VISA
SCHEME: PUBLICATION**

“Home Office review of the Tier 1 (Investor) visa scheme:
publication

Within a day of the passage of this Act, the Secretary of State
must publish in full the findings of the Home Office review of the
Tier 1 (Investor) visa scheme which relate to economic crime.”
—(*Layla Moran.*)

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 220, Noes 290.

Division No. 159]**[5.11 pm****AYES**

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy
vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackman, Kirsty
Blake, Olivia
Bonnar, Steven
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Sir Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote
cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, rh Yvette
Cowan, Ronnie
Crawley, Angela
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
David, Wayne
Davies-Jones, Alex
Day, Martyn
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dixon, Samantha
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Doogan, Dave
Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast
by Brendan O'Hara*)
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farry, Stephen
Fellows, Marion
Ferrier, Margaret
Foord, Richard
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Furniss, Gill
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Green, Sarah
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Dame Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Hamilton, Fabian
Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Hayes, Helen
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa

Hussain, Imran
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Sarah
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lightwood, Simon
Linden, David
Lloyd, Tony (*Proxy vote cast
by Navendu Mishra*)
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
MacAskill, Kenny
MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McLaughlin, Anne
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Nichols, Charlotte
Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote
cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
Olney, Sarah
Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena

Osborne, Kate
Owatemi, Taiwo
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Powell, Lucy
Qaisar, Ms Anum
Qureshi, Yasmin
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, rh Rachel
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Alyn
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smyth, Karin
Spellar, rh John
Spheens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Wakeford, Christian
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Western, Andrew
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Whitley, Mick
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Winter, Beth
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mary Glindon and
Colleen Fletcher

NOES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth

Badenoch, rh Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Buckland, rh Sir Robert
Burghart, Alex
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chishti, Rehman
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Dowden, rh Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, Sir James
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth

Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gibson, Peter
Glen, rh John
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Graham, Richard
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, rh Simon
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, rh James
Henry, Darren
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kearns, Alicia
Keegan, rh Gillian

Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kniveton, Kate
Kruger, Danny
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Lamont, John
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Mackinlay, Craig
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McVey, rh Esther
Mercer, rh Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Milling, rh Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, James
Morrisey, Joy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Neill, Sir Robert
Nici, Lia
Nokes, rh Caroline
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, rh Chris
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, rh Victoria
Pritchard, rh Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, rh Jeremy
Quince, Will
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Robinson, Mary
Ross, Douglas

Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, rh Sir Alok
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Simmonds, David
Skidmore, rh Chris
Smith, rh Chloe
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, rh Mark
Stephenson, rh Andrew
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Iain
Streeter, Sir Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, rh Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunderland, James
Swaine, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
Trott, Laura
Tugendhat, rh Tom
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Sir Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Warman, Matt (*Proxy vote
cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Watling, Giles
Webb, Suzanne
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
Young, Jacob

Tellers for the Noes:
Steve Double and
Robert Largin

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 26**BENEFICIAL OWNERS IN OVERSEAS TERRITORIES**

“(1) The Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 51, after subsection (5) insert—

“(5A) The Secretary of State must ensure that the Order in Council under subsection (2) above comes into effect on date no later than 30 June 2023.”—(*Stephen Kinnock.*)

This new clause would amend the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018 to ensure that an Order in Council requiring open registers of beneficial ownership in the British Overseas Territories comes into force no later than 30 June 2023.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 222, Noes 289.

Division No. 160]**[5.27 pm****AYES**

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackman, Kirsty
Blake, Olivia
Bonnar, Steven
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Sir Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, rh Yvette
Cowan, Ronnie
Crawley, Angela
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
David, Wayne
Day, Martyn
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dixon, Samantha
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Doogan, Dave
Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Fellows, Marion
Ferrier, Margaret
Foord, Richard
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Furniss, Gill
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Green, Sarah
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Dame Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Hamilton, Fabian
Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa

Hussain, Imran
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Sarah
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lightwood, Simon
Linden, David
Lloyd, Tony (*Proxy vote cast by Navendu Mishra*)
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
MacAskill, Kenny
MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McLaughlin, Anne
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Monaghan, Carol
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Nichols, Charlotte
Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
Olney, Sarah
Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena
Osborne, Kate
Owatemi, Taiwo
Paisley, Ian
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Powell, Lucy
Qaisar, Ms Anum
Qureshi, Yasmin
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, rh Rachel
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Alyn
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smyth, Karin
Spellar, rh John
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thompson, Owen
Thomson, Richard
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Wakeford, Christian
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Western, Andrew
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Whitley, Mick
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Winter, Beth
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel
Tellers for the Ayes:
Colleen Fletcher and
Mary Glindon

NOES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah

Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, rh Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carter, Andy
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Crabbe, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, Sir James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Graham, Richard
 Gray, James
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, rh James
 Henry, Darren
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus

Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kniveton, Kate
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Karl
 McVey, rh Esther
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warman, Matt (*Proxy vote
cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
Tellers for the Noes:
Robert Largan and
Steve Double

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 27**COMPENSATION FOR VICTIMS OF ECONOMIC CRIME**

“(1) The Secretary of State must, no later than 90 days from the date on which this Act comes into force, publish and lay before Parliament a strategy for the potential establishment of a fund for the compensation of victims of economic crime.

(2) The strategy may include provisions on the management and disposal of any assets realised by the government, or any body with law enforcement responsibilities in relation to economic crime, under relevant UK legislation.”—(*Stephen Kinnock.*)

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to prepare and publish a strategy on the potential establishment of a fund to provide compensation to victims of economic crime.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 221, Noes 289.

Division No. 161]

[5.40 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Bonnar, Steven
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Sir Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 David, Wayne
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dixon, Samantha
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Foord, Richard
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran

Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Sarah
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony (*Proxy vote cast by Navendu Mishra*)
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osborne, Kate
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Paisley, Ian
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Powell, Lucy
 Qaisar, Ms Anum
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, rh Rachel
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh John
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Wakeford, Christian
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel
Tellers for the Ayes:
Mary Glindon and
Colleen Fletcher

NOES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth

Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, rh Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carter, Andy
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, Sir James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Graham, Richard
 Gray, James
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, rh James
 Henry, Darren
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus

Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kniveton, Kate
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Karl
 McVey, rh Esther
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 O'Brien, Neil
 Oppard, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warman, Matt (*Proxy vote
cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
Tellers for the Noes:
Steve Double and
Robert Largin

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 171

INFORMATION ORDERS: MONEY LAUNDERING

Amendments made: 44, page 152, leave out lines 20 to 29 and insert—

- “(a) a request has been made by a foreign FIU to the National Crime Agency for the provision of the information required to be given under the order,
 - (b) the National Crime Agency has reasonable grounds to believe that the information would assist the foreign FIU to conduct—
 - (i) operational analysis of information that is relevant to money laundering or suspected money laundering, or
 - (ii) strategic analysis identifying trends or patterns in the conduct of money laundering, or systematic deficiencies or vulnerabilities which have been, are being or are likely to be, exploited for the purposes of money laundering,
- and that the information is likely to be of substantial value to the foreign FIU in carrying out such analysis,
- (ba) the provision of the information by the National Crime Agency to the foreign FIU would be for the purposes of the criminal intelligence function of the National Crime Agency, so far as it relates to money laundering.”.

This amendment modifies the conditions that have to be met before an information order can be granted by a court to provide information to the National Crime Agency in a case where a request for the information has been made by a foreign financial intelligence unit.

Amendment 45, page 152, leave out lines 32 to 34.—(Tom Tugendhat.)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 44.

Clause 172

INFORMATION ORDERS: TERRORIST FINANCING

Amendments made: 46, page 155, leave out lines 29 to 38 and insert—

- “(a) a request has been made by a foreign FIU to the National Crime Agency for the provision of the information required to be given under the order,
 - (b) the National Crime Agency has reasonable grounds to believe that the information would assist the foreign FIU to conduct—
 - (i) operational analysis of information that is relevant to terrorist financing or suspected terrorist financing, or
 - (ii) strategic analysis identifying trends or patterns in the conduct of terrorist financing, or systematic deficiencies or vulnerabilities which have been, are being or are likely to be, exploited for the purposes of terrorist financing,
- and that the information is likely to be of substantial value to the foreign FIU in carrying out such analysis,
- (ba) the provision of the information by the National Crime Agency to the foreign FIU would be for the purposes of the criminal intelligence function of the National Crime Agency, so far as it relates to terrorist financing.”.

This amendment modifies the conditions that have to be met before an information order can be granted by a court to provide information to the National Crime Agency in a case where a request for the information has been made by a foreign financial intelligence unit.

Amendment 47, page 155, leave out lines 41 to 43.—(Tom Tugendhat.)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 46.

Clause 175INDIRECT DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION:
RESTRICTIONS ON CIVIL LIABILITY

Amendments made: 48, page 160, line 12, leave out “1(1)(l) or” and insert “1(1)(j) to”.

The amendment extends the categories of business in the regulated sector in relation to which clause 175 applies, to include business in the audit, insolvency and tax sectors.

Amendment 49, page 160, line 13, leave out “accountancy” and insert

“audit, insolvency, accountancy, tax”.—(Tom Tugendhat.)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 48.

Clause 188

COMMENCEMENT

Amendments made: 50, page 169, line 4, at end insert—

“(1A) Section (Reports on the implementation and operation of Parts 1 to 3) comes into force at the end of the period of 2 months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.”

This amendment provides for NC15 to come into force 2 months after royal assent.

Amendment 57, page 169, line 7, at end insert—

“(2A) The following come into force on the day on which this Act is passed—

- (a) paragraph 1 of Schedule 7 so far as it inserts section 303Z25 into the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, and
- (b) section 167 so far as it relates to that paragraph.”

This amendment provides for inserted section 303Z25 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (requirement to prepare codes of practice in relation to powers to search for cryptoasset-related items) to come into force on the day on which this Act is passed.

Amendment 51, page 169, line 8, after “subsection” insert “(1A) or”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 50.

Amendment 58, page 169, line 8, after “(2)” insert “or (2A)”.—(Tom Tugendhat.)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 57.

Schedule 6

CRYPTOASSETS: CONFISCATION ORDERS

Amendments made: 59, page 201, line 39, leave out “sheriff” and insert “relevant court”.

This amendment and Amendments 60 and 61 amend inserted section 131ZB of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (realisation of confiscated cryptoassets) to provide that (as well as the sheriff) the High Court of Justiciary and the Sheriff Appeal Court may make an order under that section requiring confiscated cryptoassets to be realised.

Amendment 60, page 202, line 11, leave out “sheriff of the sheriff’s” and insert “relevant court of its”.

See Amendment 59.

Amendment 61, page 202, line 19, at end insert—

“(7) In this section ‘relevant court’ means—

- (a) the court which makes the confiscation order, or
- (b) the sheriff court responsible for enforcing the confiscation order under section 211 of the Procedure Act as applied by section 118(1).”

See Amendment 59.

Amendment 62, page 203, line 24, leave out “sheriff” and insert “relevant court”.

This amendment and Amendments 63, 64, 65 and 66 amend inserted section 131AA of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (destruction of seized cryptoassets) to provide that (as well as the sheriff) the High Court of Justiciary and the Sheriff Appeal Court may make an order under that section requiring seized cryptoassets to be destroyed.

Amendment 63, page 203, line 41, leave out “sheriff of the sheriff’s” and insert “relevant court of its”.

See Amendment 62.

Amendment 64, page 203, line 43, leave out “sheriff’s” and insert “relevant court’s”.

See Amendment 62.

Amendment 65, page 204, line 3, leave out “sheriff” and insert “relevant court”.

See Amendment 62.

Amendment 66, page 204, line 12, at end insert—

“(8) In this section ‘relevant court’ means—

- (a) the court which makes the confiscation order mentioned in subsection (2)(a), or
- (b) the sheriff court responsible for enforcing that confiscation order under section 211 of the Procedure Act as applied by section 118(1).”

See Amendment 62.

Amendment 67, page 204, line 14, leave out “131ZB(3), 131A(3) or 131AA(2)” and insert “131A(3)”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 68.

Amendment 68, page 204, line 14, at end insert—

“(1A) After subsection (1) insert—

- “(2A) If the relevant court decides not to make an order under section 131ZB(3) or 131AA(2), the prosecutor may appeal to the Court of Session.”

This amendment amends section 131C of the *Proceeds of Crime Act 2002* (appeals under sections 131A and 131B) to make provision for prosecutors to appeal to the Court of Session against a decision of the relevant court not to make an order under section 131ZB or 131AA of that Act.

Amendment 69, page 204, line 15, leave out subparagraph (3) and insert—

“(3) For subsection (2) substitute—

“(2) If—

- (a) a sheriff makes an order under section 131A(3), or
- (b) the relevant court makes an order under section 131ZB(3) or 131AA(2),

a person affected by the order may appeal to the Court of Session.”

This amendment amends section 131C of the *Proceeds of Crime Act 2002* (appeals under sections 131A and 131B) to make provision for a person affected by an order made under section 131A, 131ZB or 131AA of that Act to appeal to the Court of Session.

Amendment 70, page 204, line 17, at end insert—

“(4A) After subsection (7) insert—

“(8) In this section “relevant court”—

- (a) in relation to a decision or order made under section 131ZB, has the same meaning as in that section, and
- (b) in relation to a decision or order made under section 131AA, has the same meaning as in that section.”

This amendment is consequential on Amendments 68 and 69.

Amendment 71, page 204, line 32, leave out “the sheriff” and insert “a court”.—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 62.

Schedule 7

CRYPTOASSETS: CIVIL RECOVERY

Amendments made: 72, page 218, line 25, at end insert—

“(2) A requirement in section 303G(2), 303H(2) or 303I(2), as applied by subsection (1), to carry out a relevant action may be satisfied by the carrying out of that action before this section comes into force.

(3) In subsection (2) ‘relevant action’ means any of the following—

- (a) publishing a draft code of practice;
- (b) considering any representations made about the draft;
- (c) modifying the draft in light of any such representations.

(4) The requirement in section 303G(3), as applied by subsection (1), to consult the Attorney General may be satisfied by consultation carried out before this section comes into force.”

This amendment amends inserted section 303Z25 of the *Proceeds of Crime Act 2002* (cryptoassets: codes of practice) to provide that certain preliminary steps in relation to the making of a code of practice under that section (for example, consulting on a draft code of practice) may be carried out before that section comes into force.

Amendment 73, page 220, line 36, at end insert—

- “(c) by the Scottish Ministers in connection with their functions under this Part, to an authority exercising equivalent functions in a foreign country, or
- (d) by a person under section 375A or 408A (evidence overseas).”

This amendment and Amendments 74, 75, 79 and 80 provide that a “request for assistance” in inserted Chapters 3C to 3F of Part 5 of the *Proceeds of Crime Act 2002* (cryptoassets: civil recovery) includes a request made by the Scottish Ministers to an authority exercising equivalent functions in a foreign country or a request made under section 375A or 408A of that Act.

Amendment 74, page 222, line 45, at end insert—

- “(c) by the Scottish Ministers in connection with their functions under this Part, to an authority exercising equivalent functions in a foreign country, or
- (d) by a person under section 375A or 408A (evidence overseas).”

See Amendment 73.

Amendment 75, page 227, line 17, at end insert—

- “(c) by the Scottish Ministers in connection with their functions under this Part, to an authority exercising equivalent functions in a foreign country, or
- (d) by a person under section 375A or 408A (evidence overseas).”

See Amendment 73.

Amendment 76, page 229, line 6, leave out from “detained” to “or” in line 7 and insert “under Chapter 3C”.

This amendment provides that cryptoassets detained under any provision of Chapter 3C of Part 5 of the *Proceeds of Crime Act 2002* (forfeiture of cryptoassets) (including under section 303Z31 of that Act) are subject to forfeiture under section 303Z41 of that Act.

Amendment 77, page 230, line 20, leave out from “detained” to end of line 21 and insert “under Chapter 3C”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 76.

Amendment 78, page 230, line 22, leave out

“in pursuance of the order”

and insert “under Chapter 3C”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 76.

Amendment 79, page 246, line 18, at end insert—

- “(c) by the Scottish Ministers in connection with their functions under this Part, to an authority exercising equivalent functions in a foreign country, or
- (d) by a person under section 375A or 408A (evidence overseas).”

See Amendment 73.

Amendment 80, page 247, line 18, at end insert—

- “(c) by the Scottish Ministers in connection with their functions under this Part, to an authority exercising equivalent functions in a foreign country, or
- (d) by a person under section 375A or 408A (evidence overseas).”

See Amendment 73.

Amendment 81, page 254, line 41, after “303Z30” insert “, 303Z31”.

This amendment and Amendments 82, 83, 84, 85 and 86 provide that where cryptoassets are detained under section 303Z31 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (seizure of cryptoassets) or paragraph 10Z7AF of Schedule 1 to the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 (seizure of terrorist cryptoassets) and are subject to an application for forfeiture, those cryptoassets are not “free property” for the purposes of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.

Amendment 82, page 255, line 2, after “10Z7AE” insert “, 10Z7AF”.

See Amendment 81.

Amendment 83, page 255, line 26, after “303Z30” insert “, 303Z31”.

See Amendment 81.

Amendment 84, page 255, line 32, after “10Z7AE” insert “, 10Z7AF”.

See Amendment 81.

Amendment 85, page 256, line 8, after “303Z30” insert “, 303Z31”.

See Amendment 81.

Amendment 86, page 256, line 14, after “10Z7AE” insert “, 10Z7AF”.

See Amendment 81.

Amendment 87, page 258, line 12, at end insert—

“(5A) After section 311 insert—

‘Chapters 3C to 3F: supplementary

311A Financial investigators

- (1) This section applies where an accredited financial investigator of a particular description—
 - (a) applies for an order under section 303Z28, 303Z32, 303Z57 or 303Z58 (further detention of cryptoassets etc),
 - (b) applies for forfeiture under section 303Z41 or 303Z60 (forfeiture of cryptoassets etc), or
 - (c) brings an appeal under, or relating to, Chapter 3E or 3F (cryptoassets etc).
- (2) Any subsequent step in the application or appeal, or any further application or appeal relating to the same matter, may be taken, made or brought by a different accredited financial investigator of the same description.”

This amendment contains a consequential amendment to Part 5 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. It inserts new section 311A, which includes provision about accredited financial investigators making certain applications or appeals in relation to Chapters 3C to 3F of that Part.

Amendment 88, page 258, line 13, after “Scottish Ministers)” insert

“—

- (a) in paragraph (c), for “271(3) and (4)” substitute “271”, and
- (b) ”.

This amendment amends section 312(2) of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (performance of functions of Scottish Ministers by constables in Scotland) to provide that all functions of the Scottish Ministers within section 271 of that Act (agreements about associated and joint property) may not be performed by constables.

Amendment 89, page 258, line 16, at end insert—

- “(ra) section 303Z28(5)(b) (further detention of seized cryptoasset-related items);
- (rb) section 303Z32(5)(b) (further detention of seized cryptoassets);
- (rc) section 303Z34(4) and (5)(b)(i) (release of cryptoassets and cryptoasset-related items);”.

This amendment and Amendments 90 and 91 consequentially amend section 312(2) of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (performance of functions of Scottish Ministers by constables in Scotland) to provide that certain functions of the Scottish Ministers in inserted Chapters 3C to 3F of Part 5 of that Act may not be performed by constables.

Amendment 90, page 258, line 20, at end insert—

- “(ua) section 303Z44 (agreements about associated and joint property);
- (ub) section 303Z45(10) (associated and joint property: default of agreement);
- (uc) section 303Z46(2) (continuation of crypto wallet freezing order pending appeal);
- (ud) section 303Z47(1) (sections 303Z41 to 303Z45: appeals);”.

See Amendment 89.

Amendment 91, page 258, line 25, at end insert—

- “(y) section 303Z61(1) (appeal against decision under section 303Z60).”

See Amendment 89.

Amendment 92, page 263, line 6, at end insert—

“11A In section 453B of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (certain offences in relation to SFO officers), in subsection (5), after paragraph (g) insert—

- ‘(ga) section 303Z21 (powers to search for cryptoasset-related items);
- (gb) section 303Z26 (powers to seize cryptoasset-related items);
- (gc) section 303Z27 (powers to detain cryptoasset-related items);’.—(Tom Tugendhat.)

This amendment consequentially amends section 453B of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (certain offences in relation to SFO officers) to provide that the offences in that section apply in relation to an SFO officer who is acting in exercise of certain cryptoasset-related powers in inserted Chapter 3C of Part 5 of that Act.

Schedule 8

CRYPTOASSETS: TERRORISM

Amendments made: 93, page 267, line 19, at end insert—

- “(c) by the Scottish Ministers in connection with their functions under this Schedule, to an authority exercising equivalent functions in a foreign country, or
- (d) by a person under section 375A or 408A of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (evidence overseas).”

This amendment and Amendments 94, 95, 99 and 100 provide that a “request for assistance” in inserted Parts 4BA to 4BD of Schedule 1 to the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 (cryptoassets: terrorism) includes a request made by the Scottish Ministers to an authority exercising equivalent functions in a foreign country or a request made under section 375A or 408A of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.

Amendment 94, page 270, line 12, at end insert—

- “(c) by the Scottish Ministers in connection with their functions under this Schedule, to an authority exercising equivalent functions in a foreign country, or
- (d) by a person under section 375A or 408A of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (evidence overseas).”

See Amendment 93.

Amendment 95, page 274, line 33, at end insert—

- “(c) by the Scottish Ministers in connection with their functions under this Schedule, to an authority exercising equivalent functions in a foreign country, or
- (d) by a person under section 375A or 408A of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (evidence overseas).”

See Amendment 93.

Amendment 96, page 277, line 3, leave out from “detained” to “or” in line 4 and insert “under Part 4BA”.

This amendment provides that cryptoassets detained under any provision of Part 4BA of Schedule 1 to the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 (seizure and detention of terrorist cryptoassets) (including under paragraph 10Z7AF of that Schedule) are subject to forfeiture under paragraph 10Z7CA of that Schedule.

Amendment 97, page 278, leave out line 4 and insert “under Part 4BA”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 96.

Amendment 98, page 278, line 5, leave out “in pursuance of the order” and insert “under Part 4BA”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 96.

Amendment 99, page 295, line 20, at end insert—

- “(c) by the Scottish Ministers in connection with their functions under this Schedule, to an authority exercising equivalent functions in a foreign country, or
- (d) by a person under section 375A or 408A of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (evidence overseas).”

See Amendment 93.

Amendment 100, page 296, line 16, at end insert—

- “(c) by the Scottish Ministers in connection with their functions under this Schedule, to an authority exercising equivalent functions in a foreign country, or
- (d) by a person under section 375A or 408A of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (evidence overseas).”—(*Tom Tugendhat.*)

See Amendment 93.

Third Reading

5.52 pm

Tom Tugendhat: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I will briefly thank a few people on my behalf and on behalf of the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake). I must thank my noble friend Lord Callanan, the Minister for Business, Energy and Corporate Responsibility, who continues to do so much to support the Bill and has been a great help. I also thank the Home Office Minister, Lord Sharpe of Epsom, who is a fantastic asset to our Department.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) and my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully), who helped so much to prepare the Bill. Furthermore, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Dean Russell), who ably shepherded the Bill through its early parliamentary stages, and the Lord Commissioner of His Majesty’s Treasury, my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann), and his team for their excellent assistance, particularly when he courageously stood in and answered on behalf of the Department in a brief moment of surprise—mostly to him. I also thank the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy for their contributions.

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I thank the Minister for his positive response to the amendments tabled by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland) and others in relation to the reform of corporate criminal responsibility. That is welcome. Will he take on board

the importance of including in that the reform of the identification principle, which is a major bar to corporate prosecutions? The Justice Committee has called for that more than once in its recent reports, and it is supported by the current and previous Directors of Public Prosecutions and the current and previous Directors of the Serious Fraud Office.

Tom Tugendhat: I thank my hon. Friend the Chair of the Justice Committee. As he knows, this is an area of great interest and for further discussion, which we are indeed looking at taking forward.

I finish by saying an enormous thank you to the Bill team, who are in the Box today—Tom Ball and the rest of the clan—who have done a fantastic job on Burns night, of all times. Because it is a time for us to find that we are no longer wee and tim’rous beasties, but are instead going to look for that fair trojan of the human race, the “puddin’-race”—forgive me—I look forward very much to being freed of the Dispatch Box and skipping off to the whisky and the haggis. On that, Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Lucky Minister. I call the shadow Minister.

5.55 pm

Stephen Kinnock: Like the Minister, I am keen to thank colleagues who have done so much and made so many valued contributions both to this Bill throughout its progress and in the debate today. I would very much like to thank the Bill team for the excellent work they have done, as always supporting us through our work and on many occasions helping to shed light where there was more or less total confusion, so we really appreciate that. I also thank our own staff. My hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) and I are very fortunate to have wonderful teams supporting us—particularly colleagues such as Joe Bishop, Danny Hathaway and Joe Jervis—who have done so much in our teams to help us to get to this point.

It is worth just casting our minds back to October, when the Prime Minister stood on the steps of Downing Street and stated that he wanted a Government of “integrity, accountability and professionalism”. Well, we are almost 100 days into his tenure, so we are bound to take stock of how that is going, and I think it is fair to say that progress has been somewhat mixed. His Home Secretary has committed multiple breaches of the ministerial code, his chairman has just been exposed for tax avoidance on a massive scale and his claims—

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr Kinnock, you are going really wide of the mark on Third Reading. Please could you focus on the Bill that is having its Third Reading?

Stephen Kinnock: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was just about to make the point that the Home Secretary has talked of learning the lessons from the golden visas issue, but she still has not published the full report. Of course, we have seen many oligarchs getting those visas since the invasion of Crimea, so I would contend that that is directly relevant to the debate we are having today.

That is the key point. It is about striving for integrity, professionalism and accountability. Of course the Bill offers an outstanding opportunity to deliver the change we all want to see. As we have said on many occasions, it is a step in the right direction and we are supporting it on Third Reading, but of course it still does not go far enough on SLAPPs, golden visas, information sharing, corporate transparency, corporate criminal liability, compensating victims or, indeed, structures for enforcement.

That final point is critical. We can have all the laws we want, but if we do not enforce them—whether we are talking about economic crime or anything else—they are pointless. These were points that Bill Browder made forcefully during the evidence that he gave to our Committee and, on cryptocurrency, that the expert Aidan Larkin made in a recent meeting with me. So we need to ensure that the agencies and institutions that should be fighting the illicit finance we all want to combat are given the resources they need, and are given the political support and licence to operate they have to have if they are going to be able to deliver on what we want them to deliver.

In conclusion, the fact is that we have left the back door open and allowed our country to become a kind of fixer for the world's dictators, kleptocrats and gangsters. We cannot go around the world preaching about the rule of law and transparency until we get our own house in order. We should not have to wait for the next "Panama Papers" or the illegal invasion of another country to force us into taking action. I said at the outset of the debate that the Opposition have approached this Bill in a spirit of constructive engagement. That has not changed and it will not change. However, we have not so far seen from Ministers sufficient openness to input from Opposition Members, or even from many of their own Back Benchers, but we welcome the remarks that the Minister made in his winding-up speech. We look forward to the progress that we wish to see being made in the other place as rapidly as possible. It is not too late, there is still time, and I genuinely hope that the remaining stages of the Bill will see the gaps filled, the loopholes closed, and the opportunities seized.

6.1 pm

Alison Thewliss: I thank everybody who has contributed to the Bill. It has been a cross-party and worthwhile effort, and everybody who has been part of it has felt that. I hope the Government do their bit and take that cross-party effort in the spirit in which we meant it. We want to improve the Bill and for it to do everything it can do right now, rather than waiting for some distant point in the future when we come back and say, "We've still got these problems and this Bill, which could have addressed them, has not." We have been there before. We had the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Bill, and other Bills while I have been in this House could have addressed or fixed these problems, yet we are here again today still not fixing all the problems. Who knows when parliamentary time will allow us to pass this way again.

I thank the experts who have given so much evidence to us individually and as parliamentarians in Committee and other places. In particular I thank Helena Wood of the Royal United Services Institute, Duncan Hames of Transparency International, Bill Browder, Oliver Bullough and Graham Barrow, the expert on Companies House. He has had his own health issues but has continued to campaign on Companies House. We wish him well and a speedy recovery, and all the best with his treatment.

I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands). He came on board with this Bill and was very supportive and helpful throughout its passage, raising the issue of phoenixing, which is of concern to many of our constituents. I encourage the Government to look at how they can fix phoenixing, and ensure that our constituents and companies based in our constituencies do not fall victim to companies that seek to abuse the system in such a way. I give great thanks to the right hon. Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge) who has been such a tremendous champion for all these issues over a long period. Her expertise, her contribution, and the way that she convenes people within this place has been incredibly important for this agenda, and I cannot thank her enough for that work.

I thank the Clerks and the Bill team for all they have done to help support us throughout the passage of the Bill. Putting together all the amendments is not easy, and under pressures of time they have been incredibly helpful in putting them together for us. I also thank Mhairi Love in my own office, and Sarah Callaghan in the SNP research office. Again, they have been incredibly helpful in putting together research on all these areas, and putting up with me when I go down a big rabbit hole of all the things about economic crime that live in my head most of the time. They have been very helpful indeed over the course of things.

I want to make an announcement, Mr Deputy Speaker, before everybody departs—[*Interruption.*] I am not going to the Government Benches; the Minister is welcome over here any time. I am not sure that his constituents would expect him to be an SNP Member, but any time he feels the need that is fine. As it is Burns Night, there is haggis in the canteen, and I encourage everybody to partake and get their honest, sonsie faces over to the canteen before it goes. I am looking forward to mine. Not related in any way to the Bill, the Ayrshire Fiddlers—not that kind of fiddlers—are in Strangers Bar, and Members should go and see them because they are very good indeed. Crucially for this Bill they are playing the fiddle and they are not on the fiddle, so please go and give them your support.

I finish with some lines from our national bard:

"O, wad some power the giftie gie us

To see oursels as others see us!

It wad frae monie a blunder free us,

An' foolish notion."

I ask Ministers to reflect on how others will see the Bill and make amendments to it in the other place to make it befitting of the commitment that we all have to seeing economic crime removed.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Happy Burns Night, everyone.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

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

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Bereavement Benefits (Remedial) Order 2022, which was laid before this House on 13 October 2022, be approved.—(*Joy Morrissey.*)

[*Relevant Documents: Eighth Report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, Draft Bereavement Benefits (Remedial) Order 2022: Second Report, HC 834*]

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

**North Northamptonshire Unitary Council's Care
Provider Services Strategy**

6.5 pm

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I rise to present a petition, the lead petitioner being Mr Aran Whiting. It is a rather unusual petition in that it supports what North Northamptonshire Council is doing and does not want any change. The easiest way to explain the petition will be to read it. It states:

The humble petition of the residents of Da Vinci Court, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire,

Sheweth,

That the petitioners believe that the care needs of Da Vinci Court residents have not been adequately considered in North Northamptonshire Unitary Council's Care Provider Services Strategy and that these needs cannot be adequately met by agency staff due to a lack of continuity and stability for service users,

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House urges the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to work with North Northamptonshire Unitary Council to consider the concerns of the petitioners and ensure that measures are implemented to protect the quality of care the residents of Da Vinci Court receive.

And your petitioners, as duty bound, will ever pray, &c.

[P002790]

**Pre-payment Meter Energy Customers and
Higher Costs**

6.7 pm

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): The usual laws of commerce and capitalism are that buy first, pay later costs more and that those who can pay in

advance will get a discount. The direct opposite is true for people on prepayment meters. Nearly 67,000 people in Glasgow alone are paying more than I am for their gas and electricity, and in daily standing charges. I object to that because I and other people on higher incomes not only get to pay in arrears and have the comfort of a guaranteed supply of energy, but, somehow, get to pay less. I also object because the vast majority of people on prepayment meters are on them because they have had some financial challenges. They should be helped, not punished.

The petition states:

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to ensure that prepayment meter energy customers do not pay more than standard credit or direct debit energy customers.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[*The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,*

Declares that 4.5 million pre-payment energy customers, who are some of the most vulnerable in society and are more likely to be classed as fuel poor, pay more for their energy than standard credit or direct debit customers; notes that prepayment meter customers will pay, on average, an additional 20p per day in standing charges alone; notes that regional variations in standing charges for prepayment meter customers can see customers in the North of Scotland paying 17.82p per day more than those in London, notes the surge in forced prepayment meter installations and reports that some 3.2 million prepayment meter customers were disconnected from their supply as they ran out of credit, more in 2022 than in the last 10 years combined; recognises the perverse injustice that the poorest and most vulnerable in our society pay more for their energy, and that for many they have no choice in how they pay for their energy.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to ensure that prepayment meter energy customers do not pay more than standard credit or direct debit energy customers.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002796]

Britishvolt

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

6.8 pm

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): On a point of clarification at the outset, it is important that the media and everyone else involved recognise that the Britishvolt site is in the East Bedlington parish of my constituency of Wansbeck, contrary to most media reports.

The rise and fall of Britishvolt and its dream to build a gigafactory in Cambois, in Wansbeck, is an incredibly important story not only of how the Government have once again failed people in the north-east, but of how the wider lack of an industrial strategy, in particular regarding the automotive industry, is putting thousands of jobs at risk and making the creation of high-quality manufacturing jobs—like the ones promised by Britishvolt—nothing but a pipe dream.

Due to its proximity to the old Blyth power station and the local deep sea port, the fact that it is fully plugged into the national grid, with a potential supply of green hydroelectric power from Norway at a competitive price, and its fantastic transport links and planning permission, Cambois is the most attractive and desirable site in the country, if not in Europe, for a gigaplanet—those are not my words, but those of many industry experts.

However, the biggest asset is the people of our great region, who once again feel terribly let down by the situation that has been allowed to develop with Britishvolt.

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is a great champion for his constituency, working people and the north of England. Has he seen the reports today saying that if the north of England were a country, it would be more or less the worst in the whole OECD for investment by the public or private sector? Have we in the north not been let down enough, and particularly those in my hon. Friend's constituency, who were led up the garden path, by the looks of it, on a promise that will now not be delivered?

Ian Lavery: My hon. Friend makes a number of important points. It is correct to state that people in the north have been let down greatly as a result of this Government's policies. Many people in our constituencies have been let down greatly, and some are even saying they have been left behind.

Kate Osborne (Jarrow) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for bringing this debate to the House. Cambois is in the constituency of Wansbeck, not Blyth, as some seem to think. What we are discussing will impact not just Northumberland and Wansbeck but the wider north-east, including my constituents in Jarrow. Does my hon. Friend agree that if the Government want the people of the north-east to believe that levelling up is not just empty rhetoric, they need to deliver not just in more affluent areas, but in places such as the north-east, where we have seen very little—certainly in my constituency, and I believe the same goes for my hon. Friend's constituency.

Ian Lavery: The reality is that the development of this Britishvolt plant would have transformed lives and communities not just in the south-east of Northumberland, in places such as Blyth, Wansbeck and Bedlington,

but—my hon. Friend is right—in the likes of Jarrow and farther afield in Sunderland, North Tyneside and the entire region. It was to be the biggest investment in our region since Nissan in the '70s.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): My hon. Friend is being very generous with his time. Does he agree that despite the clear failure of the Government's UK industrial strategy, they should continue to try to attract investors to support a battery gigafactory in his constituency by establishing a localised supply chain across the north-east? That would in turn support automotive giants, such as Nissan, which he mentioned, that are already investing in electric vehicles. We know that that is vital for EU trade and the drive toward zero-emissions vehicles by 2030.

Ian Lavery: Thanks for that intervention. The supply chain is so, so important. Britishvolt suggested at the time that there would be 3,000 jobs created at the site and 5,000 jobs created in the supply chain. That would have been felt throughout the whole of our region in the north-east and probably further afield.

Links with Nissan would be brilliant. We need to take a leaf out of Nissan's book in the way it has operated in the north-east for so many years. We were hoping to see some sort of link. Nissan is looking towards an on-site gigafactory with Envision AESC, which is in progress as we speak.

Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government seem to have forgotten and neglected the area north of Teesside? This great part of our region, whether it is Tyneside, Northumberland or Wearside, always seems to be forgotten. We were forgotten when it came to a freeport, levelling up and now Britishvolt, which, as my hon. Friend says, would have created jobs across the region and given it a brighter future.

Ian Lavery: That is very, very well put. People in our region are very much aware that there has been investment in Teesside. I welcome every penny coming into the region, by the way—every single ha'penny of investment we can get—but it has to be further afield than just one particular pocket of the north-east region. As my hon. Friend says, there has been a complete lack of investment in our region and it has been left behind for decades now. That is just not acceptable any more. This is the idea that could have transformed and changed that for a lot of the people we proudly represent. People were excited by the thought they actually had the potential to get a decent job with good wages, terms and conditions.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Gentleman for bringing this issue forward. He has been really active on this issue and he was active in the Chamber last week during questions, so well done to him.

I am sure the hon. Gentleman will agree that the news of an Australian company's intention to potentially purchase Britishvolt, which I heard about today when talking to the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Jon Trickett), is truly good news. Does he agree that the Government must invest in British business, manufacturing and engineering? I see our highly skilled aerospace workers constantly fearful for their jobs and managers reluctant to expand. Further, will he join me in asking the Minister

[Jim Shannon]

for the Government to focus—they must focus—financial investment in our manufacturers throughout all of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland?

Ian Lavery: Yes, of course. I will come on to the nub of the questions the hon. Gentleman raises during my speech—I have only got through two paragraphs up till now.

The Britishvolt site has been kept alive for years. It is not just something somebody has come up with; it is to the credit of the former Labour-run council, which had the foresight to recognise the site's advantages. It insisted on maintaining the site for industrial use to create thousands of potential jobs in the future, a prophecy that Britishvolt promised to make a reality. We should remember that projects on the scale Britishvolt was proposing do not just appear from thin air. They go through decades of decision making and planning. That was largely done by the Labour group on Wansbeck Council, which made the site so attractive to potential builders over decades.

Britishvolt arrived on the scene in late 2020 and was full of promise and potential. While many of the industry professionals I spoke to, along with others, expressed scepticism about its lack of experience and long-term plans, it continued to exceed expectations and gather support. I recall the chief executive ringing me up before Christmas that year, just out of the blue. He said, "I'm the chief executive of Britishvolt"—I had not heard of it—"and we are bringing 8,000 jobs to your constituency." They were going to be well-paid, secure jobs—green industrial jobs. I promise you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I could not believe it. It was like all my Christmases had come at once. Since then, I have been heavily involved, only to be devastated by the current position.

As I say, Britishvolt arrived on the scene in late 2020. It impressed people so much that it managed to secure a £100 million grant from the Government's automotive transformation fund. To many, that seemed to legitimise the company. There were still many people—many, many people, in fact—who doubted it, but they were confounded by glowing reports from the then Business Secretary, the then Chancellor and the then Prime Minister.

At the time, the then Business Secretary, the right hon. Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng), announced:

"I'm delighted to confirm we have now provided Britishvolt with a final grant offer through the Automotive Transformation Fund. The Blyth gigafactory will turbocharge our plans to embed a globally competitive electric vehicle supply chain in the UK and it is fantastic to see how the project is progressing.

The vast site will ensure Britain can fully capture the benefits of the booming global electric vehicle market. The well-paid jobs and growth it will generate for the North East of England will be transformational and are exactly the reason we are investing to make the UK the best place in the world for automotive manufacturing."

In an interview with national media when the grant had been confirmed, he also claimed:

"It is absolutely what levelling up is all about. In fact, I can't think of a project that demonstrates levelling up better than this one."

The then Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), claimed:

"Britishvolt's plan to build a new gigafactory in Northumberland is a strong testament to the skilled workers of the North East and the UK's place at the helm of the global green industrial revolution.

Backed by government and private sector investment, this new battery factory will boost the production of electric vehicles in the UK, whilst levelling up opportunity and bringing thousands of new highly-skilled jobs to communities in our industrial heartlands."

Last summer, before his departure from office, he gave me further guarantees in this House that support for Britishvolt was in the post and that the Government remained 100% behind the project.

The then Chancellor, who is now the Prime Minister, also took the opportunity to jump on the bandwagon, boasting:

"Once complete, this factory will produce enough batteries for over 300,000 electric vehicles each year...Our #PlanForJobs is working."

So he claimed. At the time, everybody wanted a piece of Britishvolt, which was hailed as the poster boy of levelling up and as a tribute to the vision of life post Brexit held by this new-look Conservative party.

So where did it all go wrong? What actually happened? Why are we in this situation now? At what point did the Government go cold on Britishvolt, which was hailed only a year ago as the jewel in the crown of their levelling-up plans and vision for Britain? As ever, the Government will be keen to blame the cost of soaring energy bills and the knock-on effects of the illegal invasion of Ukraine, but that does not add up with the story across Europe. The website Sifted is tracking the development of 33 gigafactories across Europe, many of which are due to be up and running imminently. Germany has plans for 12 gigafactories, while the UK has plans for only three, one being the Cambois gigafactory we are discussing, which is now in great peril at best.

The underlying issue with Britishvolt is that as a start-up it had no capital to work with, and a range of issues meant it was not able to attract sufficient investment and meet the milestones that would have unlocked the Government funding that was promised—not a penny was ever received by the company, despite the benefits explained by the Prime Minister, the former Prime Minister and the former Business Secretary.

Mrs Hodgson: I do not want to interrupt my hon. Friend's flow too much, as he is making some excellent points. On the number of gigafactories we need, he mentioned plans for three. I hope the one in his constituency will be saved, but it looks as though we may lose it. We actually need eight gigafactories if we are to meet the 2030 target for zero-emission vehicles. The last thing in the world we should be doing is not saving the plant in his constituency. The Minister shakes her head, but I do not know how we will ever reach that target if we do not save such plants.

Ian Lavery: I will come on to that point later in my speech, but my hon. Friend makes a very valid and strong point.

On the issue of competitive energy sources, the UK's industrial energy pricing is far from competitive and drives investment away, while our green energy infrastructure is nowhere near able to guarantee a supply of energy via the national grid. In December 2022, the UK cost per

megawatt-hour was £580, while in Germany it was £225, in Italy £259, in France £238, and in Sweden £206. If we are ever going to reach our targets and support the automotive industry, that disparity must be addressed without any further delay.

That is just a drop in the ocean of the wider strategic issues that have been allowed to develop in the industry. We have hundreds of thousands of workers producing parts for vehicles that will not be required, with no clear plan on how those workers will transition and be reskilled in a rapidly changing industry. That is part of the wider issue of a chronic skills shortage that needs to be addressed by having the proper training available for our young people leaving schools and paying them a proper living wage to do well-paid skilled jobs. We are being rapidly overtaken by European competitors who have support from the European Commission and the member states themselves, and we are also being stymied by the strength of the US and, in particular, China, which has a near dominance in the supply of cells, cathodes and anodes, as well as the base materials for their manufacture.

CATL in Germany has received grant and loans from the state of €750 million, or 22.8% of the total build costs; Northvolt in Sweden has had €505 million, or 17.1%; and in North America General Motors has had \$2.5 billion, or 36.2%, Stellantis has had \$1 billion, or 35.7%, Tesla has had \$1.3 billion and Ford has had \$884 million—the list is nearly endless. Compare that with Britishvolt, which was promised just £100 million by the Government, and guess what percentage that was of build costs—only 2.3%. That is absolutely disgraceful. Moreover, the £100 million was heavily caveated, to the point where the company never had a penny of Government support. How can this country—how can we, as a manufacturing nation—expect to be competitive while Governments across Europe and beyond are offering real incentives for the manufacture of batteries, far greater than those offered by our Government? We have to pull our socks up. We have to get on to the pitch. We have to start playing the game, for the sake of this nation.

In the autumn, when Britishvolt was facing financial difficulties, it asked for £30 million of the £100 million grant that had been agreed by the Government. The company asked for this to be released early because it had cashflow problems, arguing that the money would help keep it afloat and attract the private investment that it needed to reach the other milestones set by the Government. The Government have repeatedly made the point that they need to act responsibly with taxpayers' money. I agree with that, and I am sure no one disagrees with it, but it seems to me that £30 million for a company that says the money will allow it to stay in business and create 8,000 jobs in a region that has been held back for so long, keeping it afloat, is a worthwhile investment. That £30 million is a mere drop in the ocean of the money lost so carelessly during the pandemic, which went into the coffers of those with close ties to senior members of the Government, but when it might be spent on benefiting held-back towns in the north-east, it is held under very tight wraps.

By this point, the Government's attitude towards the company seems to have cooled considerably since the previous January, when they were singing its praises from every rooftop they could find. The pandemic and

the Russian invasion of Ukraine have been harsh reminders of the need for national self-reliance, particularly in key strategic industries. Simply assembling the batteries in the UK is not enough; as we enter a new phase of globalisation, we must take control of our own destiny—and of battery manufacturing—if we want our car industry to survive. We still do not have a single fully functioning gigafactory, although, as was mentioned earlier, predictions suggest that we will need anywhere between eight and 10 by 2040.

All this has real consequences at an individual human level. Towns and villages across south-east Northumberland and in the north-east as a whole, including my constituency, have been held back for decades. Once thriving industrial communities, they have had their economic and social fabric swept from under them with nothing to replace it. More than a decade of brutal austerity has hollowed out our public services and civic spaces and left us battling high levels of unemployment, low pay, poverty, crime, and addiction problems. The jobs that were promised to come with the gigafactory had the potential to be the first step in changing the fortunes of our region. The income from the new well-paid local jobs would have supported thousands of families across our communities, and might well have helped to kick-start a new era of manufacturing in industrial work that could have reignited the economy in the towns and villages close by.

There was a good deal of reluctant optimism about announcements of new developments in transport and infrastructure, alongside the announcements about the factory and the possibility of money from the Government's new towns fund and levelling-up fund, but bit by bit, drip by drip, that has ebbed away. Only last week a bid from Ashington, in my constituency, for levelling-up money to transform the crumbling town centre was rejected, while Richmond, in the Prime Minister's Yorkshire constituency, received a cosy £19 million. That is pretty offensive to people in held-back communities.

Bedlington in my constituency got about £8 million to build new cycling lanes, although the bid was somewhat ironically designed with getting workers to the new Britishvolt factory in mind. Although every penny given to Bedlington is welcome, many are already questioning whether new cycle lanes are all that levelling up will amount to, given how starved the town has been, like many in my constituency, of crucial infrastructure funding for so long. The levelling-up fund has proved itself to be time-consuming, expensive, divisive and unable to meet the needs of held-back towns in the north-east. The south-east has received nearly twice as much as the north-east from the fund, and none of this touches the sides of the cuts to local councils since 2010 and the introduction of austerity.

The best use of levelling-up money for south-east Northumberland would have been getting behind the Britishvolt gigafactory. The people of Northumberland and the north-east have, sadly, once again been let down by those working far away in the halls of Whitehall and Downing Street. Three Prime Ministers in a matter of weeks and a merry-go-round of Ministers in different positions, based on nothing but blind loyalty, rather than competence and know-how, has been a disaster for any plans the Government may have had to level up my constituency and the region. As usual, we are the ones dealing with the consequences of the internal political drama unfolding in the ranks of the Conservative party.

[*Ian Lavery*]

We need long-term thinking and a proper plan for our broader industrial sector, and we need to overcome the major obstacles our automotive industry is up against, if we are to truly level up, or gauge up, our communities in the north-east, not just a few packets of money—not just the crumbs off the table. It cannot just be that who is best at submitting a bid will get the money and other areas that are sadly lacking will again get left further and further behind—my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Jon Trickett) talked about that.

This morning, the news broke in the press that Recharge Industries, an Australian-based company, had put in an offer to buy Britishvolt, which is very encouraging, as were other reports in the press this morning that 12 other companies have shown an interest. Let us hope that something can happen, because we cannot have another false dawn. We cannot have another Britishvolt, where we have a project of this magnitude, with the land, the planning and everything else in place, only for the Government to go cold and step back from assisting our regions.

A couple of issues are really interesting. The administrator, Ernst & Young, has a legal obligation to accept the highest offer. It has no legal obligation to accept what might be the best offer for the people in our communities or to say, “I will take that offer because it is going to create tens of thousands or hundreds of jobs.” It has an obligation to seek what is best for the current shareholders. We have to look at that and hope that the administrators bear in mind when making this ultimate decision that this is not only about the shareholders, many of whom will probably not live in our region, or even in this country, and are looking for as much money as possible—the people in our region count and they should not be forgotten. We have to put as much pressure as we can on the administrators.

I am going to ask the Minister a number of quick questions. We have to make sure that the Government step up to the plate on this. I have explained this and I will not repeat myself, but the Government were shouting about Britishvolt from the rooftops one minute and then they were refusing any finances to it the next moment—that is well documented. They said that one of the milestones was private investment, but the company thought that was wrong way around. Those private companies were willing to invest on the basis that the Government would support it morally and financially. If the company had UK Government support, that would hold sway. The British Government basically abdicated responsibility, and jumped off the ship like a rat. That caused investors to be extremely unhappy, and probably put them off in the short and the medium term.

We are where we are with Britishvolt at Cambois. Will the Minister commit to do whatever it takes to get behind whoever acquires the site to build a gigafactory, including offering a proper package of financial support, in line with what other states across Europe offer? I have explained the massive difference in support that European countries get from their Governments. Can the Minister outline the Government’s plans to ensure that the site in Cambois is developed as quickly as possible? There cannot be any more delays. We hope that the Government will get in intense discussions to support any successful bidder for the plant.

Would the Minister tell us why money was not forthcoming to Britishvolt when it requested the £30 million early, which it argues would have gone a long way to reach its milestones and to get the gigafactory developed? Can the Minister clarify what due diligence was done on the company when it decided to offer it a £100-million grant in the first place? Why did the Government eventually go cold on their support? Can the Minister clarify what the Government are doing to reach the target of building eight to 10 gigafactories by 2040? How do they plan to stay competitive with other companies across Europe and globally, given the strategic barriers that I have outlined?

I have spoken for quite some time, but the issue is critical for Members, individuals and families in south-east Northumberland and the wider afield constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for North Tyneside (Mary Glendon), for Hemsworth and for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson). We feel left behind. We feel that the Government have not supported us, despite the initial euphoria that this was to be the best possible opportunity to transform our area. I say to the Minister that, seriously, we need to get on to that playing field. We need to support the automotive industry. That includes electrical vehicle battery plants. We are way behind if we are to have 80 by 2040. Let’s get cracking. Let’s get the site developed in Cambois. Let’s get the Government support to the preferred bidder and make sure that the bidder wants a gigafactory, not something much less, so we can transform the economy of our great region.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Mr Ian Levy has sought permission from the mover of the motion and from the Minister to make a short contribution, and I have been informed.

6.43 pm

Ian Levy (Blyth Valley) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) for allowing me to speak briefly in his debate. I would like to make it clear that Britishvolt is in the hon. Gentleman’s constituency, but its regional office was in Blyth on the other side of the river, as is JDR Cables.

Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I accept that it was right for the Government to set milestones that had to be met in order to receive taxpayers’ money. It is regrettable that Britishvolt could not fulfil its business plan, which would have triggered a staged release of public funds, but giving a business £100 million of taxpayers’ money without conditions would have been completely indefensible, no matter how much we all want the plan to succeed. I want it to succeed, and the hon. Gentleman wants it to succeed, and I do hope that we can work together.

Since my election, I have been a big supporter of the project to build a gigafactory on the Blyth estuary, and despite the disappointing news about Britishvolt I will continue to champion this opportunity. I welcome statements from the Government in recent days that Ministers wish to ensure the best outcome for the site, and I will work closely with the local authority and potential investors to achieve this. Despite articles in the national press this week seeking to run down our area, people in Blyth and Blyth Valley are working hard and will make the most of the opportunities to work in skilled roles. The Blyth area is still a significant centre

for the renewables sector, with businesses based in Blyth, JDR Cables' huge investment in the area next to the Britishvolt site and the excellent work that the offshore catapult is doing on the estuary to support the industry with cutting-edge research and development. The north-east really is at the cutting edge of investment and innovation and the site still offers a massive opportunity to the right developer, as the hon. Gentleman says. We need to work together to do this.

At the site of the old Blyth power station, there is excellent power connectivity with the ability to hook up to the interconnector. This would allow us to draw green renewable energy from Norway. On the estuary, we have the only deep water port in Northumberland. We have easy access to the A1 and the national road networks, as well as good rail connections. Most importantly, there is a strong and willing workforce, and the schools, colleges and skills providers are all raring to get people prepared for the 3,000 jobs on the shop floor that this project will bring, along with another 5,000 jobs in the supply chain. I will work with anyone—the Government, the council, the hon. Gentleman and anyone who believes in what Blyth and the area have to offer—to attract potential investors to the site and make sure that this project goes ahead.

6.47 pm

The Minister for Industry and Investment Security (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Allow me to begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) on securing today's debate. I know that he has been very active in Parliament in raising the profile of this situation, and I could hear from the passion in his speech how concerned he is for the people in the region. I also welcome the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Ian Levy) about working with us on this. I welcome this opportunity to address a number of the issues raised, and I hope we can agree that the site provides a perfect ecosystem for a factory to be viable. I will address that shortly.

Britishvolt entering administration is regrettable and my thoughts are first and foremost with the company's employees and their families at this difficult time. The Government are completely committed to building a sustainable future for the automotive industry in the UK, and promoting our EV manufacturing capability is a central pillar of that mission. I will come on to that in a moment. We are determined to see British companies succeed in the EV industry, and as part of our efforts we offered significant support to Britishvolt through the automotive transformation fund, but the Government also have a fundamental responsibility to protect taxpayers' money and we have to ensure that our investments are not put at risk. I am sure that the hon. Members' constituents would feel even more let down if that were to happen. The funding for Britishvolt was therefore offered on the condition that key milestones were met. Those milestones were agreed after lots of conversations with officials in the Department and included private sector investment commitments. As my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley perfectly put it, offering public money without conditions would have been indefensible. Unfortunately, the company was unable to meet these conditions and, as a result, no ATF funds were paid out.

The hon. Member for Wansbeck made an important point about due diligence. Full due diligence was completed before a final grant offer letter was awarded to Britishvolt. As a result of that work, the funding was designed so that agreed milestones had to be achieved for the company to draw down any funds but, obviously, those milestones were not achieved.

Throughout the process, we always remained hopeful that Britishvolt would find a suitable investor, and we are deeply disappointed that that has not been possible, but I will move on to what really matters. The hon. Gentleman spent quite a bit of time talking about his constituency and the region, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley said, is a fantastic place. I assure the hon. Gentleman that securing battery production in the UK is a Government priority. We understand it is the foundation of a successful EV industry, and we remain committed to seeing a gigafactory developed in Blyth. Cambois is widely regarded as one of the best locations in Europe for a gigafactory, as it is a huge site with power connection and planning permission. Of course, the proud manufacturing history of Blyth Valley means it is home to the highly skilled workers that a gigafactory would need to succeed. All the ingredients are there. I am therefore certain the site will continue to attract interest from developers with big ambitions, and I look forward to working with the hon. Member for Wansbeck and my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley as any interest progresses.

We are doing all we can to ensure the best outcome for the site, and we will work closely with Northumberland County Council to achieve this. We are also working hard to support Britishvolt employees and their families. Employees will be able to access a broad range of support, including universal credit and the new jobseeker's allowance scheme.

Finally, we will continue to work to unlock the region's enormous potential. The new Northumberland railway line aims to improve journey times and reliability when it opens to passengers. A lot has been said about funding to the region, and we have provided more than £20 million from the towns fund and £11 million from the future high streets fund. The site is such a fantastic place because there is a lot going on, and there is a lot of support to help the community, arts and cinema, alongside the new Energy Central campus.

This builds on Blyth's energy success story, as it draws on its maritime history to develop the offshore industries of the future—my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley beat me to it. Today, Blyth is home to the Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult's National Renewable Energy Centre, which provides open access and independent tests and research facilities to drive the development of transformative clean technologies. The clean energy industry will be a critical part of Britain's green transition, but if we are to deliver a green transition that works for everyone, delivering growth and jobs for all in energy is only part of the picture.

The automotive industry is vital to the UK's economy, and it is at the core of communities across the country. We must ensure it succeeds in the transition to net zero if we are to deliver not only on our climate goals but on our ambition to level up our country and advance its global standing. If we get it right, we can build an industry fit for the future that delivers security, prosperity and opportunity for places such as Blyth and Wansbeck

[Ms Nusrat Ghani]

in the century to come. We will continue to champion the UK as the best place in the world to build automotives as we transition to electric vehicles.

The automotive transformation fund supports the development of an internationally competitive electric vehicle supply chain in the UK, and the Government continue to work through the ATF to unlock private investment for gigafactories, battery materials, supply chains, motors, power, electronics and fuel cell systems. We already work closely with the sector through the joint Government and industry-led Automotive Council to ensure that we can identify and seize the opportunities for growth and competitiveness as they arise.

We regularly meet the automotive companies, both new and of long standing, to discuss a range issues, including future investment. To ensure our automotive industry can thrive by leveraging investment, we are providing Government support for new plants and upgrades, as several Opposition Members mentioned. Companies continue to show confidence in the UK, announcing major investments across the country. [Interruption.] This is good news, guys. Since 2021, we have seen £1 billion from Nissan and Envision to create an EV manufacturing hub in Sunderland, a world-class eco system that will drive growth at every stage of the EV supply chain, from batteries to the finished product. We have also seen £100 million from Stellantis to support electric vehicle production at its site in Ellesmere Port, and Ford commit additional funding to Halewood for its first EV component site in Europe, bringing its total investment to £380 million. These investments show that we have a track record of success, which is why this site with the right firm can be just as successful.

I am proud that we are not just sticking to the tried and tested. If we want to continue to succeed, we have to dare to do things differently. That is why it is so important that the UK is also a world leader in automotive research and development. Through the Advanced Propulsion Centre, Government and industry have committed more than £1.2 billion to accelerate the development and commercialisation of strategically

important emerging vehicle technologies to strengthen the UK's competitive edge in an increasingly competitive world. That is a long-term strategy. The APC estimates that projects we have supported will help to create and safeguard more than 50,000 jobs, saving over 312 million tonnes of CO₂, which is the equivalent of removing the lifetime emissions of more than 12.6 million cars.

What is incredibly exciting is that we are also supporting the Faraday Battery Challenge with an overall budget of £544 million for work to establish the UK as a battery science superpower, so, as I said earlier, all the right ingredients are here. We are investing nearly £80 million through Innovate UK in driving the electric revolution, a programme to accelerate the capability and growth of the electric supply chain for power, electronics, machines and drives in the UK.

Industry recognises the depth and breadth of our innovation economy, which puts eco right at the cutting edge of automotive manufacturing. Just last week, Williams announced that it would be opening a new plant for manufacturing advanced batteries for HGVs in Kidlington. That is exactly the sort of investment that we want to see come to all regions of the UK to build on more than a century of vehicle manufacturing to deliver sustainable growth and jobs for decades to come.

We have the infrastructure and the talent. Together, we can and we will create a globally competitive electric vehicle supply chain in the UK, boosting homegrown EV battery production and levelling up across the country as we accelerate towards a greener future that works for everyone. As my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley said towards the end of his speech, this is a fantastic site. All the ingredients are in play. I cannot comment on speculation in the press, but I can confirm that we will of course take any credible options very seriously. We are very committed to the site and I can assure the hon. Member for Wansbeck that this Government are determined to make that site work for Blyth and for the whole of the United Kingdom.

Question put and agreed to.

6.57 pm

House adjourned.

Deferred Divisions

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

That the draft Environmental Targets (Biodiversity) (England) Regulations 2022, which, were laid before this House on 19 December 2022, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 302, Noes 166.

Division No. 154]

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Badenoch, rh Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Buckland, rh Sir Robert
Burghart, Alex
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chishti, Rehman
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto

Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Double, Steve
Dowden, rh Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, Sir James
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gibson, Peter
Glen, rh John
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Graham, Richard
Gray, James
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Henry, Darren
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, rh Jeremy
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kearns, Alicia
Keegan, rh Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kniveton, Kate
Kruger, Danny
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Lockhart, Carla
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Mackinlay, Craig
Macleane, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McVey, rh Esther
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw

Metcalf, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Milling, rh Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, James
Morrissey, Joy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Mundell, rh David
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Neill, Sir Robert
Nici, Lia
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, rh Chris
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, rh Victoria
Pritchard, rh Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, rh Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, rh Dominic
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Roberts, Rob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, rh Sir Alok
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Simmonds, David
Skidmore, rh Chris
Smith, rh Chloe
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, rh Mark
Stephenson, rh Andrew
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Iain

Streeter, Sir Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, rh Rishi
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
Trott, Laura
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, rh Tom
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Theresa

Walker, Sir Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Warman, Matt (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Watling, Giles
Webb, Suzanne
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
Young, Jacob

Madders, Justin
Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonald, Andy
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Nichols, Charlotte
Norris, Alex
Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena
Osborne, Kate
Owatemi, Taiwo
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillipson, Bridget
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, rh Angela
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, rh Rachel

Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Shah, Naz
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smyth, Karin
Starmar, rh Keir
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Wakeford, Christian
West, Catherine
Western, Andrew
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitley, Mick
Wilson, Munira
Winter, Beth
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Blake, Olivia
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Sir Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, rh Yvette
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Davey, rh Ed
Davies-Jones, Alex
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dixon, Samantha
Dodds, Anneliese
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, Maria
Efford, Clive
Elmore, Chris

Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Farry, Stephen
Fletcher, Colleen
Foord, Richard
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Furniss, Gill
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glindon, Mary
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Dame Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
Hanna, Claire
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lightwood, Simon
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly

Question accordingly agreed to.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

That the draft Environmental Targets (Woodland and Trees Outside Woodland) (England) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 20 December 2022, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 302, Noes 166.

Division No. 155]

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Badenoch, rh Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter

Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Buckland, rh Sir Robert
Burghart, Alex
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chishti, Rehman
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon

Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, Sir James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Graham, Richard
 Gray, James
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Henry, Darren
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kniveton, Kate
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lockhart, Carla
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McVey, rh Esther
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen

Millar, Robin
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warman, Matt (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wigg, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blake, Olivia
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Sir Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair

Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Foord, Richard
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly

Madders, Justin
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osborne, Kate
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, rh Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shah, Naz
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Wakeford, Christian
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitley, Mick
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

AGRICULTURE

That the draft Environmental Targets (Water) (England) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 19 December 2022, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 300, Noes 170.

Division No. 156]

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Badenoch, rh Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carter, Andy
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire

Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, Sir James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Graham, Richard
 Gray, James
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca

Question accordingly agreed to.

Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Henry, Darren
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kniveton, Kate
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Largan, Robert
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lockhart, Carla
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien

Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond

Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin

Warman, Matt (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blake, Olivia
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Sir Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill

Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Foord, Richard
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Lake, Ben
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 Madders, Justin
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 McCabe, Steve

McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McMorrin, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osborne, Kate
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, rh Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt

Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Wakeford, Christian
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitley, Mick
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, Sir James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Graham, Richard
 Gray, James
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca

Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Henry, Darren
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kniveton, Kate
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lockhart, Carla
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan

Question accordingly agreed to.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

That the draft Environmental Targets (Fine Particulate Matter) (England) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 19 December 2022, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 301, Noes 170.

Division No. 157]

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Badenoch, rh Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carter, Andy
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan

Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David

Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warman, Matt (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blake, Olivia

Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Sir Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette

Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Foord, Richard
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Lake, Ben
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 Madders, Justin
 Malhotra, Seema

Maskell, Rachael
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osborne, Kate
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, rh Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Slaughtier, Andy
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Wakeford, Christian
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitley, Mick
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Question accordingly agreed to.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

That the draft Environmental Targets (Residual Waste) (England) Regulations 2022, which were laid before this House on 19 December 2022, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 301, Noes 170.

Division No. 158]**AYES**

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Badenoch, rh Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Buckland, rh Sir Robert
Burghart, Alex
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chishti, Rehman
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire

Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Double, Steve
Dowden, rh Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, Sir James
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Garnier, Mark
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gibson, Peter
Glen, rh John
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Graham, Richard
Gray, James
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca

Harrison, Trudy
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Henry, Darren
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Holmes, Paul
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, rh Jeremy
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkinson, Mark
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kearns, Alicia
Keegan, rh Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kniveton, Kate
Kruger, Danny
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Lockhart, Carla
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Mackinlay, Craig
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
Mercer, rh Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Milling, rh Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, James
Morrisey, Joy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Mundell, rh David
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Neill, Sir Robert
Nici, Lia
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, rh Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, rh Chris
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, rh Victoria
Pritchard, rh Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, rh Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, rh Dominic
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Roberts, Rob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, rh Sir Alok
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Simmonds, David
Skidmore, rh Chris
Smith, rh Chloe
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, rh Mark
Stephenson, rh Andrew
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Iain
Streeter, Sir Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, rh Rishi
Sunderland, James

Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin

Warman, Matt (*Proxy vote
 cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob

Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Lake, Ben
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs
 Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 Madders, Justin
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex

Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osborne, Kate
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, rh Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thomas-Symonds, rh
 Nick
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Wakeford, Christian
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitley, Mick
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy
 vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Blake, Olivia
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Sir Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cummins, Judith

Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dixon, Samantha
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Foord, Richard
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
 Hanna, Claire

Question accordingly agreed to.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 25 January 2023

[ESTHER McVEY *in the Chair*]

Public Procurement Processes

9.30 am

Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered reform of public procurement processes.

It is a great privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McVey, and I am grateful to Members for participating in this important debate.

The House is considering the Procurement Bill, and I stress that I and my party fully appreciate the need for legislation on the issue. That is why Labour did not oppose the passage of the Government's Bill on Second Reading. Indeed, I had entertained the hope that the sentiment expressed in the Green Paper that preceded the Bill that social value

"is critical to ensuring the social, economic and environmental benefits are delivered"

would find a place in the Bill itself.

I do not believe that addressing the needs of our communities across the country by embedding a requirement for a measure of social value to be integral to every contract awarded is either unreasonable or beyond our powers. After all, we are talking about public contracts that account for £1 in every £3 of taxpayers' money spent, totalling £300 billion of public funds every year. That spending should bring direct benefits to the people of this country, not primarily to the corporations that win most contracts, and still less to those in tax havens who utilise loopholes in the law to siphon taxpayers' money into offshore accounts. However, the Bill does not match the scale or scope of reform to public procurement procedures required to ensure that it addresses the needs of the British people following the UK's exit from the EU. Nor does it provide guarantees that the danger of corruption will be permanently removed from the process of awarding contracts.

My objective in today's debate is to highlight the Bill's shortcomings and to propose ways in which we could achieve a change in legislation that resulted in a public procurement legislative framework that could radically improve our public services, boost our local economies and deliver real benefits and hope for the future to the people of so many of our left-behind towns, such as Birkenhead, the constituency I am privileged to represent. Moreover, through root-and-branch reform of the process, we could ensure that the strides we need to take towards our net zero target were quicker and longer.

Let me begin with an issue close to my heart. The Mersey ferries are an iconic and world-famous symbol of Merseyside. After years of transporting tourists and commuters alike across the river, they need renewing. The Mayor of the Liverpool city region, Steve Rotherham, won a grant for one to be replaced and the other refurbished. That is to be warmly welcomed, and I am as grateful as Steve was for the opportunity to retain

and refresh such an important and historic transport system, but what happened next goes to the heart of the public procurement process. Unfortunately, it is not addressed by the Bill.

Birkenhead is a shipbuilding town and home to the world-famous Cammell Laird shipyard. In any rational world, it would make perfect sense to build and refurbish the ferries in the shipyard that sits on the river they will be sailing on. Sadly, neither the existing procurement rules nor those proposed in the Bill provide us with the means to ensure that such a rational decision is the one that gets made. The reason for that is simple: there is no provision for vital issues such as the impact on social value, the local economy and the supply chain to be taken into account in the awarding of contracts. Quite the reverse: under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, the primary consideration in accepting a bid has to be

"getting the right supplier and best tender in accordance with sound commercial practice."

That so-called sound commercial practice tied the hands of the Mayor of the Liverpool city region regarding the tendering process for the Mersey ferries. The Mayor, the trade unions, Cammell Laird and I, as the local MP, worked hard to find solutions, and eventually a joint venture was agreed between a Dutch shipbuilding firm and Cammell Laird, but under the existing rules the allocation of the work—the amount of work that could be awarded to each site—could not be agreed or decided by the Mayor, despite him being the contracting authority.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): I am glad the hon. Gentleman is making that point about participation. The Senedd in Cardiff is introducing a Welsh procurement policy under the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Bill, which is part of the agenda to involve trade unions and others when delivering public projects with certain objectives. I think he shares that aim, but does he share my concern that the Government's recent attacks on trade unions and the right to strike could undermine that approach of introducing a broader range of people into the process of public procurement?

Mick Whitley: Public procurement is for all, not just the Government or privateers. This is all about social value.

The fact that a vital local employer in Birkenhead, a deprived constituency, was at the mercy of a Dutch company is a very good reason why the public procurement process needs to be reformed. Social value is not an empty phrase. Cammell Laird is the largest employer in my constituency. Birkenhead has an above-average number of benefit claimants, who struggle to survive, so work flowing into Cammell Laird is vital to turn despair and poverty into hope and prosperity, yet the opportunity to create such work was hindered by the legal restrictions surrounding the existing procurement process. That problem is not addressed by the Procurement Bill, because it excludes social value—a key measure of the overall value of any contract.

Value for money has come to mean the cheapest bid, not the best bid. As a result, Cammell Laird and the workers in my constituency suffered a blow. The bulk of the work of the ferries contracts goes through a Dutch company, which I have been told will be keeping its costs low and its profits high by outsourcing work on

[Mick Whitley]

Mersey Ferries to Romania. That is a glaring example of how public money has not served the public good. I am pleased for the workers of Belfast and Devon that Harland & Wolff and BMT were included in a winning Team Resolute bid, but there is no guarantee of the amount of work they will get as a result of the contract.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): On that point, is the hon. Gentleman concerned about the climate change impact—the carbon impact—of getting stuff and people from further away, the social issues that that causes, and the effect on the people who live locally?

Mick Whitley: The hon. Lady makes a good point, which I will cover a bit later.

Team Resolute is led by a Spanish ship company called Navantia, which is guaranteed to get at least 40% of the work, worth about £640 million. Ministers have confirmed that there is no limit on the jobs it can create in Spain. As for Navantia being part of a UK consortium, it is true that the bid includes Navantia UK, but here's the rub: Navantia UK was created only in May last year as a subsidiary of the Spanish firm. It has no trading history, and its two directors live in Spain.

At the very heart of the problem lies the fact that a social value calculation is not included in the public procurement process. My call on the Government is simple: make it a compulsory component—make its inclusion in the consideration of all bids compulsory.

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend aware that in the other House, Members expressed concern that the Procurement Bill falls short of the Green Paper, in that there is no exact definition of key procurement principles, there are no specific requirements on climate objectives and, as he just said, there is no real emphasis on social value elements?

Mick Whitley: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention; I am just about to cover that point.

Only by including a social value calculation can we ensure that every contract is transparent, and that its impact on local communities, job creation, the standard of jobs and the local economy is taken into account and plays a key part in shaping the final decision. Its absence from the Bill is even more surprising given the noise the Cabinet Office made in response to the consultation on the original Green Paper, "Transforming Public Procurement". The Cabinet Office wrote last December that social value

"can play a big role in contributing to the Government's levelling-up goals."

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Social value is not restricted to these shores. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that China has a very prescriptive regime, particularly in relation to people in Xinjiang province. In this country, Hikvision produces CCTV equipment for councils. Does he agree that the Government need to be much more careful about allowing such companies into the UK market?

Mick Whitley: Yes, I do agree with the right hon. Gentleman.

In December 2020, the Cabinet Office published a social value model that said there should be a requirement on Government Departments to evaluate social value when awarding contracts, and not, as previously, just to consider it. Yet when it came to publishing the Procurement Bill, there were no explicit references to social value, so Labour MPs and peers have raised it as something that should be integral to the Bill and the public procurement process.

Another problem with the Procurement Bill as it stands is that it contains no provisions to ensure that bad employers are prevented from winning contracts. Far too many bad employers exist and far too many of them profit from public procurement contracts. A decent Procurement Bill can address that with construction projects nationally and by legislating to tie local government contracts to a clear and fair employment charter of the kind that already exists in the Liverpool city region.

Contracting authorities should be obliged to build into every contract that involves even a penny of public money a cast-iron guarantee that fair employment practices and the right to trade union recognition will be respected. There are other aspects of public procurement, such as strict conditions regarding the need to meet our climate targets and helping to regenerate our country through a green industrial revolution, but I wish to finish on a very important principle that must be embedded into the reform of public procurement: a watertight mechanism to put an end to cronyism.

The Bill hands more powers to Ministers without any meaningful safeguards to ensure that decisions will not be determined by favouritism at best and cronyism at worst. This is not an abstract issue: it is, sadly, a real problem that has led to major scandals. While the country was rocked by the curse of covid, a VIP lane was opened to enrich friends of Conservative Ministers and donors to their party coffers. Taxpayers' money was doled out without any proper scrutiny. As a result, orders of personal protective equipment were handed out to companies that had no track record of producing or providing medical equipment. More than half the £1.7 billion paid by the Government to politically connected VIP companies to supply PPE in the pandemic was spent on equipment that has not been used, according to new figures.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): The hon. Member is making a really important speech. He talked about NHS procurement, and social value must surely include saving lives. I chair the all-party parliamentary group for radiotherapy and last week we met oncologists, radiotherapists and cancer-centre managers. They say that one reason why we are not saving as many cancer patients' lives as equivalent countries around the world is that we do not have a centralised procurement system for linear accelerators. As a result, we are 120 machines down on where we should be, and hundreds of machines are more than 10 years old. Does he agree that the Minister ought to consider central procurement, so that every part of the country has the up-to-date machinery to save lives through radiotherapy?

Mick Whitley: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. The Government must be aware that the supply chains are too long. Instead of offshoring, they need to inshore.

Public money has been wasted on an industrial scale, and the ability of Ministers to throw taxpayers' money away is now being codified in the Procurement Bill. Conservative peers voted down an amendment to ban the use of VIP lanes in the awarding of contracts. Together, my Labour colleagues and I will do our level best to change that and get the VIP lanes closed for good. The High Court has agreed with us and ruled the VIP lanes illegal.

Peter Dowd: I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend in mid flow. He has dealt with some specifics, but one of my concerns is that there does not appear to be any real assessment of how the measures in the Procurement Bill will fulfil its principles. For example, the Government want to launch new measures to promote jobs and new skills, but how many, and what sort of skills? They want to encourage economic prosperity and growth—God knows, we need it—but there is no indication of how. They want to tackle climate change and level up, but there are no indicators and no metrics at all to assess that. Does he agree that we need not just words but facts and assessment to back this up?

Mick Whitley: Yes, and the Minister should address that question in his response.

In summary, we cannot continue with a system under which one in six procurement contracts over a five-year period was found by the Fair Tax Foundation to have been awarded to companies with connections to tax havens. We cannot continue with VIP lanes. We need a system that is accountable and transparent and made watertight against cronyism; that places social value, local economies and fair employment practices at its heart; that enables the Government to recoup money from those who fail to deliver; that gives real opportunity to small, medium and social enterprises to win; and that recognises that outsourcing has been a complete failure and the time for a return to insourcing is overdue. Without extensive amendment, the Procurement Bill does none of those things.

Esther McVey (in the Chair): I remind Members that they should bob if they wish to be called to speak. We will go to the Front Benchers no later than 10.33 am, mindful of the fact that Mick Whitley will need time to wind up the debate.

9.45 am

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab): I am pleased to speak under your chairpersonship, Ms McVey.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley), who has made a great contribution to the debate. I agree with him that the procurement of services and goods during the pandemic was a disgrace. It is hard to avoid the word “racketeering” when we consider what happened. There was a time when suppliers would meet on the golf course—perhaps at the 19th hole, as they used to say—to rig the prices for providing services to local councils, and there was debate about whether that took place in freemasons' lodges and elsewhere; now, it seems that they just pick up the phone to a Tory Minister or MP and it gives them access to the VIP lane.

One pound in every £3 of public spending goes on procurement, and possibly more. It is around £300 billion, which is an astonishing amount of money. The OECD,

the European Commission and the United Nations have all said that procurement carries the biggest risk of corruption or fraud in modern states. Of the £12 billion that was spent on PPE, £4 billion was spent on contracts that failed to meet the NHS standards—a third was spent on supplies that were not fit for purpose. Some £10.5 billion-worth of contracts was awarded without any fair or open competition in a seven-month period at the height of the pandemic. We understand that there was a national crisis and huge pressure on the NHS, but notwithstanding that, something went badly wrong; everybody must agree with that.

Peter Dowd: It is interesting that a Government publication said:

“Value to the taxpayer should lie at the heart of our procurement decisions.”

Does my hon. Friend believe that there was value for the taxpayer in that particular process?

Jon Trickett: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to ask that question. No convincing answer has been provided as to whether value for money was achieved. In fact, it is as plain as the nose on your face that there was no value for money, and I will come to that in a second.

In recent decades, there has been a presumption in favour of outsourcing. That was never the case before. Britain used to be proud of its public service and of the high standards of ethics in the civil service and in politics. It is hard to share that pride these days. The presumption in favour of outsourcing contracts and obtaining services from the private sector has gone through the leadership of all the political parties, and it is time it stopped.

There are seven separate reasons why one should be cautious about that presumption. I hasten to say, though, that there will always be a case for some procurement from the private sector—for instance, police motorbikes will not be nationalised in the immediate future, so one can see that there is a case there—but the presumption should end. Let me briefly refer to the seven issues that it is important to consider.

First, the Government Procurement Service is not as professional as it needs to be. It is possible to get a university degree these days in good procurement practice. That is a necessity to ensure value for money for every penny spent, but the service is under-resourced and not as professional as it needs to be. That is not to criticise the civil servants who do a difficult job in difficult circumstances, but they are in danger of being flooded by the provision of contracts.

I worked in the private sector, as a plumber in the building industry. We were monitored by the main developers to make sure that we provided value for money. Quite often, I confess, we would see whether we could get extras built in on top of the money in the original contract. It was for the quantity surveyors who worked for the developers and builders to make sure that we did not get away with anything. Can we honestly say that every single line in every contract is monitored in the same way as in the private sector? I do not think we can. The reason is because staff are under-resourced, and we are under-resourced because we are outsourcing as an ideological decision rather than anything else.

[Jon Trickett]

Here is my second point. More often than not, there is no public comparator. When I was the leader of Leeds City Council, I would ensure that if something was going out to the private sector, there would be a public sector bid made by the council, which would not have a slice on top for profitability. I would then see whether the private sector could compete with the public sector bid. That is one thing that might be done, but there are no public sector comparators under the present neoliberal economic settlement, which we regard with despair, to be honest. Therefore, there is no guarantee that a cartel or group of racketeers is not fixing prices between them to rip off the taxpayer. We cannot be clear about whether that is happening, although without a proper procurement service, I am sure that it is.

My third point is this. No evidence has been produced anywhere in the world that outsourcing is cheaper than insourcing. It has been looked at by the Public Accounts Committee and various bodies throughout the world. What is striking is that larger global companies are now insourcing. They were outsourcing, buying in accountancy and legal services and so on. That is stopping. Why are they insourcing? Because it is cheaper and more effective, and delivers better value for money. Yet here we are with a Government that seem hellbent on outsourcing, for ideological reasons rather than to protect the public purse.

My fourth point is that the private sector puts in prices, but the first thing it does when it wins the contract is to drive down the pay and conditions of the staff employed. Wherever one looks, that is the case. I have experience of that in my constituency. We had a service for cleaning a school a few years ago. The first thing the company did was to cut wages and try to get rid of some of the staff. The staff went on strike, which went on a long time, and the school was filthy. That contract was frankly a disgrace. We all know that that happens everywhere. We see wages falling as a share of GDP. What is the process behind that happening? There are a number of processes, but one is outsourcing, driving down wages in order to increase profits.

My fifth point is this. A service provided in the public sector is motivated by the single ethos of public service. It tries to provide a service to the public without a mind to delivering profits and dividends to shareholders. There are two contesting ethoses—if that is the correct plural—in play. One is serving and enhancing shareholder value as a private sector provider; the other is public service. Well, I know what I want for the staff who treat me, my family or my constituents. I want people who are motivated by one thing only: providing the highest possible quality service. That is what motivated people. The three women I just talked about, who were cleaners and went on strike, were treated in a really shabby way. Their greatest concern was the kids left in the school. The toilets were not being cleaned. They would talk to me regularly about their guilty consciences at being unable to provide the service. They were interested in only one thing: providing a service to those children.

Kirsty Blackman: On the point about wages, does the hon. Member share my concern that, although we have control of public sector wages, the Conservatives are not keen on negotiating fair pay settlements?

That means that public sector wages are actually being reduced and done down, compared with where they should be.

Jon Trickett: I totally agree with the hon. Member. We are seeing a fragmentation of the labour market and the driving down of people's incomes—particularly of manual workers and others—and I resent it, on behalf of those people. It is not right for the country; after all, if wages are in long-term decline, the economy itself will be in long-term decline as well.

My sixth and penultimate point is about pay and pay ratios. What happens in the public sector—although we would have to say, if we were living in a purely ethical economic environment, that certain public servants are probably paid more than they ought to be—is that pay ratios accelerate the minute a service is outsourced, to the point where we see people earning massive multiples of what the lowest paid in the same service receive. That is not congenial to providing a public-oriented service, which is what we would want to see. Pay ratios in the public sector are accountable through Parliament to the public in a way that they are not once they have been privatised. Indeed, once a service has been privatised—outsourced—it is no longer subject to all the constraints that the public sector has to operate under. Indeed, one further point to make is that if I want to understand why a public sector service in my constituency or the country is deteriorating, I can submit a freedom of information request or ask questions in Parliament. The minute that service has been privatised, we cannot do that, so it is not accountable.

My final point is about the impact on the local and national economy. If we do not control procurement in a proper way, we are unable to direct it to local providers of services in a way that we would expect to be able to do with taxpayers' money. That has an impact, too, on the local economy.

For all those reasons, this is an important debate, and I am glad that it was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead. It is beyond the legislation that is before us. We need an ideological shift; we need a presumption in favour of the public sector, not the private sector, and I hope that I have contributed in a small way to making an argument for that.

9.58 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McVey. I thank the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) for introducing the debate. I often come to support him in his debates in Westminster Hall, and I am here today to do the same, because he raises important issues and I want to add my support. It is also a pleasure to follow the contribution of the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Jon Trickett), which also was full of detailed evidence and content.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead referred to the Procurement Bill, which is currently going through Parliament. It applies to the devolved institutions, including Northern Ireland; however, we maintain our own legal framework for Northern Ireland, so that might give us a bit more input in the process as we go forward. It is no secret that I am a Brexiteer like yourself, Ms McVey, and I am proud to be a Brexiteer. I have always been positive about the opportunities provided to us by

leaving the EU, notably our chance to secure British contracts with British companies to secure jobs for our people—for my constituents and the constituents of everybody here. It is great to be here to discuss how we can encourage that through the procurement process. I particularly look forward to the Minister's response. I am fairly sure that we are on the same page. That being the case, I will ask my question only at the end of my contribution. I am keen to get the Minister's response.

It is always important that we take the correct steps for our economy in terms of where we produce our products and where we procure them from. Some say that we have made mistakes in the past—it would be unfair to say that we have not, especially throughout the pandemic—but the principle behind the Bill gives us an opportunity to change that. A classic example from Northern Ireland, which I have referred to, goes back to March 2022, when leading UK bus manufacturer, Wrightbus, announced its second international zero-emission bus deal in a fortnight, under which it will ship dozens of clean buses to Europe. That is really good news.

Wrightbus has signed a deal with the German bus operator Regionalverkehr Köln GmbH, or RVK as it is better known—that is easier for me to say than to try and speak German—to supply up to up to 60 Kite Hydroliner single-decker buses over the next two years. All of those buses will be fully built at the Wrightbus factory in Ballymena, north Antrim, supporting green jobs and the wider Northern Ireland economy. While that is a welcome step, I can remember a time—of course, my lifetime is maybe a bit more than others—when London buses were ordered from Egypt, despite the UK containing the world-renowned manufacturer Wrightbus. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley), and thank him for his energy and commitment in pursuing Wrightbus deals, not just in the United Kingdom but across the whole world. His pushing for that company as its MP has certainly paid dividends.

Thankfully, the procurement of London buses was brought home and the superior manufacturing that takes place in Ballymena is securing additional projects, but my point is that we need a legislative change to ensure that contracts within the UK are weighted, with procurement taking into account the impact on the local economy. While we have to remain competitive, every Government contract must consider our own manufacturers; we are indebted to them, and should be focusing on them, outsourcing only when there are exceptional reasons for doing so. That includes British companies that operate outside the United Kingdom.

In addition, I recall from a debate I spoke in some time ago that it had been highlighted by the House of Lords that the NHS sourced materials made by the forced labour of Christians, Tibetans, Uyghurs and Falun Gong practitioners in Xinjiang, China, and the Government took steps to deal with that. That has also become an issue in international procurement: making sure that the materials we rely on are not made or processed by those subject to human rights violations such as forced labour, child labour, unsafe working conditions or illegal wages. Those human rights violations have become increasingly apparent in the apparel sector—clothes, handbags, accessories and so on—where young children are being trafficked into child labour and forced

to produce affordable clothes. Those clothes will attract millions of people internationally, but the price—the human rights price, the physical price, the emotional price—is just too high.

Our national procurement policy statement will ultimately ask public authorities to consider benefits for the public, such as the creation of new jobs, improving diversity, and ensuring integrity and value for money. I put great stress on integrity, and I think it is important that we focus on that as well. Many think that we must procure internationally to be successful and diverse; however, I suggest that there are numerous opportunities in our own back yard that we can take advantage of. We should be focusing on those and supporting them, not to the detriment of elsewhere in the world, but certainly to the advantage of our own manufacturers.

I have mentioned the importance of defence and cyber-security procurement for the United Kingdom. Contractors such as GKN Aerospace, or Thales in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson), have the capacity to build our own products to the highest standard, and should be made aware of more procurement opportunities.

Peter Dowd: One definition of contract monitoring is the process of tracking the performance and status of contracts, to ensure that the obligations within them are being fulfilled as intended; it is not just about the purchase of a contract, but the monitoring. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that in the current climate, given the massive cuts that local government has endured over the past 13 years, it is being denuded of its ability to monitor some of those contracts, and that that issue has to be addressed as well?

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, which was succinctly put. I am sure that the Minister is taking notes, and I hope that he will reply to his request.

It is right that we oversee and ensure that local government, wherever it may be, has the same opportunity and is not precluded by financial or other restrictions. In Northern Ireland, we are fortunate to have some of the best cyber-security companies in the whole of the United Kingdom. There are some in south-east England that perhaps might be able to match them, but we have been at the fore in cyber-security, and that includes the two companies that I referred to. Thales, for instance, is at the fore in supporting the NLAWs—next generation light anti-tank weapons—being provided to Ukraine. Again, our cyber-security is excellent. Does the Minister agree that Northern Ireland must be included in the Procurement Bill? Its inclusion will bring significant benefits for the country and Northern Ireland businesses, as well as our great Union, which we are here to protect and promote.

To conclude, many would say that it is time that the Bill is put into law so that we can repeal the current EU-based procurement regulations and make our own. It is time to do that. After the UK's exit from the EU, we should have the scope to create new home-grown procedures, select suppliers and award contracts. That will also allow for the advancement of smaller businesses. My constituency has many small businesses; it has some large ones as well, but there are a larger number, percentage-wise, of smaller businesses. They are the

[Jim Shannon]

backbone of my constituency of Strangford and of the economy. I look forward to learning about the opportunities for us to do all that we can to ensure that this great nation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, progresses together in the way that it should.

10.6 am

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Thank you for chairing this meeting so admirably this morning, Ms McVey. I congratulate the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) on securing the debate. I also thank all those who have spoken for having such easy-to-pronounce constituency names. I very much appreciate that none of them is a mouthful; that has worked out very well for me this morning.

I want to talk about a number of things that we are concerned about in the Procurement Bill, and that we are concerned about more generally in how public procurement works. Public procurement is devolved in Scotland; we are able to set our own procurement rules and legislation. None the less, the Bill impacts Scotland. Also, while we are part of this place and while we are part of this United Kingdom, for however short a period of time that may be, we very much want to improve the situation and ensure the utmost levels of fairness and transparency in the public procurement regime, whether or not we continue to be involved in it.

Hywel Williams: Of course, Scotland can chart its own course on this matter. Does the hon. Lady share my surprise that the Welsh Government have consented to the UK Government's legislating on their behalf?

Kirsty Blackman: I absolutely do. It is disappointing, especially given some of the excellent things that are happening in Wales, particularly around the work of the Future Generations Commissioner and how that is embedded in what the Welsh Government do. To hand that over to Westminster seems a real dereliction of duty, and I am concerned that that is the direction that has been chosen.

The biggest concern that we have about the Procurement Bill is its significant impact on Scotland in relation to devolution and the implementation of trade deals, including the Australia and New Zealand trade deals. We agree that trade deals are reserved. Obviously, we want to be independent, and we will be signing our own trade deals then, but while they are reserved, we agree that that is what the devolution settlement looks like. However, the implementation of trade deals in Scotland touches on devolved areas. We should be able to implement the procurement rules that come out of trade deals ourselves. The Procurement Bill will allow UK Ministers to implement, through secondary legislation, procurement practices in Scotland, as well as in the rest of the UK. That should be the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Ministers, and the UK Government should put that in the Bill rather than reserving that additional power.

Peter Dowd: Does the hon. Lady agree that the Bill is taking back control to Westminster, not to the places that actually need it?

Kirsty Blackman: I absolutely agree. It is a further power grab, just like the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020. We have an agreed settlement that was put to a referendum in the first place. We have the Scotland Act 1998, which gives the Scottish Parliament its powers. This is within those powers. It is our responsibility—a responsibility that our parliamentarians in Scotland were elected to carry out—and that the UK Government are trying to take that back means that people in Scotland are not getting what they voted for. They voted for politicians in order to direct this, but their politicians are unable to do so because the UK Parliament is trying to take back control.

Turning to the issues that have been raised today, I will touch first on the EU principles that have been written into the Procurement Bill, which concern transparency, equal treatment, non-discrimination and proportionality. We agree that we should remain as closely aligned with the EU as possible in this regard, and that keeping those principles is absolutely the right thing to do.

Jon Trickett: I wonder whether the hon. Lady agrees with those learned commentators who said that EU rules actually preclude the use of procurement to achieve social objectives, and that that was an argument for Brexit rather than for remaining in the European Union.

Kirsty Blackman: I think a number of other states have done procurement in a more flexible way even though they are in the European Union. It is not necessarily the case that the way the UK did procurement prior to Brexit is the only way to do procurement within the EU, as a number of states manage to do it very differently. We all have to work within the global procurement agreement. That is part of the World Trade Organisation, which sets rules that, similarly, the EU procurement rules abide by. I am not aware that anybody has suggested that we should step outside that global procurement framework; whether or not they support Brexit, people are still keen to remain part of that.

On transparency and the comments by the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Jon Trickett) about the kind of ideological shift that is required, I agree that this is ideology. We can do procurement in a number of different ways—we can focus on external companies in the private sector, or we can reframe that and focus on the public sector. We can think about the best way to do it. On the basis that they are trying their very best to defund it, I have concerns about the current UK Government's willingness to use the public sector, which seems completely ideologically opposed to what they would be keen to achieve. However, I agree that we should go further in that direction, on the basis that we can better implement and embed fair working practices because we have much more control over the terms and conditions of people who are directly employed by local authorities or other public sector bodies and we can be more sure they are employed in a fair way.

The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) mentioned Hikvision, which is involved in the Chinese Government's detention camps and what is happening with the Uyghur Muslims through its facial recognition technology. Some 61% of UK public authorities use Hikvision cameras. That is not a small

number. In Scotland, we have committed to getting rid of Hikvision cameras and ending our work with Hikvision, and the US has blacklisted it. The UK Government still have not chosen to do that, so I would very much welcome a commitment from the Minister that they will look at Hikvision specifically and consider what actions they can take to ensure that they are not supporting a company that is committing human rights abuses. It seems to me that the Procurement Bill fails to take into account some of those abuses, despite pushes by the Lords to make that happen.

Again, climate change issues are not embedded in the Procurement Bill. It does not take into account the climate change targets in Scotland, for example. Every Government should be focused on the impact that every single thing that they do will have on the climate, and on future generations as a result of the climate change it will cause. The UK Government should be leading by example by having that thread running through everything they do, but they refuse to. There is no point in just talking about climate change; we need to make sure that we are focusing on it in every single thing that we do. The UK Government are failing to put actions in place; they are only using words.

I am aware that I am short on time, so let me briefly mention the Supplier Development Programme in Scotland, an amazing organisation that was set up to ensure that local companies are linked with public sector procurers. It works incredibly well, so I just wanted to plug it briefly. I thank the hon. Member for Birkenhead for bringing forward the debate, and I thank all those who have made contributions.

10.15 am

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms McVey. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley), who not only managed to sit through Second Reading of the Procurement Bill, but clearly came out thinking he wanted more. Who can blame him? He spoke passionately about the importance of the wider social and economic considerations. He also highlighted the need for procurement to help promote British businesses and invest in places such as his constituency.

I also thank other Members, who have spoken with a lot of knowledge on this issue. On the face of it, it can seem quite dry and clunky, but it is important, as all Members have highlighted. My hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Jon Trickett) mentioned that almost £300 billion is spent on procurement, yet the OECD has highlighted concerns about fraud or corruption in many areas. It is important that we look at which companies are getting contracts and ensure that enough procurement officers are reviewing them. How about we insource instead of outsource, and work with local councils to get those contracts? I am pleased that many local authorities, including mine in Lambeth, are looking at insourcing.

It is always a pleasure to see the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) in these debates. He spoke with a lot of passion about some of the things happening in Northern Ireland. As a former London Assembly member and chair of its transport committee, I know that Wrightbus is doing fantastic work to produce buses that are going up and down London. Last year, the

Mayor of London went to County Antrim to visit the Wrightbus depot and look at more buses coming on to London streets. That is why it is important to invest in local UK businesses that help the whole of the UK.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) highlighted the glaring omission that we are seeing from this Government. Climate change must be front and centre of everything that we do. Yesterday, my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth and I had the honour of meeting some fantastic young people who had come to see my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham East (Nadia Whittome) about the Climate Education Bill. It is so important that we teach our young people, who are so passionate about the climate emergency, yet we are seeing an omission here.

Hywel Williams: The hon. Lady will recall that I mentioned the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Bill, which is focused on achieving some socially responsible outcomes. Does she share my concern that the aims of that Bill might be in conflict with the Government's current legislation, which is—as far as I can see—much more concerned with process?

Florence Eshalomi: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that important point. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd) highlighted, key issues were raised in the other place that now seem to have disappeared from the Bill. That is one of those many areas, and I will come on to it later.

We have heard that procurement makes up around a third of public spending. If it is done right, procurement can have such a transformative impact on our whole economy. My hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead highlighted that social value should not just be an empty phrase. Social Enterprise UK found that between 2010 and 2020, the UK may have missed out on £700 billion-worth of economic, social and environmental opportunities. We are missing out on so much. That is a staggering amount of money. It is crucial that we address some of the problems in the Procurement Bill as it passes through the House.

As I mentioned on Second Reading, Labour supports the introduction of the Bill and recognises the genuine steps forward that it takes. That is why we want to work constructively with the Government to produce a Bill that is fit not just for today, but for the next Government and the Government after that. The Minister has heard my concerns about the Bill a number of times—we have sat through urgent questions and Second Reading—and we will be spending the new few weeks in Committee, which I am sure he is looking forward to, but I want to raise some of the problems that we see with it. I hope that he will think carefully before tomorrow's deadline for tabling amendments and look at how he can make genuine improvements to the Bill. I am sure that he has had the chance to look at the amendment paper and that none of our concerns are novel to him, so I hope that he will be able to provide full and frank answers to the House on the issues that I raise.

First, I have deep concerns about the workings of the excluded, excludable and debarment systems in the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth highlighted the practice of companies winning contracts and then doing down staff wages. The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) highlighted the

[*Florence Eshalomi*]

CCTV cameras that councils are sourcing from Hikvision and the fact that we should be worried about some of the companies we are seeking contracts for. Labour is clear that we do not want to see those who act improperly, who abuse their workers or who are a threat to this country being awarded public contracts.

We therefore welcome the purpose of the powers in the Bill, but we can see loopholes in the system, which must be closed while the Bill is before the House. It is concerning that references to excludable contracts seem to give the contracting authorities discretion about whether to disregard a tender. Can the Minister please explain why excludable suppliers are not automatically disregarded in the same way as excluded suppliers?

While I understand that there may be some need for flexibility on discretion grounds, there is no mechanism in the Bill to decide where that flexibility should stand. That is extremely troubling given that grounds as serious as national security can be discretionary—that is outrageous. Can the Minister assure us that companies that are considered national threats will be excluded from contracts under the Bill? Will he ensure that contracting authorities will never be able to bypass this judgment and not disregard such suppliers during the process?

A similar problem exists with the debarment list. In his letter to Baroness Neville-Rolfe on 4 August, the Minister in the other place, Lord True, wrote that

“the debarment list is intended to focus on the most serious cases of supplier misconduct, where suppliers may pose a significant risk to contracting authorities or the public. It is not the case that every supplier which meets a ground for exclusion will be considered for inclusion on the debarment list. Rather, there will be a prioritisation policy which governs how cases are selected for investigation. It is likely that only a small number of cases will be considered each year.”

However, the Bill outlines no such qualification for ascension to the debarment list. As it is currently drafted, the only firm qualifications beyond the Minister’s wishes are mandatory and discretionary grounds for exclusion. Given the merry-go-round of Ministers we have seen over the past year, does the Minister not believe that it is right to put a mechanism in the Bill to provide clarity about the scope of the debarment list?

Will the Minister confirm that the Government’s intention for the debarment list is as Lord True laid out in his letter to Baroness Neville-Rolfe? If only the most serious cases of misconduct go on the debarment list, how can it be fair that those put on the list for discretionary reasons are still treated as excludable suppliers? If the Minister believes that a supplier poses a significant risk to the public, that supplier must be disregarded automatically from the process as an excluded supplier.

I have a further concern about the 30-day payment period down the supply chain. On Second Reading, the Paymaster General said that

“we will be paying the prime contractor within the 30-day period. People in the supply chain will be aware of the contract under which they are supplying to the prime, and we expect that 30-day payment to trickle all the way down”.—[*Official Report*, 9 January 2023; Vol. 725, c. 347.]

Many small and medium-sized enterprises in all our constituencies rely on prompt payment to keep afloat; they cannot rely on expectations of a trickle-down

effect. The Minister may say that it will call into doubt the contract of the prime supplier, but how long will this take?

Jon Trickett: My hon. Friend is making a strong speech, although I wish her good luck if she is trying to persuade this ideologically driven Government to change their course. She may recall that three Prime Ministers ago—not so long ago in weeks or months, but some time ago in politics—the then Prime Minister advocated Brexit on two grounds: state aid to industry and procurement. Does my hon. Friend think the Government’s procurement policies are doing anything to level up the country socially, economically or otherwise?

Florence Eshalomi: I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting that. I think again of the example of Scotland, where procurement issues are being decided at the whim of Ministers. If anything, that is not levelling up; it is levelling down. We need a Procurement Bill that highlights and recognises small and medium-sized businesses, which often do fantastic work, ensure that their staff have good terms and conditions, and recognise trade unions. They should be given a fair chance at bidding for Government contracts paid for by public money, as my hon. Friend highlighted earlier.

Given how long colleagues on both sides of the House have to wait for responses from the Government, what steps will the Minister take to ensure that instances of late payment reported to the Government are dealt with promptly? In many cases, that could be the difference for an SME that stops it going under and having to hand redundancy notices to its staff. Does the Minister agree that putting strong enforcement down the supply chain in the Bill is the best way to guarantee that no supplier goes without the vital funds that it needs?

The Minister has heard many concerns this morning and I hope he will respond to all our pressing questions. Of course, I will be picking up many of these issues again in Committee.

10.27 am

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Alex Burghart): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Ms McVey.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mick Whitley) on securing the debate. As the Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi), has already said, it is nice to have the opportunity to debate the issues with the hon. Gentleman again. I am looking forward to the next three weeks in Committee, discussing the Procurement Bill with colleagues from all parties, and to the Report stage that will follow. It is right that we debate these issues thoroughly. The Bill is a landmark piece of legislation that the Government believe will bring real benefits to public authorities, public services and ultimately to the taxpayer. These are things to celebrate.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead’s constituents voted, like mine, to leave the European Union in 2016, and the Bill is one of the landmark pieces of legislation that enables us to take advantage of freedoms that we simply did not have when we were in the EU. The response to the public consultation on the Bill showed the strength of feeling among public authorities and suppliers for change. I am pleased to say that we have developed a

sophisticated piece of legislation that is rising up to meet the asks of us made by those who responded to the consultation.

We have about £300 billion of public procurement in this country. That represents a huge amount of taxpayers' money—public money—that we think can be spent better for people at all levels. We see a chance to reduce paperwork, streamline processes, improve opportunities for SMEs, which I know is close to the hon. Member for Birkenhead's heart and is close to mine because it is the backbone of the economy in my part of the world, and to introduce new ways of viewing procurement.

As Members will have heard me say on Second Reading, it is a shift from MEAT to MAT—from the most economically advantageous tender to the most advantageous tender. That gives public authorities a freer hand to make an assessment about whether procurement decisions will create jobs in their area, benefit the environment or create any other forms of social good that are not purely economically measured. We think this is a major step forward, and I hope he agrees.

I am afraid I cannot speak in detail about the ferry contract in the hon. Gentleman's area, but the work we are doing on the Procurement Bill is intended to make it easier for procuring authorities to make decisions that are not based purely on money. It will enable them to look at local need and things such as jobs.

Shipbuilding is covered by our World Trade Organisation commitments, so we would struggle to confine shipbuilding contracts to British-only suppliers unless we left the WTO. That would, of course, deprive British companies of the opportunity to take advantage of the procurement agreements within that framework, which are worth about £1.2 trillion. I cannot comment on the exact specifics of the hon. Gentleman's case in Merseyside, but there are limits to what we can do within the WTO.

Mick Whitley: I think it was three Prime Ministers ago when the Prime Minister came to Birkenhead and announced the 50-year plan for shipping. The Ministry of Defence awarded a contract to build fleet supply boats, and colleagues from Northern Ireland and Devon won it, but as soon as they did that there was a debate in the House about what kind of company Navantia was. It was registered in the UK earlier this year and its two directors come from Spain, and the majority of the work on the fleet supply boats will get done in Cadiz. That is public money; that is what we are talking about. We are talking about levelling up the left-behind towns, but that has been totally ignored.

Alex Burghart: If the hon. Gentleman is talking about fleet solid support ships, they are built to a British design. There is a huge amount of construction in Belfast and Appledore—the final assembly is completed in Belfast—bringing shipbuilding back to Northern Ireland. This is an enormous opportunity for levelling up and bringing jobs into exactly the sort of shipyards around the country that I am sure the hon. Gentleman wants to see benefit, so I do not quite recognise all the allegations he has made.

Peter Dowd: Will the Minister give way?

Alex Burghart: I am happy to give way to my old adversary from Bootle.

Peter Dowd: One of the issues that I am trying to tease out is that even when we were in the European Union—I know this, the Minister knows this, and so does everybody in this Chamber—those countries had an imaginative approach to public procurement, and we did not. Even under those rules, we had a less imaginative approach. Even under the provisions that the Government are bringing forward, they cannot move away from the *anal* retention and enable us to take a much more imaginative approach to procurement. What in the Bill is more imaginative and will enable us to do what we want and we were promised when we were coming out of Europe?

Alex Burghart: I blush to quote the hon. Gentleman back at him, but there is a lot less of the form of retention that he describes in this Bill than he would have found in the existing European rules. As he heard me say to the hon. Member for Birkenhead, the system is moving from MEAT to MAT. This is a broader understanding of what public authorities can choose to do when they procure goods and services, and that is a really good thing.

The hon. Members for Bootle (Peter Dowd) and for Birkenhead talked about buying British. This Bill will help, but we start from a strong position: between 2016 and 2019, 98% of contracts given out by public authorities in the UK went to British firms. In the Bill, we are making it easier for small and medium-sized enterprises, the majority of which are likely to be in the vicinity of public body procuring, to access contracts from public authorities. We are making it much more likely that there will be more jobs and more opportunities for growing businesses. That is very exciting and one of the most appealing things about the Bill. My noble Friend Baroness Neville-Rolfe wrote a good piece for *The Times* showing how we are removing barriers to engagement for SMEs in a meaningful way. She has vast experience in business and was able to shine a light on that.

Let me turn to the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Jon Trickett), who talked about insourcing and outsourcing, and the need for an ideological shift. I hope he will not mind me reminding the House that he entered the Commons in 1996 and supported one of the great outsourcing Governments—that of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. It is so interesting to see the hon. Gentleman's ideological shift since that time.

I gently remind the hon. Gentleman that public authorities absolutely have the freedom to insource if they think that is the best thing to do. The important thing is that they have the choice, and I hope he would not want to deprive local authorities and local councils of that choice. Maybe he would.

Florence Eshalomi: On that particular point, does the Minister recognise the issue highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Jon Trickett), which is that a number of our local councils and public bodies have seen their funding cut over the past 13 years? The procurement teams that would be looking at bringing contracts back in house have shrunk, and a number of councils face difficult decisions—do they fund social workers or fund procurement officers? It is not as simple as saying councils have the freedom to insource.

Alex Burghart: I hesitate to remind the hon. Lady why funding for local authorities was reduced, but it had something to do with the behaviour of the Labour

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Government up to 2010. We all remember the letter that Labour's Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), left for his Lib Dem successor.

The fact of the matter is that we have highly capable local authorities across the country that manage public contracts very well and which have worked with us in the construction of the Bill to ensure they have a legal framework that helps them make the decisions they want. I have no desire at all to talk them down. I have seen their capabilities up close, and I know that they are looking forward to taking advantage of the powers they will get from the Bill.

I would also very, very gently say this to the hon. Member for Hemsworth. I know that this is political knockabout, but the statements he made about PPE procurement could have been taken to insinuate that Ministers made the awarding decisions. That is absolutely not the case. Those decisions—

Jon Trickett: Says you.

Alex Burghart: The hon. Gentleman heckles me with a smile on his face, but the fact is that those decisions were made by highly capable and competent civil servants whose decisions have been upheld in court. It is wrong to suggest that they were in any way corrupt when they were trying to serve the country at a time of utter crisis in order to get, as every Member of the House wanted, as much PPE as possible when the NHS needed it most. I have listened on a number of occasions to Opposition Members speaking in such a way that suggests that Ministers handed out the contracts. That is not the case, and it would be much better for the public discourse if Opposition Members did not suggest to members of the public that that had been so.

Let me move on to the remarks made by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). It has been a pleasure to be able to work on the Bill with people in Northern Ireland, and the Bill is stronger as a result. We look forward to businesses of all sizes in England and Northern Ireland, and in Wales, benefiting from the new procurement legislation.

The hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams) chastised the Welsh Government for allowing Westminster to legislate for them. Me and my officials have had the most productive working with the Welsh Government and these mischaracterisations imply that this is Westminster telling Wales what to do. This has been a partnership between Westminster and Cardiff and between Westminster and Belfast. It is a wonderful example of nations working together.

Hywel Williams: The Minister will know better than I that the Welsh Government are yet to recommend that the Senedd grants consent to the Procurement Bill due to two outstanding issues. The first is the presence of concurrent, rather than concurrent-plus powers. Concurrent-plus powers mean that both legislatures give their consent. The second is the lack of commencement powers for Welsh Ministers. Will the Minister give me an update on any progress on those two points?

Alex Burghart: The hon. Gentleman will get a final answer in Committee, but I can tell him that we have had nothing but productive and courteous conversations

with our counterparts. I believe that we are going to end up in a mutually beneficial place, which is great news for people in Wales, England and Northern Ireland. The hon. Gentleman can join us in Committee if he wishes to hear the final read out on that. I look forward to seeing him there.

The hon. Member for Strangford is right: Northern Ireland must be included in these important opportunities. We are sad that our colleagues in Scotland have, unlike counterparts in Wales and Northern Ireland, not chosen to be part of the Procurement Bill. They are entitled to make that decision, but it is a shame. It adds a layer of complexity within the British Isles that need not be there, but *c'est la vie*.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) asked about trade deals and implementation. Trade deals are a reserved area. It is important that they are able to be implemented because otherwise we might find that the UK was in breach of an international agreement and that would be wrong. Yesterday, we made an amendment following discussions with the Scottish Government to narrow powers in this area and we will continue to work closely with them on implementation and, likewise, I look forward to discussing it with her in Committee; I do believe it will be her in Committee.

Kirsty Blackman: It will indeed.

Alex Burghart: Hooray.

Kirsty Blackman: I thank the Minister. I have not seen that amendment, so I will have a good look at it. I appreciate that he has taken some action.

Alex Burghart: Super. I look forward to debating that further in the weeks ahead.

The Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Vauxhall, rightly highlighted that debarment is a crucial area of the Bill. In the past few days, we have tabled new amendments on debarment, which strengthen the regime. I am not going to go into all the details now because there is ample opportunity in the days ahead, but she is right to draw attention to it. On subcontractors and 30-day payments, there are implied payment terms within the Bill. Even if it is not a subcontract, the SME can demand this and raise it. Again, we could go into further details, but we have thought through the point she raised.

In conclusion, this is a great opportunity. We have come a long way from the starting point that we found ourselves in when we were in the EU. We are starting to make British procurement rules that will benefit British taxpayers, British employees, British public authorities and British suppliers. That is a good thing for all of us.

Esther McVey (in the Chair): I call Mick Whitley to wind up.

10.44 am

Mick Whitley: Thank you, Ms McVey. I thank Members for their thoughtful and varied contributions. I let the Minister know that I will soon be joining colleagues to scrutinise the Procurement Bill in Committee. Today's discussions have given me much to reflect on.

I am particularly grateful to the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi), for the passion and clarity with which she spoke today. I have already paid tribute to Labour peers and friends in the House for their hard work in fighting to amend the Bill for the better. It is welcome to hear the shadow Minister restate our party's commitment to ensure that public money is put back into the pockets of working people and communities, such as Birkenhead, through our five-point national procurement plan.

I thank the Minister for attending and hope he recognises what has been said here today. In the short time available to us, my hon. Friends and I have attempted to highlight the real-world implications of the decisions being made in this place. I hope that the Government will seek to work constructively with colleagues from across the House in building a progressive procurement regime that helps to lay the foundations of a fairer, greener and more prosperous Britain.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered reform of public procurement processes.

10.46 am

Sitting suspended.

Cryptocurrency Regulation

10.56 am

Esther McVey (in the Chair): I will call Dr Lisa Cameron to move the motion and then call the Minister to respond. As is the convention in 30-minute debates, there will not be an opportunity for the Member in charge to wind up,.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered regulation of cryptocurrency.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship today, Ms McVey. As Chair of the crypto and digital assets all-party parliamentary group, I am delighted to be able to raise this important sector of innovation. I thank the Minister for taking the time to respond today.

This is not the first time that cryptoassets have been debated in the House of Commons. Over the last 12 months, there has rightly been increased interest in the growth of the sector from the media and from colleagues in all parties across this House and the House of Lords. I am pleased by the increased interest, particularly in the work that we have been doing to bring ourselves up to speed with the sector. We have found that millions of people in the United Kingdom already own some form of cryptocurrency, yet there has not been as much discussion about it as was needed, particularly in terms of regulation.

Regulators around the world are now racing to develop their own frameworks for crypto. Recently, the European Union developed its markets in cryptoassets regulation—MiCA—and I look forward to hearing more about that with the all-party parliamentary group in the months to come. Whether people voted for Brexit and agree with it or not, it is where we are, and the UK has an opportunity to create its own bespoke regulatory framework for cryptocurrency.

Recent events, such as the collapse of the crypto exchange FTX, have focused minds and highlighted the importance of ensuring that consumer protection is at the heart of everything that we do. My own journey into this space started when a constituent said to me, “Who do I contact in Parliament? I have been following a scam online linked with cryptocurrency.” When I looked into what was happening at that point, there was no all-party parliamentary group on the subject and I was not sure where to direct my constituent, so, leading on from constituents' concerns, we set one up. It is vital, given what has happened this year, that regulation and a framework are taken forward at pace.

The UK already has a rich legacy and strong track record as a leader in financial services and fintech, so there is huge potential here for economic growth, jobs and skills from the sector. As the mum of a 14-year-old who is choosing her subjects at school, I have been looking at reports on jobs for the future. She thought that, given our family's history in medicine and pharmacy and so on, I would encourage her to become a doctor, but I said, “Coding is the way ahead for you.” She was shocked by that. Young people are already doing a lot of this in school—it comes very naturally to younger generations.

I have researched the subject and think that the jobs of the future will be placed firmly in science, technology, engineering and maths activity, and in the finance sector,

[Dr Lisa Cameron]

too. In future, digital, health and tech will be across all sectors, and I am enthused by that. It would be good if the Minister and Cabinet colleagues identified the centres of excellence at college and university levels so that young people know where to go, and where the gaps are. That would ensure that we level up opportunities right across the United Kingdom for people who want to have a future in development and innovation in the sector.

We already have some fantastic examples of innovative companies in the UK, not just in London but in Scotland and elsewhere, creating jobs and development opportunities. In terms of international practice, I had the privilege to speak with Alex Bornyakov, Ukraine's Deputy Minister of Digital Transformation, who told me that cryptocurrency had been essential to Ukraine's ability to respond to the Russian invasion. It is right that we place consumer protection, regulation and robust regulatory frameworks at the heart of everything that we do, but we should also look to the sector's potential to solve some of the issues that countries will face and some of the difficulties across the world just now.

It has been almost a year since the Government set out their landmark vision to make the UK a global hub for crypto investment. The Minister will be aware that I have been very supportive of the Government's vision, and I am keen to work constructively with him to ensure that it becomes a reality. The Government's announcement is welcome for business, because good actors want regulation. I was not sure about that when I started looking into the sector with the all-party parliamentary group. From media and things I had read, I thought it was very much a wild west, where people did not want structure or regulatory frameworks; but there are many good actors who do want those things, and investors need regulatory frameworks to take forward their work in the sector with confidence. Business certainty supports a fair and transparent market. There must never be a race to the bottom in the UK, and I urge the Government to take forward the regulatory framework at pace, because we need to protect consumers first and foremost in all that we do. Regulatory clarity and business certainty are at the core of that work.

Over the past year members of the all-party parliamentary group have very much been educating ourselves, and I include myself in that. One has to do a lot of reading about the sector to understand acronyms and so on. We spent a lot of time even understanding that, when people spoke about fiat, they were speaking not about a type of car but about money. We have upskilled ourselves, which is a great first step. When I spoke with Members of the Swiss Parliament, they said that they had been on a similar journey; upskilling across their chambers meant that they could engage much more effectively on "what works" legislation.

Over the past year, industry has raised with me a number of barriers, which I will set out to help the Minister and support the work he is taking forward. First, significant delays are still being reported by business operators seeking registration with the Financial Conduct Authority. Will the Minister update us on progress in that area, and on the number of firms that have been granted licences in the UK since the creation of the licensing regime for crypto firms?

We have also heard real frustration about lack of communication. Some companies are not certain about what is required of them; they are being left for months on end with no response to tell them whether anything further is needed, whether their application is in process, or whether they need to take additional steps. I have met with the FCA on a few occasions and learned of their CryptoSprint event last year, which brought together industry and regulators to look at a number of areas, including how to protect consumers and markets while supporting innovation. I felt that that was a real step in the right direction, but could more be done to take this work forward?

Will the Minister update the House on the average FCA processing times for crypto registrations? I fully understand if he is unable to do so today, but it would be helpful if he wrote to me with that information. The FCA reassured me that it was employing more people to work in its department dealing with this specific sector, given the public interest in and engagement with cryptocurrency. It needs that expertise and wants to move forward at a greater pace.

It would also be helpful to know what more the FCA has planned to foster sustained and meaningful engagement with the sector. I have spoken to businesses that have such a bond with the UK—businesses that have been here and that want to set up here, and whose representatives have been to university here and feel that the UK is the place to be. Regrettably, because of the delays and lack of engagement, some have gone to Paris, while others have gone to Zug in Switzerland and elsewhere. That is a great shame if they are good actors and want to support the United Kingdom economy.

The all-party parliamentary group is undertaking an inquiry. We have heard about opportunities for the sector from businesses and regulators, and from those in overseas territories. I have noticed the importance of engagement between Government, regulators and the sector to ensure that the policy developed is practical and fit for purpose. Members of Parliament in Switzerland told us about the value of thinking about the different pillars of the sector—not just finance but research, university development and innovation hubs—and about bringing them all together with companies, regulators and Government to ensure that there are opportunities and a robust framework.

When we talk about the future of cryptocurrency regulation and what it might look like, it is imperative that everybody works together in the same direction to get it right. That has to be the case for consumer protection, which is the reason I became interested in this area in the first place and is at the core of everything that we are trying to do. At times, there has appeared to be a disconnect between the Government's vision and some of the statements made by the banking industry and so on. How is the Minister pulling that together so that everyone is moving ahead in tandem? Yes, concerns are being raised and addressed as we go, but we need to ensure that people are moving in the same direction, rather than pulling in different directions away from the vision of the UK cryptocurrency hub set out so meaningfully by the Prime Minister.

We need a proportionate approach to regulation that balances risk and ensures high levels of consumer protection, but does not unnecessarily restrict growth or innovation for our future. That should be built on a strong evidence base to ensure that sound decisions are

made. I recently heard from a number of economic crime experts at Elliptic, Chainalysis and the Royal United Services Institute; they indicated to our inquiry that crypto-related crime still accounts for quite a small percentage of overall crypto transactions, and that economic crime remains a challenge for financial services as a whole. Cryptocurrency is a part of that, but the focus is not just on that sector.

I have written to the FCA and the Bank of England to get further information. In recent statements, the incoming chair of the FCA has said that crypto platforms are “deliberately evasive”, facilitate money laundering on a large scale and create “massively untoward risk”. The Governor of the Bank of England said that cryptocurrencies are the new frontline in criminal scams and have created an

“opportunity for the downright criminal”.

Of course, these issues must be addressed, but that has to be balanced with the evidence to ensure proportionality. That is why it is even more important that Government regulators and industry come together to move things forward in a way that is meaningful and that everyone can agree on.

Another potential barrier is the recent announcements by leading banks to limit or block cryptocurrency transactions. I have written to them to tease out a little more information. Nationwide, Starling Bank, Santander and Virgin Money are among a number of banks that have announced limits and restrictions on transactions. Starling Bank has claimed that crypto exchanges are “high risk, and heavily used for criminal purposes”,

which is a real concern. Other banks, such as Revolut and Monzo, are said to be open to crypto and largely positive towards cryptocurrency transactions. Again, the divergence of views within the sector should be grounded in evidence and be addressed in a way that protects consumers and puts them at the heart of what we do.

On the timeline for the Government’s plans, I have been speaking with many members of other Parliaments and businesses that operate internationally, because this is an international issue and hopefully there will be guidance internationally that we can come together on. If we want to harness the UK’s position at the forefront of this industry, we need to move at pace while ensuring that the work we do is robust.

I reassure the Minister that the all-party parliamentary group will continue to advocate for the UK cryptocurrency hub set out in the vision, and work in conjunction with his office. We will be extremely pleased if he updates the House on timescales for the year ahead and how he sees this playing out, so that we can continue to work constructively to support everything he is doing to protect consumers, while harnessing the innovation of cryptocurrency for the future in the United Kingdom.

11.12 am

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Andrew Griffith): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms McVey. I congratulate the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) on securing this debate on crypto regulation, which follows the first debate on cryptoassets, led by her fellow party member the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) in September last year. The hon. Lady is absolutely right that this is an important sector for innovation, and I commend her

and the crypto and digital assets all-party parliamentary group for their work to upskill Members of this House in this important emerging area.

My goal is simple: we want the UK to be the home of an open, well regulated and technologically advanced sector. As the hon. Lady said, recent events have highlighted some vulnerabilities in the cryptoassets sector, but it is a big sector. We have seen how FTX’s collapse has impacted some consumers, but as with any emerging technology—and this technology is at an emerging stage for all its myriad potential uses—there will be risk. We understand the importance of risk in the system and that, regrettably, that brings failures as much as success and opportunity. That is part of the process of change itself.

The hon. Lady talked about how cryptocurrencies could be an area of Brexit opportunity, and because we have taken back control of our rulebook, this House—importantly—has the opportunity as well as the obligation to bring forward regulations. In that context, she talked about being the mum of a 14-year-old, all the potential jobs and the advice that she would give. Clearly, this is a world that has captured the imagination of young people. Anything we can do to get our young people to equip themselves with more STEM skills is very positive.

The hon. Lady also talked about the positive benefits in a sector in which, owing to its nature as a nascent and emerging sector, people are not always clear about its use cases. She made a powerful point about the use case in Ukraine and allowing that financial system to continue to work. Government policy is that we will introduce timely, sensible and balanced regulation to allow the safe use of the technology and allow participants in the sector to understand with certainty the environment in which they operate.

On the potential economy, the hon. Lady might be familiar with the work done by PricewaterhouseCoopers that estimates that blockchain technology, which underlies what is often referred to as crypto, could boost the UK economy by £57 billion by 2030. That is a sizeable opportunity and we are keen for the UK to seize its fair share. She talked about other jurisdictions that have introduced regulation, and it is right that we learn from them and use the opportunity to perfect our own regulation, but obviously we must ensure that we capture—if that is the right word—a fair share of the opportunities.

The fintech sector is a great success story for both the City of London and the wider UK economy, and last year the UK attracted more fintech investment than the next 13 European countries combined, so we have a real lead. Natural extensions of that sector are crypto firms and cryptoassets—people working with blockchain. It is important, therefore, that the regulations we introduce facilitate that.

The hon. Lady rightly raised the role of our regulators and their speed and agility. I will write to her, but will share now the figures that I have. I understand from the Financial Conduct Authority that 41 such firms are registered in the UK. Obviously, the FCA has its own regulations around that—the hurdles that firms have to clear—and I am interested in general, as we seek to have an agile and proportionate financial regulatory system, in our regulators moving at the right pace.

There are measures in the Financial Services and Markets Bill more generally to encourage the regulators—indeed, to compel them—to be more transparent about their key operating statistics, such as those in respect of

[Andrew Griffith]

speed. I think the hon. Lady talked about the number of authorisations and the average processing time for authorisations, which I hear about widely across the financial services sector and know is a focus for the FCA. It is important that it is: we cannot have a financial system that is competitive internationally if it has a slow latency and if it does not operate at speed. I share the hon. Lady's concern, and if there are any additional measures I can obtain, I will of course write to her.

The hon. Lady talked about the importance of engagement between Ministers and the sector. I want to assure her that during my relatively short time in this role I have held a desire for broad and deep engagement. This is a really big sector. She might be interested to know that rather than having a standing council, as it were—Governments sometimes set up a group of 12 anointed figures and all the engagement is there—I want to be much more agile and to engage with a much broader range of people. My undertaking is to have six roundtables with the sector, but with a variety of sector participants, during calendar year 2023. That will build on the three roundtables that I have already held with the sector in the first few months since my appointment. That is a real commitment; this area rewards a lot of time being spent on it.

I assure the hon. Lady, members of the all-party group and industry bodies that I want to take an evidence-based and proportionate approach to regulation. That is something to which we all aspire. It is not helpful in any domain for people to make sweeping statements without offering facts and proof.

I hope I have addressed most of the hon. Lady's points. There is one final point on which I wish to offer clarity: where we go from here. I do not have the precise date, but I assure the hon. Lady that the Government will very soon come forward with our consultation paper on the regulatory approach to cryptoassets. That will be a matter of weeks, not months, but I do not have the precise date. I urge people to get ready to respond to that paper. We will engage on the back of it, because it is of course just the next step in the process. The purpose of the consultation is that we have proportionate regulation, that we do it right and that it is practitioner led.

Of course, the flipside is that consultative processes sometimes makes things take a little longer than one might wish in a fast-moving domain. In order to get the balance right, I urge those with views to be ready to advocate them. They should be assured that they have a Minister and a Government who are keen to see the sector grow and to harness the benefits for the United Kingdom and the hon. Lady's constituents. I would be delighted to return to update this place frequently on the progress of this exciting new sector.

Question put and agreed to.

11.22 am

Sitting suspended.

Steel Industry: Contribution to the UK Economy

[MARK PRITCHARD *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the contribution of the steel industry to the UK economy.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard, and to lead today's debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), a Welsh Labour colleague, secured the debate and was due to lead it, but he has been waylaid by his Front-Bench duties on the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill. He is an excellent chair of the all-party parliamentary group for steel and metal related industries. He represents the UK's biggest steelworks—in Port Talbot—and I know that he will take a keen interest in today's debate and wishes that he was here. Before I begin, I declare an interest: I am a member of the Community and GMB trade unions, both of which represent steelworkers in my constituency so ably, as does Unite. I refer Members to my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I am incredibly proud to represent a steel constituency; for well over a century, the industry has been at the heart of the communities that I serve, and of constituencies represented by Members present. It is good to see interest from Members on both sides of the House. The contribution of the steel industry to the UK economy is the title of the debate, but the immense contribution of this vital strategic industry is, in a sense, undebatable. Our steel sector employs 34,500 people directly in the UK and supports a further 43,000 in supply chains. Steel salaries are 45% higher than the UK national average and 59% higher than the regional median in Wales, Yorkshire and Humberside. It goes without saying, then, that the steel industry should be at the heart of any levelling-up agenda worth the paper it is written on.

The workforce is a winning combination of highly skilled, experienced workers who have honed their expertise over decades of dedicated work, and a healthy influx of younger steelworkers eager to work in an industry that is at the cutting edge of innovation. Even in the face of the considerable challenges that the industry faces, which I will talk about today, steel still has enormous pulling power for young workers who are looking to build up skills that will last them a lifetime. That is clear to see at Tata's Llanwern steelworks in my constituency, where the average age of the workforce has fallen from 53 to 32 in recent years. There is a new generation of workers who, like so many before them, are hugely proud to be steelworkers. We must look after them.

Directly and through supply chains, the steel sector adds £5.5 billion to UK GDP and makes a £2.4 billion direct contribution to the UK's balance of trade. It underpins our entire manufacturing base, and steel is an essential material for the construction, energy, aerospace, defence, engineering and packaging sectors. Some 96% of Network Rail's steel is sourced from British Steel in Scunthorpe; 250,000 tonnes of steel from Celsa in Cardiff will support the building of Hinkley C nuclear power station; and Liberty Steel produces critical parts for aircraft

engines and wind turbine gears. Nearly all 1p, 2p, 5p and 10p coins originate from steel made at Tata in Port Talbot, and Tata Llanwern produces world-class automotive steel for the likes of Jaguar Land Rover and BMW.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. She rightly mentions the Celsa plant in my constituency and the critical role that steel plays in so many of our industries and in manufacturing. Does she share my frustration that we seem to have been going round the houses for the last 10 years, particularly on the critical issue of competitive energy pricing? We have seen something like 12 steel Ministers during that time. That is not to disparage the current Minister, whom I like immensely on a personal level, but we need consistency and action on the critical issue of energy prices.

Jessica Morden: I thank my hon. Friend, who is a champion for steel in his constituency, where Celsa is based. I wholeheartedly agree that we have been going on about energy prices for so long—it is a theme that I will come to later in my speech—and I thank him for his contribution.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): First, I apologise for being a minute late. My hon. Friend's last point is crucial. All these pots of money that are available are obviously welcome, but for Shotton and the whole steel industry, we need a long-term plan with long-term investment. There is a lot of talk about companies investing, but they will invest only if they can see a future, and if all we are doing all the time is just buying a bit of time here and there, until steel drops out of the news again, that is not a plan. We really need a long-term plan.

Jessica Morden: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention. Yet again, I agree wholeheartedly with him. He is a fantastic advocate for Shotton, and he is exactly right: we need a long-term plan for steel.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way; she is being very generous with her time. She made the very important point a few moments ago that steel is at the heart of many of our growth industries. Does she agree that a growth industry for the future is green energy, and that whether we are talking about floating offshore wind or other forms of marine renewables, steel will be at the heart of them? To that end, does she welcome the agreement struck between RWE and Tata to explore the use of Welsh steel in the nascent floating offshore wind industry? Does she also agree that we need Government to be part of the discussion of how we support the growth of new green industries and ensure that British-made steel is at the heart of them?

Jessica Morden: I thank the right hon. Member for that intervention. I wholeheartedly agree; I am agreeing with all the interventions! He anticipates my next point, because I was about to say that steel will be integral part of the UK's journey to reach net zero. Without a thriving steel industry, there can be no transition to a low-carbon economy that supports a range of industries, from automotive to nuclear and renewables, which he mentioned.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way; she is being very kind in taking interventions. There have been suggestions that a closed-loop cycle could be created in south Wales, whereby floating offshore wind is used not only for electricity but to make green hydrogen for heavy industry in the area, including, of course, steel production. Contracts for difference could be used to support such a relationship. Will she join me in asking the Minister to clarify how the contracts for difference scheme could be adjusted, so that it supports renewable energy hubs that use multiple technologies, and to assess how such projects could be linked? The important words there are “multiple technologies”.

Jessica Morden: I thank the right hon. Member for that very important intervention. She gave an example, as did the right hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb), of how we can use our steel in these projects, and I hope that the Minister will refer directly to that point when she responds to the debate.

These interventions prove that we simply cannot decarbonise the economy without decarbonising steel. As Tata has highlighted, almost every aspect of the UK's decarbonisation plan is steel-intensive, with 10 million tonnes of steel being required over the coming years for offshore wind, solar, nuclear, hydrogen, and carbon capture and utilisation storage projects. The “Britain, we need our steel” campaign was launched by the Community trade union and union partners in 2020. It is not just a slogan; it is a statement of fact.

Today's debate comes in the context of the recent worrying news from Liberty Steel, which has announced that it will idle its steel plants in my constituency and at the Tredegar site in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Nick Smith). The primary production plant in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), who is also an excellent advocate for steel in her area, and the Performance Steel supplier in the constituency of the hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Nicola Richards), are among the other sites affected.

In a written response to me last week, the Secretary of State for Wales mentioned that he had spoken to Cabinet colleagues about the situation at Liberty and what it means for the workforce, and said that the Government stood ready to provide support. Any updates on that written response that the Minister can provide would of course be welcome to us and, more importantly, all those working at the plants, who are worried about the future. We must not underestimate the uncertainty that they will feel following the news about Liberty.

Of course Liberty has its specific issues, and the Community union is seeking answers from the company about how the latest announcement squares with previous commitments to invest in the business and ramp up production in Newport, Tredegar and elsewhere. It is clear, however, that there is a wider context, and that Liberty's announcement again demonstrates the precarious outlook for the steel industry more widely. Indeed, the company specifically cited energy costs as a factor in the decision that it made this month.

The same is true for British Steel in Scunthorpe, which is paying nearly £1 million a day for electricity, the cost of electricity having risen tenfold since 2021. There is still real uncertainty about the situation of

[Jessica Morden]

British Steel, and I am sure that the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Holly Mumby-Croft), who is here, will speak about that shortly. I hope that the Minister can provide updates. It is imperative that talks between the company and the Government continue, and reach a successful outcome that ensures that steelmaking at Scunthorpe continues and decarbonises.

As Community has highlighted, the cost of Government inaction, in terms of job losses, employment support, and the loss of a vital strategic foundation site, is incalculable. The sky-high energy costs facing the steel sector are by no means a new issue, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) said. It is one that I and other Members representing steelmaking constituencies have raised with 12 different steel Ministers since 2010, including six in the last three years alone. It is difficult to establish a long-term relationship when our steel Ministers change so often. I also like the Minister personally, but I make that point.

Over recent years, Opposition Members will have lost track of the number of times we have had to highlight the energy cost disparity, which remains a blight on the competitiveness of UK steel producers compared with their continental counterparts, particularly those in France and Germany. Indeed, UK Steel research shows that British steel producers paid twice as much for electricity last year as German counterparts, hitting competitiveness.

The UK Government's response to this over the years can be described as piecemeal at best. The energy bills discount scheme announced by the Treasury earlier this month confirmed that there would be at least a continuation of energy price support for businesses until April 2024, removing fears of a March cliff edge—an uncertainty that the Government allowed to fester through the tail end of last year.

However, it is important to note that the support for energy-intensive industries outlined by the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury falls far short of that provided by competitor countries. That is the point. For example, the German Government have guaranteed their steel industry an electricity price of €130 per MWh for 2023. In contrast, the Treasury's announcement on non-domestic energy support earlier this month provides our steel industry with a discount only to electricity prices higher than £185 per MWh. That means that UK steelmakers will stump up an estimated 63% more than their German counterparts for electricity.

UK Steel has rightly been critical of what the UK Treasury has on offer, saying that its

“reforms significantly narrow the help that Government will provide”,

and that Ministers are

“betting on a calm and stable 2023 energy market, in a climate of unstable global markets, with the scheme no longer protecting against extremely volatile prices.”

For a decade, British steelmakers have continually been asked to compete with one hand tied behind their back. That is why Labour's £1 billion contingency fund to help energy-intensive industries, such as steel, deal with energy costs is crucial. It goes far further than this Government's proposals and is vital.

The £800 million toward energy costs that the Minister mentioned in previous meetings is not all for the steel sector. In any case, it is not a new package of support. It relates to a package introduced under the coalition Government between 2013 and 2015, which was pushed largely by the Liberal Democrat-operated Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. In any case, the support referenced is significant less than the £1 billion contingency fund that Labour has suggested.

We need a Government who will support the industry in a move towards decarbonisation. We have read the reports of the £600 million that the Government have pledged, or are reported to have pledged, to Tata and British Steel this week to help with lower-emissions technology. I trust that we will get more details on this from the Minister later. I hope the negotiations continue and progress with urgency, and that any plan to decarbonise will be fully consulted on and agreed with the unions to ensure a just transition for the workforce. However, it is important to note that the support arrived significantly later than the support for other European countries did, and is significant lower. For example, the German Government have already spent €8.5 billion towards greening their domestic steel industry, and the French Government have spent €2.2 billion. British Steel Scunthorpe's multi-union chair, Paul McBean, put it well in his recent interview with *The Yorkshire Post*, saying:

“We are the only country being told to go green and (with) no help.”

I look forward to the Minister's response on that point about the adequacy of what is on offer.

It is clear that the steel sector is committed to the transition to net zero, but needs a long-term policy framework to make that a reality without penalising steelmakers with gargantuan carbon prices in the interim years. As things stand, rising carbon costs are eating into any available capital that steel companies may have to invest in decarbonisation. That is completely counterproductive, and we need the Minister to act on it. That is a key point.

The Government have spoken about a roughly £1.5 billion package of support schemes for the industry. However, it is important to note that those schemes are spread across many industries, so £1.5 billion does not translate into very much direct capital support for the steel sector. In particular, the £1 billion carbon capture, utilisation and storage infrastructure fund is not money provided to steel companies to support CCUS on site, but investment in pipelines and storage that may at some point be used by steel companies—it is far from a certainty. For example, Welsh steel plants will not be using that infrastructure even if they opt for carbon capture, as it is all for the North sea. Let us not forget the £250 million clean steel fund promised by the Government led by the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), which disappeared without trace.

Labour's proposed £3 billion green steel fund represents a potential way forward—not a sticking-plaster emergency bail-out, but a plan to work with industry, investing alongside it over the next 10 years. If this Government will not take action, we will.

I also urge the Minister to look at proposals for a carbon border adjustment mechanism. The costs of the UK's emissions trading system have spiralled over the

past two years. Compliance costs for the sector reached £120 million last year, which is equivalent to 60% of the average annual capital investment of the sector, and are set to get much worse. A carbon border adjustment mechanism would create a level playing field by applying carbon prices at the border equivalent to those faced by domestic producers, ensuring that imported steel does not have a price advantage. The Community union has highlighted that such a mechanism would also support the decarbonisation of steel production, as it would allow steelmakers to produce low-emission steel without being out-competed by high-emission, lower-cost imported steel.

Stephen Doughty: I thank my hon. Friend for her generosity in giving way again. I should also put on record my membership of the GMB, and past interests involving the GMB and Community.

On the subject of that transition to green steel, my hon. Friend will know that the Celsa plant uses an electric arc furnace—it is producing green steel from scrap. Does she agree that if we are switching to scrap-made steel, we need to ensure not only that there are adequate supplies of scrap in the UK, but that we do not suddenly all start producing the same product? Celsa predominantly produces rebar; we also need the flats, the sections, and all the other products that the UK currently provides so excellently.

Jessica Morden: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point—I cannot top it, really. I hope the Minister has heard it.

Procurement policies also need to be updated. For every 1,000 tonnes of steel produced in the UK, 4.2 direct jobs are created, with a further 6.6 jobs created in the supply chain. It is understandable, then, that Make UK found that 68% of the UK public think that public infrastructure projects should prioritise the use of UK-made steel wherever possible, yet the Government have a pretty poor track record in this area. The most recent example was last month's announcement that a £1.6 billion contract for steel for three fleet solid support vehicles was awarded to a Spanish consortium. That is just one case, but there have been too many missed opportunities for the steel industry. We cannot let that carry on.

As I mentioned earlier, green infrastructure projects will need literally millions of tonnes of steel by the end of the decade. The UK Government's own steel public procurement pipeline data, released last June, states that offshore wind projects alone will require some 5.3 million tonnes of steel within five years. We need the Government to commit now to maximising the procurement of British steel for all those upcoming projects, a move that Make UK estimates could boost the UK economy by as much as £4 billion and support 11,000 British jobs in steel companies and their supply chains. As the Community union's general secretary Roy Rickhuss has rightly said,

"The green energy revolution presents a huge opportunity to build a robust British supply chain based on the supply of top-quality domestic steel."

The events of the past two years tell us that Britain cannot rely on fragile global supply networks for strategic goods, and that if we want to go green, it is nonsensical to transport steel from the other side of the world.

On that point, I welcome that the Government themselves have acknowledged that, in the area of energy supply, the country has

"drifted into dependence on foreign sources".

We agree, and I echo Roy Rickhuss by calling on Ministers to not make the same mistake when it comes to steel, a sector of such vital strategic importance to our sovereign capability and our national security. Alun Davies, a stalwart of Community in south Wales, puts it succinctly:

"There is a clear choice facing this Government—either they back our workforce and our industries or they choose to offshore thousands of good jobs to other countries."

Mark Tami: The industry really is at a cliff edge. I have said that in meetings. That is not crying wolf; this is not a made-up situation. It really is at the 11th hour. Unless we really step up to the mark and invest, will we lose not only the industry but the confidence of the supply chain and the customers, who will start questioning whether some of these plants will be around this time next year. Something has to change now.

Jessica Morden: My right hon. Friend is exactly right: the steel industry is at a particularly precarious point and the purpose of this debate is to highlight to the Minister the need to act quickly.

On procurement, it is high time that the UK Government started setting more ambitious targets for the use of UK steel in public projects and for all initiatives and schemes supported by public funds. Ultimately, they must devise policies to deliver those projects and grow the economy. Other countries have shown that they are not afraid to support their manufacturing sectors in the green transition. For example, in the USA, the Biden Administration's Inflation Reduction Act uses the tax system to reward American manufacturers that invest in and use American manufacturing supply chains.

If this Government will not take action, the next Labour Government will. I am pleased that my party is committed to asking every public body to give more contracts to British firms, big and small. We will use stretching social, environmental and labour clauses in contract design to raise standards, and we will spend and make more in Britain. We are committing to making, buying and selling more in Britain. We will lead a culture change in Government, putting the growth of local industries and economies first and reviewing the pipeline for all major infrastructure projects to explore how to increase the materials made in Britain. We will also upskill workers to get the jobs for the future. That is the kind of vision that industries such as steel and our country need.

It is worth flagging up the continued risk of melted and poured Russian steel entering the UK via third countries. Although the UK has banned finished-steel imports from Russia and placed a 35% tariff on semi-finished steel from Russia, loopholes in the sanctions means that Russian steel that is re-rolled in the EU or Turkey and exported into the UK is reclassified as EU or Turkish-origin material, circumventing the ban and the tariff. That means UK consumers, including public projects, are unwittingly importing and using Russian steel. It is wrong as a point of principle and it has damaging consequences for the UK market. I echo UK Steel's call for the Government to tackle that by applying

[Jessica Morden]

sanctions on all steel that is melted and poured in Russia, regardless of whether it has been re-rolled in a third country.

At the Dispatch Box earlier in the month, the Prime Minister told the hon. Member for Scunthorpe that the Government

“remain committed to a thriving UK steel industry.”—[*Official Report*, 11 January 2023; Vol. 725, c. 557.]

Steel workers and steel communities throughout the country will understandably have taken that with a heavy pinch of salt. For our steel industry, the past decade has been characterised by neglect and a lack of vision for the future. The loss of skilled jobs at the SSI plant in Redcar and the Orb works in my constituency of Newport East were tragic cases in point. Orb was the last steel plant in the UK producing electrical steel, and it needed investment of about £50 million to be saved. The Government did not listen and did not let it be saved, and the opportunity was lost. That is heartbreaking. The next decade must be different, not just for our steel industry but for our energy security and a greener economy, both of which are utterly dependent on a healthy steel sector.

We need answers today. I hope the Minister will update us on her engagement with Tata, British Steel, Liberty Steel and Celsa Steel. I hope she will acknowledge that the current level of support for UK steelmakers in respect of energy costs and decarbonisation is not enough, and I hope the Government will commit to doing much more. The era of warm words has bitten the dust and the time for meaningful strategic action has come. Just like levelling up, the industrial strategy part of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy's title should not just be a handy buzz phrase; it should be a central, defining mission of the Government.

Instead of sticking plasters, we need a long-term plan. If the Conservative party is not up to the challenge, Labour stands ready to fill the gap and ensure that the steel industry has the bright future it needs and deserves.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): I will not set a firm time limit at the moment, but we have quite a few speakers. Speeches of around five minutes would fit perfectly to allow all the Front Benchers to have their full 10 minutes.

2.54 pm

Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I thank the hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) for securing the debate. I know from our work together on the APPG for steel and metal related industries that we agree on many things and have the interests of the steel industry jointly at heart. I also thank my hon. Friend the Minister for the level of focus that the steel industry is receiving at the moment. I am heartened by that and want to put my thanks on the record.

Steel is something that I never tire of mentioning in Parliament. My home town of Scunthorpe has one of the biggest steelworks in the country. I care about the local jobs because I understand the impact that it would

have on our local community and on individuals and families were those jobs to be lost, but we can never say enough times the impact that it would also have on us as a nation and our position in the world were we ever to lose our ability to make our own steel.

Not only does the steelworks provide thousands of jobs that pay roughly 45% more than the average job in Yorkshire and Humberside, but its impact ripples throughout our entire local economy, supporting an ecosystem of businesses that sustain countless livelihoods. I have been told that it supports 20,000 jobs in our area, and I believe that to be the case. People who work in the steelworks in Scunthorpe are people I went to school with. They are people whose children went to school with my daughter. They are my neighbours. They are members of my family—my granddad made his living and raised his family through his work at the steelworks. It is a source of great pride to him and to many people in Scunthorpe and the surrounding area that the work our town has put in has helped to build this country.

We heard figures from the hon. Member for Newport East on the value of the output of steelmakers here in Britain, but it is almost impossible to truly quantify the impact that steel has throughout the wider economy and every sector and, just as importantly, the loss we would face were we not able to produce our own steel.

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) on securing this debate, which is very important for not just steel but ceramics. Refractory ceramics are vital for the steelmaking industry, and particularly energy-intensive industries such as steel and ceramics need additional support to transition and invest in energy efficiency measures. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need additional support from the Government that is easier to access so that these industries can invest in energy efficiency measures?

Holly Mumby-Croft: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He and I have worked together on many of the issues that affect energy-intensive industries. Ceramics play a crucial role in the steel industry, lining the blast furnaces that we use to make steel and, of course, we like to have a cup of tea in a ceramic mug as well.

I cannot say enough times how important it is that we never, ever become the only country in the G20 that is not able to make its own steel. That would leave us at the mercy of steel producers around the world, who would be in full knowledge that we were not able to make our own steel, with the prices and challenges that would come with that. I hope the Minister agrees that steel truly is a vital strategic industry. Nobody can go a single day in their lives, from the moment they get up to the moment they go to bed, without needing to use steel.

A dependable supply of high-quality steel—that is a crucial point: in this country we make some of the finest steel money can buy anywhere in the world—will underpin our every endeavour as we tackle the problems of the 21st century and the issues that we grapple with in this place. It is vital for everything from growth to defence, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine has served only to highlight the challenges and the importance of that. I truly believe that the public have a fantastic understanding of how important this is and instinctively know it is crucial that we are always able to make our own steel.

I have seen the support in recent years, including the £800 million of energy support and the two occasions when the Government took the brave step of extending the steel safeguards. That was a challenging time for us, so I congratulate the Government on doing that, because it was really important. Had we not done that, I am not sure we would be here now having this conversation—it was absolutely right. In Scunthorpe, we remember how the Government paid workers' wages in 2019 and into early 2020 when the buy-out happened.

We have all seen the press reports about British Steel and Tata negotiating with the Government. I know that is a live negotiation and we cannot talk about it, but I will do everything I can, as I know other Members will, to help and assist all parties involved to reach a good outcome and secure the future of steelmaking in Scunthorpe. My own view is that, should a deal be reached, we must look at this as a pivotal moment. We must get a deal done and then the next day wake up and start straight away with the steps we need to take to allow steel to thrive into the future. We must immediately start discussions at pace about carbon border adjustments, so that we do not find ourselves falling behind the EU. We must look at the emissions trading scheme and the perverse incentive that it is possible to create whereby we can see loss-making production—carbon-producing production—incentivised by a scheme initially designed to prevent excess carbon production. We must also address all the issues relating to energy costs.

I urge the Government to go as far and as fast as they can on those issues, and to do everything they can to give the industry confidence that ours really is the Government that will put in place the measures that will secure the future of the steel industry. I believe they are, and I urge the Government to give the steel industry that confidence.

3.1 pm

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard—for the first time, I think. It is a pleasure to speak in this debate secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden), who outlined the broader picture so well. I speak today as a member of Unite.

As others have said, the UK steel industry makes a vast contribution to our economy. It employs 34,500 people directly in the UK and supports a further 43,000 in supply chains. The industry makes a £2.4 billion direct contribution to UK GDP, and the supply chains it supports add another £3.1 billion each year. It offers skilled, well-paid employment, with a median salary that is almost 60% higher than the average in Yorkshire. But it is an industry that continues to be chronically undervalued by the Government, its needs neglected and its concerns ignored. That has consequences.

One hundred and eighty five of my constituents were recently told that their jobs would likely go as part of 440 redundancies across Liberty Steel's UK businesses. Just before Christmas, in a speech I have made countless times, I warned that unless the Government acted on the underlying issues that face the industry, steel production in the UK would wither. For years, steel MPs from all parties have called on successive Business Ministers to listen to the industry, value its contribution to the economy and help to create an environment in which it can thrive. Our pleas have fallen on deaf ears, and our constituents are losing their jobs as a consequence.

Rotherham is a steel town. The industry is at the core of our identity and local economy. The job losses will affect not only the 185 workers and their families but businesses up and down Liberty's supply chain and throughout our local economy. Many businesses move to Rotherham specifically because of our steel industry, including those on the advanced manufacturing park. The job losses will have a catastrophic impact on our town and communities.

Liberty has cited soaring energy costs as a major factor behind its decision, and the fact that its announcement came only days after the Government announced the scaling back of support for businesses struggling with high energy costs should surprise no one. If the Government are serious about delivering economic growth, they cannot stand idly by while industries that should be at the heart of our growth are pushed to the brink.

Our energy markets have placed British steelmakers at a profound disadvantage for decades. British steel manufacturers have been left struggling to compete due to the Government's failure to act to address energy costs that for years have been vastly greater than those of our European competitors.

In its 2021 report, "Liberty Steel and the Future of the UK Steel Industry", the BEIS Committee argued that:

"If additional support is not forthcoming, high electricity prices will continue to have a pernicious effect on the UK steel industry, resulting in long-term decline and future crises."

Well, here we are. The Minister, as a member of that Committee at the time, will no doubt recall that the report went on to recommend:

"At a minimum, the price disparity should be brought down to within £1/MWh of the total cost faced by key competitors in France and Germany".

I could not agree with the Minister more. But since that report, the only thing that has changed is her job title.

The Government have taken no meaningful action to address the crippling pressure on the industry. It is not only the cost of energy that continues to burden British steel producers: the industry has been prevented from investing in its future due to punitive business rates that penalise capital investment. Yet again, nothing has been done to reform a system that continually hamstringing our domestic steel industry.

Most damningly, public procurement procedures continue to fail to prioritise steel from British manufacturers. What was the point of Brexit if not to better support our own industries? That simple step, entirely within the Government's control, could go a long way to stabilising the industry and laying the groundwork for future growth.

I believe that at the heart of the Government's failure on steel has been a fundamental misunderstanding of our industry. It is not some relic of an industrial past but a dynamic, world-leading industry, vital to both Britain's economic future and its security, that has been ignored, to the Government's eternal shame.

The Government must now engage proactively with Liberty and the trade unions to work to limit job losses, and they must ensure that a comprehensive support package is in place for the affected workers. If the Government fail to act—and act with urgency—the redundancies announced in my constituency will sadly not be the last.

3.6 pm

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): When I came to this debate I was not planning to make a contribution—I was planning just to make an intervention about green industries and the role that British Steel can play in them—but having listened to some of the contributions I would like to make two broad points, one looking backwards and one looking forwards.

My backward looking point is in response to the remarks made by the hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden). She made a very good speech and I agreed with a lot of the important points she made, but I want to challenge the Opposition narrative that over the last 12 years the UK Government have pursued a deliberate policy of neglect of the steel industry.

I had the privilege of serving as a Minister in 2012, and it was not just Liberal Democrats fighting for steel at that time: many Conservative Ministers were fighting for the steel industry. I was in the Wales Office, putting together working groups and roundtables of energy-intensive industries, meeting officials at BEIS's predecessor Department and looking at the energy costs of intensive energy users. There was a big focus on the needs of steel, particularly from us in the Wales Office because steel is so important to the Welsh economy and to our identity. Some of the contributions made by Members from other parts of the UK testify to that point in relation to their own communities.

There was a focus on steel in the early years of the coalition Government, and I believe that has continued until the present day. I do not remember a time when Ministers were sitting on their hands when it came to discussions about steel. I remember, during my short stint at the Department for Work and Pensions, being lobbied by Tata to sort out its pension problems and offload its obligations to British Steel pension holders.

It is almost like we have bounced from crisis to crisis in terms of discussing steel, but at no point did I honestly detect that the Government were asleep at the wheel. There have been a succession of different BEIS Ministers, Chancellors and Prime Ministers, but steel has always been a subject that has been able to attract attention from the top of Government, including from the Prime Minister's office.

The hon. Member for Newport East made an important point, which I kind of agree with, about overall industrial policy. Going back even further to when Labour was in Government, we have not been good enough as a nation at protecting domestic supply chains and local content, and that point extends to the steel industry.

Jessica Morden: There may have been discussions about steel but there was very little by way of action. Will the right hon. Member acknowledge the huge disparity between what we pay for our energy and the way that other European countries help? There has been no action to address that.

Stephen Crabb: I accept that point. I remember bringing representatives of Celsa Steel from the constituency of the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) to meet various Ministers at different points during that period of government. Celsa was incredibly open about opening its books and showing costs to Ministers. The point that Celsa made, when we put in place the support scheme for energy-intensive users, was about the disparity with competitor countries.

That is a valid point that the Government should address. We are in an intensely competitive steel-production environment.

I come back to my point. Some Opposition Members hope to be in Government in a couple of years' time as Ministers. They will have a string of companies knocking on their doors continuously asking for support and help. The trade-offs they will need to make, with regard to responsibility to taxpayers and the public finances, will be difficult. Difficult decisions need to be made. In the case of steel, at times the global challenges have felt so big that the amount of support being sought was almost unlimited. Ministers need to make difficult decisions, but I accept the point made by the hon. Member for Newport East that we need to look at the disparity with international competitors.

Holly Mumby-Croft: My right hon. Friend is making an interesting speech. He reflected on previous Governments' approach to steel. He knows, as we all do, that under the last Labour Government steel jobs and steel production halved. The point he makes about fairness is an important one, and I thank him for making it.

Stephen Crabb: I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution. My other argument is about looking forward. I reiterate my remarks about the importance of new green technologies and green industries for the UK economy in the years and decades ahead. British steel has a crucial role to play in that, but that will not happen by accident; it will require deliberate choices on the part of Ministers. We will not capture the full economic value of these new industries by accident. To ensure that we maximise local domestic content and supply chains will require a plan and deliberate choices by Ministers. To that end, I want to talk about the bid by Port Talbot, one of the UK's most important steelmaking communities.

There is a joint bid by Port Talbot and Milford Haven in my constituency for a freeport—a Celtic freeport that will be used as a platform to help launch a new industry of floating offshore wind. We hope that Welsh Steel will play a key part in the supply chain. I do not expect the Minister to comment on a live bidding process, but I wanted to put that on record. If the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) were here, I know he would make the same point. That is a very exciting freeport proposal, with real projects and economics behind it, and I hope the Government will look favourably on it.

3.13 pm

Jim Shannon: It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I commend the hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) for setting the scene so well. I do not have a steel factory in my constituency, or an industry that it is dependent on help from Government, but I do have a strong construction sector that depends on the British steel that comes from the factories in the areas others have spoken about, so it is important for me to put on the record why I support what the hon. Members for Newport East and for Scunthorpe (Holly Mumby-Croft) and others said in their introductions, and what others will say.

I remember the last Westminster Hall debate on steel. The hon. Member for Newport East spoke then as well, and I think the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock)

led the debate. We can see that he is in the main Chamber—his name is up there on the screen—and he cannot be in two places at one time, although I venture sometimes to try. The only reason he is not here is that he has obligations in the main Chamber; otherwise, he would be here.

I have listened with great interest to the contributions of Members today, and I agree with much of what has been said. I have long been outspoken about the need for us to bring manufacturing home to purpose-built, modern, green factories that give local people jobs and produce the renowned high-quality steel for which we are famed. I absolutely support what the hon. Member for Newport East and others have said.

You will know, Mr Pritchard, because your knowledge of the issue is every bit as good as mine, that a major issue for my constituents—many will be able to say it with me—is the Northern Ireland protocol. Why do I mention that now? Let me explain. Some of the Members here will be aware—I suspect that you are one of them, Mr Pritchard—that last August His Majesty's Revenue and Customs informed steel producers of a 25% tariff on some GB steel imports into Northern Ireland. The steel sector is important to me, and it seems that we are being penalised more than anybody else. The tariff is directly related to the Northern Ireland protocol—it is one of the issues apparent between the UK Government and the EU, to which Northern Ireland has no representation—and the rule changes in relation to steel imports. Some of those steel imports reasons relate to Russia's invasion of Ukraine; we understand that.

There are big factors that are impacting UK steel, and Northern Ireland in particular, as expert Sam Lowe has outlined. As has been reported:

“Essentially, steel from Great Britain had been able to enter Northern Ireland without a tariff because it was covered by a tariff rate quota (TRQ) for UK exports to the EU. A TRQ allows a certain amount of a product to enter a customs territory without a tariff being paid, but once a set limit is reached tariffs apply.”

So we in Northern Ireland are being penalised to the tune of 25% for our British steel—our own steel—in our own country. The report continues:

“However, when sanctions were applied to Russia EU businesses could no longer buy steel from there. So at that time the EU scrapped country-specific TRQs for the UK and others in favour of one TRQ for Ukraine and another TRQ covering all ‘other countries’.”

The Northern Ireland protocol means that Northern Ireland continues to follow EU customs rules, and therefore suffers disadvantage, pain and cost factors. It is hard to comprehend. The tariff-free limit for supplies from Great Britain to Northern Ireland is set to be reached quickly. The UK previously had access to its own country-specific quota, which it could rely on to accommodate steel moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland, but now such movements will be covered by the “other countries” quota, which could fill up much more quickly, given that the entire world has access to it.

What does that mean in practice? It means a 25% tariff on British steel moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. It means that, while European manufacturers can supply the UK with no tariff, the same does not apply to businesses in my constituency of Strangford. We want to use British steel from Newport, Scunthorpe and elsewhere, as we have in the past. It

means that the local steel supplier just two minutes from my office in Newtownards is wondering how, with a 25% tariff increase, he can continue to be involved with construction industry clients that are already teetering on the edge of bankruptcy because of increased prices. It means that my steel importers—my British steel importers—cannot supply the suppliers of other Members in this Chamber. It means that all right hon. and hon. Members should stand and join with me in actively opposing the Northern Ireland protocol, not as a Northern Ireland problem but as a UK problem that affects their local economies and mine. I support the steel industry wholeheartedly, and I ask that every Member in this Chamber recognises my position as the Member for Strangford and does the same for Northern Ireland against this insidious protocol.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Before I call the Front-Bench spokespeople, who will have 10 minutes each, I am afraid that I will have to set a time limit of four minutes for our final three speakers.

3.18 pm

Dame Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): The steel industry—or tin-plate industry, as we call it—is vital to my constituency of Llanelli, where we take the steel from Port Talbot and make it into a range of products that subsequently become tins for food or cans for aerosols. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) on securing the debate, which comes at a crucial time for the steel industry.

In the interests of saving time, I will not repeat the excellent points that my hon. Friend made on the energy issue. Energy costs are not just an immediate challenge. Now is very much decision time for the future of the steel industry. The US Inflation Reduction Act and President Biden's determination to tackle climate change have undoubtedly accelerated global interest in decarbonisation, which poses huge challenges for the steel industry. Our steelmaking capacity is ageing, and now is crunch time for steel manufacturers, which must decide where they will invest for the future—whether it will be the UK or elsewhere.

We know that blast furnaces cannot simply be replaced by electric arc furnaces. Yes, they have a role, and could clearly be run on electricity generated from renewable sources, but the real challenge is to decarbonise the blast furnace process of making steel from iron ore. That requires huge investment in research and innovation to develop the technologies of the future. The UK Government need to make the conditions right for companies to choose the UK. We need a clear vision from the UK Government, and determination to ensure that the UK gets ahead of the game and develops the technologies. We have to be prepared to take the risk in order to reap the gains. If the UK can lead the way, we will have not only a flourishing steel industry, but the opportunity to export our steel and our technologies.

We need a clear industrial strategy, from research and innovation through development to establishing production; as well as confidence that there will be a level playing field on issues such as energy costs and confidence, and a commitment to use UK-produced steel in public procurement. The only way we will attract companies to invest in the steel industry of the future is with a proper strategy. The alternative is the demise of our industry.

[*Dame Nia Griffith*]

If we are overtaken by countries producing cleaner, cheaper steel, we will be left behind. It is not just the steel industry that needs certainty; all the associated industries need to know whether to invest.

The horrors that have unfolded in Ukraine have reminded us just how important it is that we have our own steel industry—for our security of supply and to support a range of other industries, including defence. The situation has made us refocus on the importance of our own sovereign defence capability and the need to have the materials and the skilled workforce to be able to scale up production if necessary. There is strong cross-party support for sanctions against Putin's Russia, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East explained, there are loopholes. I understand that the Government may have plans to close the loopholes, but I would be grateful if the Minister confirmed this and indicated when we can expect it to happen.

We need a level playing field when it comes to UK steel having to compete against imports. When there are distortions in the marketplace, with steel arriving at our ports from countries that give massive state subsidies to the steel industry, taking action should be well within World Trade Organisation rules, and is essential to protect our steel industry against unfair competition—all the more so given that both the US and EU protect their steel industries in this way. Without such protection, we risk losing production and workers facing redundancy, and ultimately a lack of future investment in the industry.

Despite that, in both summer 2021 and summer 2022, the UK Government made very last-minute decisions about the extension of the existing steel safeguards. This does nothing to reassure the industry. If we want future investment in the UK steel industry, companies need to know that there is strong political will to protect the industry, and that they can rely on the UK Government to protect them from being undermined by artificially cheap imports. I understand that the Department for International Trade is looking to reform the way the Trade Remedies Authority works. We need a system that really works for the industry—that can respond speedily, carry out investigations and act to protect our industry. The UK Government would do well to look at some of UK Steel's suggestions to achieve this.

First, we need clear Government policy on how we deal with countries such as China and Russia. Secondly, given that in March 2022 we needed additional legislation to give the Secretary of State call-in powers, consideration needs to be given to how those powers could be part of the system so that the Secretary of State can use them in an initial investigation. Thirdly, reform of the way in which the economic interest test works is needed—

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Order. I call Tim Farron.

3.23 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate the hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) and all those who have contributed in this important debate.

I will focus on the role of steel in making Britain a sustainable economy. Steel plays a massively significant role in our ability to extend the railways, to ensure we

have the green technology to build zero-carbon homes, and to make best use of the natural resources in this country—wind and particularly hydro power, which I will talk about in a moment. But while it is vital to the greening of our economy, we cannot ignore the fact that steel produced with coal is a major contributor to climate change. The steel industry contributes 5% of the EU's carbon emissions and 7% of global carbon emissions, equivalent to the entire aviation industry. To cut to the chase, the good news is that the amount of steel produced using coal is now down to 70% and that produced by renewable means, in particular using electric arc furnaces, is up to 30% and rising. Increasingly, customers for steel are demanding that it be produced in green and renewable ways: for example, Volvo is now committed to building 100% of its trucks in a fossil-free environment.

I make these remarks because of my engagement with a great controversy in my county of Cumbria, where the Government recently gave the green light to the first coalmine for 30 years, ostensibly to support the steel industry. It is clear that 83% of the coal produced by West Cumbria Mining will be exported and not support the UK steel industry. Both Tata and British Steel have been clear that they have no plans to make use of that coal. British Steel has been clear that it is the wrong sort of coal with the wrong sulphur content, so it will be next to no use whatever to the production of steel.

Numerous people, including the hon. Member for Newport East, have mentioned the Government's recent comments about the green switch and supporting Tata with £600 million to help move towards electric furnaces. Perhaps we will hear more detail from the Minister. Tata says that it will cost £3 billion. We also know that Salzgitter in Germany, which produces about as much steel as the entire British steel industry produces in a year, will be completely fossil-free within 10 years, so my fear is that we are not being ambitious enough.

Steel is utterly vital. I think about my constituency, where we need a passing loop on the Lakes line to dual the capacity of the railway line that takes people to Britain's second busiest and biggest visitor destination after London. We desperately need zero-carbon affordable homes, and we need steel for that, too. We need to make more use of wind, and although the British Isles have a higher tidal range than any other country on planet Earth apart from Canada, we are using next to none of it, and steel is vital to the wind turbine and the wave turbine. The barrage is another way in which we could make use of tidal and wave power.

Steel is vital to our green economy. As Britain decarbonises with new infrastructure based on steel, let us make sure that we also decarbonise the processes we use to make that steel.

3.26 pm

Christina Rees (Neath) (Ind): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) for so eloquently leading on this very important debate. I speak today as a member of the Unite and GMB trade unions.

Steel is a foundational sector across the UK, never more so than in Neath Port Talbot county borough. On such strong foundations, economies and supply chains

are created. Port Talbot steelworks reaches all the surrounding communities. Thousands of Neath constituents have worked there, or know someone who works there or in its supply chain, as my father did. To say it has been a difficult few years for the steelworkers in Neath Port Talbot would be an understatement. Competing in the global market, the absence of anti-dumping tariffs, the lifting of lesser duty rates and rising UK energy prices have conspired to create uncertainty and fear.

Over 2,000 local jobs have been lost since 2014. Steel and the steel industry are vital to Wales and its economy. The idea that the steel sector does not have a future is unthinkable, but our steelworkers are as robust as the steel they make. They have so far bounced back from every adversity, but the situation is about to get much worse. Of the top 10 economies in the world, the UK's is the only one with a declining steel industry. The UK Government should immediately sit down with Tata Steel and other businesses to do a deal on green steel for the sake of the future of our workforce.

The steel sector is a crucial aspect of the partnership between the public and private sectors. The UK Government should look to set indicative targets for the amount of domestically produced steel that we put into Government-funded projects. That would enable us to make, buy and sell more steel in this country. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), who is chair of the all-party parliamentary group for steel and metal related industries, of which I am a vice chair, cannot be with us today because he has duties in the main Chamber, but he has spoken in Westminster Hall many times about the importance of the steel sector to the UK, to his constituency and to Wales.

Floating offshore wind has the potential to transform the economy and jobs market in my hon. Friend's Aberavon constituency and across south Wales, but it will happen only if floating offshore wind substructures and other components are manufactured and assembled locally. The public know we need a Britain that can stand more firmly on its own two feet, and they recognise the need for foundational industries to thrive if Britain is to prosper. Indeed, in one recent poll, 80% of those surveyed declared steel to be a strategically important industry that we must maintain in the UK. That is why the Labour party's green prosperity plan will marry the quest for sustainable growth and jobs on which people can raise a family with the need for resilience. Net zero should be seen not as a hindrance, but as an opportunity for growth and prosperity. Labour's proposed green steel renewal fund will secure the future of the steel industry for my hon. Friend's constituents and mine, who live in Neath and work at Tata Steel. By greening our steel processing, Labour will ensure that our steelmakers can compete in a world in which global steel demand is on the rise. Britain needs its steel as a foundation of the modern manufacturing renaissance that Labour will deliver.

Time is running out for the future of our steel industry. I know that the Minister, who is a very magnanimous person, is working around the clock to familiarise herself with her new brief. I am grateful that she has already met the members of the all-party group for steel and metal-related industries, and I hope that she will stay a while in her new role. I urge her, however, to impress on the Treasury the importance of investing in decarbonisation of the UK steel industry, and particularly Tata Steel in

Port Talbot. Without serious UK Government investment now, I fear that Tata Steel in Port Talbot is on the cliff edge.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Thank you to all our speakers for being on time; that allows each Front-Bench spokesperson to have 10 minutes.

3.30 pm

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I am extremely grateful to have this opportunity to speak, Mr Pritchard, and I thank the hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) and all the other Members who have spoken.

I do not want to be too downbeat or to go back too far, but ever since I came into this place in 2015, we have been in a steel crisis. In my constituency, we have Dalzell works, which does not produce steel; there is no steel production as such in Scotland. However, we use the steel produced mainly in Scunthorpe and roll it to a very high standard. The Scottish Government managed to save that mill in 2016. However, in all the time that I have been here, I have talked to a succession of Ministers—I welcome the new Minister, and I apologise for not meeting her this morning—and nothing has fundamentally changed. We have had steel charters, which Ministers signed—we all signed the steel charter—and we have talked about how the UK must produce its own steel, or otherwise we would be in grave danger. We are the only member of the G7, the G20 or whoever that might not produce steel in the future. That is not the way forward in the 21st century.

I was very proud when the Scottish Government stepped in and managed the deal that saved Dalzell works. In a constituency such as mine, which has a proud tradition of steelmaking, that was really important, not just because it is an iconic industry, but for the future. A lot of the work that is done in Dalzell ends up on wind turbines. Scottish renewables, as far as the Scottish Government are concerned, are one of the ways forward for Scotland to thrive as an independent country.

We are in the very lucky position of having lots of wind power, although we have had attempts to block the renewables industry. We wanted a carbon capture and storage unit and to reduce the price of steel by reducing the price of energy. We want to move things forward, so the Scottish Government actually have a plan. That has always been missing in the UK. I appreciate that the Minister wants to help in the latest crisis, as have all her predecessors. That is what has happened: they have helped in each succeeding crisis but we just keep stumbling from crisis to crisis, kicking the can down the road without actually implementing a proper, forward-looking strategy that would take the entire UK steel industry forward.

We have talked a lot about the value of steel, but we should also look at the supply chain and all the other industries and all the other parts of the economy that benefit from having a really good steel industry. For example, when the Scottish Government put out tenders for offshore wind, applicants for the ScotWind leasing, which took place recently, were required to submit a supply chain development strategy that set out the level and location of supply chain impacts throughout the lifetime of products. That goes back to what I talked about—signing the steel charter. We now have the ridiculous

[Marion Fellows]

situation where in the UK, High Speed 2 suppliers and contractors were not mandated to use UK steel. That is basic stuff: it would not happen anywhere else, and it is really important that it should not happen here.

I do not want to take up too much time, but I want to plead with the Minister to look at energy costs, which is another huge issue faced by energy-intensive industries such as steel, as well as ceramics. I recognise most of the Members present from my long-standing membership of the APPG for steel and metal-related industries. For the whole time I have been in this place, all of those Members—the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) has also been mentioned—have been fighting to save either their local plant or the industry in general. We have seen huge increases in tariffs from the US and cheap Chinese steel flooding into the country, so again, I go back to the major point I want to make: could the Minister please give us an indication of the way forward, with a steel plan for the next few years? We should be looking 20 years ahead, not stumbling from crisis to crisis.

I am not shy about saying that the Scottish Government look at things, consult and try, using their limited powers, to do stuff that helps Scottish industry—in this case, steel. We need the same commitment from the UK Government; we need something like mandated use of UK steel in projects across the UK, because without that, we are leaving the business open. Brexit has had an awful effect on steel as well, because we can no longer access markets in Europe in the same way. We cannot go back to the drawing board, because there has not been a drawing board on which a steel strategy has been written. Can I please have some sort of assurance that the UK Government will look at energy prices, among other things, and create a proper industrial strategy that includes steel, making sure that the UK is still a steel producer in five years' time?

3.37 pm

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): As always, Mr Pritchard, it is a pleasure to see you in the Chair. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) has set out a fantastically well-crafted case for the UK steel industry. The sense of the whole debate has been about the strategically important role that steel has to play in the UK—it is probably fair to say that everybody who has spoken has accepted that point, and indeed made that point. I dare say that in a few minutes' time, the Minister will do so as well.

The economic and national security value of steel made in the UK is incredibly important. We have seen in recent times why it is so important that we have strong domestic supply chains in our core industries—that has been underlined by Putin's invasion—and steel is at the forefront of the issue. Throughout the debate, a number of Members have made the case that it is dangerous to rely on imports, as well as for the importance of demonstrating confidence in the steel industry and a long-term commitment to it, the key role it has in the transition to low carbon, and its importance to regional economic success, jobs and communities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) rightly spoke about the 185 workers whose jobs are at risk in her constituency alone, out of

440 redundancies at Liberty. Can we honestly see a future for this country where steel for civil aircraft made by Boeing and Airbus is not being produced by Liberty Steel? This issue is strategically important for our domestic supply chains, and Liberty is producing that steel for incredibly important customers. The impact on the workers, the families and the communities is a point that my hon. Friend made extremely strongly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Dame Nia Griffith) reminded us about the last-minute U-turn—it was so late that I think it was a last-second U-turn—on tariffs last summer. I am afraid that that U-turn is typical of what we have seen over 13 years of this Government when it comes to the steel industry. It is typical of their approach to many other aspects of the economy as well.

That is not the only late response we have seen. We saw it with SSI and the blast furnace in Redcar, which at that time was one of the leading examples of carbon capture, utilisation and storage in the steel industry anywhere in the world. The Government did not intervene, and by the time Ministers became increasingly involved, talking to the steel industry and unions in 2016, it was too late.

I know that the Minister has met the steel unions, but I hope she will impress on her boss, the Business Secretary, the importance of talking to the trade unions in the steel industry. As this is a strategically important industry, there should be interest at Cabinet level, as well as at the Minister of State level. I hope I am right in thinking that she is the Minister of State; otherwise, I have just promoted her.

The Minister for Industry and Investment Security (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Well, you have just demoted me.

Bill Esterson: The Minister says from a sedentary position that I am making out that her role is not important enough. I am not doing that at all—I think it is a very important role. It is important that steel Ministers have longevity in the role, but it is also important that there is a strategic role at Cabinet level. That was the point I was making; it was certainly not my intention to undermine the Minister. I hope she will take back to the Secretary of State the points made in writing by the trade unions.

Returning to the Government's late response, I hope it is not as a result of the announcements at Liberty that we are suddenly seeing press reports of hundreds of millions of pounds potentially being available. I know that the Minister will not be able to confirm that today, because of ongoing negotiations. But I do hope that the press reports come to fruition. When she was Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) promised £250 million for a green steel fund, but that did not happen. I am afraid that our memory of what Government have previously promised the steel industry is still strong.

I gently say to Government Back Benchers that what sounds like blaming the last Labour Government for 13 years of Conservative policy does not wash with people. The figures show that steel industry production in this country has declined by half since the global financial crisis. Thirteen of those 15 years have been under a Conservative or coalition Government. We have fallen from 17th to 25th in the world for steel production since this Government came to office. Of course, this is

at a time when China and India have dramatically increased their steel production and every other steel-producing nation has experienced decline—it is just that the decline has been higher in this country over the past 13 years. As Members have pointed out, of the top 10 steel-producing countries, we are the only country currently in decline. We have to address that. We can and should go through the history, as long as we learn from it. As long as we apply the lessons from history, we will be in the right place.

My hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Christina Rees) made a heartfelt contribution about the value to communities of the steel industry, using her own family history to make the point about how vital it is to the Welsh economy. Indeed, she was one of the Members who made the point about this country being the only one of the top 10 steel-producing nations where the industry is in decline. The question is: what are we going to do about it? We have to address the challenge of our energy prices. The prediction for this year's energy prices is that in Germany, steel-producing companies will pay £107 per kWh for electricity and in this country it will be £174. This cannot continue. The Government must take action on the emissions trading scheme. Members have explained the significant cost to the industry—£120 million amounts to 60% of capital investment in the steel industry. These are the challenges the Government must take on in a strategic way, not by using yet another sticking-plaster approach to a problem in the economy.

The Government can and must do more on procurement. Environmental, social and labour clauses are at the heart of Labour's plan for procurement. It is beyond belief that this country is the only major country that would even dream of giving a contract for warships to an overseas company. There is no guarantee that the Spanish consortium awarded that £1.6 billion contract will use UK-made steel in producing those fleet solid support ships. Other countries take a more strategic approach. The United States has the Inflation Reduction Act, with strong commitments to the transition to low-carbon steel production at its heart. Such a commitment has also been made by other countries whose investments are years ahead of what is going on in this country, including Canada, Spain, Belgium and Germany. They are committed to low-carbon steel production.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the contract for warships. In Belfast, Harland and Wolff has benefited from that, but the disadvantage is that if it wants to buy British steel and bring it over to the Northern Ireland, it will be 25% more expensive. Again, that is a conflict of the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill.

Bill Esterson: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that we need to sort out the Northern Ireland protocol. That is a slightly longer and wider debate, but it is an important point for him to raise as a Northern Ireland MP.

I want to remind the Minister about the problem with Russian steel, which my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East mentioned. It cannot be right that melted and poured Russian steel can be diverted via a third country and then imported into this country. Sanctions have to apply to all Russian-produced steel. We have had the Government announcements, media reports

and lots of talk over the past 13 years from 12 Ministers. What we need is a proper strategic approach. Labour is putting forward an industrial strategy and plans for a green steel fund of £3 billion. That is the kind of strategic long-term commitment that will deliver the confidence and certainty to the industry that is needed. We have a plan. We have proposed a billion-pound fund for energy-intensive industries and it could help right now. The Government can adopt our plan if they want to. It is there in writing in the public domain. They can adopt that plan or come up with their own, but it has to be at a strategic level—no more sticking plasters. We need a strategic long-term answer for the future of this vital strategic industry.

3.48 pm

The Minister for Industry and Investment Security (Ms Nusrat Ghani): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate the hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) on securing the debate and raising the incredibly important issue of the contribution that the steel industry makes to the UK economy. We seem to be spending a lot of time with each other, and I want to put on the record that, while we are from different political parties, we are all aligned on doing what we can for the sector.

I am slightly anxious that everyone keeps pointing out that I am the 12th or 13th Minister—I am not sure if that is the kiss of death or not. As well as getting through my speech, I want to respond to all the contributions because I know how important that is for all the MPs who need to go home to their constituencies this weekend and explain what they have done on behalf of the steel sector.

I thank the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion)—life comes at you fast when your own Select Committee report is read out to you in a debate. I thank the hon. Member for Neath (Christina Rees) for setting out the importance of the steel sector to the Welsh economy; the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), whose points I will respond to very shortly; and the hon. Members for Llanelli (Dame Nia Griffith), for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon). I will cover the Northern Ireland protocol briefly, if time allows.

Of course, I thank the Chair of the Welsh Affairs Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb). Freeports were in my Maritime 2050 plan—launched when I was previously maritime Minister—which is backed by the Associated British Ports. I am not sure what more I can say, other than I do love freeports and ABP is a pretty good organisation; hopefully, that is enough said.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Holly Mumby-Croft)—our lady of steel—to whom I am indebted for the support she provides when I constantly ask for bits of information to ensure that my Department is absolutely on the right path in delivering for the steel sector. I also thank the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows). I will try my very best to get to the points she raised as well.

As we know, steel contributed £3.8 billion to the UK economy in 2021. It is crucial to many downstream sectors, such as construction, automotive and our green

[Ms Nusrat Ghani]

energy revolution, all of which sit in BEIS. I take care of automotive, aviation, maritime and construction, so it is critical to the rest of my brief. The industry provides a critical foundation that underpins our manufacturing, energy and infrastructure sectors, with a proud history forged in our United Kingdom.

In 2021, the steel sector supported 39,000 well-paid jobs in steel production and a further 59,000 jobs across the UK economy. Although my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe does not get political on steel, I thought she landed a good point in saying that jobs and production halved under Labour. However, we are trying to be collective in our support of the steel sector, so I will not dwell on that too much. We know that for many constituencies, steel is the lifeblood of the local economy and a real source of local pride. I pay particular tribute to the hard-working steel workers who have contributed much to our steel industry over the years.

However, as we have heard today, we have to recognise that there are global pressures. The sector is under stress everywhere. This is not just a UK issue; there are global challenges exacerbated by global overcapacity and the need to decarbonise. The hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth asked about the oversupply issue. Through the global forum on steel excess capacity, the G20 and other interested nations agreed important policy principles and recommendations to tackle the unfair subsidies that we believe are the cause of overcapacity, and we continue to work together to find solutions to this challenge.

We are disappointed that not all major steelmaking economies are taking part in these discussions, and I call on all players to come back to the table—in particular China, which represents more than half of all steelmaking capacity in the world. There are also great opportunities in how we can use steel as we transition to a zero-emission economy and help our other great industries to transition as well.

Challenges are particularly acute at the moment. Unfortunately, over the past couple of weeks we have learned of the potential redundancies being made at Liberty Steel, including in the constituency of the hon. Member for Newport East. Obviously, these are commercial decisions, and I am working incredibly hard with these businesses and the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure we are doing what we can to support every worker and give them the support they need. We spend most of our time working on that, to ensure they have opportunities to be trained up and get the support they need. There are a lot of challenges that the Government are facing, but it is not just us in the UK.

I want to cover some of the support that the Government have provided, which is substantial and has been in place for some time. More than £800 million has been made available to the steel sector alone since 2013. There has always been a discrepancy between the price of energy here and in Germany, which is quoted quite often, but £800 million is a substantial amount of support. We have created new, competitive funds, with more than £1.5 billion made available. The lead Member for this debate, the hon. Member for Newport East, reported that that funding covers not just steel, but a number of other industries, but I am keen to ensure that the steel sector gets the support it needs. I promised the

hon. Lady that I would go through the funds so that she would be able to share that information back home in her constituency.

The hon. Lady mentioned the CCUS infrastructure fund. Each site is at a different stage when it comes to decarbonising, but that is £1 billion. There is funding of £240 million through the net zero hydrogen fund, which I know is important to many Members present; £55 million through the industrial fuel switching fund; £20 million through the Industrial Decarbonisation Research and Innovation Centre, which provides capital funding to projects that support fuel switching to hydrogen on industrial sites; £289 million through the industrial energy transformation fund to help businesses with high energy use, including steel; and £66 million as part of the industrial strategy challenge fund. Those budgets are in place to help the steel sector in the long term. They are not short-term sticking plasters, but substantial amounts of money.

Sarah Champion: I recognise and am grateful for all the support the Government have given and will give to steel, but those are like little Lego bricks. There is not the joined-up strategy that we need to have confidence in our industry. Will the Minister please come forward with a proper national plan to save this vital sector?

Ms Ghani: We need to put in place all the budgets that are available. I will quickly touch on procurement, which gives confidence in what we are hoping to do in the long-term for the sector; it does put together a plan.

As I said when I was at the APPG earlier, since I have been in post I have been focused on the issues that we are facing right now—with Liberty, for example. I cannot comment on the negotiations because they are live. I said to the APPG that, once we have got over that moment, I hope to sit down, do a refresh and look at everything we can provide the sector in the long term. What is happening in the United States is a game-changer, so we can try to push back on some of the challenges we have had on procurement previously. We can try to see what more we can do.

I am anxious that I have only four minutes left. On the £18 billion of energy relief, Gareth Stace, director general of UK Steel, said that the energy bills discount scheme provides

“important certainty and stability for steel producers’ production costs”.

We have legislated for the full range of tools allowed under the WTO rules so that the UK can tackle the threat of unfair trading practices and injuries.

Furthermore, in financial year 2020-21, the Government procured UK-produced steel worth £268 million for major UK projects—an increase of £160 million on the previous year. When I was the High Speed 2 Minister, before I realised I might get the steel brief, I always used to bang on to HS2 about not procuring more British steel. I hope to go back and reflect on procurement again, especially because it was in the BEIS Committee report—I want to say that before the hon. Member for Rotherham pushes that and reminds me of what I committed to.

About 8.4 million tonnes of steel is required for infrastructure projects in the UK, including 5.5 million tonnes for contracts for difference, which are not always

considered public procurement, so there is huge scope for more procurement to take place in the UK. I will try to address that too.

There has been a huge level of engagement. The hon. Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) said that it should be at Secretary of State level, but I have been meeting with the unions. I have kept every appointment that has been asked of me.

Bill Esterson: It should be both.

Ms Ghani: It is both. The Secretary of State regularly meets the senior members of all the organisations that try to speak to us about steel.

Bill Esterson: You haven't met the unions.

Ms Ghani: I was with the unions yesterday and in front of the APPG today.

I am going to run out of time, so I will quickly touch on the carbon border adjustment mechanism. We are aware of the risk of carbon leakage, which a number of Members highlighted, and we have been monitoring the EU CBAM proposal with interest. As I said to the APPG this morning, once the consultation is out, it is absolutely vital that we put in the best submission. I have agreed to come back to the APPG to ensure we do that constructively.

Public procurement is a key focus of mine. I am trying to get over the negotiations at the moment, and I will reflect on what more we can do with procurement. We are looking at the BEIS steel procurement taskforce, and we will also reflect on what is happening in the United States.

On trade, Members know my positions on countries such as China and Russia, as double sanctionees. I know how important it is to ensure we are resilient in

the UK. We work very closely with the Department for International Trade to put together the best packages for trade. I absolutely understand the points made about Russia. We are doing everything we can to ensure that that steel is not arriving here, but I will go back and see whether we can push back any further. I will do everything I can to ensure that happens.

My hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe was keen to reflect on the steel safeguards. We have agreed an extensive solution to the US section 232 tariffs to significantly increase US market access for UK firms.

I am anxious that I am going to run out of time, so I will respond to Members in writing. I reiterate my commitment to the sector and to appearing in front of the APPG as soon as possible to ensure we are putting together a good package and are able to lobby No. 10 and No. 11 collectively.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): I call Jessica Morden to wind up. You have 20 seconds.

3.59 pm

Jessica Morden: I thank all Members for coming along. We have agreed that this is a critical time for steel. I welcome the new steel Minister to her role. I welcome the talks; I think they are a step in the right direction. I also support Community's call for steel companies to reconsider any plans for restructuring while those talks are ongoing and before we know what future support there might be. I say to the Minister that we need more data on procurement, so perhaps she can provide that—

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Order.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Silsden and Steeton Bridge

4 pm

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): I call Robbie Moore to move the motion, and then I will call the Minister to respond. As hon. Members know, there is no opportunity for the mover of the motion to wind up in a 30-minute debate.

Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered construction of a Silsden and Steeton bridge.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I am delighted to have secured my own personal time in the House of Commons to raise an important local issue: my campaign to get the Silsden to Steeton pedestrian bridge built over the busy A629 dual carriageway.

Before I get into the detail, it is important to outline why this campaign is so important. Silsden is a town with a population of around 8,000, including myself; perhaps I should declare that as an interest, because I would like to benefit from this bridge. Silsden is connected to Steeton—a slightly smaller settlement—by the A6034, otherwise known as Keighley Road, which then goes on to become Station Road. It is a distance of less than 1,000 metres.

Steeton has a busy and well-utilised railway station, with direct links to Skipton, Bradford and Leeds. Many of my constituents living in Silsden benefit from that station, but getting there is a treacherous journey on foot. What separates the two settlements is a very busy dual carriageway. The A629 is a busy trunk road going east to west between Skipton and Keighley, and beyond. It takes a huge amount of heavy traffic every day and into the night.

On the junction between the busy dual carriageway and the two roads connecting Silsden and Steeton is a two-lane roundabout. There is no ideal crossing point for a pedestrian to get across the roundabout and the busy dual carriageway from Silsden to Steeton. For a resident living in Silsden with children, or a young person who is wanting to walk from Silsden to Steeton, the connection to get to the roundabout is not easy in itself. The pavements are very narrow on either side of the road.

If a person is walking from Silsden in the direction of Steeton, once they get to the bridge that goes over the Aire river, the pavement disappears on one side and they have to cross over to the other side. They then have to make their way up to the busy roundabout and take their life into their hands to cross it before making their way on to Steeton. That is just not good enough. We must get a pedestrian bridge built as a matter of urgency, because many people use the crossing.

What action has been taken to date? Kris Hopkins, who was the previous Conservative MP for Keighley, first lobbied on the issue. He got a petition going that was signed by many residents living in Silsden and Steeton who had to use the crossing on a day-to-day basis. As the MP for Keighley, and Ilkley at the time, he was successful in securing £700,000 from our Conservative Government for a feasibility study, which was awarded to the West Yorkshire Combined Authority. In turn, it instructed Bradford Council to undertake a feasibility study and build a business case so more funds could be drawn down to get the pedestrian bridge built.

That money was awarded way back in late 2016, and it took until 2020 for the Labour-run Bradford Council and the Labour-run West Yorkshire Combined Authority to even get the feasibility study done. Almost four years! What on earth were they doing in that period to build a business case? It was only after I lobbied, after getting elected in 2019, that Bradford Council and West Yorkshire Combined Authority produced this feasibility study, and—surprise, surprise—what do we think it said? We need a bridge to cross this busy dual carriageway. Unbelievable! They spent £700,000 on determining that, but we could all have said that it needed to be done.

The feasibility study said that it was going to cost £3.6 million to construct the bridge—a hefty sum. Of course, detail is important, and I appreciate that it can take some time to build up the feasibility and business cases to draw down funds. But, looking at the figures, it would seem that West Yorkshire Combined Authority, a Labour-run administration controlled by a Labour Mayor, and the Labour administration at Bradford Council could not even get their figures right. In 2020, they told us, and my constituents, that it was going to cost £3.6 million to build the bridge. In June 2021, they then told us it was going to cost £5.5 million, and then—surprise, surprise—we get to August 2022 and the figure has gone up dramatically to £10.3 million.

All we want is a pedestrian bridge across a dual carriageway, and they are now telling us that it is going to cost £10.3 million. That is an increase of £6.7 million since the first figure of £3.6 million from the feasibility study that took them almost four years to do. What on earth have they been doing during the last four years, and what on earth was the previous Labour MP doing to get any traction on this project? Nothing!

I can only assume that those figures have been exaggerated to try to kick the project into the long grass because they are not interested in building the bridge. Well, let me tell you, Mr Pritchard: I absolutely am. Since I have been elected as the Conservative MP, we have been successful in securing the funds to deliver this project. Those funds have been awarded by this Conservative Government to West Yorkshire Combined Authority via an £830 million fund that is ringfenced for transport and infrastructure-related projects.

The money is there; we have secured that, and now it moves on to deliverability. Back in 2022, when the announcement was made that we had been successful and secured the money, what did Labour-run Bradford Council and Labour-run West Yorkshire Combined Authority tell us? “Oh well, it is going to take until 2026 for this bridge to be built.” I cannot get my head around how much time it takes to get a project off the ground. All we want is a safe crossing so that my constituents can get from Silsden to Steeton without having to take their lives into their hands by crossing a busy dual carriageway.

The incompetence at the council is unbelievable. Look at how long it takes to get major infrastructure projects off the ground. The Queensferry crossing, connecting Edinburgh to Fife, took six years to build, yet the council are saying that a pedestrian bridge is going to take another four years to get off the ground. That is simply not good enough. The feedback that I am getting is that the ground conditions are complex—well, let's get it sorted out and do our research so that we can get the bridge built. I know that planning issues can be complex. Compulsory purchase powers may need to be implemented because I

assume that land take will be required, as the council will not own all of the land. Let us get this project going.

I will continue to bang the drum for driving economic growth and ensuring that we have a safe crossing for my constituents, but we must get the council and West Yorkshire Combined Authority moving because I am getting impatient and I will not stop banging the drum on this issue for my constituents. All we want is a safe pedestrian crossing over a busy dual carriageway. I want to crack on and get it built now, so that a parent living in Silsden does not have to drive their child almost 1 km to drop them off at the station in Steeton or take their life into their hands when crossing the dual carriageway. I am getting fed up with the sluggish approach of our council and of West Yorkshire Combined Authority. As I say, let us get this bridge built.

Will the Minister use all his efforts to put pressure on the Labour West Yorkshire Mayor, who is dragging her feet on this issue, and on Labour-run Bradford Council, to get this project delivered with urgency? Will he write to those two organisations to put pressure on them to get the bridge built? Will he come to see me and meet some of my residents in Silsden and Steeton, so that we can get this project off the ground? All we want to do is get the bridge built.

4.11 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Richard Holden): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard, and it is always important to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Robbie Moore). Although I am from the other side of the Pennines, I went to school just up the road from him, so I am aware of the issues that he raises. Being an Ermysted's old boy, I have friends from the neck of the woods that he mentions, in Silsden and Steeton, and I know how important the road crossing is for him and his constituents.

I thank him for securing the debate and for building on the work of his predecessor but one, Kris Hopkins, who started this campaign. It is astonishing that it is now longer than six years since the project started. I am sure that by working together, we can reach a situation where this is not a bridge too far for Bradford Council and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, and get it delivered for local people.

It is a pleasure to address some of the points that my hon. Friend raised. Putting in place transport infrastructure that supports local communities is a key priority for my Department not just for West Yorkshire, but for the entire north of England and the whole country. That cannot be done without local authorities, which we need on the ground to deliver schemes.

My hon. Friend will recognise the strong investment that the Government have made in transport in the north. That has been reinforced through our flagship city region sustainable transport settlement. That will provide about £6 billion to the largest city regions in England to transform their local transport networks over the next few years.

CRSTS represents an unprecedented investment in West Yorkshire's transport, and it will play a key role in supporting growth and productivity, levelling up and decarbonisation. The settlement will see West Yorkshire specifically receive £830 million from central Government

funding for investment in public transport infrastructure and many important projects. Hon. Members, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley, can be very proud of the role that they have played in helping to ensure that West Yorkshire gets the money for those local schemes.

As part of that £830 million, £9.5 million is provided for the construction of the Silsden and Steeton bridge. Additionally, the Department for Transport provided £700,000 to support the business case for the development. How on earth it took four years, I do not know. It feels to me that there was a clear hiatus between the tenure of Mr Hopkins as the local MP and that of my hon. Friend, who now represents Keighley and Ilkley, when things did not get done because they were not being pushed for for local people. I know from speaking here and in the House that my hon. Friend is a cut above in fighting for his constituents, wherever they are in his patch.

The £830 million commitment through CRSTS is also expected to be supplemented by mayoral combined authorities with a local contribution of 15% to 20%. As well as providing investment for the construction of the bridge, CRSTS gives West Yorkshire's metro Mayor huge autonomy and flexibility in investing in wider local transport priorities for the region, and it is her decision what to prioritise. Personally, I cannot understand why a relatively small project, which is unlikely to have a broader impact, is not being prioritised, especially when it has been campaigned for for so long not just by my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley, but by his predecessor's predecessor. The investments include large transit systems, massive improvements in Bradford city centre and all sorts of other things, but crucially, they also include the important link for his constituents in Steeton and Silsden.

The Government fully appreciate the critical role that our city regions play in driving growth and long-term prosperity, and connectivity is vital to that. It is our ambition that every region has at least one globally competitive city at its heart. The CRSTS programme, which is the latest part of this Government's significant track record in investment in West Yorkshire, will begin to realise that ambition by investing in transport networks and opening up areas in the region for more employment, education, leisure and housing. My hon. Friend has consistently campaigned for such interventions as a local MP on the ground and through his work in Parliament.

We believe that better transport connectivity helps all our regions to fulfil their potential. Alongside CRSTS, the Government are providing £70 million for West Yorkshire's bus service improvement plan, which is being used locally to introduce the excellent and very welcome £2 fare cap. That is central Government money for which hon. Members, such as my hon. Friend, have campaigned. We have provided £173 million to a large public transport scheme in Leeds, improving transport for residents and workers. Many of my hon. Friend's constituents will commute to work in those places, and that is why the regional funding is so important.

The Government have funded important local schemes, including through the transforming cities fund. We are really trying to help to drive up local transport and active travel. We have also helped West Yorkshire to establish a £1 billion transport fund, which is a 20-year commitment for the city region and will help create 20,000 more jobs.

[Mr Richard Holden]

Taken together, all those initiatives will deliver significant improvements to bus services in the region, including safer and more accessible bus stops, better highways and improved journey times. The £830 million is merely the latest in a series of investments in West Yorkshire and the region, which shows our long-term commitment. When we provide such funding, we hand the reins to local people, councils and combined authorities. It is right that those local councils, such as Bradford Council, and combined authorities are held to account for what they deliver with that money for local people. That is why I think today's debate is so important.

Across the north more broadly, the Government have been investing very substantially: around £33 billion has been invested in transport since 2010, and around a tenth of that will come from the CRSTS funding. There have been projects across Yorkshire and the Humber, and the integrated rail plan is providing £100 million to look at the best way to take HS2 trains into West Yorkshire. Furthermore, over £239 million is being distributed to local authorities across the north that are not receiving the CRSTS funding that West Yorkshire is receiving, in order to support pothole repairs and local transport measures in 2022 and 2023.

Through greater investment in local areas, we can grow the economy, create good jobs and spread opportunity everywhere. The new funding will help to do that, and—this is important for towns such as those in my hon. Friend's area—it will help to reflect that real local pride. That is part of what he said: he wants to see those things delivered for local people to create pride in their towns, especially when they have fought for so long and so hard for some of these things.

With the Government providing significant funding for places to fulfil their ambitions, I look forward to seeing this being delivered, and it is all about delivery. The responsibility lies with West Yorkshire Combined Authority and the city region's metro Mayor, Tracy Brabin. West Yorkshire was at the forefront of our drive to create mayoral combined authorities and we recognise the strategic importance of joining up transport connectivity, which is why we put it at the front of the queue. Now it is up to Tracy Brabin to deliver.

Through a series of devolution deals, we have provided more transport powers—we want to provide more—and more funding to support mayoral combined authorities, but we have to see them delivering. The best way for them to do that is to push forward schemes such as the one in my hon. Friend's constituency. We understand that there are the skills and the capacity in local government; that is why they have been asking for these powers and why we have given the powers to them. Now they need to deliver.

Central Government supports local government's capacity and capability in a huge number of ways, including through the resourcing grant for the combined

authority of £7 million, which is huge money. It is there to help and to deliver projects such as the one that my hon. Friend has been fighting for.

I agree with my hon. Friend that the construction of this bridge is very important for local people, and I am excited and proud that the Department has been able to support it through funding. I take this opportunity to commend the combined authority for part of its track record on some of these projects, which they have pushed forward. However, we want to see all these schemes being delivered—not just some that have been handpicked—as quickly as possible, so that as many people as possible can benefit from them.

My Department will work closely with West Yorkshire Combined Authority on the progress of its whole settlement to realise positive outcomes for people living in Steeton and Silsden, as well as for people living in the wider West Yorkshire area, and to understand whether the local authority can take up any of the opportunities perhaps to accelerate the schemes as they go ahead to construction.

As my hon. Friend requested, I will ask my officials to raise this issue in their regular meetings with the combined authority, and I will write to him about that. The Department will monitor each MCA's progress throughout their settlement period to ensure that ambitious plans are matched by successful delivery, so he can rest assured that we will continue to monitor this work. However, the responsibility for delivery and deployment ultimately sits with the local authority in Bradford. That is why it is so important that these issues continue to be raised.

I look forward to seeing the City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council deliver promptly on the investment that my Department has made in this scheme, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising it. I will also be delighted to come up and visit him, because I think that we all need to put our shoulders to the wheel, just to give this scheme a bit of a nudge in the right direction.

I hope that I have been clear about the level of support that the Department has been providing to West Yorkshire, the importance we attach to the bridge between Steeton and Silsden, and, importantly, the broader connectivity investment that we are providing for my hon. Friend's area and the region. The sluggishness of the local authorities in this case stands in stark contrast to the sterling work of my hon. Friend, who is always at the forefront of championing his constituents. I look forward to continuing to work with him and the local authorities to get this project delivered, to get the area thriving, and to make this happen sooner rather than later.

Question put and agreed to.

4.23 pm

Sitting suspended.

Violence against Women and Girls: Plymouth

4.29 pm

Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of violence against women and girls in Plymouth.

It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Pritchard. 2021 was a tough year for the city of Plymouth. In August, a young man tragically took the lives of five people in Keyham, killing two women and a little girl, before turning the gun on himself. In November, 18-year-old Bobbi-Anne McLeod was abducted from a bus stop in Leigham and found several days later, close to a beach in my constituency, having been brutally murdered by a man. These horrific incidents compounded the sense of fear and concern among female residents of Plymouth, which was shared by many across the country after the murder of Sarah Everard by a police officer in London, earlier in 2021.

As a result, it became clear that something needed to be done to tackle violence against women and girls in Plymouth, if the city was to feel safer and be safer. And so began a cross-party piece of work, which resulted in a groundbreaking report containing 15 recommendations. Recommendation No. 5 states that Plymouth should share its learning:

“Plymouth will share its story as widely as possible so others can learn from the experiences of people in the city and the work of the Commission. The Commission will call on local MPs to host a debate in Westminster on male violence against women and girls in Plymouth.”

That is why we are here today: to share the work of the Plymouth commission on violence against women and girls, and the ongoing work across the city to embed real change and make women and girls safer in our city.

The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) sends his apologies. He cannot be with us due to a long-standing commitment, but his work following the Keyham murders was exceptional. I am also expecting my right hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) to pop in later in the debate. His ministerial duties mean that he cannot say anything, but he is very supportive of the action we are taking today. We are all in this together. I also pay tribute to the leader of Plymouth City Council and the leader of the Plymouth Labour group for collaborating so closely on this project. They appointed a rising star of the council chamber, Councillor Rebecca Smith, to head up the commission. Months later, that appointment has proved to be well judged.

The first step on the commission journey was to host a question and answer event with groups already working on the issues of violence against women and girls in Plymouth, ranging from the police and the council to organisations such as Trevi and First Light, which work with survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence. It was important to start by more clearly sharing the existing work being done across the city. The online event was attended by over 120 people and gave a clear sense of the sort of questions that women wanted answers to, but also provided some of the topics that the commission would need to address—for example,

the importance of working with young people to help to shift the culture of everyday sexism and misogyny that so many experience.

A group of experts from across the country were invited to join the commission to investigate the current situation in the city and make recommendations on how the city should tackle violence against women and girls. The commission was chaired by Councillor Rebecca Smith, with former chief prosecutor Nazir Afzal OBE serving as an independent adviser. Just over 12 months ago, the commission met for the first time and set about gathering evidence to report on how Plymouth was tackling violence against women and girls, and to recommend what might be done to enhance existing work. The result was the “Male Violence Against Women and Girls Report”, with its 15 recommendations, which was published in May 2022 and is available online.

We believe that the commission and its report and recommendations are the first of their kind in the country. The commission heard over 40 hours of oral evidence, conducted a citywide survey completed by over 1,300 people, and received written evidence from a large number of sources. From the start of the work, it became clear that the elephant in the room is the fact that the violence against women and girls acronym, VAWG, unintentionally leaves out any mention of the perpetrators. The commission therefore deliberately referred to male violence against women and girls throughout its report, to make that point. Although it is important to acknowledge that not all sexual violence, domestic abuse or stalking is male on female, it clear from the data that the vast majority is. In 2019-20, 69.3% of domestic abuse victims in the city were female and 74.4% of suspects were male. Thus, the commission sought to keep this tragic reality central to its work and recommendations.

The report and recommendations focused on four key areas: the need for cultural change around language and behaviour; the need for better access to support for women and girls who are victims of male violence; the need to help women and girls across the city to feel safer by creating safe places and spaces; and the recognition that, in order to deliver the recommendations, the whole community needs to be involved. Let me deal briefly with each area in turn, beginning with cultural change.

How do we change our deeply entrenched culture, which is riddled with inappropriate male attitudes to women and girls? In particular, how do we do so when the internet has made access to degrading images of women a free-for-all, and on social media so-called influencers such as Andrew Tate, as well as men belonging to the incel mindset, continue to pour out their bile and disrespect on women and girls? A challenge indeed. But just because we are unlikely to solve the problem completely does not mean we should not try to make a real difference right here, right now. As the commission chair, Councillor Rebecca Smith, said, a key to success is the fact that the conversation has already started.

By shining a light on male violence against women and girls through the work of the commission, Plymouth has been able to highlight the issues that need to be fixed—those that are behind the closed doors of homes across the city, common in workplaces and social spaces, evident across internet usage, and too often commonplace among our young people. Honest conversations have begun, and need to continue, as the city explores what a world without male violence against women and girls

[Sir Gary Streeter]

looks like, and the steps needed to achieve it. An early example is the NSPCC's series of five films, launched in December last year, that show an intergenerational approach to preventing violence against women and girls. Another example has been the start of a local group called M.A.N. Culture, which is described as a network to challenge lad culture and promote positive attitudes among men towards women and girls.

Cultural norms can be challenged and changed. When I was first elected 30 years ago, who would have thought that we would call each other out for having a couple of drinks in the pub and trying to drive home? Drink-driving was not seen as particularly wrong in those days, but public opinion turned, legislation followed, and once acceptable behaviour became all but obsolete. That is just one example that cultural shift is possible; and on male attitudes towards women and girls, the journey has begun.

The report's second area of focus was better support. It recommended that

"Women and girls in Plymouth are supported and empowered to report violence and abuse",

that they should

"get the support they need, at the right time and in the right place"

and that they should not have to share their story twice. Since 2018, Plymouth has been proactively addressing violence against women and girls through the city's domestic abuse and sexual violence partnership. The city has been implementing Home Office guidelines: putting the victim at the centre of service delivery; having a clear focus on perpetrators in order to keep victims safe; taking a strategic and systemic approach to commissioning domestic abuse services; providing locally led services; raising awareness of issues; and involving, engaging and empowering communities to design and deliver solutions to prevent violence against women and girls.

Work was already being done across the city before the commission was set up. However, since the commission's report, work to deliver the recommendations has accelerated. The Safer Plymouth partnership, supported by the domestic abuse and sexual violence partnership board, is providing the overall leadership and direction for the citywide delivery of the commission's recommendations, and a new strategic lead has recently been appointed, bringing to the role 20 years of experience in the sector.

Since the launch of the VAWG report in May 2022, a programme of work has been set in train across the city. Moonstone is the name of the local police force's new stand-alone domestic abuse team, which brings together expertise and focus on cases of domestic abuse. Gemstone is the name of the sexual offences team based in the city. Early indications are that this new focus is bringing about more effective pre-charge advice, improved outcomes, improved timeliness and improved responses to victims. It is significant that tackling violence against women and girls is a priority for our excellent Devon and Cornwall police and crime commissioner, Alison Hernandez.

As one of 15 areas to attract Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and national lottery funding to deliver the changing futures programme, the

city has been able to use the project to support the commission's recommendations. Charities working with abuse victims have co-designed the violence against women and girls charter mark and helped to shape last November's VAWG conference, both of which were recommended in the commission's report but were enhanced by the approach of bringing in lived experience. The city's specialist domestic abuse service is in the process of being re-procured—a timely activity, enabling the new service to be shaped to meet the commission's recommendations. Much good work is under way following the commission's report.

Thirdly, creating safe places and spaces also featured heavily in the commission's list of recommendations. Although meeting the recommendations is obviously challenging, not least because one woman's feeling of safety is not necessarily matched by her neighbour's, it has been important to take action and do whatever is possible to ensure the streets of Plymouth feel safer. Funding has been secured to deliver help points at key locations for the night-time economy—essentially lamp posts with a camera installed in them. If someone feels unsafe for whatever reason, they can push the button and get connected to the CCTV team who can support them or provide help.

A night bus service has also been funded and is running each weekend over the winter to help those enjoying the night-time economy to get home safely. A mobile CCTV van providing a high visibility deterrent to tackle all forms of antisocial behaviour has been positioned to support the safety, both perceived and actual, of women and girls. It is great to see my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View joining us; he is very engaged with the whole situation.

The dynamic response project has been developed to make tactical and visible environmental improvements across the city, using referrals from the police or local councillors on behalf of residents to improve feelings of safety in hotspots. These might be simple changes such as trimming back trees to improve the lighting in dark walkways or improving the appearance of areas that have become rundown. The city is testing a single point of entry for children who require assessment, support and treatment for harmful sexual behaviour. All those measures are part of the work being done to ensure the city feels and is safer.

Finally, there is the recognition that this is an issue for us all—the whole community. Continuing to talk about and take action on violence against women and girls is crucial if Plymouth is to see the change it seeks. As a result, the city has set up a new VAWG communications working group to co-ordinate a citywide programme of activities, campaigns and events, including an annual conference, with the inaugural event held last November attracting over 200 attendees from businesses and organisations.

In addition, conversations are taking place with over 50 organisations across the city that have already signed a pledge to tackle VAWG, and to develop a violence against women and girls charter mark scheme and champions network by November 2023. As with any set of recommendations, setting up the framework for delivery is essential, and the new strategic lead is working with the domestic abuse and sexual violence partnership board to refresh the plan for the next 12 months to include the commission's recommendations.

By setting out the work that has been done in the city since the publication of the commission's report last year, I wanted to highlight how possible it is to tackle violence against women and girls across a city like Plymouth. Obviously, we have years of committed work ahead of us to see the cultural change we want and an end to violence against women and girls, but in Plymouth we have made a positive start. We cannot pretend it will be easy to set aside centuries of ingrained male attitudes and behaviour, but if we are to build a safer, better world for all women and children, it is essential that we commit to that task.

I will conclude by asking the Minister a few questions. I am sure she will set out how the Government have worked hard, which they have, to play their part in tackling violence against women and girls in recent years. Much of the work being done and facilitated in Plymouth has been impacted directly by Government policy and through funding made available for the work. For that we are grateful, which leads me nicely to my requests.

Additional central funding for frontline interventions would make a world of difference to our cause. Is the Minister aware that current Home Office funding is inaccessible to the majority of small local VAWG organisations in Devon and Cornwall because of the conditions attached? Could she kindly re-examine and consider that?

I have spoken about the ambition to see more work on prevention and systemic cultural change impacting all generations, and additional funding and focus are necessary to include work to change the behaviour and attitudes of men and boys. That would greatly help the city to deliver this vital work. I think we all agree that it is not all about funding; we also need to hear a clear and consistent voice on the issues from those people and institutions qualified to speak about the deeper causes of such attitudes and behaviour. I welcome the recent amendments to the Online Safety Bill that will ensure that we protect children from inappropriate sexual material online, because that is a key part of tackling violence against women and girls through culture change and education.

The commission launched its report at an event last summer attended by my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), then a Home Office Minister, who gave a keynote speech that was extremely well received. All three city MPs were in attendance. We would like to invite the Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Miss Dines), to visit Plymouth and see for herself the excellent work that we are undertaking. I congratulate the commission on its work and report, and look forward to supporting its leadership on this vital issue over the years ahead.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): I do not wish to set a formal time limit, but speeches of around six minutes would allow everybody to have their full say.

4.46 pm

Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab): It is, as ever, a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. It is important for me to speak in a debate about an issue that impacts communities across the UK. It is not isolated to Plymouth or Pontypridd but impacts us all. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter), and I congratulate him

on securing this important and timely debate. Having spoken to my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), I know that violence against women and girls is a very active issue in Plymouth specifically, so it is important that we have time to debate the issue in detail.

I will keep my comments brief and fairly general, in the knowledge that much of what I say sadly applies, as I have said, to cities, towns and communities throughout the country and across the world, and is not limited to Plymouth. We all know that violence against women and girls can take many different forms, which can include, but are certainly not limited to, physical aggression, coercive control or harassment. In recent years, we have been reminded of the stark realities of what it is like to be a young woman in modern Britain. The stats speak for themselves: in 2019, the number of female homicide victims in England and Wales reached its highest levels since 2006—up 10% on the previous year.

But violence against women and girls is not just about murders or homicides; there are many more issues at play that have led us to the point where male violence against women and girls—as the hon. Member for South West Devon said, let us call it what it is—is too often treated as a societal issue that is a given rather than one that can actively be prevented. For example, there are significant issues with our criminal justice system, which has historically failed women and girls, as the Government have known for many years. I need only point colleagues to the brilliant Baroness Kennedy, who forensically examined the issue of discrimination in her incredible series of books “Eve Was Framed” and “Eve Was Shamed”.

Of course, many of the real problems around violence that women and girls experience every day on our streets, at home, online, at work and even in our schools never even make it to the police—let alone the court system. As the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on perpetrators of domestic abuse, it is clear to me that we need a long-term, whole-system response to ending violence against women that needs to provide justice and protection to survivors, deliver effective prevention, and tackle the societal attitudes, inequality and discrimination that underpin the abuse faced by women and girls.

That brings me to what I consider one of the most significant issues that underpins violence against women and girls more generally: misogyny. Colleagues may be aware that last week I had an Adjournment debate on the worrying rise of misogyny that many teachers are reporting among pupils in our schools. I think we all recognise that much of the misogyny is not new; perhaps there is scope for a separate debate on the history of sexism and misogyny, but that is certainly a matter for many other days.

Colleagues across the House have already made reference to, and must acknowledge, the role that social media plays in spreading misogyny online for all to see. I echo the comments of the hon. Member for South West Devon about the prominent so-called influencer Andrew Tate. I have made my position on him very clear in previous comments. Having done so, I have now received a barrage of misogynistic, aggressive and sexist messages across a variety of platforms, but that will not deter me. In my role as shadow Minister for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, we have recently concluded the Third Reading of the Online Safety Bill,

[Alex Davies-Jones]

which is a very important piece of legislation. Sadly, I, like the End Violence Against Women Coalition and Glitch the charity, believe that in its current form the Bill will fail to properly protect women and girls online. The systems and business models of many platforms often actively promote such controversial content, which gains significant views and therefore boosts their advertising revenue, but when it comes to keeping people safe now and in future generations, there must be a balance.

Something that I found particularly stark—I am sure this is the case in Plymouth and across the country—is the sheer number of young people I speak to when visiting schools in my constituency who aspire to be like those social media influencers. It is for that reason that we should not underestimate their influence on young people. As we know, the links between misogyny and more traditional forms of violence against women and girls are all too easy to see.

Ultimately, the Government have work to do to reassure young people, their parents, teachers and other trusted professionals that they are taking the issue seriously. While I proudly sat on the Domestic Abuse Public Bill Committee alongside the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), it feels as though that piece of legislation is failing to capture the broad range of harms, both obvious and more discreet, that are specific to women and girls. Part of the Government's approach must be to consider the power and influence that the online sphere can have on the victims' ability to seek help and in preventing perpetrators from being exposed to damaging material online, or directly fed it through dangerous algorithms. I would welcome the Minister's thoughts on that point. I hope she will feed back my comments to her colleagues in other Departments. Only with a cross-departmental approach will we truly go some way to tackle violence against women and girls at its root.

4.51 pm

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate my longstanding friend, my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter), on securing this debate.

The abduction and murder of Bobbi-Anne McLeod in November 2021 brought the issue of violence against women and girls into focus in Plymouth and across Devon and Cornwall. No one can fail to be impacted by hearing about a woman who simply left home to catch a bus and was subjected to such savagery. That followed an incident only a few months earlier when a man driven by the poisonous ideology of the incel movement shot dead five people in Keyham.

Both incidents brought fear to the streets. They brought to the fore our need to tackle male violence against women and girls, not just in the city of my birth but across our country. I grew up in Plymouth. I was born in Freedom Fields hospital and I attended Hele's School, first meeting a then councillor and newly selected parliamentary candidate, my hon. Friend, back in March 1992. It was painful to see my home town going through what happened in 2021. But for a short distance, it could have been my own family, who live there, who were affected by one of those incidents.

As a then Home Office Minister, I welcomed the way the city came together to console the bereaved, support the community and resolve to make a difference. It was particularly welcome to see the political unity in that work, which included the city council, the police and crime commissioner and the local Members of Parliament, irrespective of their political party.

As has been said, these issues are not unique to Plymouth. The poison that is the incel movement is infecting too many a mind on social media, and too many women in Torbay have a story of harassment or violence that they could share. That is why it was particularly welcome to see the work of the Plymouth violence against women and girls commission, ably and effectively chaired by Councillor Rebecca Smith, who is well known to many MPs across Devon as a champion of her community in Plymstock and for her work in tackling the issue. The commission produced a report following a process of listening to those affected by violence. Its conclusions represent a welcome list of actions that can be taken to tackle the challenge and make a difference to it. It will therefore particularly interesting to hear the Minister's thoughts on them, and how they will be embedded as part of the long-term approach, especially the recommendations about a peninsula-wide domestic violence perpetrator strategy.

It is also important to reflect on the approach taken across Devon and Cornwall, which will affect outcomes in Plymouth. Our excellent local police and crime commissioner and Torbay resident, Alison Hernandez, had made tackling violence, including serious violence against women and girls, one of her four priorities in her policing plan. The £4 million serious violence prevention programme, which is part of that, is welcome, as is the investment in victim and perpetrator programmes.

I note that the investment package that the Home Office has provided as part of the £1.1 million safer streets package for Torquay includes a specific element for tackling violence against women and girls by making our town centre safer. That also works alongside community groups, such as Torbay Street Pastors, which specifically work to provide a safe place on the harbourside where people can go in the evenings to wait for a taxi or be picked up by parents, or if they are under the influence and just need somewhere to sit safely.

It is welcome to see some of the progress that has happened, such as the provision of independent sexual violence advisers and independent domestic violence advisers to support victims through the criminal justice system. All too often, offenders and perpetrators rely on the fact that people will not want to go through the whole process, so they can continue their pattern of offending, creating new victims. The events that prompted attention to the issue in Plymouth, along with Devon and Cornwall more widely, were tragic. They showed the outcomes that can happen when poisonous attitudes, such as those of incels, are able to spread and infect minds. Yet they also show the best of how a city and a community can come together and react to such horror by looking to support each other and vowing to make a difference for the future. The people of Plymouth are doing that, and they deserve all our support as they take the work forward.

4.55 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter)—the Member for Plymouth during the 1990s—for setting the scene so well and for leading the debate. It seems that all too often we hear stories in the news about violent, sexual or domestic attacks on women and girls. First of all, we are all here to support the hon. Gentleman. I know that I do not represent Plymouth, but I represent an area in Strangford, Northern Ireland that has, I am sorry to say, the worst levels of attacks on women and girls in all of the United Kingdom—they are horrendous. With great pain, I want to add my support on this issue.

I am of a generation—I suspect you are as well, Mr Pritchard, as well as the hon. Member for South West Devon. You are probably a couple of years younger than me, but I suspect not by very much. We were a generation that had the utmost respect for women. I am from a generation that would open a door for a lady, stand and let her pass by. I am from a generation that would give up a seat for a lady or girl. I am of a generation that respected ladies—that is just me, but I suspect there are many others from my generation who are the same. Social media, as the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones) mentioned, has destroyed the attitude of some young people towards girls and ladies. I find it quite horrendous.

I understand the debate is centred around violence against women and girls in Plymouth, but I want to give the Northern Irish experience where it has proven to be extreme. In 2021, Northern Ireland was named the most dangerous place for women in Europe. Only Romania matches our grim toll across the whole of Europe of 0.43 killings per 100,000 inhabitants, which is three times that of England and Wales. Women and girls in Northern Ireland are disproportionately affected by violence, abuse and intimidation. From April 2021 to March 2022 in Northern Ireland, women made up 78% of all victims of sexual crimes—my goodness, these stats are terrible—68% of domestic abuse, 64% of harassment and 95% of stalking crimes. I know the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), will speak, and she will know the stats. It is no joy for me to stand here and say that.

Most notably and very recently, we have heard of the news of the murder of Natalie McNally. I give my sincere sympathies to the family for all they are going through. She was a 32-year-old woman from Lurgan who was 15 weeks pregnant with a baby boy. She was stabbed multiple times, losing her life and that of her unborn baby too, sadly, and still nobody has been charged with the murder. There are countless reports of women being abused, assaulted and murdered, and the volume of stories is just unheard of. I deal in my office with cases of domestic abuse every week—society seems to reflect that unfortunately—and we have to deal with cases of verbal and physical abuse as well. The hon. Member for South West Devon and the initiative he is taking in Plymouth are something to stand by.

I understand that organisations and charities in Plymouth have embarked on 16 days of activism to raise awareness of and prevent violence against women and girls, and that a new men's group aims to ensure that boys and men play their part, too. How much do we need that work in society today, not just in Plymouth but everywhere?

Such steps are crucial and they must be taken to give women a voice and reassure them that there is protection for them out there.

There has been a significant rise in the number of cases involving violence against women in the last few years. Historically, that has been because men feel—wrongly—that they can get away with these things, as women are not encouraged to report them. Everyone in this House, including those who are in Westminster Hall today, is here to speak up for women—for ladies—and for girls, and to make it very clear that there are not enough arrests or convictions. The figures are severely lacking.

I conclude by thanking the hon. Member for South West Devon for leading this very important and timely debate. I will take note of the initiative in Plymouth for us back home; it might be something that we can do with as well. I have hope that we, as policymakers in this place, can play our part to raise awareness of these crimes and do more to ensure that women and girls feel comfortable and reassured about coming forward. That is what I am about; I think that is what everybody here is about.

5 pm

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): It is a great honour to follow the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon).

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter) for securing the debate, which allows me to give my very strong opinions on this topic on behalf of my constituents in Redditch, as well—of course—to express my sympathy for the victims of the horrendous events in Plymouth. I served as a Minister in the Home Office shortly afterwards and it impacted many of us deeply to see the situation unfolding in Plymouth.

However, what is a real credit to the spirit of Plymouth is the way the city has come together and responded through the practical measures of the commission that my hon. Friend mentioned. Those practical measures are extremely encouraging and a great example for the rest of us across the rest of the country to follow to tackle this pervasive, absolutely pernicious and—sadly—endemic issue.

I would just like to ask the Home Office Minister who is in the Chamber today to respond to a few points. The Home Office has done an extremely good job in responding to the strategy to end violence against women and girls, but I think that we would all be interested to learn a bit more about some of the ongoing work, including how she is pushing it forward and how we can see the measures rolled out to protect more women and girls.

The first issue that I want to highlight is the importance of prevention. Of course we all know the emotional and psychological impacts of crimes of violence against women and girls on the victims. However, there is also the economic impact. Home Office statistics have set out that the costs of violence against women and girls are in the region of £66 billion for the whole economy, although those are quite old figures. I am sure that the Minister knows of more recent ones. It is absolutely vital that we tackle the issue for the sake of our entire economy.

Will the Minister update us on the work that she is leading on prevention? Specifically, I mean the domestic abuse prevention orders and the domestic abuse prevention

[Rachel Maclean]

notices; the electronic tagging, the provisions for which were introduced in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021; the ongoing work on the register of perpetrators to ensure that we monitor and track perpetrators and keep women and girls safe; and any work that she is doing on the mixed picture on stalking prevention orders. We know that some areas are fantastic at rolling these orders out; others are not so good. Many stalkers are being missed and are slipping through the cracks, so we really need to ramp up this work and use these powers to keep these people monitored and keep their victims safe.

Secondly, there is the incel phenomenon. May I bring the House's attention to the very good work of Laura Bates, who has some extensive research on that topic? It is a relatively new subject—I say “new”, but I mean in terms of our understanding it and making policy about it. What should the policy response be? Is it right to look at it through the terrorism lens? Should we have a bespoke response? Of course, we know that it is proliferating online. The Online Safety Bill introduces a number of measures to strengthen the response of the online platforms, but is the Minister concerned about the phenomenon and, if she is, what more can she do from a policy perspective so that we really understand why these young men are being radicalised in this way and committing such horrendous acts?

Thirdly, we have done a fantastic job in the Home Office of kicking off the Enough public information campaign, which I know is having an impact across the country. Will the Minister update us on it? Does she plan to roll it out more widely? Does she plan to repeat it? Does she plan to roll out the campaign across the transport network, because we know a lot of crimes of violence against women and girls occur on buses and trains? Can she update us on the Home Office's work on prevention and what works? We all want to prevent these crimes taking place.

We need to understand the psychology of perpetrators, who are mostly men, although some women commit such crimes. We know there are interventions that work and, thankfully, prevent lives being lost and trauma inflicted on women and girls. We need to understand that. If the interventions work, we need to roll them out widely, so that every area knows what to introduce and what is right for their area.

My hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon set out some good interventions that are clearly working in his area, but we need to gather that data so that every single local authority has no excuse but to come to the Home Office and ask for funding if needed. That funding should be available so that local authorities can roll it out and know that it will make a difference.

Finally, will the Minister update us on the strategic policing requirement, which was a commitment that we in the Home Office made on the back of the Policing, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022? A lot of work has gone on in the Home Office, and it is important to bring together strategic law enforcement at a national level, so that police forces are working and know what to do, so that we can tackle this and keep more women and girls safe.

5.6 pm

Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter) on securing this important debate. The other person I would like to thank is Eva Woods, the youth MP for Peterborough. I thank her for briefing me fully on this issue and contributing to my speech.

As has been said by other hon. Members, violence against women and girls is not just limited to Plymouth, but it is inspiring to hear of the good work that is going on in Devon and Plymouth. It is inspiring me to think about what I can do in my city of Peterborough, working with Eva and others. Unfortunately, violence against women and girls is widespread across the country, and Peterborough is not immune.

Sexual harassment in schools and colleges was pointed out in the 2022 UK Youth Parliament elections as the top concern of Peterborough's young people. Eva received the testimonies of women and girls in the constituency's schools who, on a daily basis, received sexualised comments and contacts intended to humiliate, intimidate and control. Across the UK, controlling women through such behaviour is rife, and it is visible in Peterborough. One of the biggest employers of young people is the service industry, a sector in which an enormous proportion of the female staff report intimidation by customers and even employers.

In public spaces, including Central Park in my constituency, women and girls report feeling unwelcome and unsafe as soon as darkness falls. It is saddening that incident figures from the police do not always correspond to the levels of threat that constituents have reported directly to Eva. Frequently, victims do not even feel supported to report their experiences, through fear of seeing no consequences to their aggressor, or simply thinking that their experience of violence is so minor that it is not worth police time. We need an emergency response to sexual harassment in schools and places of education. It should be the duty of every Member to make clear that a culture of violence, intimidation and control of women is not tolerated in their constituencies.

The example of Plymouth has inspired me to do something similar in my city. In fact, I already have two councillors in mind, and I texted them during the debate to see whether they would get involved and chair a similar commission to the one in Plymouth. I know that those councillors, working with me and our youth MP, can make a real difference in a place such as Peterborough.

5.9 pm

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I know we are quite tight for time. I want to show massive respect to the hon. Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter) and all those who he represented who are working collaboratively in Plymouth. He said that doing that was one of the commission's recommendations. I have to say, given the kind of reports that get written, it is a delight to hear in this building of a recommendation actually being fulfilled. It was good to hear that this place needed to be involved.

There are many brilliant organisations in Plymouth, but I want to pay specific tribute to one that I mention very regularly when I talk about violence against women

and girls general: Trevi House, which is one of only two places in the entire country where women can go with their children into substance misuse rehabilitation. I cannot express how important it is that that exists. Indeed, it is to our country's shame that there are really only two, or possibly three, places in the country where that is available, because it is hugely important to preventing what the hon. Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) talked about. I know that the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) and his wife are heavily involved with Trevi; Plymouth should be really proud of that jewel in the crown.

That said, in recent years we have obviously seen some devastating cases of violence. Others have talked about the heartbreaking murder of Bobbi-Anne, whose family described her as

“a beautiful girl who lit up our lives”

and whose death meant that their

“lives will never be the same”.

The inquest into the deaths of Stephen Washington, Kate Shepherd, Maxine Davison, Lee Martyn and three-year-old Sophie Martyn continues as we speak, so it would not be right to go into that too much. However, incel ideology—which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones) and others, including the hon. Member for South West Devon, who made a very strong and actually progressive case in that area—was undoubtedly involved in that particular case.

It is absolutely lovely to hear the fervour and the care that Plymouth has taken, but I am afraid to say that it will only ever be able to go so far on its own merit while it, like everywhere else in the country, relies on the infrastructure built for victims of violence—[*Interruption.*]

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Order. There is a Division in the House, so I am suspending the sitting. There may be more than one vote. For the first vote we will suspend for a maximum of 15 minutes and then for 10 minutes thereafter, but I will continue once the mover of the motion and the two Front Benchers are here, so hon. Members should please be as quick as possible.

5.12 pm

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

5.50 pm

On resuming—

Jess Phillips: As I was saying, Plymouth, like other places in the country, relies on the national infrastructure.

I wish to ask the Government a few questions. Last year, the Government committed to making violence against women and girls a national policing priority, as the hon. Member for Redditch said, yet here we are, nine months later, and it has been reported that nothing has happened. Will the Government confirm that nine months after Ministers announced it, they have not yet made prioritising violence against women and girls a strategic policing requirement?

I could talk about what has happened in the past nine months, but I do not even need to stretch to then—I will just go back over the past few weeks. Yesterday, we heard that a man with a history of violence was able to sexually assault and murder law graduate Zara Aleena after mistakes were made by probation staff. The

chief inspector of probation, Justin Russell, found that McSweeney had been wrongly assessed as medium risk by staff who were under “mounting pressure”. Mr Russell claimed:

“In this particular case we found a very heavily overloaded senior probation officer supervising a probation officer who had 50% more workload than they should have had.”

I could go on. This week, the latest domestic abuse stats from the Crown Prosecution Service show a crisis once more, I am afraid to say. From 2022, prosecutions are down 9.6%, while convictions are down 9%. Convictions in the latest quarter were just 9,587; in the same quarter in 2019, there were 12,467 convictions. That is a 23% fall. In 2019, there were 16,257 completed prosecutions; today, that figure is 12,672. That is down 22%. Those disgracefully low statistics demonstrate the Government's failure to act, meaning that victims are kept in danger and perpetrators are left in our communities, in our homes and on our streets.

I am sure we will all have seen the media reports about the police over the past few weeks. The Met alone is investigating 1,000 domestic or sexual abuse claims involving 800 of its officers. Last year, the Centre for Women's Justice super-complaint against the Met found significant inconsistencies in how cases of domestic abuse perpetrated by police were dealt with. The Home Office is responsible for the police. That is where the buck stops. Why are police officers accused of rape or domestic abuse not immediately suspended, as Labour is urging for? The public are astounded that this is not the case already.

Where is the promised domestic homicide sentencing review of the deaths of women, like the women killed in Plymouth? We are a year in the waiting. Where is the harms report from the family court review? Again, we are more than two years in the waiting. Where is the perpetrator strategy? Charge rates for rape have dropped to a shameful 1.5%—a drop of two thirds over the past seven years. Where is the action?

Plymouth has shown grit and joined-up thinking. I would like to see the same from this place.

5.54 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Miss Sarah Dines): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter) for bringing forward this debate on such an important issue, for highlighting the work of the Plymouth Violence Against Women and Girls Commission and for sharing the learning of the commission, to which I pay tribute for its work. I also thank those who made considerable journeys to come here, such as Councillor Rebecca Smith and Eva Woods, who has come from Peterborough. Much work is done on a community level, and that is very much how this issue will move forward.

Work in this sphere starts at the community and is also led at a national level. There is personal responsibility, too. It is only with all the sectors working together that fundamental change will be achieved. It is not just from the centre down; the things that work work with the community and individuals grappling those issues. I pay tribute to those locally elected people and those working very hard in Plymouth, as well as the Members who have always worked very hard in this place.

[Miss Sarah Dines]

I reiterate at the outset how important tackling violence against women and girls is to me and to this Government. Indeed, the Prime Minister made that clear in his new year speech this month. We need a change of culture, and that is what this Government are doing. Successive Governments have failed to grip the issue, and I am pleased that this Government are gripping it.

The David Carrick case has underscored yet again why this work is critical. It is a horrific set of circumstances. It is tragic and dreadful, but I welcome the opportunity to use it to move forward. I echo the Home Secretary's words of tribute to victims for their extraordinary strength and courage in coming forward. We must not only deal with perpetrators but encourage victims and survivors to come forward—with an onus on the perpetrators, but listening to the victims. For the victims to have suffered as they did at the hands of a police officer is almost unthinkable, and my thoughts are with them.

I express my deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Bobbi-Anne McLeod, whose life was so tragically cut short. What happened has understandably shocked us all, but particularly those in the community of Plymouth. It is shocking to the core. Whether in Plymouth or anywhere else around the country, we must use every tool at our disposal to ensure that law-abiding people can feel safe both inside and outside the home. That is a major priority for me and the Government as a whole.

Several Members raised the Keyham shooting. The inquest into those tragic events began just last week, so it is inappropriate for me to say anything other than that my thoughts and deepest sympathies remain with everyone involved in that matter.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon for bringing forward the debate and to all those people who have worked alongside him on this quite lengthy journey. It is a good cross-party piece of work, and change in society works only if it is from the grassroots up. It is encouraging to see cross-party work at that level. The words that resonated with me were:

“We are all in this together.”

Those were well-thought words, and I thank him for them.

The Trevi organisation and First Light were also mentioned. In my previous job, I had dealings with Trevi, and I travelled down to visit the area. I have always been immensely impressed with the organisation. It is just the sort of organisation that needs support. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), speaking for the Opposition, also rightly raised it. I pay tribute to it for its work.

My hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon was absolutely right that we need cultural change. These issues are deeply rooted in our society. We also need better support. The recommendations of the commission rang very true. The work of the Safer Plymouth Partnership, Moonstone and Operation Gemstone are all important, and I pay tribute to them for their work. It is an issue for us all—that is quite right. The violence against women and girls strategy and the domestic abuse work are fundamental, and I am pleased that more than 50 organisations around the city are delivering work on the issue.

My hon. Friend asked about additional funding and concerns that small groups are finding it difficult to access funds. That is exactly why the Home Office, with a lot of careful thought, is providing for consortia applications, so that those with expertise can assist those with lesser expertise to move in the right direction to secure funding. We need cultural change, as the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) reflected.

In relation to understanding why these things happen, the Home Office has undertaken a lot of research. In relation to the amount of research generally that is engaged, I am genuinely flabbergasted at the effort, expense and thought that has gone into policy making in the Department. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch has witnessed that.

As my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon said, we need to be a clear voice talking to the deeper causes of what happened. The Online Safety Bill will be amended in the Lords to reflect even greater concerns than when it first appeared before the House of Commons Chamber. The amendment will further strengthen it. It is a seminal piece of legislation and I am proud that it is this Government that is bringing it through. I do not accept the narrative that it is in any way inadequate. Legislation in this place rightly evolves and moves forward. That is why we have the House of Lords and the amendment process.

I thank the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones) for her contribution. She mentioned physical violence and coercive control, and that is at the heart of her work as chair of the APPG on perpetrators of domestic abuse. The Government are rightly shifting their focus to perpetrators, and a lot of money is being spent by the police as well as with stakeholders to ensure that work bears fruit. Historically, there has been an emphasis on the victim. We know that from offences such as rape and all forms of violence against women and girls, and against men. We want to shift the focus from victims to perpetrators. We must change societal attitudes and stop misogyny. I agree with her on that, but I do think that the Online Safety Bill is groundbreaking and will be improved.

This Government introduced the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which the hon. Lady mentioned. I do not accept that it has failed to catch online harms. There will be a focus on using industry to assist in this policy area.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) made a valuable contribution. The death of Bobbi-Anne McLeod was fundamental in bringing about local change. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's interventions; he mentioned the local police and crime commissioner, Alison Hernandez, and the work that she does. The work done in the south-west on Operation Soteria has been groundbreaking. All these things come together. There will be a moment when there will be change and I think Plymouth is fundamental to that change.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) reminded us of the dreadful situation in a part of our country and a part of the Union, Northern Ireland, and the very sad case of the lady who was attacked when pregnant, resulting in her death and the death of her unborn child. That is tragic. That is why we need a strong process in relation to violence against women and girls.

I do not need to go back to the great work that my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch did when she was in the job that I now have. She raised some important questions and wanted answers to them. In relation to the register, we are looking at the options. In relation to the specialist orders—the domestic abuse protection orders—we are continuing to work very hard in policy development. I have witnessed that for myself. We are finalising pilot sites, so there is progress in this policy area.

In relation to prevention, my hon. Friend is bang on—to use a colloquialism. The new statutory guidance on relationships, sex and health education is being changed and improved, and my personal view is that there needs to be better training and better education. If we want to change things, we have to get people while they are young, thinking about life and growing up, so I would like to see more work in that space. That is being done with the guidance to be taught in schools.

On transport champions, which several Members mentioned, I recently had the opportunity to speak to the British Transport police. We have appointed transport champions, who have given a set of recommendations that the Government are considering.

Jess Phillips: As the hon. Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) asked, what is happening with the strategic policing requirement? I note that the Minister has not answered that question, which both I and the hon. Member for Redditch asked.

Miss Dines: That is being actively worked on. Violence against women and girls will be added in due course, and if I have anything to do with it, it will be sooner rather than later. It was on my list of questions to get to.

I want to try to mention everyone, because everyone who has contributed to the debate has worked hard in the subject area and I want to acknowledge them all. When there is cross-party work, things really work.

Why do young men become radicalised? I suggest that one of the items in that complex picture is the platform that the internet has given young men to express their feelings without having to go out to meet people. There are lots of psychological reasons for that, and research is being commissioned.

I mentioned the strategic policing requirement, in respect of which a lot of work is being done. The police have to be part of this story, so I am pleased with the work of Maggie Blyth in progressing us forward. My hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Paul Bristow), and Eva Woods as the Member of Youth Parliament for Peterborough, are very much an illustration of how this work can multiply across the whole nation. The Government can do their best to steer changes and pass laws, but fundamental change comes from individuals and communities. I am proud of the work that my hon. Friend is doing in Peterborough.

The Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley, has worked very hard on this issue. She rightly talked about the work of Trevi House and said that it is lovely to hear what Plymouth is doing, and I could not agree more. Statistics for convictions are simply not good enough. Successive Governments have had difficulties, and I support the work of the deputy Prime Minister and the Home Secretary to

create movement in this policy area. The increase in police officers is a start, but we need the whole culture to change.

I would say much more if I had time, but let me say that the Government do not lack any commitment on this issue. We are committed to tackling violence against women and girls—and boys—which is why we published the cross-Government strategy on tackling violence against women and girls in 2021. It must not be forgotten that £230 million is being spent on the tackling domestic abuse plan, which we published last year. That is groundbreaking, and more than any previous Government have spent. We have made significant progress in pushing out a variety of ways to spend that money. Just one example is the “Enough” communications campaign. It was groundbreaking: almost half a million people engaged with it. It shows a need for change, and that change will happen.

To sum up, much work is being done in Plymouth. The Government are supporting that work by awarding significant amounts of money to the Devon and Cornwall police and crime commissioner. Through the police uplift programme, Devon and Cornwall police have an additional 313 officers. The University of Plymouth has been awarded £670,000 for direct work to make the streets safe. There are now local CCTV vans. There is local educational provision and training, and there is the “safe spaces Plymouth” initiative. I could say much more if I had time. In general, the Government and I are committed. I thank every person who contributed to the debate.

6.7 pm

Sir Gary Streeter: I thank the Minister for her response and thank everyone who contributed to the debate. It is worth sharing that when the three local Members of Parliament had a briefing—which was done individually by Zoom—on the killing of Bobbi-Anne McLeod, after 15 minutes I had to ask the police officers to stop. I just could not take any more. Maybe it is because I am a grandfather of two beautiful girls; I do not know, but that is what we are talking about here. We are talking about a beautiful young life, snatched away by someone who was influenced by the internet.

There is no politics in this: we are all in this together. I am so pleased that Plymouth has put in place the commissioner and is leading the way. I hope that other parts of the country will follow. I will say one thing to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who we are so fond of. He said that perhaps attitudes 30 or 40 years ago among our generation—we are the same age, more or less—were different. I am not sure about that. We are the Jimmy Savile generation. We are the Rolf Harris generation. So much was hidden. At least now it is out in the open, but we still have to deal with it. We have a long journey ahead, so we just have to commit ourselves to this task.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the matter of violence against women and girls in Plymouth.

6.8 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 25 January 2023

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Covid-19: 2023 Vaccination Programme

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield): Since the first covid-19 vaccine was authorised for use in the UK in December 2020, the aim of the covid-19 vaccination programme has been, and continues to be, the reduction of severe disease—hospitalisation and mortality—across the population, while protecting the NHS.

The independent Joint Committee on Vaccination And Immunisation (JCVI) has provided interim advice on the 2023 covid-19 vaccination programme for planning purposes.

The JCVI's interim advice is that:

In autumn 2023, persons at higher risk of severe covid-19 would be offered a booster vaccine dose in preparation for winter 2023-24;

in addition, for a smaller group of persons (such as persons of older age and those who are immunosuppressed) an extra booster vaccine dose may be offered in spring 2023;

emergency surge vaccine responses may be required should a novel variant of concern emerge with clinically significant biological differences compared to the omicron variant.

The JCVI has also provided advice on the ongoing offer of initial covid-19 vaccination—primary course—and 2021 booster dose offers—third dose. As the transition continues away from a pandemic emergency response towards pandemic recovery, the JCVI considers that the risk of severe covid-19 continues to be disproportionately greater in those from older age groups, residents in care homes for older adults and for persons with certain underlying health conditions.

The JCVI's advice is that:

The 2021 booster offer (third dose) for persons aged 16 to 49 years who are not in a clinical risk group should end in alignment with the close of the autumn 2022 vaccination campaign;

otherwise healthy persons aged 5 to 49 years, who develop a new health condition in 2023 that places them in a clinical risk group would be offered primary vaccination and/or a booster vaccine during the next seasonal vaccination campaign, as appropriate. Vaccination outside these campaign periods would be subject to individual clinical judgement;

primary course (initial doses) of covid-19 vaccination should move, over the course of 2023, towards a more targeted offer during vaccination campaigns to protect those persons at higher risk of severe covid-19; this would include:

residents in a care home for older adults and staff working in care homes for older adults

frontline health and social care workers

all adults aged 50 years and over

persons aged 5 to 49 years in a clinical risk group

persons aged 12 to 49 years who are household contacts of people with immunosuppression

persons aged 16 to 49 years who are carers

research should be considered to inform the optimal timing of booster vaccinations to protect against severe covid-19 (hospitalisations and death) for groups who are at different levels of clinical risk.

His Majesty's Government have accepted the JCVI's advice. In England, the 2021 booster offer—third dose—for persons aged 16 to 49 years who are not in a clinical risk group will end in alignment with the close of the autumn 2022 campaign in England on 12 February 2023. The JCVI's advice to target the initial vaccination—primary course—offer to those at higher risk from covid-19 has been accepted by HMG subject to further consideration of timings.

I am informed that all four parts of the UK intend to accept the JCVI's advice on the same basis.

I will update the House when further advice is received from the JCVI on the covid-19 vaccination programmes recommended for 2023, including confirmation of whether a spring booster programme is advised.

[HCWS518]

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

DLUHC: Foundations for Growth

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Michael Gove): One of the Prime Minister's top priorities is growing the economy, spreading opportunity right across the country. Levelling up is central to that mission. Today I am delighted to update the House on further progress being made to deliver the right foundations for growth through increased innovation, strong local leadership, and pride in place for communities.

First, on investment zones. This country has no shortage of growth industries, whether in advanced manufacturing, renewable industries or life sciences. And we have no shortage of world-class universities. But where we have underperformed is leveraging the success of these industries and research to support growth across the whole country. That is my guiding mission for investment zones. We will shortly begin a process to identify where zones will be located, guided by three principles. First, that Government cannot create clusters, but it can create the conditions for them to succeed. Secondly, success requires fiscal support, but also a wider range of interventions, whether land assembly, housing, transport, or skills, to tackle the specific barriers each cluster faces to growth. And thirdly, that can only happen in partnership with strong local leadership over the long-term.

Secondly, on nationally significant infrastructure projects. Working with BEIS, DEFRA, DFT and HMT we are modernising the approach to major projects and we will shortly publish an action plan setting out reforms to the nationally significant infrastructure projects regime that will streamline and speed up the consenting process. These important reforms will boost investor confidence in major infrastructure and help Government to improve energy security, achieve net zero and deliver the transport connectivity, water and waste management facilities this country needs.

Thirdly, on backing local leadership to regenerate their local areas. I am today announcing that I will shortly lay before Parliament secondary legislation setting up two new mayoral development corporations in Tees valley. These will drive a major regeneration of Hartlepool and Middlesbrough town centres and attract businesses and people back to these centres, making them vibrant, safe, and pleasant places in which to live and work.

We are also in talks with both Greater Manchester and the West Midlands to strengthen the hands of both Mayors. We are exploring options to devolve more power, including in areas such as housing, to these combined authorities. Further details will be set out in the trailblazer devolution deals that will be published in due course. Alongside this, as part of our national reforms to ensure that all homes are free from the types of poor conditions and hazards that led to the tragic death of Awaab Ishak, I am today announcing £30 million to support the Mayors of Greater Manchester and the West Midlands combined authorities to support improvements in the quality of social housing in their areas.

Fourthly, as we take steps to devolve more power to local leaders we are also backing this with clear accountability. We announced in the levelling up White Paper that we would establish a new Office for Local Government (Oflog), which will empower citizens to hold local leaders to account, while supporting local leaders to innovate and drive self-improvement. I am pleased to announce

that I have appointed Lord (Amyas) Morse to the position of interim chair of the Office for Local Government. Lord Morse brings to the role a wealth of experience in public sector service delivery and performance, and will provide independent advice, support and challenge to Oflog's strategic vision, functions and delivery. My Department will shortly recruit for a new chief executive for this important body.

Fifthly, to level up truly we must also ensure that people feel safe in their communities. We know that this is a real priority for our communities who want strong, practical action to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour. Graffiti, vandalism, disorder and evidence of drug use makes daily life a misery. Indeed, for many, tackling this blight is a prerequisite to levelling up. This requires a multifaceted response. Working with the Home Office, the Department for Education and the Ministry of Justice, we will shortly announce plans that will deliver for communities, giving them the confidence that the places they love can and will be protected and enhanced.

[HCWS519]

Ministerial Corrections

Wednesday 25 January 2023

EDUCATION

Teacher Recruitment and Retention

The following is an extract from Education Questions on 16 January 2023.

Beth Winter: The National Foundation for Educational Research says today that a strategy for improving recruitment and retention should involve

“pay uplifts that are higher than pay growth in the wider labour market for most or all teachers”.

Does the Secretary of State agree? Is it not the case that she cannot address the crisis until she gives teachers and support staff the fully funded, inflation-plus pay rise that they deserve?

Gillian Keegan: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. In 2019, we launched the Government’s first ever integrated strategy to recruit and retain more teachers in schools, which had a number of different strands in it, including supporting teachers on the way in, recruiting more, and various routes into teaching. Of course, we have an independent pay review body and this year we accepted all its recommendations in full.

[Official Report, 16 January 2023, Vol. 726, c. 2.]

Letter of correction from the Secretary of State for Education:

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter).

The correct response should have been:

Gillian Keegan: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. In 2019, we launched the Government’s first ever integrated strategy to recruit and retain more teachers in schools,

which had a number of different strands in it, including supporting teachers on the way in, recruiting more, and various routes into teaching. Of course, we have an independent pay review body and this year, **for academic year 2022-23**, we accepted all its recommendations in full.

Inflation

The following is an extract from Education Questions on 16 January 2023.

Mr Dhesi: In addition to having grave concerns about recruiting and retaining teachers, schools in Slough and across our country continue to struggle with their budgets, with a quarter of primary school senior leaders reporting that they have had to cut outings and trips due to budgetary constraints. How will the Government ensure that children do not miss out on these vital opportunities?

Gillian Keegan: The autumn statement announced significant additional investment in core schools funding. The core schools budget will increase by £2 billion in 2023-24 and 2024-25. **That will be paid into schools’ bank accounts in April**, and I am sure they will welcome that additional funding.

[Official Report, 16 January 2023, Vol. 726, c. 16.]

Letter of correction from the Secretary of State for Education:

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi).

The correct response should have been:

Gillian Keegan: The autumn statement announced significant additional investment in core schools funding. The core schools budget will increase by £2 billion in 2023-24 and 2024-25. **This funding will be allocated to schools from April 2023**, and I am sure they will welcome that additional funding.

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Wednesday 1 February 2023**

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