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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 1 March 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

WALES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Digital Connectivity: Rural Wales

1. **Ben Lake** (Ceredigion) (PC): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on improving digital connectivity in rural Wales. [903769]

Mr Speaker: I call the Minister. Happy St David's Day.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Dr James Davies): Diolch yn fawr, Mr Llefarydd, and a happy St David's Day—dydd gŵyl Dewi hapus.

The Government are committed to improving digital connectivity as demonstrated by our commitment to Project Gigabit, the shared rural network and, most recently, the new very hard-to-reach pilots, two of which are located in Wales.

Ben Lake: Ofcom reports that some 30,000 premises across the UK have no access to decent broadband or to a decent 4G signal, including rural areas of Ceredigion, such as Lledrod, Pennant, Talgarreg, Cribyn, Sarnau, Abermeurig and Coed-y-bryn to name but a few. Will the Minister make representations to colleagues in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to ensure that those areas are prioritised in the next iteration of Project Gigabit?

Dr Davies: The hon. Member is right to raise that issue. Let me reiterate that we have Project Gigabit, which is an ambitious £5 billion project to reach the hardest-to-reach areas outside of the commercial scope, and also the Alpha trials using satellites, two of which are in Snowdonia National Park. There are, as he will be aware, also opportunities through the Mid Wales growth deal. I would be happy to meet him to discuss what more we can do. With regard to mobile networks, there is the shared rural network, alongside the use of the Home Office's extended area service infrastructure.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) is absolutely right to raise the issues that he has—he is often right, actually. I declare an interest here, Mr Speaker. In the Dysynni valley, in Gwynedd, broadband fibre was connected to premises after being a complete non-spot for so many years. Can my hon. Friend the Minister carry on with the hard work to ensure that there is gigabit connection within Cymru—Wales?

Dr Davies: I know that my hon. Friend is a regular visitor to Wales. He is quite right to raise the importance of broadband both to people's modern way of life and also to business. There has been progress, but there is much more to do.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): Happy St David's Day, Mr Speaker. I thank London Welsh School for such a lovely flag-raising ceremony this morning.

On the subject of digital connectivity, EU structural funds have helped our universities to deliver research, innovation and skills development across areas that the Minister's Government consider a priority, including digital transformation. Many of these projects now face a cliff-edge as EU structural funds finish, with 60 projects in Wales due to end this year, putting around 1,000 skilled jobs at risk. What conversations has he and the Secretary of State had with Cabinet colleagues to protect those valuable skilled jobs?

Dr Davies: I thank the hon. Lady for that question. She is right that academic institutions have been reliant on EU structural funding in the past. There is, of course, the shared prosperity fund coming forward, which universities will need to apply to. I know that my colleague the Secretary of State is visiting all universities across Wales. I have accompanied him to Bangor University and I have also visited Wrexham University very recently, and both are adjusting to the new landscape.

Jo Stevens: Going back to the subject of gigabit, the Government's Project Gigabit boasts that it will deliver lightning-fast reliable broadband to every corner of the UK, but the project update that was published this week by the Minister's Government shows that Wales has the lowest coverage of any of the home nations—just 57% compared with, for example, 73% in England and 89% in Northern Ireland. Does that not represent yet another broken promise by the Tories to Wales?

Dr Davies: The hon. Lady is aware that the geography and topography of Wales make digital connections more tricky than in some other areas. She is also aware that it is the Welsh Government who have been leading on the roll-out of broadband in Wales in conjunction with Building Digital UK, and I agree that more work needs to be done to improve those figures.

Mr Speaker: I call Liz Saville Roberts.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Diolch yn fawr iawn, Llefarydd, a dydd gŵyl Dewi hapus i chithau ac i bawb—happy St. David's Day to everybody.

Although the Minister might blame the mountains, it is evident that poor connectivity in rural areas is clearly one of the factors holding businesses back. Another is trade barriers, particularly for Holyhead. Pre-Brexit, about 30% of all trade through the port went on to Northern Ireland from Dublin. That trade has collapsed and it is not protected by green lanes. Stena Line says that there needs to be a solution to this disparity. Can he come up with a solution to protect Holyhead from his Government's policy?

Dr Davies: The right hon. Lady recently attended a debate that I responded to in Westminster Hall, where she was making the case for a freeport in Holyhead. She knows that there are opportunities, through freeports,

to boost the trade through Holyhead and other ports in Wales that are seeking the same designation. I urge her to continue that fight.

Liz Saville Roberts: I urge his Government to come forward with news, because Wales desperately needs two freeports at least.

The Prime Minister said yesterday that Northern Ireland is in the “unbelievably special position” of having privileged access not just to the UK market, but hey, to the EU single market. That is an excellent argument for Plaid Cymru’s policy to rejoin the single market. Why is it not good enough for Wales?

Dr Davies: Wales voted to leave the EU quite decisively. The right hon. Lady knows that the situation in Northern Ireland is really quite different from that in Wales, and this is a carefully put together deal to accommodate that situation. I feel quite sure that the EU is not in the business of allowing what she suggests.

Healthcare Provision

2. **Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Welsh Government on the adequacy of NHS provision in Wales. [903770]

7. **Marco Longhi** (Dudley North) (Con): What discussions he has had with the Welsh Government on the adequacy of healthcare services in Wales. [903775]

The Secretary of State for Wales (David T. C. Davies): A gaf i hefyd ddymuno dydd gŵyl Dewi hapus i bawb?—*[Translation: May I also wish everyone a happy St David’s day?]*

Health is a devolved matter and we therefore have no control over how the National Health Service is delivered in Wales—that is a matter for the Welsh Labour Government—but improving health outcomes for people across the UK is, of course, a priority for this Government, and we have made sure that the devolved Administrations have the funding to enable them to deliver the same high standards of care that have been delivered in England by this Conservative Government.

Theresa Villiers: Does my right hon. Friend agree that a top priority for the Welsh Government should be helping the 45,000 people who are currently waiting more than two years for treatment in the NHS in Wales, rather than focusing on things such as banning meal deals and axing road improvement schemes?

David T. C. Davies: I agree completely with my right hon. Friend. Figures from the Office for National Statistics this week suggest that around 1 in 5 people in Wales is now on a waiting list as opposed to just 1 in 18 people in England. As she has just pointed out, 50,000 people have been waiting more than two years for healthcare in Wales. I would far rather see the money that will be spent on creating extra Senedd Members spent on delivering healthcare in Wales.

Marco Longhi: Despite the Welsh Government receiving £1.20 for every £1 spent on public services in England, they spend only £1.05 of that money. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Welsh Government should

spend less time and money on expanding the Senedd and putting tampons in men’s toilets, and focus on delivering a proper service for the people of Wales?

David T. C. Davies: I agree completely with my hon. Friend. I am sure that the 50,000 people who are in pain and on waiting lists at the moment would far rather see the £100 million that will be spent on expanding the Senedd being spent on delivering healthcare and reducing waiting lists in Wales.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State will be aware that higher levels of poverty give rise to higher healthcare costs and higher absolute numbers of people needing healthcare, so how can he justify the fact that Wales does not get its 5% share of High Speed 2—£5 billion—and is losing enormous amounts of money from EU funding, which he promised would be provided, and thousands of jobs in Welsh universities? We need that productivity to alleviate poverty and to put less pressure on the NHS. It is his fault that those waiting lists are growing.

David T. C. Davies: I certainly do not recognise the figures that the hon. Gentleman has come up with on HS2. The fact is that the UK Government have replaced EU funding in full through the shared prosperity fund, the community ownership fund, the community renewal fund, levelling-up funds and much else besides. The UK Government have also made certain that £1.20 is delivered per head of population for NHS care in Wales, as opposed to £1 in England. It is very hard for him to explain why Wales receives more money to deliver healthcare and yet delivers lower standards.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): If the UK Government were to uplift NHS and social care pay in England to the level in Scotland, it would unlock funding for all the devolved nations to support their national health services through the cost of living crisis. Will the Secretary of State discuss the possibility of a pay uplift and its impact on Wales with Cabinet colleagues?

David T. C. Davies: The hon. Lady is right that Scotland is very generously funded. She seems to be making an argument that Wales and England should receive more money per head than Scotland does at the moment and that she would be happy with that: I doubt it very much. The reality is that despite the generous funding that the Scottish Government receive, they have very poor outcomes, and some of their own members have said that health care in Scotland is close to collapse.

Renewable Energy

3. **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on support for renewable energy in Wales. [903771]

4. **Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on support for renewable energy in Wales. [903772]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Dr James Davies): The UK Government are committed to supporting renewable energy generation in Wales, including for innovative tidal stream technologies at

Morlais through our flagship contracts for difference scheme. I will continue to work across Government to ensure that we can capitalise on the huge renewable energy opportunities Wales has to offer.

Jeff Smith: The best way to bring down bills for Welsh businesses long term is to help to transition away from fossil fuels. That is why Labour is calling for a national wealth fund, so we can help industries such as Welsh steel win the race in the future. What comparable steps will the Government take to help heavy industry decarbonise?

Dr Davies: The Government have an ambitious programme to decarbonise the country by 2050, and we have provided £21.5 million to the south Wales industrial cluster to decarbonise heavy industry and support the transition to net zero. Of course, the opportunities for floating offshore wind in that region could be critical too.

Liz Twist: A Labour Government will more than quadruple offshore wind to make the UK a clean energy superpower, making the most of the fantastic natural resources in Wales. When will the Government match that ambition so that sectors such as Welsh offshore wind can achieve their full potential?

Dr Davies: As I mentioned in my previous answer, there is an ambitious programme for offshore wind, including floating offshore wind in south-west Wales and south-west England. There is an intention for 4 GW of power to be provided through the Celtic sea by 2035 and many more gigawatts in the future.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Select Committee.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): On this St David's Day there are many reasons to be positive about the Welsh economy, not least the role that Wales will play in delivering greater energy security for the UK and helping move us to net zero. On that theme, would the Minister agree that we have a brilliant opportunity with the deployment of floating offshore wind in the Celtic sea, but we need the Government to go ahead and give us the Celtic freeport for south Wales? We also have a huge opportunity on Ynys Môn with the development of new gigawatt-scale nuclear power there.

Dr Davies: My right hon. Friend is a strong campaigner on this front. I would add that £60 million is being invested in the marine project at Pembroke dock through the Swansea Bay city deal, so there is plenty of potential for his region.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): Does the Minister agree that over recent months we have seen better co-operation between the European Union and the UK over energy? Does he agree that the Windsor framework will mean that we can go much further? That co-operation will release the potential for energy security and hopefully see prices come down, which will help Wales.

Dr Davies: My right hon. and learned Friend is of course right that co-operation is always a good thing, and in fact interconnectors are critical to our energy

security. Only last week I met a company proposing to connect mainland Great Britain with the Republic of Ireland through a second interconnector.

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): We know that oil and gas producers have been making record profits for more than 18 months, but the Government's paltry windfall tax began in May last year. How can the Government justify leaving billions of pounds of excess profits untouched while so many people across Wales are struggling with household bills and the rising cost of living crisis?

Dr Davies: Mercifully, energy costs now appear to be on a downward trajectory, but the hon. Gentleman will be aware that up to 70% in tax has been taken from energy producers through the windfall tax, which is bringing a great deal of money into the Treasury to help to fund the support packages that people are relying on.

Governance of Elite Rugby Union

5. **Dr Luke Evans** (Bosworth) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Welsh Government on the adequacy of the governance of elite rugby union in Wales. [903773]

The Secretary of State for Wales (David T. C. Davies): I share the concerns of all hon. Members about the grave allegations of misogyny that have been made about the Welsh Rugby Union, and the recent contract negotiations with players have also been a matter of concern. Rugby has always been at the heart of Welsh culture and, as such, I was pleased to meet the acting chief executive officer Nigel Walker recently. He is an honourable man and well thought of. I am sure that he takes the allegations seriously and will be dealing with them.

Dr Evans: Being half Welsh and half English, the game at the weekend can often be difficult, but I am united in being a rugby fan. In England, I have met the CEOs of premiership rugby and of the Rugby Football Union, and the Minister, to ensure good governance. What conversations has the Secretary of State had with the Welsh Labour Government to ensure that the players, fans and good governance secure rugby union and its elite stars in Wales?

David T. C. Davies: Obviously, sport is a devolved matter, but I have had conversations with Nigel Walker and other members of the WRU informally. The UK Government, and I am sure the Welsh Government, were appalled by the allegations. I would be happy to work with the Welsh Government, the WRU or any other body, including the external body that has been set up to look at the issue, to ensure that the allegations are properly dealt with.

Anna McMorris (Cardiff North) (Lab): Dydd gŵyl Dewi Sant hapus, Mr Speaker. I am sure that all hon. Members are concerned about the allegations of discrimination and misogyny within the WRU that victims have come forward and said they have faced. What conversations is the Secretary of State having with his colleagues in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport about the matter and the pressure that they can put on the WRU to address these serious allegations?

David T. C. Davies: The hon. Lady will be aware that sport is a devolved matter, but those concerns will be shared in DCMS. Those sorts of allegations have been made about not just rugby, but other sports, so there is a nationwide problem. My colleagues in DCMS will be doing everything they can to deal with such allegations in England. I would honestly be happy to work with her, the WRU and the Welsh Government—or any other body that has some means of dealing with the issue. We must absolutely ensure that sport is safe for women, minorities and everyone to take part in without any form of discrimination.

Levelling-Up Fund: Welsh Communities

6. **Simon Baynes** (Clwyd South) (Con): What assessment he has made with Cabinet colleagues of the impact of the levelling-up fund on Welsh communities. [903774]

11. **Alun Cairns** (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): What assessment he has made with Cabinet colleagues of the impact of the levelling-up fund on Welsh communities. [903779]

The Secretary of State for Wales (David T. C. Davies): I have regular discussions with ministerial colleagues about how the £330 million allocated to Wales so far through the levelling-up fund is supporting communities, creating jobs, driving up economic growth and keeping the Government's commitment to ensure that Wales does not lose a penny as a result of coming out of the European Union.

Simon Baynes: The Labour Welsh Government have badly let down Clywd South and Wrexham by scrapping the A483 junction upgrade, which would have unlocked substantial investment and jobs in our community. Does my right hon. Friend agree that they need to support and maximise the benefits of the UK Government's Welsh levelling-up fund projects by investing in road upgrades across Wales?

David T. C. Davies: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. The Welsh Government's response to the roads review gives the impression that Wales is closed for business by determining that no further road-building projects will take place. I urge them to consider the impact of not building roads on the economy and the long-term prosperity of Wales. They should consider how they might build on the record support that Wales has received through the levelling-up fund and city and growth deals by rebuilding roads and improving connectivity across Wales.

Alun Cairns: Dydd gŵyl Dewi hapus, Mr Speaker. The levelling-up fund offered prospects for communities such as Barry that had been ignored by the Welsh Labour Government for many years. In the last levelling-up fund round, however, Cardiff bay, which has received billions of pounds for regeneration in recent decades, received a further £50 million, but Barry Making Waves, which is delivering a marina project, was ignored. What hope, prospect and opportunity can I offer people in Barry for the next round of levelling-up funding?

David T. C. Davies: I fully understand my right hon. Friend's disappointment that the bid was not successful on this occasion, and I pay tribute to him for being such a champion for that particular bid and for his constituency.

I suggest to him that there is going to be a third round of levelling-up funding, and I hope that local authorities that have not thus far been successful will apply.

Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Dydd gŵyl Dewi hapus i bawb. Will the Minister please join me in congratulating Mountain Ash in my constituency on being shortlisted for the Let's Celebrate Towns competition, which is being announced here in Parliament this evening? On this St David's Day, will he also now join me in urging the UK Government to restore the £1.1 billion missing in Wales, and allow the Welsh Government to administer those funds to enable every community in Wales, including Cynon Valley, to thrive?

David T. C. Davies: First, Mr Speaker, I would like to say llongyfarchiadau mawr to the constituents of the hon. Lady. I do not recognise the figure that she has just quoted: the UK Government have made sure that record funding has flowed through to the Welsh Government, and in replacing the funds that we used to receive from the European Union we have made sure that Wales has not lost out by one penny. The UK Government have been working directly with the 22 local authorities across Wales, including the hon. Lady's, to ensure that we can continue to deliver jobs, prosperity and growth in Wales.

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): The Minister says that he does not recognise the figure of £1.1 billion—well, the people and communities of Wales will recognise that £1.1 billion when it fails to materialise any significant improvement in their communities and healthcare outcomes, or in business investment. What will he do to compensate the people of Wales for the paltry levelling-up funding that is no match for European funding?

David T. C. Davies: The hon. Gentleman will know perfectly well that it is not just levelling-up funding that is replacing EU funds: it is levelling-up funds, community ownership funds, community renewal funds and shared prosperity funds. On top of that, the Government are delivering nearly £790 million in growth deals. Wales has not lost out by one penny as a result of the UK Government's implementing the result of the referendum, in which the people of Wales voted to leave the European Union.

Cost of Living Crisis: Impact on Businesses

8. **Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the impact of the cost of living crisis on businesses in Wales. [903776]

The Secretary of State for Wales (David T. C. Davies): This Government have provided an unprecedented package for non-domestic energy users through this winter, worth £18 billion, and our new energy bills discount scheme will provide a discount on high energy costs to give businesses certainty while limiting taxpayers' exposure to volatile energy markets.

Chris Elmore: I welcome the Secretary of State's support running up to April, but he must accept that the changes that the Government are introducing from April are also bringing about huge amounts of uncertainty for many businesses, including in my constituency of

Ogmore. One business is looking at potentially making several hundred of its workforce redundant because it is unable to get guarantees on funding beyond April. Will the Secretary of State meet me to see what work we can do to try to ensure that business is secured, and convince the Chancellor that more support is needed in the Budget for businesses in Wales and across the UK?

David T. C. Davies: I certainly know that the Chancellor and the Treasury have been having discussions with businesses in Wales about what support can be given, but I would be perfectly happy to meet the hon. Gentleman and that business in his constituency to see what further support can be given.

Virginia Crosbie (Ynys Môn) (Con): Dydd gŵyl Dewi hapus. Businesses on Ynys Môn have been impacted by the cost of living crisis, compounded by a lack of investment in key infrastructure. With the cancellation of plans for a third Menai bridge, it is clear that Labour and its Plaid chums in Cardiff would rather Anglesey was on a road to nowhere. Does the Secretary of State agree that a freeport on Anglesey would demonstrate that my constituency is on a superhighway to the future?

David T. C. Davies: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who has been a doughty champion for not only a freeport, but a nuclear power station and a third Menai bridge, in her constituency of Ynys Môn. She must have been as disappointed as I was that the Welsh Labour Government have decided that they will build no more roads in Wales, meaning that her constituents will lose out as a result of not being able to have that vital road connection.

Public Services: Government Support

9. **Christina Rees** (Neath) (Ind): What recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on the adequacy of Government support for public services in Wales. [903777]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Dr James Davies): This Government are committed to delivering high-quality public services. For instance, by next month, there will be a record number of police officers serving communities across Wales, and we have seen crime decrease by 10% across England and Wales between 2021 and 2022. As the hon. Lady is aware, many public services, including health and education, are devolved in Wales.

Christina Rees: Will the Minister urge his colleagues to accept the Welsh Affairs Committee's recommendation that HS2 be reclassified as an England-only project? Wales will then receive Barnett consequentials estimated at £5 billion, allowing the Welsh Labour Government to continue to expand public transport services, and people in Wales can then receive the same benefits from HS2 as those in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Dr Davies: The hon. Lady knows that HS2 is an England and Wales project and is an important backbone of Britain's rail infrastructure, and the important thing for Wales is to be able to plug in to it and take advantage of it. We also need to see the roads review that the Welsh Government have brought forward scrapped. We need to see investment in our roads.

Mr Speaker: Before we come to Prime Minister's questions, I would like to inform Members that a book of condolence for Baroness Boothroyd has been placed outside the Library.

I point out that live subtitles and British Sign Language interpretation of proceedings are available to watch on parliamentlive.tv.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [903853] **Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 1 March.

The Prime Minister (Rishi Sunak): May I wish everyone, but in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Craig Williams), a very happy St David's Day?

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

Justin Madders: The Prime Minister understands the importance of NHS staff, because he was out there every Thursday night clapping for them during the pandemic. He must therefore also surely know that he has not got a hope of dealing with the NHS crisis if he does not invest in its workforce. We have a plan to double medical school places and end the scandal of straight-A students being denied the chance to become a doctor. Patients support our plan, the NHS supports our plan, and even his Chancellor supports our plan. Why doesn't he?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman needs to keep up—we are doing a workforce plan for the NHS. There are tens of thousands more doctors, more nurses in the NHS, a record number of GPs and record investment in the NHS. That is what we get with a Conservative Government delivering.

Q3. [903855] **Tom Randall** (Gedling) (Con): Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating the staff at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, who, faced with a challenging winter with 300 covid and flu patients, as well as thousands of appointments affected by industrial action, have succeeded in reducing the backlog of those waiting more than 18 months for surgery by a quarter in just a month? Will he further reaffirm the Government's commitment to the redevelopment of the Queen's Medical Centre and Nottingham City Hospital, the second biggest hospital investment programme in the country?

The Prime Minister: I join my hon. Friend in thanking everyone at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust for their fantastic work, and I can confirm that we are committed to a new hospital scheme at the Queen's Medical Centre and City Hospital as part of our new hospital programme. I know that progress is being made, and I look forward to seeing the project come to completion.

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

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): Can I join the Prime Minister in wishing everybody a happy St David's Day?

After 13 years of Tory failure, the average family in Britain will be poorer than the average family in Poland by 2030. That is a shocking state of affairs. If the Tories limp on in government, we are going to see a generation of young people learning to say “auf Wiedersehen, pet” in Polish, aren't we?

The Prime Minister: It is clear to everyone that the biggest impact on household living standards is the energy prices we are suffering as a result of an illegal war in Ukraine, and I would just remind the right hon. and learned Gentleman what we are doing to ease people through that. Because of our energy price guarantee, the Government are paying more than half of a typical household energy bill, saving households right now £1,000. It is one of the most generous support schemes globally. He knows that future decisions to support the cost of living are for the Budget, but if he is concerned about the cost of living, what he should do is stop making inflationary, unfunded spending commitments and back our plan to halve inflation.

Keir Starmer: The dictionary definition of unfunded commitments is last year's kamikaze Budget. We are the only country in the G7 that is still poorer than it was before the pandemic, and the Prime Minister stands there pretending that it is all fine—total denial about the damage and decline that he is presiding over. Delivering growth and tackling the cost of living crisis will mean standing up to vested interests. Energy bills will go up by £900 in April. He knows he will have to act, but who is going to pay? Hard-working families through higher taxes and more borrowing, or the oil and gas giants celebrating record profits?

The Prime Minister: I know the right hon. and learned Gentleman recently made a rare trip out of north London to visit Davos. Perhaps while he was there, he missed the survey of 4,000 global CEOs from 100 different countries who ranked the United Kingdom as their No. 1 European investment destination. If he is serious about getting the economy growing, he should stand up to the vested interests in the unions and back our minimum service levels.

Keir Starmer: Here is the thing: all CEOs of businesses are saying there is only one party with a plan for growth, and it is this party here. There is one party that broke the economy, and its Members are sitting on the Government Benches. On energy bills, it is not as complicated as the Prime Minister pretends. Oil and gas companies are making vast, unexpected profits while working people face the misery of higher bills. He can boast all he likes, but companies like Shell did not pay a penny in windfall tax last year, and they are still not paying their fair share now. Why does he not admit his mistake, get rid of the loopholes in his botched windfall tax and finally choose family finances over oil profits?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman seems to forget that, as Chancellor, I introduced a new tax on energy companies. Energy companies will pay a 75% tax rate on extraordinary profits comparable to—indeed, higher than—other North sea nations. That

is what his shadow Levelling Up Secretary recently called for, but I have good news for them: we did it a year ago. They have to keep up. I know they claim to support levelling up, but they really need to keep up.

Keir Starmer: The Prime Minister introduced a tax on Shell and it has not paid a penny—fantastic work! If he were serious about investing in the future of the country, he would start with housing. A few months ago, his Back Benchers forced him to scrap house building targets. At the time, he stood there and said it would mean the Government would build more homes. Well, would you believe it? A few months later, the Home Builders Federation say house building will fall to its lowest level in 75 years. He can change course on this. He can bring back targets and planning reforms, or he can duck that fight and let a generation down. Which is it?

The Prime Minister: Actually, we have had record high numbers on house building and, indeed, the highest number of first-time buyers in around 20 years under this Government. The right hon. and learned Gentleman talks about investing for the long term of our country, and that is important when it comes to energy security, but Labour's policy is to oppose any new oil and gas licences in the North sea. It is an absurd policy that would see us paying billions to countries abroad for our energy, while shipping it here with twice the carbon emissions. It is typical political posturing. It is bad for the economy; it is bad for our security—just like the Labour party.

Hon. Members: More!

Mr Speaker: Order. Because of the noise, I do not think the Prime Minister is hearing the questions because I do think that one was on house building.

Keir Starmer: House building is at the lowest level for 75 years. A whole generation of people are desperate to get on the housing ladder. Thirteen years in power, and all the Prime Minister has to say to them is, “It's somebody else's fault—let me deflect.” No wonder they are furious with his Government.

It is not just bills or housing. Families are paying over £1,000 a month just to send their child to nursery. If the Prime Minister scrapped his non-dom status, he could start to fund better childcare, put money back into people's pockets and get parents back to work. It seems a pretty simple choice to me. Which is he going to choose: wealthy tax avoiders or hard-working parents?

The Prime Minister: If we want to see what happens with house building under a Labour Government, we just need to look at what is going on in London—and when it comes to the facts, they do not suit the right hon. and learned Gentleman's argument. Let us just go over them: the wealthiest pay more tax and the poorest pay less tax than under any year of the last Labour Government. As for his plans, he has already spent the money he claims he would raise from his policy on five different things. It is the same old Labour party: always running out of other people's money.

Keir Starmer: The Prime Minister is never happier than when he is pretending that everything is fine or blaming someone else—and didn't we just see it there? He is choosing tax avoiders over hard-working parents.

I do not want to finish this session without asking about the covid disclosures in today's *Daily Telegraph*. We do not know the truth of what happened yet—there are too many messages and too many unknowns—but families across the country will look at this, and the sight of politicians writing books portraying themselves as heroes or selectively leaking messages will be an insulting and ghoulis spectacle for them. At the heart of this is every family who made enormous sacrifices for the good of the country or who tragically lost loved ones.

The country deserves better. The covid inquiry has already cost the taxpayer £85 million and has not heard from a single Government Minister yet. Can the Prime Minister assure the House that there will be no more delays and that the inquiry will have whatever support it needs to report by the end of this year?

The Prime Minister: The past couple of years were an incredibly difficult time for everyone involved in the health service. I pay tribute to all their hard work, and I know that the House will join me in that regard.

Rather than comment on piecemeal bits of information, I am sure the right hon. and learned Gentleman will agree that the right way for these things to be looked at is through the covid inquiry; that is why we have established the covid inquiry. He will know—he has mentioned once or twice before that he was a lawyer in a previous life—that there is a proper process for these things. It is an independent inquiry. It has the resources it needs, it has the powers it needs, and what we should all do in this House is let it get on and do its job.

Q5. [903857] **Philip Dunne** (Ludlow) (Con): I warmly welcome the Prime Minister's work to resolve the Rubik's cube of the Northern Ireland protocol, opening up the prospect of resuming more positive relations with our nearest neighbours. Last week, Imperial College generously hosted an event to celebrate 25 years of the Environment Audit Committee's scrutiny work. Academics from Imperial and the other world-class universities that support our work have been clamouring to re-engage with their research partners through Horizon and other programmes. Can my right hon. Friend assure the House that he has commenced negotiations to resume an association for the UK with Horizon Europe?

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend for his support for the Windsor framework. He is right about the benefits that it can bring. I also join him in paying tribute to our incredible research community, who do a fantastic job. I can assure him that we will continue to work with the EU in a range of areas—not just research collaboration, but strengthening our sanctions against Russia, energy security and, crucially, illegal migration. I look forward to those discussions and hope we can conclude them productively on a range of different areas.

Mr Speaker: We now come to the SNP leader.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): Yesterday, the Prime Minister said that EU single market access was “special”, “exciting” and “attractive”. If that is the case, why is he denying it to the rest of us?

The Prime Minister: It is disappointing that the hon. Gentleman is seeking to play politics with the situation in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland, as he well knows, has a unique place in the United Kingdom. What we are trying to do is restore the balance inherent in the Belfast/Good Friday agreement, and he would do well to acknowledge that.

Stephen Flynn: Let us be clear: what the Prime Minister said yesterday was that EU single market access will be a good thing for business. Of course, that is in contrast to the leader of the Labour party, who said in December that EU single market access would not boost economic growth. Does it hurt the Prime Minister to know that the Labour party believes in Brexit more than he does?

The Prime Minister: With regard to Northern Ireland, the important thing is to avoid a land border on the island of Ireland between north and south. That is what it is crucial to achieve in getting the right framework for the arrangements in Northern Ireland, and the businesses there that trade across that border on a daily basis, with complex supply chains need, and value that access. That is something that the Windsor framework has sought to achieve and, I believe, delivers. It is not about the macro issue of membership of the European Union; it is about getting the right mechanisms in place to support businesses and communities in Northern Ireland. I would say to the hon. Gentleman that he knows better than that: he knows that this is about Northern Ireland, and I hope that he can support what we have agreed.

Q9. [903861] **Virginia Crosbie** (Ynys Môn) (Con): I am sure the Prime Minister, like me, was excited to see the first new nuclear reactor for a UK power station in more than three decades arrive at Hinkley C this week. Will the Prime Minister make it his personal mission to deliver vital new nuclear power at Wylfa in my constituency of Ynys Môn, one of the best nuclear sites in the UK?

The Prime Minister: When it comes to our energy policy, the important thing is to focus on our long-term energy security. That means more renewables, more offshore wind, hydrogen, carbon capture and storage and, indeed, more nuclear. Wylfa remains one of the best nuclear sites in the UK, and the strong support from the local community, and indeed my hon. Friend, makes it an attractive site for the UK's nuclear revival. I know that Great British Nuclear, when that body is up and running, will be taking a very close look at it.

Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP): Well, I have to say it is great to hear of the conversion that the Prime Minister has had on the benefits of the single market. Given Northern Ireland's access to the dual market—both markets—and the benefits that that brings, will his Government commit to investing in infrastructure and higher education provision to maximise that benefit?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his engagement and support in developing the Windsor framework. I think it delivers on what he wanted, which was to ensure that we protect Northern Ireland's businesses and the supply chains that they have, and I can give him that commitment. He and I both want to see more investment in Northern Ireland not just from the Government, but from the private sector. This agreement

will unlock that investment, but, critically, a step on that journey is to have a reformed Executive, something I know everyone in this House would like to see.

Q10. [903862] **Sir Oliver Heald** (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in these difficult times, the free world must stand together? With that in mind, would he also agree that strengthening our friendships and support with other countries in Europe is important? Will he welcome the delegation here today from Lithuania, and does he agree with me that the decision to hold the Heads of State of NATO meeting in Lithuania—in Vilnius—in July shows what a strong ally it is and also how important we think it is to strengthen the eastern flank?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend. I am delighted that Lithuania and the city of Vilnius will host the NATO leaders summit in July, and the UK does have a strong and growing relationship with Lithuania. It was just yesterday that its Defence Minister was here supporting our efforts, together with Lithuania, to train Ukrainian soldiers. At the summit, we will work together to ensure we can deter and defend against Russian aggression by making sure that we implement the next phase of the most radical military transformation since the 1960s.

Q2. [903854] **Sarah Champion** (Rotherham) (Lab): To date, 79 people have been killed on smart motorways. Last January, the Government said they would pause their roll-out. The Prime Minister said:

“Smart motorways are unpopular because they are unsafe. We need to listen to drivers and stop with the pursuit of policies that go against common sense.”

Since then, three new schemes have gone live, with three more expected shortly. Prime Minister, especially during a cost of living crisis, how do you justify pushing ahead with these deathtrap roads?

The Prime Minister: Safety on our roads is our absolute priority, and we will do everything we can to make sure drivers do feel safe. Last year, we in fact paused the roll-out of smart motorways not already in construction while we consider the data and next steps. In the meantime, we have committed almost £900 million for safety improvements across the entire network.

Q11. [903863] **Angela Richardson** (Guildford) (Con): On Monday evening, Zero Carbon Guildford received national recognition here in Parliament, winning the Climate Coalition’s Innovative UK Community Project award. It has taken what is often an overwhelming subject and turned it into tangible solutions to local issues to give people agency. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating all the volunteers, including Ben, Izzy and Mark, on their award? Does he agree that grassroots organisations such as Zero Carbon Guildford are key stakeholders in our national journey to achieving net zero?

The Prime Minister: I join my hon. Friend in congratulating Zero Carbon Guildford on receiving the Climate Coalition’s Innovative UK Community Project award. She is absolutely right that community empowerment, engagement and action can play a role in supporting the UK’s transition to net zero, enabling communities to access the benefits that it brings, from greener jobs to improved health.

Q4. [903856] **Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Last week I met nurses from the Royal College of Nursing. One of the biggest challenges that they face is the crumbling buildings of Royal Lancaster Infirmary. Hospital bosses were promised capital funding as one of the so-called 40 new hospitals back in January, but it is March and they have not seen a penny. How many broken hospitals and broken promises will it take for the Prime Minister to finally fix something?

The Prime Minister: We are investing record sums in the hospital capital upgrade programme across the country. I am very happy to make sure that we are making progress on the scheme that she mentioned and that she gets the detail of that. It is not just the 40 hospitals but the 90 upgrades around the country, and up to 300 community diagnostic centres and elective surgical hubs. This is a Government who are backing the NHS with the resources it needs.

Q14. [903867] **Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): The tragic death of more than 50 people over the weekend when their small boat broke up off the coast of Italy is a sad reminder of the total disregard for life of the illegal traffickers who facilitate these crossings to make their money. Will the Prime Minister set out what steps he is taking to bring an end to this barbaric trade, and will he reassure my constituents that stopping illegal immigration remains a key priority for this Government?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right that the tragic incident near Italy at the weekend demonstrates only too well how illegal crossings put lives at risk. That is why last year the Home Secretary and I last year announced five new measures to tackle the problem of small boat crossings, including the largest ever boats deal with France and a landmark deal with Albania. But we must do more, and as soon as the legislation is ready it will be brought to this House to ensure that if you arrive in this country illegally, you will not be able to stay. You will be swiftly detained and removed to your own country or a safe third-country alternative. That is the right and responsible way to tackle this problem.

Q6. [903858] **Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The Prime Minister and I have one thing in common: we have both had to step in and sort out legal and constitutional messes created by his predecessor but one, the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson). The Prime Minister has boasted that his new Brexit deal puts Northern Ireland in an “unbelievably special position” because it will have access to both the UK and EU markets. He said that that makes it

“the world’s most exciting economic zone.”

My question to the Prime Minister is, if there can be a very special status for the province of Northern Ireland, why can there not be a very special status for the nation of Scotland?

The Prime Minister: There is a very special status for the nation of Scotland, and that is inside our United Kingdom.

Sarah Atherton (Wrexham) (Con): The Prime Minister will know that Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board has yet again been put in special measures. The chairman and the whole board resigned en masse, as they no longer have faith in the Welsh Labour Government. Yet on a call earlier this week, the Welsh Health Minister told me that it was not the Welsh Labour Government's fault that healthcare has collapsed in north Wales. Given that Labour runs the NHS in north Wales, can my right hon. Friend suggest to the people of north Wales whose fault it is and who should put it right?

The Prime Minister: I share my hon. Friend's concern. The House will know that health is a devolved matter for the Labour-run Government in Wales, where one in five people in the entire country are now on a waiting list. The Government there should focus on the people's priorities and start cutting waiting lists, as we are doing here in England.

Q7. [903859] **Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): A heartbreaking 80% of those who responded to a survey that I carried out recently in my constituency said that the high cost of energy meant they would have to ration it—and I do not represent a deprived area. Nearly a quarter of Scottish households now live in fuel poverty, not helped, of course, by the total absence of a Scottish Government insulation programme. Will the Prime Minister now accept that allowing the price cap to rise will only make things worse for millions of families, and given the significant reduction in the cost of wholesale energy, will he also accept that it is time to listen to the Liberal Democrats and cut bills to the levels of last April?

The Prime Minister: The Liberal Democrats' shadow Energy Secretary said that there was no role for nuclear power in our future energy industry, which is not something that we need to listen to. As for helping people with their energy bills, as I said earlier, because of the energy price guarantee we are paying, typically, about half a family's energy bill at the moment, which is worth £1,000. However, the support does not end there: over the next year there will be about £1,000 of direct support for the most vulnerable families in the nation.

I agree with the hon. Lady about energy efficiency. It is important, which is why the Government have allocated more than £6 billion over the current Parliament, and the new schemes that we have just introduced will help hundreds of thousands of households across the country, saving them about £300 on their bills through improvements in their energy efficiency—and the hon. Lady is right: it should be available everywhere, including Scotland.

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): As chairman of the all-party parliamentary group for Greece, may I put on record how sad we all are about the tragic train accident and loss of life there?

The double child rapist and killer Colin Pitchfork is once again up for parole next month. I know that the Prime Minister has no part in any decision-making process in terms of the independent Parole Board, but can he organise an urgent meeting with the Secretary of State for Justice, so that I can refer my constituents' views about this dangerous man and he can take them into account in his submissions to the board?

The Prime Minister: Pitchfork's crimes were heinous, and our thoughts remain with Lynda and Dawn's friends and families. My hon. Friend knows that it is for the Parole Board to make these decisions, but my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will be submitting his views on the Pitchfork case to the board before the oral hearing and will be happy to meet my hon. Friend again. We recently published a root-and-branch review of the Parole Board system that outlined our plans to introduce greater ministerial oversight, and I look forward to my hon. Friend's contributions and thoughts on that.

Q8. [903860] **Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Yesterday, new figures showed that there had been a 26% increase in the number of people sleeping rough. Meanwhile, a Conservative party donor has spent £25,000 on a crystal-encrusted portrait of the Prime Minister, and another has paid £40,000 for a shooting trip. Does this not demonstrate just how out of touch the Conservative party is with the cost of living crisis?

The Prime Minister: Rough sleeping levels have been 35% lower this year than the peak, partly as a result of our £2 billion of extra investment over the last three years to tackle rough sleeping. We still have one of the lowest rates in the world, according to when it was last measured, but we will continue to do more. We do not want anyone to have to sleep rough. Because of the innovations that we have made we are taking more and more people off the streets, and we will keep delivering more.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): Last month The Pines Primary School in my constituency achieved a "good" rating in its Ofsted inspection. That in itself is laudable, but what is particularly significant is that The Pines is now the 40th of 40 eligible schools in Bracknell to be rated "good" or "outstanding". This clean sweep is itself an outstanding achievement, and I am very proud of everyone locally. Will the Prime Minister please join me in congratulating our fantastic teachers, staff, governors and pupils, as well as Councillor Gareth Barnard and the entire education team in Conservative-run Bracknell Forest Council?

The Prime Minister: Education is the closest thing we have to a silver bullet for transforming people's lives, so I am delighted to join my hon. Friend in praising everyone involved, from the councillor to the teachers to the staff to the governors, for delivering such fantastic results. They are in the business of providing tremendous opportunities for the children in their care, and we all owe them an enormous debt of gratitude.

Q12. [903864] **Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): Citizens Advice estimates that the number of households unable to afford their energy bills will double from one in 10 to one in five from April. Labour has a plan to help struggling families right across the country now. Why can the Prime Minister not see the need to take action on energy bills now, avoid the cliff edge—[*Interruption.*] Conservative Members can shout all they like. Why can he not see the need to take action now, avoid the cliff edge and stop plunging more people into poverty from April?

The Prime Minister: We are helping people now. We are helping people with the energy price guarantee, which is ensuring they have a £1,000 saving on their energy bills right now, and we are providing further support over the coming year for the most vulnerable with direct cost of living support of up to £1,000. There is also a record increase in pensions, a record increase in benefits and a record increase in the national living wage, because that is what Conservative Governments do.

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): Some 97% of ceramics businesses are small and medium-sized enterprises, which means that they have not received the level of support that many other energy-intensive sectors have, so will my right hon. Friend look at what more support, particularly financial support, can be offered to help this sector to decarbonise and invest in energy efficiency measures?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is a powerful advocate for his ceramics industry, and rightly so. It has been a pleasure to meet him and his businesses in the past. He will know that our energy bills discount scheme will support businesses with their energy bills through to March next year, and we have a range of other funds to support energy-intensive industries. There is the scheme that he mentioned, and also the industrial energy transformation fund, which provides capital grants to businesses such as his to help them decarbonise. I look forward to discussing this with him and his businesses in the near future.

Q13. [903866] **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): It has been announced that on 7 May, a coronation choir will perform at Windsor castle, comprised of some of the UK's keenest community choirs and amateur singers, including refugee choirs, NHS choirs, LGBTQ+ singing groups and deaf signing choirs. If it turns out that any of the refugees taking part in that choir have arrived here on small boats or from a safe third country, should they be deported to Rwanda before or after they sing for the King?

The Prime Minister: It is amazing, when we have had a question about the awful tragedy of illegal migration that happened recently, that the hon. Gentleman cannot accept that there is absolutely nothing compassionate about tolerating illegal migration when people are dying.

That is why the Government will bring forward legislation to improve the system here. It is absolutely right that if people come here illegally, they should be sent to a safe alternative, because that is the only way we will break the cycle of these criminal gangs and stop people dying needlessly.

Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con): A school in my constituency was complaining that it could not afford to turn the heating on, yet that school and others are spending money on PSHE materials from organisations such as Stonewall and Jigsaw that are educating our boys and girls that they may not have been born in the right body or that they may have an inner gender identity. Will the PM meet me to see how we can stop this unscientific, ideological education being taught in our schools and get our children learning where they should be learning—in a warm, safe place?

The Prime Minister: We have boosted school funding by around £2 billion in each of the next two years, which will help schools to manage their energy costs, but we do expect schools to take responsible and sensible decisions on their RHSE materials and make sure that those materials are age-appropriate, suitable, politically impartial and value for money. I look forward to discussing this matter with my hon. Friend, and I will make sure that he gets a meeting with the relevant Minister.

Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab): The Prime Minister may be aware of Sky News's investigation and report today on the over-the-counter sale of nitrous oxide, or laughing gas, to children and young teenagers. One alarming aspect is the change in the size of canisters related to overuse have tripled. Instead of criminalising the young people who buy nitrous oxide, is it not time to take urgent action against those knowingly selling this harmful and potentially life-changing substance to children under age?

The Prime Minister: I share the hon. Lady's concern and that of Members across the House about nitrous oxide's detrimental impact on communities and its contribution to antisocial behaviour. Indeed, I mentioned it specifically in a speech I made at the beginning of this year. The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs is conducting a review of nitrous oxide and looking at this question in particular. The Home Secretary has asked it to expedite that review and we will consider its advice carefully when it is received.

Covid Pandemic: Testing of Care Home Residents

12.35 pm

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care if he will make a statement on the testing of care home residents during the covid pandemic.

The Minister for Social Care (Helen Whately): The covid-19 pandemic was an unprecedented global health emergency involving a novel coronavirus that we were still learning about day by day, even hour by hour. Even in those early days, the UK Government and colleagues in my Department were clear that testing would be crucial. That is why the former Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock), set ambitious testing targets to drive a true step change in the quantity of tests, because he knew that testing would be a vital lifeline until vaccines could be developed and proven safe and effective.

The importance of testing was never in doubt, and there was full agreement on that in every part of Government, from the chief medical officer to the Health Secretary and the Prime Minister. But in a situation where we had the capacity to test, at most, a few thousand each day, tough decisions about prioritisation had to be made. Those decisions were taken on the best public health advice available. Thanks in no small part to the bold testing ambitions driven by the Government, we were able to build the largest testing network in Europe.

I put on record my thanks to all those who worked tirelessly on this mission day and night, from civil servants to the NHS and, of course, our incredible social care workforce, who did so much to look after their residents. They all deserve our lasting gratitude.

The situation in our care homes was extremely difficult during the pandemic, not just in England but across the UK and, indeed, across the world. Because of the vulnerability of residents and the large number of people who come in and out of care homes, it is vital that we learn lessons.

It is equally vital that we learn those lessons in the right context. Selective snippets of WhatsApp conversations give a limited and, at times, misleading insight into the machinery of government at the time. The covid inquiry is important so that we have the right preparations in place to meet future threats and challenges.

Liz Kendall: Throughout the covid pandemic, Ministers repeatedly claimed that they had thrown a protective ring around England's care homes and that they had always followed the evidence and scientific advice, but WhatsApp messages from the former Health Secretary revealed in today's *Daily Telegraph* suggest that nothing could be further from the truth.

Will the Minister confirm that the chief medical officer first advised the Government to test all residents going into care homes in early April 2020? Can she explain why the former Health Secretary rejected that advice and failed to introduce community testing until 14 August—a staggering four months later? Can she publish the evidence that following the advice would have muddied the waters, as the right hon. Member for

West Suffolk (Matt Hancock) claimed? And can she confirm that 17,678 people died of covid in care homes between the CMO's advice and the Government finally deciding to act? She should know, because she was responsible for care homes at the time.

Former Ministers are touring the studios this morning claiming that this delay was simply because there were not enough tests. Where is the evidence for that? Even if tests were in short supply, why were care homes residents not prioritised when the devastating impact of covid was there for all to see?

Nobody denies that dealing with covid was unbelievably difficult, especially in the early days, but care home residents and staff were simply not a priority. Yet the former Prime Minister and former Health Secretary were first warned about the emerging horror in care homes by my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) in March 2020. I myself raised the lack of testing in care homes with the Health Secretary on 8 April, 28 April, 19 May and 17 June 2020, long before the CMO's advice was finally followed.

The Minister will no doubt say that all these issues will be looked at in the public inquiry, but its findings will not be available for years. The families of the 43,000 care home residents who lost their lives will be appalled at the former Health Secretary attempting to rewrite history—an attempt that will turn to ashes along with his TV career. We need more humility and less celebrity from the right hon. Member for West Suffolk, and above all we need answers.

Helen Whately: It is relatively easy for the hon. Member to come to the House today and make these highly political points. Knowing how she and I worked together in the pandemic, and that she and I talked about all that we were doing to look after people in care homes, I am shocked and disappointed by the tone she has taken today, when we are dealing with extremely serious questions.

I will turn first to some of the difficult prioritisation decisions that were made, given the limited quantity of testing we had at the beginning of the pandemic. The Government followed the expert public health advice available at the time. We had the capacity to test just 3,000 cases a day in mid-March, and I am sure colleagues will understand why the health advice at the time was to prioritise those working on our NHS frontline and, for instance, the testing of people in hospitals and care homes who had symptoms. In fact, the courts have already agreed that our prioritisation decisions on testing were completely rational.

As we dramatically ramped up testing capacity, we also adjusted that prioritisation in line with the public health advice and the capacity, so by mid-April—just a month later—with testing capacity exceeding 38,000, we were in a position to test more widely. In fact, that is reflected in our adult social care plan published on 15 April, which made it clear that everyone discharged from a hospital to a care home should be tested even if asymptomatic, and that all discharged patients, regardless of the result of their test, should be isolated for 14 days. It is worth reflecting just what a dramatic increase in testing the Government oversaw, from just 3,000 in March 2020 to over 38,000 in mid-April, to over 100,000 by mid-May, to the point where we could test many millions in a single week. We established the largest testing network in Europe from a standing start, and the science proves that it saved lives.

[Helen Whately]

The hon. Lady asked about the content of the WhatsApp messages that have been published. I say to her that it is a selection from a larger quantity of messages. Clearly, while there were discussions and debates between Ministers and colleagues, partly on WhatsApp, there were also meetings and conversations and other forums in which advice was given and decisions made. A huge quantity of that is with the public inquiry, but I can say to her that, for instance, a meeting to discuss the implementation of the advice on testing was not referenced in the WhatsApp messages she is talking about. There is an email following the exchange to which she is referring that says, “We can press ahead straightaway with hospitals testing patients who are going into care homes. And we should aspire, as soon as capacity allows and when we have worked out an operational way of delivering this, that everyone going into a care home from the community could be tested.” As I say, she is basing her comments on very selective information.

As I said, the hon. Lady knows how the Government, and me personally, strained every sinew, worked day and night, and did everything in our power to help people, and specifically the most vulnerable, during the pandemic. She and I spoke about it regularly during our frequent calls. In fact, at the time I appreciated her perspective, questions and insights from her own area of Leicester. I say to her that we should go about this discussion in the right way for the country. This is not the time to play political games. We should look to save lives. That is the purpose of the public inquiry: to learn lessons in the right way in case this should ever happen again.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): My hon. Friend will agree that it was Labour that called for a public inquiry, and the Government agreed to it. It is a full public inquiry and we could not have a better judge than Dame Heather Hallett, one of our most experienced and distinguished judges. She will do a very thorough job. Does my hon. Friend agree that what we are seeing today is a bit of trial by media and party politics?

Helen Whately: My right hon. and learned Friend is exactly right; we are having a public inquiry and the Government are fully co-operating with it so that it has all the information required to look through all that happened, to investigate it and, rather than trying to score political points, to truly learn lessons for the benefit of the country.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): On 2 April 2020, I wrote to the former Health and Social Care Secretary, jointly with my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth), highlighting the urgent need for testing in care homes for staff and residents and, in particular, for patients being discharged from hospital. I knew at the time, as did other colleagues, that without that testing, care homes in my constituency and those across the country were suffering a heavy toll of deaths of residents. Indeed, one of our care home managers died of covid in my constituency.

Furthermore, at a session of the Select Committee on Health and Social Care in July 2021, I asked the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock) why the Government had not taken up the offer from care providers of facilities to isolate people discharged from hospital before admitting them to care homes. He told me that he did not know anything about the letter, despite it being sent by Care England. Will the Minister now admit that the Department and Ministers failed to understand and to involve social care in the key decisions about the covid pandemic, and ignored letters offering help that could have saved lives?

Helen Whately: The hon. Lady is right about the importance of testing. It is a view that she has and that I had at the time; some of the exchanges will show how I, as Social Care Minister, was arguing very hard for testing for care homes, as Members would expect. I know that other Ministers and other people were arguing for the things that they had oversight of. Ultimately, of course, the Health Secretary and the Prime Minister had to make decisions, based every step of the way, clearly, on the scientific advice on these things, as we did. To that point, during the course of the pandemic, as the capacity allowed, millions of tests were distributed to care homes. As I have said, as the capacity increased, care homes were prioritised in that process. Specifically to address one of the points she made, let me say that the guidance set out on 15 April was not only that everyone discharged from hospital to a care home should be tested, but that they should be isolated.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): It seems that the Opposition want to rewrite history. The fact is that at the time people did not know what was right or what was wrong. The then Secretary of State listened to a whole lot of advice and then had to make a decision. Even one of the WhatsApp messages I have seen said:

“Tell me if I’m wrong”.

What should happen is that the covid inquiry should deal with all these matters properly. The one question I have for the Minister is this: is it possible to get the covid inquiry to report earlier?

Helen Whately: I completely agree with my hon. Friend about the covid inquiry being the right place for people to go through the details of what happened—who said what and, as he said, the genuine debates that took place behind the scenes. This was a new virus and, at the time, we had only limited information about it. For instance, when it first hit our shores, it was not known who would be most vulnerable to it. We also did not know about asymptomatic transmission. There was a huge amount of uncertainty at the time, but the best possible decisions were made. As for the timing of the public inquiry, that is not within the control of Ministers.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): The leaked WhatsApp messages from the then Health and Social Care Secretary, the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock), showed that, despite a shortage of covid tests in September 2020, one of the Minister’s advisers sent a test to the home of the right hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) by courier. This is yet more evidence that it is one rule for Conservative Ministers and another for everyone else. Can the Minister please inform the House how many other Government Ministers,

Conservative MPs and their families received priority tests during the pandemic when there was a shortage of tests?

Helen Whately: It is difficult for me as a Minister to see WhatsApp messages from me in the pages of a newspaper. If the hon. Lady has read those, she will have seen that I was seeking a test for a member of my family and that I used exactly the same test app as everybody else to try to access a test that was needed.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I seem to recall that two years ago, when there was a limited supply of testing equipment, there were all sorts of calls for certain groups to be prioritised. There were also urgent calls for available beds in hospitals to be freed up to cope with the likely surge in cases. In hindsight, some of those priorities may have been wrong, but at the time it was an urgent situation. Will my hon. Friend confirm that exactly the same set of priorities about access to testing prevailed in Wales, and it took the Welsh Government two weeks longer to mandate testing for care home residents in Wales than it did in England? Why are we not seeing equal outrage from the Opposition about that?

Helen Whately: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the challenges that were faced around the world in handling the pandemic, and very conspicuously for us across the UK. Decisions were having to be taken in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as well as here in England. Had Opposition Members been in our position, in government, and having to make these difficult decisions, I am sure that they, like us, would have strained every sinew and done their very best to make the best possible decisions in a situation of limited information.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): Even if we now know that the Secretary of State was not following the scientific advice, the Minister was in her job at the time these decisions were being made. Can she explain why she did not do the right thing then? Was she not listening to the chief medical officer either?

Helen Whately: I fear that the hon. Lady did not hear my previous answer, which was that the public health advice and the advice of the chief medical officer was followed. Of course there is a job to do when advice is given, and then there are the practicalities of implementation. As the volume of tests became available, those tests were used as advised, following the public health advice.

Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): I will not forget the totally shameless politicking by Opposition Members during the pandemic. I specifically remember the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, who is no longer in her place, and the Leader of the Opposition talking about how we had the worst death toll in Europe. They said that again and again. *[Interruption.]* I hear the shadow Minister say from a sedentary position that we did, but the studies now show that we were ahead of Italy, ahead of Spain, broadly in line with France and Germany, and very far from the worst in Europe. Have we ever heard any Opposition Member come to the Dispatch Box and apologise for misleading

the British public about our record during the pandemic? Does my hon. Friend agree that they might seek to do that before criticising us any further for our record?

Helen Whately: My hon. Friend is right. The right thing for us to do as a country is to reflect overall on how we handled the pandemic, on the decisions that we made and, indeed, on how prepared we were in the first place. That is the right way to do it. Of course we regret every life that was lost; I think about the families who lost mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters and grandmas. It is so deeply sad that so many lives were lost, but that is something that affected us here in England, across the UK and, indeed, across the world. But the right thing for us to do is to look at these things in the reasoned environment of the inquiry and then use the lessons learned and the reflections from that inquiry to make sure that, in the event that we ever have to face another pandemic like it, we can do better.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): The Government entered the pandemic unprepared, ignoring the lessons from Operation Cygnus, and ran the NHS at 96% capacity. That was part of the problem. We all know that mistakes happen. We all know that it was really difficult. However, today is disappointing, because some humility should have been brought to this place. More than 17,000 people lost their lives. It is our job as the Opposition to scrutinise decisions. The former Secretary of State has thrown his colleagues under a bus because of his own vanity, but I suggest that Government Ministers need to use this time before the inquiry to ease families' suffering by coming forward with more detail on actually what did happen.

Helen Whately: There has already been a legal investigation into some of the aspects that we are talking about today. Given the huge number of decisions that had to be made and the period of time that we are talking about, the right way to do this is to bring all the evidence together, in the form of a public inquiry, and have it fully examined. That is the best way to answer the sorts of questions that the hon. Lady suggests.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): This is a profoundly serious question—literally a matter of life and death. As such, I am sure that my hon. Friend is right to say that the appropriate way to reach conclusions is through a proper public inquiry conducted by a very distinguished judge. Can she assure the House that the Government will be as transparent and as open as possible in giving evidence to that public inquiry, so that we can all be confident at the end of this that we have reached the appropriate conclusion?

Helen Whately: I can absolutely assure my right hon. Friend that the Government are sharing with the public inquiry a huge quantity of evidence so that it can reach the best possible, best informed conclusions.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): The emails and WhatsApp messages expose the fact that the scientific advice was that people leaving hospital should be swabbed before going into care homes, and the Government ignored that. That shows that the Government were not following scientific advice. The Minister has said that other priorities had to be considered before the Government could

[Clive Efford]

implement that policy, but no one would have been more aware of the competing priorities than Professor Whitty. What was it that the Government knew that Professor Whitty did not when they decided not to follow his advice?

Helen Whately: It really feels as though Opposition Members have not been listening to my answers. The public health advice was followed. The situation was that we had a limited capacity for testing. That is not spelled out in those messages, because, as I have said, other meetings and other conversations were taking place. As soon as testing capacity was available, further testing was used—for example, on people being discharged to care homes. Having been Care Minister at the time, I can tell the hon. Gentleman how hard we worked across Government. We all worked—not only me, but all of us involved in this—to get millions of tests out, during the course of the pandemic, to care homes in order to help protect those residents. This was followed by our prioritising those in care homes for the vaccination because, when it came down to it, although testing was helpful, what really made a difference was being able to vaccinate people. That is what really started to provide protection.

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): Is it not regrettable, if all too typical, that the Labour party ignores the fact that when the pandemic struck there was capacity for only 2,000 tests a day—ignoring, too, the huge, successful efforts to massively increase that capacity—and instead chooses to leap on partial information to make political points rather than listen to the full facts of the public inquiry?

Helen Whately: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about how we ramped up incredibly fast from a capacity of just 3,000 tests a day in March 2020, to more than 38,000 in mid-April, and more than 100,000 by May. We were then able to test many millions per week during the course of the pandemic. That was the most extraordinary increase in the capacity to produce, carry out and analyse tests, and he is absolutely right to draw attention to it.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): The Minister said that what my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester West (Liz Kendall) said was shocking. What is shocking is the number of people who died but who might have been saved in the first place. Is the Minister really saying that, at the beginning of the pandemic, there was no rush to get people out of hospital and back into the community without being tested?

Helen Whately: The questions about the discharge policy have been interrogated on a number of occasions, including by Select Committees. The hon. Gentleman will well know that in general, and in the work that we are doing now on discharge, it is rarely good for somebody who is medically fit for discharge to continue to be in hospital beyond that time. So of course it is right that when people are medically fit, they should be discharged home. The guidance of how that was done was set out on a number of occasions during the pandemic, and

that guidance was updated both as we learned more about the virus and as greater testing capacity became available.

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con): I am very proud of this Conservative Government's record during the pandemic: 400 million tests, a world-leading and world-beating vaccine programme, and £400 billion spent to keep jobs and people's prospects going. Clearly, hard decisions were made, and hindsight is a wonderful thing, but we should not be reflecting with hindsight now; we should deal with the facts at hand. Does the Minister agree that this Government will continue to take measures, and that if—God forbid—there is another pandemic, we will not let party politicking get in the way of making decisions to protect lives, fund jobs and keep our country going?

Helen Whately: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to point out the extraordinary things that were done during the pandemic. I do not think that the Government should seek to take credit for that; so many people worked incredibly hard, whether in local authorities, social care or the NHS, or through their involvement in supply chains and the huge efforts to secure personal protective equipment when that was incredibly hard to get hold of across the world. I am glad that he draws attention to some of those things. He is absolutely right that, in the context of the public inquiry, we should reflect overall.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): In April 2020, now-disappeared Government guidance in relation to hospital discharges stated:

“Negative tests are not required prior to transfers/admissions into the care home.”

It was later reported that the Minister then leaned on Public Health England to alter its proposed advice to care homes from ensuring that those discharged from hospitals tested negative to not requiring any testing at all. Why, at every stage, were the Government content to send people to their deaths in our care homes?

Helen Whately: I do not recognise the hon. Lady's account at all. If she looks back at one of the legal cases that has looked into this question, she may find more accurate information about some of the conversations that went on behind the scenes. I can assure her that, as she would expect, in my capacity as social care Minister, I fought the corner for people receiving care—both home care and in care homes—throughout the pandemic.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): Leaked WhatsApp messages will be partial and selective, but in reading even those I note that the Minister was doing her job on behalf of my constituents. In a message on 8 April, she spoke up for a care home in Newcastle-under-Lyme and raised it with the Government and her fellow Ministers. Everyone was doing their best. I served in the lessons learned inquiry, and there are lessons that can be learned with the benefit of hindsight, but the hindsight that we have seen from the Labour Front Bench is opportunistic. Does she agree that the Government were doing everything they could to respond to an unprecedented situation under severe pressure and severe supply and capacity constraints?

Helen Whately: My hon. Friend is 100% right. The context is absolutely important as part of this conversation. It was a global pandemic about which very little was known and about which we worked incredibly hard to find out more, and on which we continually made the best possible decisions in the light of the information that we had. At all times, we prioritised protecting people and saving lives, particularly those who we learned would be most vulnerable. It is extremely disappointing to see an attempt to play politics with this issue.

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): Care home residents and their families were failed not just at the beginning of the pandemic but in the months and years that followed, as families and loved ones were prevented from visiting. The leaked WhatsApps show that the Minister was arguing against the ban on visiting. Can she say why the ban was sustained for so long throughout the pandemic, and what plans she has to ensure that families with loved ones in care homes have the right to visit if this ever happens again?

Helen Whately: I know how strongly the hon. Member feels about this. Clearly, we are having ongoing conversations about visiting in care homes at the moment. As is evident in the WhatsApps, I was concerned during the pandemic about ensuring that families were able to see loved ones in care homes. As I have said in response to a number of questions, public health advice had to be taken into account all the way through the pandemic. Getting the right balance between protecting people from the risk of covid being taken into care homes and seeing friends and family will, I am sure, be looked into as part of the public inquiry discussions to answer questions such as his about the decisions taken on visiting. I will continue to work with him here and now to ensure that those who are currently in care homes get the visiting that they need.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): The front page of today's *Telegraph*, which reveals that the medical advice was not followed, will be heartbreaking for so many families up and down the country, re-opening the grief that so many felt about the loss of their loved ones. I have listened carefully to the Minister's responses, and she has basically said that she is unable to compel the public inquiry to move more quickly—that it is above her pay grade. But what she could do now is commit to lobbying the Government to complete that public inquiry before the end of the year, and to doing everything she can to bring those answers forward for all those families who are today feeling so deeply hurt and upset.

Helen Whately: On the first point about the use of public health advice, the hon. Lady is wrong; all decisions were informed by public health advice. On her request about the public inquiry, that inquiry is independent of government, so I cannot do what she asks.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): To reiterate the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) just made, every time there is a statement, every time there is a revelation, every time such an issue is raised, whether in this House or in the press, it triggers trauma for many people who have not healed from losing their loved

ones, who were not able to go to funerals, and who were not able to seek closure. I hope that the Minister will reflect on her response in that context.

To come back to the public inquiry, Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice said that the revelations show why the inquiry must allow the bereaved families to “be heard in the hearings and for our lawyers to cross-examine key people”—

including the former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock)—

“so we can get full answers to our questions in the right setting instead of having to relive the horrors of our loss through exposés.”

Does the Minister agree?

Helen Whately: As I have said, we are talking about, very sadly, people's lives being lost—people's mothers and fathers, grans and grandpas, sons and daughters, and sisters and brothers. We should always remember the genuine and real human cost, as well as all those who worked in health and social care looking after dying people and who had a traumatic time themselves.

On the trauma that the hon. Lady talks about, it is Labour Front Benchers who have asked the urgent question and made this conversation happen in this forum rather than in the context of a public inquiry, which might encourage a more reasoned form of debate. I hope she will have noticed that my tone fully appreciates the points that she makes, but it is not for me to dictate who will give evidence to the public inquiry.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): As the Minister will recall, I spoke for the Opposition on dozens of regulations to do with the pandemic, and on occasions I questioned some of the decisions that were made. The suspicion was that sometimes political rather than medical or scientific decisions were taken. What has come out overnight has caused me to question that again, and I hope she can understand why. It is an important question of trust for us as politicians but also for the wider public. Does she agree that rather than a partial and selective release of information to sell newspapers or books, the public deserve from the Government the release of all information so that we can get to the bottom of this?

Helen Whately: I do remember many of those SI debates. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that it was not political decision making as he suggests. At every step of the way, Ministers such as I, the Health Secretary and of course the Prime Minister were making incredibly difficult decisions but always trying to do the right thing to save people's lives and to protect people from that cruel virus which particularly attacked those who were most vulnerable, such as the frail elderly. In doing so, we continuously took public health advice. The way to look into everything that happened is indeed through the public inquiry: that is where the evidence is being provided and that is the forum in which the reflections will be taken and the lessons can be learned.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): My heart goes out to the bereaved families and I cannot imagine what they must be feeling again today. My heart also goes out to care workers, many of whom lost their lives having contracted covid. Many also survived

[Layla Moran]

but are now living with long covid and have lost their livelihoods. The Minister may be aware that advice from the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council that would give compensation to just some of those brave workers is currently with the Department for Work and Pensions. In a recent meeting with me, the Minister told me that it could take years for that to be taken up. What conversations has this Minister had with the DWP and, if it will take years, will her Department set up a compensation scheme so that those brave workers get the support they deserve?

Helen Whately: As the hon. Lady says, care workers were among those on the frontline during the pandemic and they had some incredibly difficult experiences. They took the risk of catching covid and, very sadly, some care workers and NHS workers were among those who lost their lives. Others have long covid. The question of compensation is currently with the Department for Work and Pensions. The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove), is in his place on the Front Bench: his Department is looking at this and will respond in due course.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for her answers. Everyone's thoughts and prayers are with those who lost loved ones. The impact of the covid lockdown on mental health was felt most keenly in care homes. To see what the elderly people were put through, and learn that the full protections were not in place and they could not see loved ones at the end of life, is totally unacceptable. What would the Minister offer to those who lost precious hours with those they loved and adored on hearing this tragic news today?

Helen Whately: I reiterate to those living in care homes and their loved ones and families that the Government took every step throughout the pandemic to protect those we knew were vulnerable. For instance, we prioritised testing with more than 180 million tests going to care homes during the pandemic, and we prioritised vaccinations. I remember talking to residents in care homes at the time, and vaccination was a huge moment for them because it was the first time they had felt really protected from that cruel virus. I know how hard it was for families that they could not see loved ones in care homes, and that was one reason we put out guidance about visiting, saying that if someone was close to end of life they should be able to receive visitors. I will continue to do my utmost as Minister for Social Care to make sure that we do our very best for those living in care homes.

Independent Public Advocate

1.14 pm

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Dominic Raab): Today I can announce that we intend to legislate as soon as possible to introduce an independent public advocate; to put victims and the bereaved at the heart of our response to large-scale public disasters; to make sure they get the support they deserve through public inquests and inquiries; and to make sure they get the answers they need to move forward in their lives.

I know the whole House will recall that fateful day of 15 April 1989, when thousands of fans prepared to watch the FA cup semi-final between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest. Ninety-seven men, women and children lost their lives, unlawfully killed in our country's worst ever sporting disaster. What happened at Hillsborough was a monumental and devastating tragedy. To this day, I remember watching the scenes in horror, and the impact is felt to this day, especially by the families and friends of the victims.

Of course, for Hillsborough's survivors and the bereaved, that terrible day was just the beginning of a 34-year ordeal. It was followed by an appalling injustice. Fans were blamed for their own injuries. Survivors and the bereaved were blocked at every turn in their search for answers. We must learn the lessons of Hillsborough and we must make sure they never happen again.

In the wider context, major disasters involving significant loss of life are mercifully rare in this country. But, as Hillsborough, Grenfell and the Manchester bombings have shown, when they do happen, victims, families and communities have not received the answers to their questions, nor the support they need. We are duty bound, as a Government and as a House, to make sure that that never happens again and, positively, to ensure that those families and communities never again have to struggle in anguish against a system created to help them, in order to get the truth, and some measure of accountability.

The IPA will go some way to making good on the Government's longstanding promise to ensure that the pain and suffering of the Hillsborough victims, and other victims, is never repeated. It will be passed into law, and made up of a panel of experts to guide survivors and the bereaved in the aftermath of major disasters. It will deliver in six important respects that I will outline for the House.

First, the IPA will provide practical support to the families of the deceased, and individuals, or their representatives, who have suffered a devastating or life-changing injury. That practical support will include helping them to understand their rights, such as their right to receive certain information at inquests or inquiries, and signposting them to support services, for example financial or mental health support. In particular, the IPA will help victims every step of the way, from the immediate aftermath of a tragic event, right through to the conclusion of investigations, inquiries or inquests. We will make IPA support available to the closest next of kin relative, both parents where they are separated or divorced, or to a close friend if there is no close family. That support will also be there for those whose loved ones die after the tragedy as a result of their injuries—a particular issue in relation to Grenfell, as I know from my experience as housing Minister. The IPA will also offer support to injured victims or their representatives.

Secondly and critically, the IPA will give the victims a voice when they need it most. It will advocate on their behalf with public authorities and Government, for example, where they have concerns about the engagement and responsiveness of public authorities such as the police or local authorities, or where the victims and bereaved want an investigation or inquiry set up more swiftly, to ensure maximum transparency.

Thirdly, the IPA will give a voice to the wider communities, not just the directly affected victims and bereaved, that have been affected most by the tragedy in question. To achieve that, we will set up a register of advocates from a range of different professions, backgrounds and geographical areas, including doctors, social workers, emergency workers, clergy, people with media-handling experience—often that is another burden that victims will not have experienced—and others. Communities will be able to nominate an advocate to act on their behalf, in order to express their particular concerns and ensure that their voice is heard as a community.

Fourthly, the IPA will be supported by full-time, permanent staff so that it can act swiftly when a tragedy occurs to make sure that the support is there for the victims and the families from day one. Critically, the IPA will be there to consult with and represent victims and their families before any inquiry is set up, so it will be able to make representations on the type of inquiry, whether it is statutory or non-statutory, and other important functional issues, such as the data controller powers available to any inquiry and the relationship it may have with the IPA in the exercise of such functions.

Fifthly, the scope of the IPA will be extended to cover events in England and Wales, but of course we are mindful of the devolved settlements, so we will work with all the devolved Administrations to ensure that our plans are co-ordinated with the support offered outside England and Wales. Finally, although the IPA is first and foremost about doing better by the victims and survivors, it is worth acknowledging that it is also in the wider interests of the public. It will ensure that we achieve a better relationship between public bodies, the Government and the bereaved; that we get better, quicker answers; and that we can learn and act on the lessons from such tragedies more decisively.

I can tell the House that the preparatory work is well under way to establish the IPA, and we will place it on a statutory footing as soon as possible. I will say more about the legislative vehicle shortly.

Of course, there have been other important reforms in recent years to support and empower victims and their families. We have made inquests more sympathetic to the bereaved with a refreshed, accessible guide to coroner services, so the process, which can feel like a minefield to navigate, is easier to digest and understand. We have removed means testing for the exceptional case funding for legal representation at an inquest, which means that applying for legal aid is easier and less intrusive. People who have suffered a traumatic bereavement no longer have to submit the details of their personal finances to the Legal Aid Agency; if their case meets the exceptional case funding criteria, they will be entitled to legal aid whatever their means.

More broadly, we are putting victims at the heart of our justice system by quadrupling victims funding compared with 2010, and we are giving them a louder voice

through the upcoming victims Bill. The creation of an independent public advocate to give greater voice to the victims and the bereaved of major tragedies is the next important step forward.

I know that hon. Members on both sides of the House will join me in paying tribute to the Hillsborough families for their courage and determination despite every setback and to their long-standing struggle to stop other families from enduring the same anguish in future. They have always maintained that their struggle for truth and justice for the 97 was of national significance, and I agree entirely. I also pay tribute to the families of those who died at Grenfell and the Manchester Arena bombing. Our hearts go out to them for their loss and I pay tribute to them for their dignified courage.

I also take the opportunity to pay tribute to hon. Members in this House and those in the other place who have campaigned tirelessly on the issue, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), the right hon. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle), the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Ian Byrne), Lord Wills, the Mayor of Liverpool and others, for their steadfast commitment to establishing an IPA. I will continue to work closely with all those hon. Members, the Hillsborough families, the Grenfell groups and the families of the victims of the Manchester Arena bombing to ensure that their experiences are taken into account and we get the detail of the IPA right as we establish it.

I pay particular tribute to the right reverend James Jones KBE for his work on Hillsborough and his important report. I met him last week and the Government will respond to the wider report this spring. We know in our heads and hearts that there is still much more to do to heal the wounds from that horrendous and heartbreaking tragedy, but this is an important step forward. The IPA will make a real difference. I commend this statement to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the shadow Secretary of State.

1.24 pm

Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement. For decades, the Hillsborough families fought for justice and for the truth about how 97 innocent children, women and men were unlawfully killed in wholly avoidable circumstances. They faced a cover-up by public authorities that hid the truth and blamed the victims. Those brave families did more than seek justice for their loved ones; they sought to shine a light on what had gone so tragically wrong, because that is how we learn how not to make the same mistake again, but it should never have taken more than three decades.

I was in Sheffield on that fateful day in 1989, just a mile or so from Hillsborough, with a junior doctor friend who was called back to the hospital to treat the victims and deal with the aftermath, so I vividly remember the horror of what we heard unfolding from the football stadium. I pay tribute to those families for their long struggle for justice and to those who have spoken up for them, notably: my right hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle); my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Ian Byrne); the

[Steve Reed]

former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May); Lord Wills; and the Mayor of Manchester.

Today is a chance to balance the scales of justice and give those victims the voice that they need and the power to make it heard, but it is a chance that the Government have missed. Their proposals do not go far enough and will be too weak, as they stand, to prevent future cover-ups. The public advocate needs to be a fully independent, permanent figure that is accountable to the families, not a panel of advisers appointed as a signposting service by the Government if they see fit.

It is critical that the public advocate has the full power of data controller, not just the power to make representations, as we heard from the Secretary of State. That means having the power to access all data, communications, documents and other information to torpedo cover-ups before they even happen. We know from the Hillsborough Independent Panel that the existence of such powers would be a massive deterrent to future cover-ups.

Will the Secretary of State reconsider and establish a fully independent public advocate? Will he agree to give it the full power of data controller from the start? That matters immensely because without control over the data that can expose the truth, there can be no transparency, and without transparency, there can be no justice. How many more tragedies will it take to wake the Government up? How many more lives need to be lost?

Labour is committed to real change. In government, we will establish a fully independent public advocate that is accountable to survivors and victims' families. We will arm it with the power it needs to access documents and data to expose the truth about what went wrong, and, importantly, to stop cover-ups before they happen. That will be part of a Hillsborough law with teeth that will also give victims' families access to legal aid and impose a duty of candour on public officials. We will do that because we believe that victims must be at the heart of the justice system and that they must have a voice and the power to make it heard, and because we understand that a system that fails to learn from its mistakes is doomed to repeat them.

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his partial welcome of the announcement. I listened carefully to what he said. We share, and I personally share with him, the commitment and desire to set up the most credible advocacy for the bereaved, the victims and the families. I am very happy to work with him and hon. Members on both sides of the House on the detail, but I do not accept his characterisation.

The hon. Gentleman said that the IPA was not independent, but in fact it will be decided on the basis of consultations with the victims and the bereaved. That must be right to make sure that we have the right range of experts to deal with the particular circumstances of the tragedy in question. It would act on their behalf; it would not act on behalf of the Government.

The hon. Gentleman has referred to data controller powers. I understand exactly the point he makes, and as I said in my statement, it is important that there will be consultation with the families. The IPA will be able to

consult with a putative independent inquiry, but the hon. Gentleman has to recognise that the independent inquiry will have many of those powers itself. Therefore, how would he reconcile that with duplicated powers in the IPA? However, this is something that we should talk about—I know it is an issue that has been raised by the right hon. Member for Garston and Halewood. We want to get this right, but what we risk is a conflict of functions, which is something we would all want to avoid.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned other measures, such as the duty of candour. That is a broader issue for the Government's response to the wider Hillsborough report, which is expected in the spring. I know it has been a long time coming, but it is right to deal with those broader issues. Although the IPA is only part of the redress and the accountability, I felt that we were in a position to not just bring forward the policy announcement but in due course, very shortly, to be able to say something about the legislative vehicle. Because this is such an important issue for the bereaved, the victims and the families, I felt it was right to do that now, not wait any longer.

Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for bringing this statement to the House today and welcome the decision to introduce an independent public advocate, which was of course a commitment in our 2017 manifesto. However, as I am sure my right hon. Friend will understand, I want to ensure that this body will meet the ambition of the commitment that we made in that manifesto. I am happy to work with him to do that.

For today, though, could my right hon. Friend please just go back to two particular issues? One is the question of whether the families, victims and survivors will be able themselves to initiate the independent public advocate, so that they are not relying on the Government to do that for them. Certainly, in the case of Hillsborough, it was the fact that the state and state authorities shut their doors to people that led to the 34 years' wait for any answers for the families. Also, in line with that, will my right hon. Friend ensure that the IPA is able to compel the provision of information and evidence to the families? He is assuming that an inquiry will always take place, but that might not be the case. It is essential that the families have answers to their perfectly reasonable questions.

Dominic Raab: I thank my right hon. Friend and pay tribute again to her for her campaigning and advocacy on this issue. On the right of initiative, the Government will ultimately have to decide the shape of any IPA that is set up. The right of consultation is clearly set out, but of course, one of the challenges will be where different views are expressed as to how the IPA should be configured for a particular inquiry. Ultimately, where there are differences, the Government will have to try to reconcile those, so in committing to an IPA, I think it is right to allow the Government to engage and to allow the victims, the bereaved and the families the power of initiative to call for an IPA and make their representations, but to allow the Government to decide the precise configuration of that IPA.

I listened very carefully to what my right hon. Friend said about the compulsion of evidence. As I said before, I am very happy to engage with her and with other hon.

Members as this policy comes forward. I take her point that an inquiry may not be set up, but where one is set up, the piece that we need to reconcile is making sure that we do not have conflicting powers. But again, I am very happy to work with my right hon. Friend on the detail of this policy and, in due course, on the clauses.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): I welcome the fact that the Government want to legislate for a public advocate, five years after the consultation that they undertook closed, but I am very disappointed with the provisions as the Secretary of State has set them out. His proposed public advocate would not be independent, would not be a data controller, and would not be able to act only at the behest of families. It would be directed by the Secretary of State. It would not have the power to appoint independent panels such as the Hillsborough independent panel—but at a much earlier stage following a disaster than the 23 years it took us to get that report out—and it would not have the power to use transparency to get at the truth at an early stage and torpedo the cover-ups that public authorities set about undertaking in the aftermath of disasters. This must be something that the families themselves can initiate and use to get at the truth at an early stage.

The public advocate having the power to compel—to produce documentation and shine the light of transparency on what public authorities have done in the immediate aftermath of a disaster—would stop cover-ups. It would mean people not still having to fight to get at the truth 34 years later. That prize is within our grasp if we set this up right, so does the Secretary of State accept that if he does not beef up his proposals significantly, he will be missing an important opportunity to stop things going wrong for families? For what it is worth, I am perfectly willing to indicate to him in detail quite how those proposals ought to be improved.

Dominic Raab: I thank the right hon. Lady for her question. She has worked tirelessly on this issue, and we have very good engagement on it; I am happy for that to continue. I take her point about the power of initiative. The families of the bereaved will have a power of initiative through consultation, but if there are conflicting views—something that I have seen before at first hand—the Government will have to reconcile those views in the last analysis.

Secondly, on the point about data, I am happy to keep listening and working on this issue, but if we have an inquiry that has powers to compel evidence of its own, the problem will be how we reconcile those powers where they are competing in a process. But as I have said, it is important that we bring this policy forward. There will be full scrutiny of it, and as we develop the clauses, I am very happy to keep working with the right hon. Lady.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the Chair of the Justice Committee.

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle), a fellow member of the Justice Committee, for the work she has done, and to the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May).

The former Prime Minister's point about the risk of cover-ups by those in authority is an important one. That is why, while I very much welcome what the Secretary of State has said—it is an important step—I hope that when engaging on how best to refine and advance these proposals, he looks again at the Justice Committee's recommendation that there should be an extension of legal aid availability. Although the situation has already improved, we should be extending non-means-tested legal aid to all cases where there are mass fatalities, or where public bodies are potentially at fault. It is not fair—there is no equality of arms—when those public bodies are represented by teams of lawyers, but the bereaved families have to rely on sometimes getting legal aid and sometimes not, or on pro bono representation. Equality of arms would surely mean representation as a matter of right in those cases.

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend, the Chair of the Select Committee. I think that this policy will create stronger advocacy on behalf of the bereaved, the victims and the families, and having panels with the right expertise, range and status will go a long way towards getting the answers.

Again, I understand the point about compulsion of evidence. There is not a theological objection to it, certainly as far as I am concerned: it is a question of reconciling competing powers when an inquiry is set up. I will, of course, look at the Justice Committee's report and recommendations on that issue. In general, of course, inquiries are not supposed to be adversarial, which is why the rules in relation to legal aid are as they are, but we will look at this and work with colleagues in all parts of the House as we introduce these important clauses.

Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State's acknowledgement that we need to legislate for an independent public advocate, but I am sorry to say that today's announcement is a pale imitation of what Hillsborough families and survivors spent years campaigning on. The Government's proposal feels like a weak signposting service. It does not have any of the powers that a truly independent public advocate would require—it feels so weak.

For me, the key question is whether this proposal would have stopped the state cover-ups of Hillsborough, the contaminated blood scandal and so many other cover-ups over the ages, and whether it will prevent further cover-ups. Unfortunately, I have to say that the answer is no, so will the Secretary of State instead adopt the Bill tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood, which is ready to go, and work with us to bring the Hillsborough law—including a fully independent public advocate—into legislation?

Dominic Raab: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for all his efforts. I am afraid I do not accept the characterisation; calling it a signposting service is quite wrong. By the way, the signposting is important, but that is the start, not the end of the role of the IPA. It will be set up as a statutory advocate for all those who have been affected, whether individual victims or on behalf of the community as a whole. As of its own status, it will be impossible to ignore.

[Dominic Raab]

On the specific functions beyond those I set out in my statement, I am very happy to keep engaging, but I think that Members need to think about the practicalities, for example with data compulsion, and how we make sure that they can be reconciled. I hope that we will be able to continue working together to make sure that victims and the bereaved, particularly of pre-existing tragedies, such as Hillsborough, but also those in the future feel they are better equipped to get the answers and accountability that they need.

Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con): I join other Members in welcoming today's statement and the important step that it takes, as well as recognising that the legislative process to follow will provide opportunities to strengthen the role and ensure that it delivers what we set out all the way back in 2017, not least trying to ensure that we can safeguard the independence of the IPA from Government. Can I ask my right hon. Friend how "survivors" will be defined? Will it simply be those who have had a life-changing injury, or will it also include those who may have been physically or mentally changed by their experience of a disaster they have been involved with and their need to have support and advice through that inquiry process?

Dominic Raab: We will work very closely with my hon. and learned Friend and colleagues on the definition. It is important to get that right. It will be an independent advocate once it is established, with the full force of expression and advocacy to get the answers that are required. As I have said before, I am happy to work with colleagues to make sure that we get the right balance and, in particular, to get the IPA to be as effective as possible, whether in relation to an inquiry, statutory or otherwise, or indeed when an inquiry is not established.

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for coming to the House today and the willingness to legislate in this area. As he has heard already today, nothing less than an independent public advocate acting at the behest of families, not directed by the Secretary of State, and with specific powers, will do. How is he engaging with Members in this place, others who have campaigned on these issues for years and, most important, the Hillsborough families? My constituent Deanna Matthews wrote to me—her uncle Brian was unlawfully killed at Hillsborough—to share her dismay about the lack of engagement with bereaved families ahead of this announcement. Can he tell me how he is engaging with those concerned?

Dominic Raab: Just to be clear, the advocate will be entirely independent once it is established, so the characterisation is not accurate. In terms of engagement, I am caught a little bit in terms of the detail by the strictures of Mr Speaker in making announcements to this place first, but I wrote to the families, the bereaved and the various groups from Hillsborough, Grenfell and the Manchester bombings, so they have had advance sight. One of the concerns now is the lack of detail, which I could not provide in advance of the statement. I did consult Bishop James Jones, and I saw him over the last week. I am committed to working with all those families—I know Grenfell United and some of those

well from my time as Housing Minister—to make sure that we get this right and, above all, get them the most effective means of giving them the transparency and accountability they need.

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): I warmly welcome this announcement by the Government of the establishment of an independent public advocate, and I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle), with whom I have sat on the Justice Committee and who I know has worked tirelessly on this for many years. I was at university at the time of the Hillsborough disaster in Sheffield, and sadly a friend of mine died in that tragedy, so I know all too well the frustration that the bereaved families have felt ever since. Can my right hon. Friend tell us in more detail how he will ensure that the families of the bereaved of the Hillsborough disaster will be fully involved in the practicalities of the establishment of the advocate?

Dominic Raab: I am very sorry for my hon. Friend's loss in relation to Hillsborough. I mentioned some of the engagement there has been. I have offered to meet the families and their groups, in relation to not just Hillsborough but Grenfell and the Manchester Arena bombing. I have always found in these cases, when facing the bereaved or survivors of such dire tragedies, that the most important thing is that they feel they have access, and I am very happy to meet any of them.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): I share the view of my right hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle), and I just wonder whether the Secretary of State has actually read previous debates on this issue in *Hansard*, because 12 years and five months ago my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Derek Twigg), my right hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood and many other Members of this House and I stood here seeking the power to compel the Government to release papers on Hillsborough and to get transparency over that information, yet all this time later, here we are again, still debating who has the power to compel information—in other words, how we as citizens can have the power to get to the truth.

I also want to ask the Secretary of State about extending the duty of candour to public servants so that they have to proactively tell the truth, because without this information we will, as my right hon. Friend has said, always be liable to these cover-ups. I saw it through all of the process with Hillsborough, with Lakanal House, with Grenfell and with the covid inquiry—again and again. I want the Secretary of State to understand this issue properly; it is about the truth. Will he explain what he is going to do on the duty of candour?

Dominic Raab: I know the hon. Lady cares deeply about this subject. I am familiar with these challenges from my time as Housing Minister, aside from the issue of Hillsborough, which I followed closely.

I totally understand the importance of the duty of candour. I have never said that the IPA is the whole picture; I said that it is a partial but important step that we are taking. It is better to get on with it, because after so long, one thing that I get from the communities, victims and survivors is the need to get on with tangible action—that is the way we will restore confidence. They

duty of candour was included in the report by Bishop James Jones, and therefore it is right that is part of the Home Office response. As has been set out previously, the Home Office will publish that response in the spring, and of course it will cover that issue.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend explain in a little more detail at what point and under what circumstances the availability of the advocate will be triggered? I see that he or she could be involved in not just inquiries but inquests, so how large a tragedy does it have to be before the victims and the bereaved can call upon his or her services?

Dominic Raab: I thank the Chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee, who raises a very good point. The principle is that the advocate is there for major tragedies. This is a specific institution set up with a range of expertise designed to deal with that. It is not dealing with one loss of life or a smaller event like that. We will need to work closely with Members on the definition to get that right.

Maria Eagle: Take up my Bill.

Dominic Raab: There are many good things in the right hon. Lady's private Member's Bill, but there is more we can do than just that, and there are some areas where, as she knows from her engagement with me—we talked about this at some length, and I am always happy to continue engaging—we take a different view. The most important thing, and I think my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) made this point well, is to make the advocate as effective as possible. I am committed to that, and I am committed to working with Members in all parts of the House.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, I was at the Hillsborough disaster. Along with my right hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle), I worked closely with the families, particularly in the lead-up to the decision of the independent panel, so we know quite a bit about the impact on families and what families and victims want. I came to this statement today when I saw its heading, about an independent public advocate, but I am going away not sure what "independent" means, because the Government have not set out clearly how independent it will be. It appears to me, from what the Secretary of State has said, that it will not be totally independent. I am surprised, given that there has been so much discussion in this Chamber, including with my right hon. Friend, that the Secretary of State has come here today and it is still a bit muddled. What does "independent" mean? If it is truly independent, it means that Ministers have no role in it whatever.

Dominic Raab: To be clear, on the right of initiative, which I know the right hon. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) has raised and included in her Bill, there could be different views as to its shape or scope, so that is something the Government will ultimately have the last word on. Frankly, what the hon. Gentleman said about the IPA not being independent is wholly wrong. We ought to be clear that, from the point of establishment in relation to a tragedy, the IPA will be

wholly and entirely independent to serve the victims, the bereaved and the survivors, and only them. I could not be clearer on the subject.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): A lot of the statement is welcome and will hopefully rebalance the position for families and victims, not least since they have had the unedifying experience of facing phalanxes of lawyers, knowing they were being paid for by their own taxes and by public funds to sometimes cover up the impact on their relatives. However, I do not find myself particularly persuaded on the points made by the Secretary of State around the compulsion of evidence, which strikes me as something that needs to be part of this. In his preparation work, which he referred to, what timeline has he set for this institution being up and ready, pending the legislation coming through the House?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The policy work is quite far developed, but of course we have not foreclosed options so that we can have maximum transparency and proper engagement. I will need to identify the right legislative vehicle and it will then take as long as the House takes to enact it, but I hope to say more on the legislative vehicle shortly.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I put it to the Secretary of State that, in the case of the contaminated blood scandal, Governments failed to acknowledge what actually happened for decades, even though thousands of people had been harmed and died. The scandal is now recognised as one of the worst treatment disasters in the history of the NHS. How would this independent public advocate work in circumstances where incidents happen over many years and across many parts of the United Kingdom, and where Governments fail to come clean about the involvement of the state for years and deny that there was a problem? What confidence would victims actually have in a situation where the Government decided whether an independent public advocate was appointed?

Dominic Raab: We are talking about the final configuration of the IPA, and the immediate consultation will take place with the families and the bereaved. On how it would help in a scenario like that, that is precisely why—with the greatest respect to the right hon. Lady—we went for a panel approach, so that we have a range of experts. A disaster like she mentions would be quite different from, say, Hillsborough or Grenfell, and it is therefore important that the IPA has that range of expertise. I take the point about compulsion of data and evidence, and that is something I am happy to keep looking at, but, frankly, from the moment an independent public advocate starts asking those questions, given the nature of its status in statute, it would break down many of the barriers that have previously faced victims in these situations.

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): I agree fully with my right hon. Friend when he says getting the detail right is vital in this process. I am pleased with the tone he has taken in his comments about being willing to work with Members from across the House to reach the right settlement for victims and ensure that this process is right for the future. Will he expand more on the panel he is planning? In particular, will victims be fully represented? Could they elect people to go on this panel to advocate for people involved in a tragedy?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is right: the point of having a range of expertise on the panels, rather than a single public advocate, is precisely to ensure that there is a range of expertise to deal with the nature of the unfolding tragedy, but also to allow the victims, the bereaved and the families to be properly consulted. In addition, they will have the ability to nominate a community-level representative on that panel to ensure that, as well as dealing with technical issues and with individuals being represented, the community as a whole and its concerns, which are often expressed as a whole, are properly reflected in that advocacy.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): I pay tribute to the Hillsborough families and all those affected for their tireless campaigning over decades to establish the truth of what happened and their determination to ensure that other families do not have to suffer the injustices they have been forced to endure. I pay tribute in particular to the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) for all their hard work on this matter.

The Secretary of State talks about a conflict between the IPA and any inquiry. Surely he must recognise that it is vital that victims and families feel confident that they have a truly independent advocate. Surely he must also recognise that, by definition, we cannot have too much transparency.

Dominic Raab: I certainly agree with the thrust of that. The IPA will be fully independent once it is established, with all the powers of advocacy and with the expertise to give voice and expression to the victims and the bereaved. On the compulsion of data or access to evidence, we need to ensure that we reconcile that with the powers an inquiry might be exercising and that we do not end up with either a legal muddle or an ineffective process.

Dr Kieran Mullan (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): I join colleagues in paying tribute to my fellow member of the Justice Committee, the right hon. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle), for her long campaigning on this issue, which the whole House recognises.

I am interested in the issue of legal representation that other Members have raised. How would the IPA interact with that, and what support might be there in accessing legal advice when, as others have said, it may face public bodies with well-funded legal teams that family members will not necessarily have access to?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend makes an important point. In general, inquests should be inquisitorial, fact-checking processes, and the 2019 review into legal aid for inquests, which he may recall, underlined the importance of us keeping it that way. There are, of course, circumstances, such as article 2 inquests or where there is significant public interest in the outcome, where legal representation may be available under exceptional case funding. I mentioned more about the detail of how that will work in my statement.

Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab): For bereaved families to have confidence in an independent public advocate, it needs to be truly independent of Government. That means acting on the directions of families and not the Secretary of State, exercising the powers of a data controller and being empowered to establish independent panels. Elkan Abrahamson, the co-author of the Hillsborough law, has said this Government's engagement with the Hillsborough families has been "almost non-existent", and it shows. Will the Justice Secretary commit to meeting with the Hillsborough families with a view to revising his proposals and bringing them in line with what the Hillsborough families have long been calling for?

Dominic Raab: I thank the hon. Gentleman. I have already made clear the level of engagement we have had before, and of course I am willing to meet with representatives or directly with the families involved.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I understand that the Secretary of State could not divulge the detail of today's announcement to the families who had been campaigning, but does he believe they would recognise the independent advocate he has announced as what they have been campaigning for on behalf of the people they lost?

Dominic Raab: I hope that they would, particularly as we engage with them on the detail. As I said, it will be fully independent. I take the points that have been made about the right of initiative and powers over data; we are always willing to look at the detail of how that will work, but we want to make sure that we have the most effective means of giving expression and voice to people in their time of need.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): Chloe Rutherford and Liam Curry from South Shields were tragically murdered in the Manchester Arena terror attack. Archaic law on terror attacks prevents their parents from registering their precious children's deaths. Last week they again met Ministers, who this time treated them with contempt, patronised them and insulted them. In that meeting, it became clear that they have been misled by the Government for nearly a year: the law can be changed but the Government simply choose not to change it. Registration is now imminent. The IPA will not help them or other families. How on earth can they believe the Secretary of State when he says that victims and the bereaved are at the heart of his response?

Dominic Raab: If the hon. Lady looks at what we are doing in the round, I think she will see the steps we are taking. I am very mindful of and sensitive to the issues that she describes and, indeed, the constituents who lost their lives in that appalling attack. As the hon. Lady will know, the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953, which is owned by the Home Office, and the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 set out the process for registering deaths following an inquest, which requires the coroner to inform the registrar of particulars of the deceased. As the law is currently configured, there is no flexibility around that, but I reiterate my deepest sympathies to the families who were so tragically bereaved.

Turkey and Syria Earthquakes

2 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will make a statement on the situation in Turkey and Syria. I know that the House will join me in offering sincere condolences to all those affected by the recent earthquakes.

Last week when I visited Turkey, I witnessed at first hand the terrible scale of human suffering. I also had the opportunity to speak to Syrian partners and the United Nations about their work on the immediate response. I pay tribute to the hundreds of British personnel engaged in specialist health, humanitarian and rescue work in Syria and Turkey. I saw for myself the outstanding work that Britain is doing on the ground to save lives and support those who are suffering. Throughout these events and our responses, there has been excellent co-ordination across the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Health and Social Care.

Today, the death toll across Turkey and Syria stands at more than 48,000, and at least 118,000 people have been injured. Approximately 25 million people have been affected, with homes, businesses and key infrastructure destroyed. The further earthquakes on 20 and 27 February, which have tragically led to additional deaths, show that the danger has not passed. In Syria, this disaster adds to years of turmoil inflicted by conflict, striking hardest in the very place that has borne the brunt of Assad's war machine.

I turn to the initial response. Turkey requested international support immediately after the earthquakes. The UK Government delivered aid as swiftly as possible, working closely with Turkey, the United Nations, international partners, non-governmental organisations and charities. That included deploying a 77-strong search and rescue team in Turkey, along with state-of-the-art heavy equipment. We also quickly announced £4.3 million in new support to Syria Civil Defence—the White Helmets—who have carried out search and rescue operations in 60 villages, helping thousands of civilians. The British Government rapidly engaged with the Turkish Government at the highest level, and the Foreign Secretary, my noble Friend Lord Ahmad and I immediately spoke to the senior UN humanitarian officials to ensure a rapid and co-ordinated response in Syria.

As part of the immediate response, the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office set up a field hospital in Türkoğlu, including an emergency department and a 24/7 operating theatre. I saw for myself 150 UK-Med and Ministry of Defence personnel working side by side with Turkish medics to save lives. I was deeply impressed and moved during my visit by the lifesaving work that those teams are doing. Together, they have treated more than 5,000 patients so far.

Meanwhile, the UK has delivered 465 tonnes of relief items to Turkey and Syria through civilian and Royal Air Force flights. That includes tents and thermal blankets for families made homeless in freezing conditions, as well as solar lanterns, water purification tablets and hygiene kits. On 15 February, we announced a further £25 million in funding to bolster our humanitarian response. That is supporting the work of the UN and aid agencies on the ground in Syria, helping communities

ravaged by war, as well as by this natural disaster. It also continues to support the recovery effort in Turkey, led by its Government.

Beyond our support to the White Helmets, UK-funded charities and NGOs in northern Syria have cared for the injured through mobile medical teams and health centres. The UN has distributed food and other essential items, to which the UK has contributed. Further assistance will be delivered in the coming days as part of the UN's Syria cross-border humanitarian fund, to which the UK is one of the most significant donors. The fund has already allocated \$50 million to scale up the response. There is a particular focus on displaced families, the elderly, women, children and people with disabilities.

The UK has also supported and bolstered the response through our existing support to key multilateral organisations that are helping in Turkey and Syria. The UN's global fund, Education Cannot Wait, announced a \$7 million grant for Syrian children affected by the earthquake, and the Global Partnership for Education will provide \$3.75 million to support the emergency education response. The UK is one of the most significant donors to both funds.

We are also a long-standing partner and donor to the World Bank, which announced \$1.7 billion to assist Turkey, and the United Nations central emergency response fund, which has released \$50 million for the crisis. Most significantly, our constituents—the British public—have demonstrated extraordinary generosity through the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal, raising more than £100 million. That figure includes £5 million from the UK taxpayer in matched seed funding.

His Majesty the King visited Turkish diaspora groups and members of the British Syrian community at Syria House, a donation point in Trafalgar Square, on 14 February. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited Syria House on 16 February.

It is clearly vital to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches those who need it as efficiently as possible in Syria. I will continue to engage with the United Nations to ensure maximum access for as long as is required. We welcome the accelerated pace of United Nations deliveries and are monitoring the situation closely in the Security Council in New York.

The House will understand that the scale of this tragedy is immense. The UK will continue to stand in solidarity with Turkey and with the people of Syria during these most testing of times. I commend this statement to the House.

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

2.7 pm

Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Minister for giving me advance sight of his statement.

We have all been deeply shocked by the scenes from Turkey and north-west Syria. The damage done and the loss of life inflicted by these earthquakes and aftershocks is incomprehensible. The death toll in the two countries has surpassed 48,000 people. About 25 million people have been affected—a staggering figure—and homes, businesses and key infrastructure have been destroyed. We are looking at a damage area of more than 50,000 sq km.

[Preet Kaur Gill]

The Labour party and, I am sure, each hon. Member present send our deepest condolences, thoughts and sympathies to all those whose lives have been devastated by this appalling tragedy. The many heartfelt contributions that Members across the House made to last Thursday's Westminster Hall debate demonstrate the strength of support for the people of Syria and Turkey at this time.

Turkey is, of course, a close NATO ally and partner of the United Kingdom. There are many close ties of family and friendship between us, as there are with the people of Syria, many of whom have fled from the crisis there to be in the United Kingdom. We are duty-bound as a nation to respond to the challenges posed by this disaster in the long term as well as the short term, even as the cameras and headlines move on. While we have seen countless images of despair and devastation, I am sure that all of us have heard the stories of bravery, resilience and hope. I hope that this disaster can show that the spirit of humanitarianism still prevails across much of the world.

The response of the British public has been incredible. More than £30 million was donated on the first day of the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal, which has now raised more than £100 million. That shows the British public at their best: generous, outward-looking and deeply concerned for the welfare of others around the globe.

I take this opportunity to express my thanks to the search and rescue teams that sprang to action within hours of the tragedy to assist in saving people trapped under the rubble of buildings that had collapsed. Speed was absolutely critical in those first 72 hours, and I was very proud to see how quickly British forces mobilised on a flight out to Gaziantep. In particular, I thank the volunteers from West Midlands Fire Service: Shyam, Shaun, Mark, Aghia, James, Mark, Joe and Paul, who flew out to Turkey, and Rob and Hannah, who supported from the United Kingdom.

The UK Government were right to respond quickly in those first 72 hours. Our support to the White Helmets was vital while humanitarian access to north-west Syria was impeded, and the delivery of medical assistance, rescue equipment and sniffer dogs to the disaster area has been important to help people in the immediate aftermath. However, we are now in a new phase of our response, and our support must not stop there. People are in need of emergency accommodation, food, healthcare, water and sanitary health, and the largest single need is for emergency shelter in both countries.

The earthquake has not only resulted in additional displacement, but diminished the prospects for the safe return of internally displaced persons from earthquake-affected areas. Even before the earthquake, an estimated 4.1 million people in north-west Syria relied on aid to meet their basic needs. The UN estimates that, in north-west Syria, 120 schools have been destroyed and 57 hospitals have been partially damaged or forced to suspend their services following the earthquakes. That is absolutely devastating. For those who survive, hunger, dirty water and the bitter winter cold still pose a significant threat. It is in Britain's interests to support Turkey and Syria. Turkey hosts the largest number of Syrian refugees

displaced abroad due to the country's civil war, and in some of the affected areas 50% of the population in Turkey are refugees.

Through multilateralism and common purpose, we can stand together in the face of tragedy and do more than we can alone. The work that the UK has supported through our multilateral partners is significant, and it is a reminder of the many important partnerships that the UK has led in and often helped found over the years. The UN appeals for Turkey and Syria have now been announced, with a combined \$1.4 billion requested for both countries over the next three months. As yet, the UK has not announced any further direct support since the launch of the two appeals. What is the Minister doing to co-ordinate and scale up the humanitarian response with our international partners in the United Nations?

On the £30 million announced so far, can the Minister say over what timeframe it will be disbursed and how it will be distributed between the two countries? Crucially, will he confirm where that support has been drawn from, and that it will not be taken from other planned in-country work or other humanitarian crises, such as those in east Africa and Yemen? According to reports, in December the Syria country team was asked to find cuts of between £6 million and £8 million. That would be utterly unconscionable in the light of the disaster that has befallen people who have already suffered so much. Can the Minister today confirm whether those cuts will still go ahead? Ministers have been asked about that twice and have not answered either time, so I would be grateful for some answers today.

Humanitarian access in Syria remains an ongoing challenge. The obstruction of Bab al-Hawa, the only border crossing into Syria, in the first week following the earthquake meant lifesaving support could not reach people who needed it. It has been disgraceful to see the damage that Russia's political game playing on the UN Security Council has done to people there by restricting humanitarian access. It is important and welcome, therefore, that the UN has brokered an agreement to reopen two further crossings for three months. However, this agreement must be extended. Most of the aid packages crossing the border have only a 12-week lifespan. Moreover, UN convoys are severely lagging compared with before the earthquake. On average, roughly 650 to 700 trucks per month were passing through before the earthquake, but now, with two more crossing points available, only 493 have accessed north-west Syria.

A long-term strategy for aid and support is needed. What diplomatic efforts are the UK making to extend this agreement beyond three months and to hold authorities to their word on humanitarian access? Will the Minister set out a long-term strategy for the UK's support to the region, and does he recognise the interplay between the earthquake and the conflict in Syria?

Mr Mitchell: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments and for the tone in which she delivered them; the House is completely united on such occasions, and particularly on this one. She underlined the British commitment and that of our constituents. I agree about the extraordinary international response across so many different countries that she mentioned. She mentioned the search and rescue team, which of course left from Birmingham

airport, close to her constituency and mine. She also mentioned the strong British support to the White Helmets, whose leaders I met on my recent visit.

The hon. Lady asked about tents and blankets. I can tell her that Britain has delivered something like 3,350 tents to both Syria and Turkey, as well as 24,000 thermal blankets to Turkey and 17,000 to Syria, making a total of 41,000. She also mentioned the damage that has been done to schools, and I mentioned in my statement that Education Cannot Wait has allocated \$7 million as a result of this crisis. However, I was in Geneva a couple of weeks ago for the replenishment for Education Cannot Wait, and Britain was able to find an additional £80 million to support the very important work that Education Cannot Wait is conducting.

The hon. Lady asked me about cuts in Syria. I can tell her that in 2021 we pledged £205 million for Syria, but we actually delivered £232 million. This year the figure has been reduced, but we are confident that, by the end of this month, £158 million will have been delivered. I would just emphasise to her that, to the support for refugees from Syria, Britain has contributed very substantially over the years since this crisis first started in Syria. In fact, we have contributed more than the whole of the European Union added together, with a figure of something like £3.8 billion.

Finally, on the crossings, the hon. Lady is right that there have been considerable difficulties. In the early stage, the one crossing that was open was damaged by the earthquake, but the most recent information indicates that, while 358 trucks have got across from Bab al-Hawa, 82 trucks have now got through at Bab al-Salam and 16 at al-Rai. That is something in the order of 456 trucks, so the food and supplies are moving.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): Two weeks ago I was in Syria, and I saw for myself the refusal to open the borders with Turkey, and the reticence of the Syrian Government to allow humanitarian aid to enter the north-east autonomous region was causing additional suffering. Does the Minister share my revulsion that the drone missile attacks have continued, with the killing of a Syrian Democratic Forces soldier as recently as 12 February in Kobane, while I was there?

Mr Mitchell: My hon. Friend has seen at first hand the impact of the Syrian regime on those poor people who have suffered not only from Assad and the Russian war machine, but now from this dreadful earthquake. The access that my hon. Friend rightly says is desperately needed was the result of the negotiations by the head of the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Martin Griffiths, who deserves considerable credit for the speed and efficacy of the way he got them opened.

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

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Let me also thank the Minister for early sight of his statement. Let me also join the House in expressing condolences and sympathy, on behalf of those on the SNP Benches, to the peoples of Turkey and Syria, who have suffered the most powerful earthquakes in the

region for over 80 years, releasing the catastrophes we see now compounding the suffering of the peoples of the region.

With an estimated 500,000 people of Turkish origin living across the UK and an estimated 28,000 Syrian nationals, I think we can all agree on how personal much of this loss is to many of our constituents. Let me welcome the Department's decision to send further support to Turkey, and I commend the Department for co-ordinating with the UN on support for those in Syria. That said, it is always important that the international community continues to listen to those on the ground, including the UN, the Red Crescent and, of course, the White Helmets in the coming days and weeks, so that we can deliver the best relief and assistance possible. I am sure that the Minister and the Department are doing just that.

Let me ask three specific questions. My hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), in a written parliamentary question, has already asked the International Development Minister whether the Department plans to provide additional funding to the World Food Programme to help tackle immediate humanitarian needs in both Turkey and Syria. The Minister responded:

“The UK currently has no plans to provide additional funding to the World Food Programme.”

That question was asked because the World Food Programme says it requires \$46 million over the next three to four months to address the immediate needs. Will the Minister reconsider the decision not to pledge to the World Food Programme and make a substantial donation?

In addition, the European Commission has announced that it will organise a donor conference for Syria and Turkey to mobilise funding, to be held in March. Will the Minister provide clarity on the Government's attendance, as they are eligible to attend? Will his Government pledge generously and early to that campaign? Finally, the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces in the north-east have pledged to facilitate the delivery of aid. It has been reported that the United States will fly aid to Qamishli, a city controlled by the SDF, where it will be transported by land to the affected region. Will the Minister outline whether UK aid will be flown in through that route as well?

Mr Mitchell: I thank the Scottish National party spokesman for his comments about the work of British service and search and rescue personnel, and of others in my Department, given their hard work throughout many nights and days when this terrible event took place. He asked three questions. We are very significant funders of the World Food Programme. On whether we decide to use that route to provide additional help in Syria and Turkey, we will have to wait and see, but for the moment we have responded and made sure that UK aid gets through to those who need it at this point in the crisis.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether funding will be considered for the Turkey-Syria fundraising conference. We will look at that at the time, but I assure him and the House that we have been right up there in the lead on making sure that critical needs are met. On the third and final question he asked, we will make sure, in every way we can, that aid gets through to people in north-east

[Mr Mitchell]

Syria. We will use whatever means are available to us. As I hope he has seen from what has happened already, Britain has not been shy in pressing these points to make sure that the aid gets through.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): Will the Minister join me in thanking my constituents at Royal Air Force Brize Norton for the significant help that they have given to the people of Turkey? I am thinking in particular of the tactical medical wing, which has been deployed and is giving the medical assistance that he spoke of, and the wider air mobility force that, on top of significant other tasking requirements, has moved the aid so swiftly. Simply put, without them British aid would not be going anywhere. They ought to have our thanks.

Mr Mitchell: I very much agree. My hon. Friend is right that the support of the Royal Air Force has been quite exceptional during this crisis. Across Whitehall—the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and the Department of Health and Social Care—there has been a quite unusual degree of cohesion and excellent co-operation.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the Chair of the International Development Committee.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his statement and for his personal interest in this topic. It has been fantastic to see the international community come together to support this region. But as we move from the rescue to the recovery phase of the earthquake response, could he give more detail about the UK Government's long-term commitment to NGOs and UN partners, particularly in Syria, which is already suffering hugely? Could he focus on the help that communities will get to rebuild their lives?

Mr Mitchell: I thank the Chair of the Select Committee for what she has said. The international community has done extraordinarily well in rallying together to meet the needs that the Turkish Government have set out, and to estimate and try to meet the needs in northern Syria. The co-operation between Greece and Turkey, for example, has been enormously heartening. She will appreciate that the £100 million raised from across our country will go to 15 British and international charities that are household names. We have allocated £43.3 million across the piece, which has paid for search and rescue, medical work in Turkey, and UK and aid agencies working inside Syria. The White Helmets funding of £4.3 million goes to help the 3,000 White Helmets who are operating in northern Syria, in 60 different areas.

The House should also look at the multilateral pound—the money going in, which I mentioned, through the Central Emergency Response Fund, which was invented by Britain and to which we have contributed \$1.7 billion since its inception. That will be deployed in both countries. I have mentioned Education Cannot Wait, but the Global Partnership for Education programme has allocated £3.75 million. The effect of all that will be a very substantial British input. I can assure the hon. Lady that we will watch carefully what is going on. If further British leadership and money are required, we will certainly consider deploying it.

Mr Louie French (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): The earthquakes in Turkey and Syria have been heartbreaking to watch. I welcome the support that His Majesty's Government are providing, and I pay tribute to the British rescue teams. As always, our community in Bexley has come together with care and compassion following the disaster, with many local businesses and residents donating what they could. Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking all the local residents of Bexley, especially Councillor Andy Dourmough, the Turkish School at Blackfen School, Sidcup Partners, St John's Church Sidcup, Barry and the Welling town centre businesses, and the Lighthouse charity for all their efforts collecting donations and vital aid?

Mr Mitchell: I thank my hon. Friend for telling us what is happening in Bexley. All across the country, our constituents have responded magnificently to the appalling situation in Turkey and Syria. It is on such occasions that we see Britain at its best—going first and with effect to people in desperate jeopardy.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): The scenes in Turkey and northern Syria are without doubt a tragedy. My heart goes out to all those who have lost their lives or who find themselves without shelter or sanitation. This has been a difficult time for the diaspora here at home. It is vital that the Government show global leadership not just in aid but in helping people to get out if they need to. Will the Government consider a new expedited temporary visa scheme, as has been introduced in Germany, for those with relatives here in the UK so that they can come and stay with their families and get the support that they desperately need?

Mr Mitchell: We have no plans to introduce a scheme of the type that the hon. Lady describes, but the visa centre in Adana is now open again. The consular services that we are able to offer, particularly in Turkey, were back up and running very quickly after the crisis struck. I hope that she will feel that, although we cannot make any commitment to such a scheme, we are doing everything we can to ensure that the normal consular and visa services are available.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Clearly, this is a humanitarian disaster on a massive scale. I commend my right hon. Friend for his work, as I would expect, given his long experience in this field. The British people have been incredibly generous, as he said, with £100 million donated. Given that all our condolences and thoughts are with the families of those affected by the earthquake, what advice can he give to those who want to give money to ensure that it gets to the frontline? How do they give it, where do they give it, and can we ensure that organisations that might not be acting in the best interests of the people affected do not get the money?

Mr Mitchell: My hon. Friend asks an extremely important question. People are still seeking to give donations because they can see the full scale of what has happened. The answer is that the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal is a highly effective way of getting money through to 15 immensely respected organisations that really can deliver on the ground. The details are available online. Money delivered to the Disasters Emergency Committee will get through to where it is really needed.

Feryal Clark (Enfield North) (Lab): I was pleased to hear about the Minister's trip to Turkey and the continued aid support to Turkey and Syria. He will know that thousands of my constituents have been personally impacted by the earthquake, having lost loved ones and friends. Hundreds have written to me and to Government Ministers because they want to provide temporary relief for family members who have lost everything. Will the Minister tell me why the Government will not support their calls for an expedited temporary visa scheme?

Mr Mitchell: We do not believe that that is the right way to handle the situation in Turkey that the hon. Lady describes. I know that in her constituency she has many families who are suffering and to whom the whole House will want to send their condolences. What I can say is that I saw for myself, on my visit on 19 February to Türkoğlu, the quite extraordinary work by 150 British medical and military personnel on the ground, working with their Turkish counterparts not only in the field hospital set up by the MOD and the FCDO but in the two British emergency medical clinics. I can tell her that in terms of the need on the ground, Britain has been doing everything it can to help. I have seen for myself both the shattered towns and cities in the aftermath of the earthquake, and the brilliant work being done by Britain, together with our Turkish counterparts, to try to make things better.

Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his comprehensive and reassuring statement, which demonstrates that the UK is more than playing its part in delivering vital humanitarian aid needed in Syria and Turkey. To that end, will the additional commitment he made to the Education Cannot Wait UK global fund mean that the amount of funding already announced is likely to grow in future as we hopefully move to a rebuild and recovery part of this disaster, because education will be key for many children who have lost their schools?

Mr Mitchell: My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right to make the point about the need to restore schools. Otherwise, on top of everything else, children will miss out on education, one of the key ladders for opportunity in their later lives. Education Cannot Wait, a charity Britain has been enormously supportive of, is a key area that can make an immediate effect. That is why we were so pleased to see it respond with \$7 million of support in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): Many people in the Wirral have been fundraising as well; it is so good to see Britain coming together. I know that because of that, the Minister will have given the thanks of everyone in this House to our brilliant civil servants who have been helping and to all those he has met who are engaged in the response. On what he said about the United Nations, does he think we can now get better collaboration and support in pursuit of safety and care for civilians in Syria?

Mr Mitchell: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments. She knows a lot about these difficulties and she rightly says that the United Nations is the key to restoring basic services and the ability of people caught up in this terrible earthquake in northern Syria to survive. I believe

that Martin Griffiths and his colleagues across the six agencies actively taking aid into northern Syria have wrestled at speed, and with effect, with the early problems, some of which were as a result of the earthquake damaging the infrastructure of crossings. I think she can now have confidence, as I have confidence, that the UN is delivering on the ground.

Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Minister for coming to the Chamber and giving us the statement. Natural disasters show the importance of having a well-funded crisis reserve that can provide timely emergency aid. Previously, that reserve totalled £500 million, yet today it is now only £30 million. Can the Minister explain how it has been allocated this year and whether he will use it to support relief efforts until the end of this financial year?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Lady makes a good point about the importance of a crisis reserve. That is the reason why Britain set up the CERF, the fund I mentioned earlier which is now deploying \$50 million, so she is entirely right about that. That is the multilateral spend. In terms of the bilateral spend, the humanitarian budget has a degree of flex within it. It is not as tightly restricted as the core international development budgets, so on the humanitarian side we are able to exercise our judgment on how to deploy limited funds to best possible effect.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The earthquakes in Syria and Turkey have shocked and appalled us all. For the Turkish and Syrian communities in Newcastle, that horror is particularly close. They want to know why so many died, why it was so deadly and what they can do to help. Can the Minister give us his understanding of why so many relatively new buildings collapsed? Will he also look at the issue of cross-border remittances, so that the proceeds of the extensive fundraising that diaspora communities are undertaking can be transferred as effectively, easily and quickly as possible?

Mr Mitchell: I thank the hon. Lady very much for her comments, in particular about the support her constituents in Newcastle have been giving. She asks me specifically what people can do to help. I think I have made clear that the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal is the right way for our constituents to assist. She asks me why so many have died and why so many buildings collapsed. That is primarily a matter for the Turkish authorities to address. It is clear from what the press in Turkey are saying that that is a point people in Turkey are themselves pursuing vigorously. On cross-border remittances, I will have a look at that and write to her. She is quite right that ease of remittance is extremely important. It is something we try to facilitate in many parts of the world and I will look to see whether we can do any more in that respect.

Alex Davies-Jones (Pontypridd) (Lab): All our thoughts are with those impacted by the horrendous earthquakes in Turkey and Syria. I commend all the brilliant community groups across the UK who are doing incredible fundraising work. I am due to attend one this weekend in Treforest in my constituency. It is currently estimated that 24,000 women are due to give birth in Turkey in the areas affected by the earthquake. There is very little specialised

[Alex Davies-Jones]

maternal and gynaecological support to help those women give birth safely. What more can the UK Government do to support those women with specific healthcare needs to help them give birth in a safe environment?

Mr Mitchell: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments and I hope she will pass on my thanks to the community groups she is seeing this weekend. On the 24,000 women in jeopardy in the way she describes, we have seen vividly on our television screens exactly how that can impact people who are caught under the rubble in awful circumstances. Our great intent has been to ensure that not only tents and thermal blankets get through, but hygiene kits, water and sanitation so that basic healthcare is restored. All those things will play a part in helping to address the problem she rightly brings before the House.

Allan Dorans (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP): I thank the Minister for his statement. As tragically demonstrated, earthquakes are hugely unpredictable. What preparation and contingency planning are the United Kingdom Government making for future earthquakes in that region?

Mr Mitchell: The Government consider all these matters in terms of humanitarian need and resilience not just in this region and with earthquakes but in many regions of the world facing many other challenges, most of which, but not all, result substantially from climate change. The hon. Gentleman may rest assured that in all these matters of preparation, we are considering them every day and every week.

Point of Order

2.38 pm

Anthony Mangnall (Totnes) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I apologise for interrupting the business and the 10-minute rule Bill from my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mark Fletcher). During Prime Minister's questions, the Leader of the Opposition claimed that Shell had not paid any taxes through the Government's oil and gas levy. A simple Google can correct that fact, but unfortunately we do not necessarily know what the mechanism is to bring the Leader of the Opposition back to the Dispatch Box to show that the oil and gas levy is working, and that Shell paid record levels this year and is set to pay more next year. How can we clarify that?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. I am assuming he has informed the Leader of the Opposition of his intention to raise it. However, he will know that it is not for the Chair to verify the accuracy or otherwise of comments made by hon. and right hon. Members. That is a matter for Members themselves. If a mistake has been made, the record can be corrected, but in the meantime the hon. Gentleman has put his point on the record, so I think we will leave it at that.

BILLS PRESENTED

AIR POLLUTION (LOCAL AUTHORITY AUDITS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mr Barry Sheerman, supported by Christine Jardine and Caroline Lucas, presented a Bill to make provision for local authorities to conduct annual audits of air pollution in their area and associated emissions by public and private entities; to require those local authorities to prepare reports on those audits; to require the Secretary of State to report annually to Parliament on those audit reports; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March, and to be printed (Bill 257).

NATIONAL INSURANCE (VOLUNTARY CLASS 2 AND 3 CONTRIBUTIONS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Wendy Chamberlain presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to report to Parliament on the merits of extending to 5 April 2025 the period for which voluntary Class 2 and 3 National Insurance contributions may be paid in respect of one or more of the tax years 2006-07 to 2016-17; to require the Secretary of State to publish certain information about the performance of the Future Pension Centre in providing advice about voluntary Class 2 and 3 contributions in relation to the state pension; to require the Secretary of State to publish a strategy for increasing public awareness of voluntary Class 2 and 3 contributions; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March, and to be printed (Bill 259).

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION
(STATUS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Dame Maria Miller, supported by Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger, Chris Elmore, Steve Brine, Julie Elliott, Harriett Baldwin, Bob Blackman, Layla Moran, Taiwo Owatemi, Sir James Duddridge and Dr Lisa Cameron, presented a Bill to provide for corporate status of and for certain privileges and immunities to be accorded to the international inter-parliamentary organisation of national and sub-national legislatures of Commonwealth countries known as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and to its Secretary-General; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March, and to be printed (Bill 260).

ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON (LEASES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Bob Blackman, supported by Ms Karen Buck, Nickie Aiken and Sarah Champion, presented a Bill to amend the Crown Estate Act 1961 to increase the maximum term of the lease that may be granted to the Zoological Society of London in respect of land in Regent's Park; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March, and to be printed (Bill 261).

**Sexual Offences (Prohibition of
Name Change)**

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

2.40 pm

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to prohibit a person subject to notification requirements under Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 from changing their name; and for connected purposes.

The Bill is one of several steps that need to be taken to fix safeguarding in this country, and to ensure that those who have committed some of the most heinous crimes—including rape, assault by penetration, indecent photographs of children offences, and sexual communications with a child—are not able to use a loophole to change their names to escape scrutiny and the authorities, and, in some cases, end up working with children and vulnerable people.

As is so often the case, my attention was brought to this situation by a constituent's casework. They know who they are, and I will say no more, other than that they are very brave and what they have been through is horrific and unimaginable for most of us. However, the person who is responsible for their pain is in prison and wishes to change his name. I could not believe that this was possible, but it turned out to be the tip of the iceberg. Further research led me to the excellent work on the issue done by the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) and, in turn, to the Safeguarding Alliance's superb research, and also the advocacy of my right hon. Friends the Members for Harlow (Robert Halfon) and for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid). I pay tribute to their work, and from here on in steal many of their arguments and research.

The crux of the situation is this: registered sex offenders are able to change their names by deed poll, both enrolled and unenrolled, allowing them to go under the radar of the authorities and putting society's most vulnerable at risk. Bizarrely, the onus for keeping details up to date on the sex offenders register lies with the offender, rather than the onus being on the police and other authorities to keep a close eye on the offender. It is illegal not to notify the authorities if you do change your name, and it can result in a sentence of five years in prison, but there is an automatic right for sex offenders out of prison to be able to change their names. It does not take a genius to realise that sex offenders are not the most trustworthy group. The Safeguarding Alliance's report of April 2021 revealed that 16,000 offenders had breached notification requirements in the past five years and 905 had gone missing between 2017 and 2020, and this morning the BBC News website released new figures showing that 729 had gone missing between 2019 and 2021.

Rose West, Ben Lewis, Vanessa George and Ian Huntley all changed their names. The Bichard inquiry of 2004, set up in response to Mr Huntley's horrific crimes, identified name-changing as a problem that needed solving, yet it remains unsolved. The same inquiry led to the establishment of the Disclosure and Barring Service, or DBS, of which many of us will be aware. It is meant to provide an assurance for employers that an employee or volunteer is safe, but a sex offender can

[Mark Fletcher]

now change their name and, with little difficulty, receive a passport or driving licence with their new name. At no point will they be asked whether they have a criminal background. In some cases, that can in turn lead to a DBS check under their new identity, and too often we find these people working in schools, care homes and elsewhere.

A few years ago there was a debate in the House on whether prisoners should have the right to vote, and it was agreed that they should have no such right. The Bill seeks to extend that principle, providing that someone who commits a heinous crime and is on the sex offenders register must in turn surrender their right to change their name while they remain on the register.

Last Monday, the Government announced several new and very welcome additional measures on domestic abuse and violence against women and girls. Two in particular are worth mentioning. Those who receive a sentence of 12 months or more for coercive and controlling behaviour will now be added to the sex offenders register, and the domestic violence disclosure scheme—or Clare’s law, as it is better known—will be put on a statutory footing. However, both measures are redundant if offenders can change their names and slip off the system. The same problem applies to the child sex offender disclosure scheme, or Sarah’s law, which, again, relies on accurate records. This is a major safeguarding breach at the heart of a system that is meant to protect us.

I think most people would be horrified to discover that this loophole exists. There are different approaches to fixing it, as I am sure we will discover during tomorrow’s Backbench Business debate initiated by the hon. Member for Rotherham; but that the current system is not fit for purpose and needs urgent change is beyond doubt. Too many of us have constituents who need us to act, and I hope that a solution will be central to the forthcoming Victims Bill.

Imagine being a young person and having the most horrific thing happen to you. Imagine that offender saying to you, “If you ever tell anybody, I will come for you.” Imagine living with that for decades. Imagine how the parents of that young person feel over decades. Imagine finding out that that offender may be changing their name and bringing back all those memories and that fear that they will come for you again. This Bill is about being on the side of victims and making sure that they do not have to go through that.

Again, I pay tribute to my very brave constituents, who I know are watching the debate, for bringing this mind-boggling matter to my attention; to the Safeguarding Alliance for all the work that it has done on this; and to all my colleagues who have supported the Bill, particularly the more than 50 Conservative Back Benchers who have supported it both publicly and privately. I cannot mention them all today. In particular, however, I draw the Government’s attention to the fact that two former Home Secretaries and a former Justice Secretary have supported the Bill, as does the former Prime Minister and Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May).

Safeguarding is about ensuring that our most vulnerable are protected, and we must end the real, immediate and significant risk of harm that this loophole creates. We cannot wait for another inquiry to tell us what we already know: that the law, and the system as it stands, are not fit for purpose.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Mark Fletcher, Sarah Champion, Priti Patel, Alicia Kearns, Caroline Nokes, Paul Holmes, Mr William Wragg, Sir Chris Bryant, Sir Robert Buckland, Mr David Davis, Alex Davies-Jones and Sajid Javid present the Bill.

Mark Fletcher accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March, and to be printed (Bill 258).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

Ordered,

That, at this day’s sitting—

(1) The Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Secretary Michael Gove relating to the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill [Lords] not later than 45 minutes after the commencement of proceedings on the motion for this Order; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings may continue, though opposed, until any hour, and may be entered upon after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply; and

(2) Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply to the Motion in the name of Penny Mordaunt relating to Estimates (Liaison Committee Recommendation).—(*Jacob Young.*)

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Before we come to the motion relating to the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill [Lords], I have a brief announcement to make. Under section 107(6) of the Government of Wales Act 2006, inserted by section 2 of the Wales Act 2017, it is recognised that the Parliament of the United Kingdom will not normally legislate with regard to devolved matters without the consent of the National Assembly for Wales. The Clerk of the House has been informed today that Senedd Cymru has agreed a legislative consent motion for this Bill. The Senedd agrees that the provisions of the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill, in so far as they fall within the legislative competence of the Senedd, should be considered by the UK Parliament. Copies of the motion are available in the Vote Office. It has also been published online at the Bill’s web page on the parliamentary Bills website.

SOCIAL HOUSING (REGULATION) BILL [LORDS]

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding that such provision could not have been proposed in Committee without an Instruction from the House, amendments may be proposed on consideration of the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill [Lords] to provide for the Secretary of State to make regulations specifying action that registered providers of social housing must take in relation to hazards affecting housing provided under a lease and providing for breach of such regulations to be a breach of a leasehold covenant.—(*Jacob Young.*)

Social Housing (Regulation) Bill [Lords]

Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee

[Relevant documents: The First Report of the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee, The Regulation of Social Housing, HC 18; and oral evidence taken before the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee on 6 February 2023, on The Regulation of Social Housing: Follow-up, HC 1127.]

New Clause 1

SOCIAL HOUSING LEASES: REMEDYING HAZARDS

‘After section 10 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 insert—

“Implied term as to remedying of hazards

10A Remedying of hazards occurring in dwellings let on relevant social housing leases

(1) This section applies to a lease of a dwelling if—

- (a) the dwelling is in England,
- (b) the lease is a relevant social housing lease, and
- (c) section 9A—
 - (i) applies to the lease (see section 9B), or
 - (ii) would apply to the lease if the provision in section 9B(3) did not exist.

(2) There is implied in the lease a covenant by the lessor that the lessor will comply with all prescribed requirements that are applicable to that lease.

(3) The Secretary of State must make regulations which require the lessor under a lease to which this section applies to take action, in relation to prescribed hazards which affect or may affect the leased dwelling, within the period or periods specified in the regulations.

(4) Regulations under subsection (3) are enforceable against lessors only through actions for breach of the covenant that is implied by subsection (2).

(5) In any proceedings for a breach of the covenant that is implied by subsection (2), it is a defence for the lessor to prove that the lessor used all reasonable endeavours to avoid that breach.

(6) For the purposes of this section a lease is a “relevant social housing lease” at any time when—

- (a) the lessor under the lease is a registered provider of social housing, and
- (b) the dwelling leased under the lease—
 - (i) is social housing, but
 - (ii) is not low cost home ownership accommodation.

(7) In this section and section 10B—

“lease”, “lessor” and “lessee” have the same meanings as in section 9A (see section 9A(9));

“low cost home ownership accommodation” has the meaning given in section 70 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008;

“prescribed hazard” has the same meaning as in section 10 (see section 10(2) and (3));

“prescribed requirement” means a requirement prescribed in regulations under subsection (3);

“social housing” has the same meaning as in Part 2 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 (see sections 68 and 72 of that Act).

10B Regulations section 10A: supplementary provision

(1) Regulations under section 10A(3) may apply to—

- (a) leases granted before the day when section (Social housing leases: remedying hazards) of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 came into force;

- (b) prescribed hazards which began before that day;
 - (c) only some descriptions of prescribed hazards.
- (2) Regulations under section 10A(3) may—
- (a) specify a period that is not of a specific duration (for example a reasonable or appropriate period, including a period decided by the lessor or another person);
 - (b) specify two (or more) periods in relation to particular action.
- (3) Regulations under section 10A(3) may (in particular)—
- (a) require the lessor to take particular action, or action that is intended to produce a particular outcome, in relation to a prescribed hazard;
 - (b) require the lessor to take action in relation to a prescribed hazard that is not of itself intended to remedy the hazard, for example by requiring the lessor—
 - (i) to investigate whether or how a prescribed hazard is affecting the leased dwelling, or
 - (ii) to secure that the lessee and any other members of the lessee’s household are provided with alternative accommodation at no cost to them;
 - (c) require the lessor to take action in relation to a prescribed hazard only—
 - (i) in particular circumstances, or
 - (ii) if particular conditions are met;
 - (d) provide that the lessor is not required to take action in relation to a prescribed hazard—
 - (i) in particular circumstances, or
 - (ii) if particular conditions are met.
- (4) The Secretary of State may by regulations—
- (a) provide for section 10A not to apply to particular descriptions of leases;
 - (b) make provision, in relation to the covenant that is implied by section 10A(2), which corresponds to any provision made by section 9A(4) to (8).
- (5) A power to make regulations under section 10A or this section includes power to make—
- (a) incidental, transitional or saving provision;
 - (b) different provision for different purposes.
- (6) The power to make transitional or saving provision may (in particular) be used to make provision about situations where the covenant in section 10A(2)—
- (a) begins to be implied in a lease after its grant because it becomes a relevant social housing lease;
 - (b) ceases to be implied in a lease because it ceases to be a relevant social housing lease (including provision to save the lessor’s liability for any breach of the covenant occurring before it ceases to be implied).
- (7) Regulations under section 10A or this section are to be made by statutory instrument.

(8) A statutory instrument containing regulations under section 10A or this section may not be made unless a draft of it has been laid before and approved by resolution of each House of Parliament.”

This new clause would enable registered providers of social housing to be required to deal with hazards affecting leased dwellings of which they are the landlord.—(Michael Gove.)

Brought up, and read the First time.

2.53 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Dehenna Davison): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment (a) to new clause 1, after “Social housing leases:” insert “prescribing and”.

Amendment (b) to new clause 1, after “comply with all the prescribed requirements” insert

“under regulations made under this section and section 10B”.

Amendment (c) to new clause 1, after “regulations under subsection (3) insert “or section 10B”.

Amendment (d) to new clause 1, after “sections 68 and 72 of that Act).”, insert—

“(8) Any provision of a lease or of any agreement relating to a lease (whether made before or after the grant or creation of the lease) is void to the extent that it purports—

(a) to exclude or limit the obligations of the lessor under the covenant implied by section 10A(2), or

(b) to authorise any forfeiture or impose on the lessee any penalty, disability or obligation in the event of the lessee enforcing or relying upon those obligations.

(9) Where in any proceedings before a court it is alleged that a lessor is in breach of an obligation under the covenant implied by section 10A(2), the court may order specific performance of the obligation (regardless of any equitable rule restricting the scope of that remedy).

(10) Where a lease to which this section applies of a dwelling in England forms part only of a building, the implied covenant has effect as if the reference to the dwelling in subsection (1) included a reference to any common parts of the building in which the lessor has an estate or interest.”

Amendment (e) to new clause 1, leave out line 50.

Amendment (f) to new clause 1, leave out lines 79 to 81.

These amendments seek to strengthen Gov NCI by clarifying the relevant prescribed requirements at 10A(2), making clear the extent of their application, inserting non-avoidance and non-penalisation provisions and detailing where courts may order specific performance of certain obligations.

Government new clause 2—*Power of housing ombudsman to issue guidance to scheme members.*

Government new clause 3—*Action after inspection.*

Government new clause 4—*Secretary of State’s duty to give direction about providing information to tenants.*

New clause 5—*Persons engaged in the management of social housing to have relevant professional qualifications—*

‘After section 217 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 (accreditation), insert—

“217A Professional qualifications and other requirements

(1) The Secretary of State may, by regulations, provide that a person may not engage in the management of social housing or in specified work in relation to the provision of social housing unless he or she—

(a) as appropriate professional qualifications, or

(b) satisfies specified requirements.

(2) Regulations specifying work for the purpose of subsection (1) may make provision by reference to—

(a) one or more specified activities, or

(b) the circumstances in which activities are carried out.

(3) Regulations made under this section may, in particular, require—

(a) the possession of a specified qualification or experience of a specified kind,

(b) participation in or completion of a specified programme or course of training, or

(c) compliance with a specified condition.

(4) Regulations may make provision for any of the following matters—

(a) the establishment and continuance of a regulatory body;

(b) the keeping of a register of qualified social housing practitioners;

(c) requirements relating to education and training before and after qualification;

(d) standards of conduct and performance;

(e) discipline and fitness to practise;

(f) removal or suspension from registration or the imposition of conditions on registration;

(g) investigation and enforcement by or on behalf of the regulatory body, and appeals against the decisions or actions of the regulatory body.”

This new clause would require managers of social housing to have appropriate qualifications and expertise.

New clause 6—*Application of Freedom of Information Act 2000 to registered providers—*

‘Within six months of this Act receiving Royal Assent, the Secretary of State must by order designate registered providers of social housing as public authorities for the purposes of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.’

This new clause would bring registered providers of social housing within the scope of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

New clause 7—*Regulator duty to ensure continuity of secure and assured tenancy in cases of threat to safety—*

‘(1) The Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 is amended as follows.

(2) After section 92K insert—

“92KA A Duty to ensure continuity of secure and assured tenancy in cases of threat to safety

(1) Duty to ensure continuity of secure and assured tenancy in cases of threat to safety

(a) a registered provider of social housing has granted a secure tenancy or assured tenancy of a dwelling-house in England to a person (whether as the sole tenant or a joint tenant), and

(b) the registered provider is satisfied that there is a threat to the personal safety of that person or of a member of that person’s household which means there is a risk to their personal safety unless they move.

(2) When subsection (1) applies, the regulator must ensure that the registered provider grants the tenant a new secure tenancy which is—

(a) on terms at least equivalent to the existing tenancy; and

(b) a threat of targeted youth or gang violence.

(3) In this section, a “threat to personal safety” means any threat of violence, including in circumstances of—

(a) domestic abuse where the perpetrator does not live at the same address as the victim;

(b) an escalating neighbour dispute;

(c) a threat of targeted youth or gang violence.

(4) In assessing the threat under subsection (1)(b), the registered provider must act in accordance with any relevant police advice provided to—

(a) the registered provider,

(b) the tenant, or

(c) any member of the tenant’s household.

(5) In the event that a registered provider is unable to ensure the provision of an appropriate new secure tenancy pursuant to subsection (2), the regulator must ensure that the registered provider concerned co-operates with other registered providers to ensure an appropriate new secure tenancy is provided in a timely manner.”

This new clause would require the regulator to ensure that tenants whose safety is threatened are granted alternative accommodation by their housing provider on equivalent terms to their existing

tenancy. It also requires the regulator to ensure that a provider which is unable to provide appropriate alternative accommodation co-operates with other providers to do so.

New clause 8—Regulator duties relating to supported exempt and temporary accommodation—

‘(1) The Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 192 (Overview), in paragraph (a), after “social housing” insert “, supported exempt accommodation and temporary accommodation”.

(3) In section 193 (Standards relating to consumer matters), in paragraph (a), after “social housing” insert “, supported exempt accommodation and temporary accommodation”.

(4) After section 195 (Code of practice) insert—

“195A Regulation of codes of guidance issued by the Secretary of State

The regulator shall have a duty to inspect local housing authorities as to their compliance with any code of guidance issued by the Secretary of State under section 182 of the Housing Act 1996”.

This new clause would enable the regulator to set standards for the provision of supported and temporary accommodation, make the regulator responsible for enforcing any Code of Guidance issued by the Secretary of State relating to local authorities’ duty to provide temporary accommodation, and give the regulator the ability to inspect local authorities for compliance.

New clause 9—Review of impact of this Act—

‘(1) The Secretary of State must, within one year of the passing of this Act, carry out a review of the impact of this Act.

(2) A review under this section must make an assessment as to whether the Act has improved the safety and quality of social housing both in its own terms, and in comparison to the safety and quality of housing in the private rented sector.’

This new clause would require the Government to undertake a review of the impact of this Act.

Amendment 41, in clause 1, page 1, line 10, at end insert—

“(d) after paragraph (d) insert—

‘(da) to safeguard and promote the interests of persons who are or who may become homeless in relation to the provision of social housing.”

This amendment would add to the regulator’s remit an additional objective of safeguarding and promoting the interests of persons who are or who may become homeless in the context of the provision of social housing.

Amendment 42, page 1, line 10, at end insert—

“(2) In section 92K of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 (fundamental objectives), after subsection (3) insert—

‘(3A) In undertaking its objective under subsection (2)(b) the regulator must report to the Secretary of State at least every three years on whether the provision of social housing in England and Wales is sufficient to meet reasonable demands, and must make recommendations to the Secretary of State on how to ensure that the provision of social housing is so sufficient.

(3B) The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament a copy of any reports prepared by virtue of subsection (3A).

(3C) In undertaking its objective under subsection (3)(a) the regulator must report to the Secretary of State on the progress of the removal of unsafe cladding and the remediation of other fire safety defects in social housing, and may make recommendations to the Secretary of State on further action required.”

This amendment would include in the regulator’s objective a requirement to report to the Government on the removal of cladding. It would also require the regulator to report to the Government on the adequacy of the stock of social housing, and lay a copy of any such report before Parliament.

Amendment 37, in clause 2, page 1, line 18, at end insert—

“(2A) The Panel may provide information and advice to the Secretary of State about, or on matters connected with, the regulator’s functions and wider issues affecting the regulation of social housing (whether or not it is requested to do so by either the regulator or the Secretary of State).”

This amendment would enable the Panel to provide information and advice and to proactively raise issues affecting social housing regulation more generally directly to the Secretary of State.

Amendment 38, page 1, line 19, leave out “subsection (2)” and insert “subsections (2) and (2A)”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 37.

Amendment 36, page 2, line 17, at end insert—

“(8) The Panel must be chaired by a tenant of social housing.

(9) The Chair is responsible for setting Panel meeting agendas.

(10) The majority of persons appointed to the Panel must be tenants of social housing.”

This amendment would ensure that tenant representation on the advisory panel is mandatory and that tenants are able to influence effectively what information and advice is presented to the regulator in respect of issues affecting social housing regulation.

Government amendments 4 to 10.

Amendment 39, page 17, line 16, leave out clause 21.

Government amendments 44 to 47, 11 and 12.

Amendment 40, in clause 28, page 23, leave out lines 23 to 26 and insert—

“(a) the inspection of every registered provider within four years of the commencement of this Act,

(b) the inspection of every registered provider at intervals of no longer than four years thereafter, and”.

This amendment would ensure that the regulator is required to carry out regular inspections of every registered provider.

Amendment 43, in clause 30, page 28, line 39, leave out “24” and insert “48”.

This amendment is intended to probe why an authorised person must only give 24 hours’ notice to tenants under this section, whereas providers are given 48 hours’ notice.

Government amendments 13, 2, 15 to 34, 14, 35, 1 and 3.

Dehenna Davison: I am proud to be here today opening the Report stage of the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill. The Bill has been long awaited, but I hope we can all agree that the time we have taken to engage with tenants and stakeholders has helped us to ensure that the Bill is as robust as possible. I am grateful that Grenfell United, Shelter and others are able to join us today as the Bill reaches its Report stage. I must pay tribute to them for their steadfast campaigning on this crucial legislation. I am also grateful to Members from across the House for the incredibly constructive way in which they have approached this legislation. Thanks to the strength and breadth of engagement, we have tabled a number of amendments and new clauses to reinforce the Bill even further, and I will begin with new clause 1, on Awaab’s law.

Chris Clarkson (Heywood and Middleton) (Con): As one of Rochdale borough’s two MPs, I thank the Minister’s Department for the speedy and sensitive way it has dealt with this, and I am sure that that would be echoed by the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd), who sadly cannot be here for this debate. Can I ask my hon. Friend to give an assurance that once this legislation is

[Chris Clarkson]

passed, social housing tenants can have confidence that the homes they are provided with are fit for habitation in a way that simply has not been the case up to now?

Dehenna Davison: I am grateful to my hon. Friend not just for his contribution today but for the way in which he engaged with us following this incredibly tragic case. This legislation is designed specifically to ensure that terrible cases like that faced not only by Awaab but by the Grenfell United community do not happen again, and that tenants have the protection and the respect they deserve from social housing providers.

I know I am not alone in saying that I was deeply shocked by the tragic death of Awaab Ishak. The death of a child is always heartbreaking, and its having been entirely preventable makes it even more devastating. My thoughts remain with Awaab's family in the difficult time that they have been going through. This terrible case has thrown into sharp relief the need for this Government to continue steadfastly in their mission to drive up the quality of this country's social housing and, crucially, to rebalance the relationship between tenants and landlords. Within the Government we are well aware that, unfortunately, damp and mould are not the only hazards that can pose a threat to social residents' health. For example, excessive cold and falls caused by disrepair in homes are among the top five hazards found in homes in England.

That is why the Secretary of State has tabled the Government new clause for Awaab's law, which not only addresses the concerns underpinning the Awaab's law proposals but goes further by enabling the Government to introduce new requirements on landlords to act on a broader range of hazards. We will take a power for the Secretary of State to set out in secondary legislation requirements for landlords to rectify hazards or rehouse residents within a certain time. Our new clause will empower tenants to challenge their landlords for inaction. It inserts an implied covenant into tenancy agreements that landlords will comply with the requirements prescribed in regulations. This will empower landlords to deal with hazards such as damp and mould in a timely fashion, knowing that if they fail to do so they can face a legal challenge from residents.

It is crucial that any new measures to address the issues of damp, mould and other hazards putting residents' health at risk are proportionate and evidence-based and deliver the right outcomes for social residents in the long term. That is why we intend to consult on these new requirements, including time limits, within six months of Royal Assent and to lay the secondary legislation as soon as possible thereafter.

We are also tabling new clause 4 and Government amendments 1 and 11 to 14, which will ensure that the Regulator of Social Housing sets standards for landlords and provides tenants with information about how to make complaints and about their rights as tenants. To demonstrate our commitment to this, we have included a duty for the Secretary of State to issue a direction to this effect within six months of the Bill receiving Royal Assent.

I turn now to the important matter of professional standards in the sector. Grenfell United has long campaigned for mandatory qualifications to be introduced

in the sector to ensure that professional standards are consistently high across the sector and to bring social housing into line with other frontline services such as social work, teaching and health and social care. At the earlier stages of the Bill I made it clear that we had to proceed cautiously on mandatory qualifications, as there was an identified risk that requirements could lead to housing associations being reclassified by the Office for National Statistics to the public sector, which in turn would hamper their ability to invest in improving the quality of existing homes and in building new stock.

However, I have made it clear in this process that we are here to listen and take on board comments from stakeholders and Members from across the House. We took heed of the arguments made by Grenfell United and Shelter and by those who spoke so passionately in both Houses on this matter. The tragic death of Awaab Ishak also underlined how vital it is that we use every lever at our disposal to deliver the consistently high level of professional standards that tenants deserve. Since the Commons Committee stage, we have worked incredibly hard to find a solution. I am grateful to Grenfell United and Shelter for their ongoing work with us on this issue and to my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) and my noble Friend Baroness Sanderson. I am proud to stand here today having tabled Government amendments 44 to 47 to deliver qualification requirements to improve the experience of social housing tenants.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for the consultative way in which she has guided the Bill through the House. Having gone through the Lords and now reached Report, the Government have tabled four new clauses and a substantial number of amendments. What consideration is she giving to the consultation that will be needed on those new clauses with the organisations involved, to make sure we get the regulations right when she brings forward the secondary legislation?

3 pm

Dehenna Davison: I am grateful to my hon. Friend not only for his intervention but for the constructiveness and diligence with which he conducted himself in Committee, which we can all agree was done with the best of intentions to get the best for social housing tenants. He is right that we need to make sure the process is done correctly, which is why we will be working with the sector and key stakeholders to get this absolutely right, while committing to ensuring that professional qualifications are required for the executives and managers of social housing providers to make sure that tenants get the experience they deserve.

The qualification requirements will be delivered through the competence and conduct standards, for which we have already made provision in the Bill. The new provision will require housing managers and senior housing executives to have, or to be working towards, a housing management qualification at levels 4 and 5 respectively. Qualifications must be independently regulated by Ofqual or, in the case of senior housing executives, can be a foundation degree. Relevant staff who are not already qualified will have to enrol on and complete the appropriate qualification within a specified timescale, which will be set following consultation.

We are setting qualification requirements for housing managers and executives because they are responsible for, and are best placed to drive, the delivery of high-quality professional services through their management of frontline housing officers, repairs and maintenance staff and customer service staff; through the day-to-day decisions they make about the delivery of services to tenants; and, crucially, through their ability to drive culture and change across their organisations. It was imperative that we found a way to introduce requirements that will not increase the risk of reclassification. By tightly defining the roles in scope and the qualifications that will be required, and by enabling staff to gain qualifications in post, we have been able to achieve that.

Importantly, the new requirement for managers and senior executives will work in tandem with the competence and conduct standards, which already require that the standards will have a broad application, requiring landlords to take appropriate steps to ensure all their staff involved in the provision of housing management services, including housing officers and repairs and maintenance staff, have the skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours needed to deliver professional, high-quality services to tenants.

The combination of competence and conduct standards for all staff and qualification requirements for all housing managers and senior executives will drive change throughout organisations. Together, they will deliver the transformation of the sector's culture, staff professionalism and service standards that we all want to see.

New clause 3 adds requirements relating to the production and publication of an inspector's report following the completion of an inspection. Currently, following the completion of an inspection carried out under section 201 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, the inspector is required to produce a report and the regulator is required to share that report with the registered provider. The new clause provides that, instead, the inspector must produce a summary of findings, as well as a report, on any matters specified by the regulator. The regulator will then be required to share the summary and any report with the provider, and it may also publish all or part of these documents.

Crucially, new clause 3 gives the regulator the flexibility to decide, on a case-by-case basis, whether a full inspector's report is necessary or whether a shorter summary of the inspector's findings is sufficient. The changes also allow the regulator to specify matters for the inspector to report on, allowing it to use its expertise and understanding of a provider's risks to determine the nature of inspections that should be carried out. The regulator continues to develop its approach to inspections and will work closely with the sector in this process.

New clause 2 and Government amendments 2 and 3 will give the ombudsman explicit statutory power to issue and publish guidance on good practice, alongside the power to order landlords to complete a self-assessment if the ombudsman has received a relevant complaint about the landlord. We believe these amendments are necessary in the light of the recent tragic case of Awaab Ishak. The housing ombudsman can play an important role in raising awareness of the key issues it sees within the complaints it receives, such as on damp and mould. This power will enable the ombudsman, following a complaint, to challenge social landlords to consider and improve their service to residents by ordering them to

complete a self-assessment against the good practice guidance. This provides greater weight to the good practice guidance and should prevent further issues from arising. It will also mean that a great number of issues should be resolved at an earlier stage.

Government amendments 4 to 10 and 15 to 34 concern housing moratorium procedures, as set out in the 2008 Act, and restrictions on insolvency procedures imposed by the Housing and Planning Act 2016. The powers of the Regulator of Social Housing in the event of a provider experiencing financial difficulty offer important protections for the social housing sector and protect social housing tenants by helping to ensure they can remain in their home. The housing moratorium provides time for the regulator to work with a provider and secured creditors to produce the best outcome in such a scenario.

It is essential that the legislation works as effectively as possible, and that we use this opportunity to make some technical changes that will help to ensure this. Amendment 4 will ensure there is no gap between the occurrence of an insolvency-related event and the beginning of a moratorium so that a provider cannot dispose of land. Amendments 6 and 8 make it clear that the regulator can both extend the moratorium and impose a further moratorium where it has made inquiries but has been unable to locate any secured creditors of the registered provider.

Amendment 9 relates to the process by which proposals about the future management of a registered provider made during a moratorium are put in place. It clarifies how the process works in a scenario where the regulator is unable to locate any secured creditors to agree the proposals. Not every registered provider will have secured creditors and, as such, the amendments will ensure that legislation continues to work effectively and that processes are clear in those cases.

Amendments 15 to 34 concern the giving of notices. They contain provisions on the signature and content of notices, and they provide powers for the regulator to deal with notices that have not been validly signed. Amendment 35 is a technical amendment relating to data protection, and it introduces a provision that clarifies the relationship between data protection legislation and part 2 of the 2008 Act.

I hope hon. Members see the importance of all the Government amendments before the House today and will support them, because I firmly believe they will make the Bill even stronger to deliver the high standards that we are all looking for in social housing and that we know all tenants deserve.

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

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): I rise to speak to the new clauses and amendments in my name. I join the Minister in welcoming Grenfell United, Shelter and others to the Public Gallery.

There is a shared recognition across the House that the lives of far too many social housing tenants are blighted by poor conditions and that, although there are good social landlords, too many still routinely fail their tenants. That shared understanding has underpinned the consensus across both sides of the House that the Bill is both necessary and urgently required.

[Matthew Pennycook]

Since the moment the Bill was finally published in October 2022, the Opposition have been clear that we support it and that we wish to work constructively with the Government to see it make rapid progress. Yet at every stage, we have been at pains to convey our strong feeling that the Bill could be strengthened in a number of areas, and to urge Ministers to approach our suggested improvements with an open mind and in the constructive spirit in which they were offered. That was how we approached Committee, and it is why we worked with the Minister to secure the Bill's speedy passage out of Committee.

We pressed a range of amendments in Committee, including on three key objectives: the need to expedite the professionalisation of the sector; the need to ensure that the Bill provides, in practice, for the Ofsted-style inspections regime to which the Government are ostensibly committed to introducing; and the need to further empower social tenants. I shall take each in turn.

On professionalisation, we welcome the concession made by the Government in the other place regarding professional training and qualifications, and the resulting addition of clause 21 to the Bill, but we pressed in Committee for that clause to be strengthened so that it not only provides the regulator with the ability to set standards on the competence and conduct of individuals involved in the management of social housing, but includes requirements to ensure social housing managers have appropriate objective qualifications and expertise. Our reasoning was simple: as a result of the progressive residualisation of social housing over the past 40 years, it is now overwhelmingly let to those most in need and often least able to challenge poor conditions, not least because the chronic shortage of social housing in England leaves most with few, if any, options to move if they receive an unprofessional service from their landlord.

The circumstances leading up to the fire at Grenfell Tower in June 2017 and those surrounding the death of Awaab Ishak in December 2020, as well as countless other instances of negligence and neglect that will have gone unreported, make perfectly clear what can happen when staff do not listen to their tenants, do not treat them with respect, do not respond to their concerns with empathy and understanding, do not deal appropriately with their complaints, and in some instances actively discriminate against them. In our view, it is therefore essential that those managing the homes of social tenants are properly qualified to do so; that they have undergone the necessary training to ensure that they are treating tenants fairly and providing them with the necessary support; and that they undergo continuous professional development—just as we expect those in other key frontline services to do.

In Committee, the Minister stressed the Government's concern that giving the Secretary of State the power to stipulate mandatory qualifications for social housing managers through regulation could risk the Office for National Statistics reclassifying housing associations to the public sector. We never dismissed such a risk out of hand, but neither were we convinced it was an impediment to strengthening clause 21, not least because we have never seen any evidence that suggests that mandating qualifications would automatically trigger a reclassification. To underscore how strongly we felt about using the Bill to

expedite the professionalisation of the sector, we tabled new clause 5. However, true to the commitment that the Minister gave in Committee to explore in good faith whether there was scope to go further without risking reclassification, the Government tabled amendment 47 and others just before the deadline on Friday afternoon.

The Minister mentioned frontline social housing managers, unless I am mistaken. While we would welcome an assurance from the Minister that the definition of “relevant manager” in that amendment and others encompasses all those in frontline roles involving extensive resident engagement, such as neighbourhood housing, customer service and antisocial behaviour managers, and also a commitment that the Government will set out a timeline for implementation in the not too distant future and that the new burdens doctrine will apply in relation to local authorities, we are satisfied that amendment 47 and others address the concerns we raised in Committee. On that basis, we are happy to support them. I take the opportunity to once again praise Grenfell United and Shelter for helping to convince the Government to make the concession.

Turning to the issue of inspections, we welcomed the concession made by the Government in the other place to impose a duty on the regulator to publish, and take appropriate steps to implement, a plan for regular inspections. I once again commend the efforts of Lord Best and Grenfell United in achieving that outcome. However, while recognising the need for the regulator to have a significant degree of discretion in formulating that inspections plan, we pressed in Committee for clause 29—which was then clause 28—to be made more prescriptive in two important respects. First, we believe it is essential that the Bill makes it clear that all registered providers, large or small, will be subject to inspections by the regulator. Secondly, we believe it is essential that the Bill ensures that every registered provider will be subject to routine inspections.

In resisting our amendment in Committee, the Minister made two principal arguments: first, that it would be unreasonable to bind the regulator's hands by specifying that the inspections plan must include those two minimum requirements; and, secondly, that basing the system of inspections on a provider risk profile determined principally by size will ensure those landlords at greatest risk of failing tenants are accorded greater oversight. In our view, both those arguments are flawed.

On the argument that we should not bind the regulator's hands, the Minister must surely appreciate that the Government cannot on the one hand commit to introducing an Ofsted-style inspections regime, and then resist specifying any minimum expectations as to how that regime should operate, however reasonable they might be. If the Government's intention were to give the regulator unlimited operational flexibility in relation to the inspections plan, they should have been clear about that fact, rather than promising tenants that they would introduce an Ofsted-style regime, with the obvious connotations that that has in terms of universal coverage and a defined regularity of inspection.

On the argument that a risk profile based on a size threshold will best ensure tenants are protected, the Government have not provided any evidence as to why they believe that landlords with a stock of 1,000 homes or more are at the greatest risk of failing in terms of standards. We appreciate entirely the case for prioritising

larger landlords with a stock of over 1,000 units, given that that will cover the vast majority of social homes in England, but there is no evidence to suggest that landlords with fewer than 1,000 homes are less likely to fail their tenants; indeed there are cases listed right now on gov.uk of such smaller landlords having been served regulatory notices for breaches. Nor can we understand, given that these smaller landlords are responsible for just 4% of England's social housing stock, what the Government believe are the benefits of allowing them to escape regular inspection, given that doing so is unlikely to significantly reduce the burden on the regulator and carries the obvious risk that one or more smaller providers will fail their tenants as a result of the lack of oversight.

We agree with the Government that the regulator should retain a high degree of operational independence and flexibility in formulating and implementing the inspections plan now required by clause 28, but we believe the Government are making a mistake in refusing to mandate the two basic requirements that we have proposed: namely, an inspection for all landlords irrespective of size at least once every four years.

3.15 pm

To ensure that every social landlord must be inspected within four years of the commencement of the Act, and then inspected by the regulator at intervals of no longer than four years thereafter, we have tabled amendment 40. I commend it to the House as the best possible means of giving tenants real confidence in the new inspections regime. If the Government are intent on resisting it today, the Minister could, at the very minimum, state clearly from the Dispatch Box that the Government will not rule out an inspection plan that includes smaller landlords and will listen to the arguments for including them carefully in the forthcoming consultation process.

Finally, on tenant empowerment, we firmly believe that the empowerment of social tenants should be at the heart of the Bill, and we believe that a key test of its overall robustness is whether it ultimately includes mechanisms that will enable tenants to influence in practice the regulator's approach to regulating standards, to shape any future changes to regulatory standards and codes of practice, and to proactively raise wider issues affecting social housing regulation and policy not just with the regulator but with Ministers.

The Government ostensibly agree that tenants are at the heart of the Bill, and Ministers have repeatedly assured us that one of its primary objectives, largely owing to the fact that the warnings of Grenfell Tower tenants were repeatedly ignored before the fire, is both to give social housing tenants a voice and to ensure that voice is listened to. Yet when it comes to providing ways in which tenant representatives can exert a measure of influence over the work of the regulator, shape the future direction of the regulatory arrangements that the Bill establishes, and proactively influence national regulation and policy so as to shape the services that tenants receive from their landlords, the Bill lacks all ambition. We believe this is a serious omission.

Since the abolition of National Tenant Voice in 2010, we have not had an independent body that is truly representative of tenants across the country and allows them to speak for themselves on a more equal footing

with other interests. The Bill cannot be the vehicle for establishing such a body, but it could do much more to ensure that tenants are influencing the making of national regulation and policy. In Committee, the Minister resisted several amendments we proposed for empowering tenants, on the basis that the social housing quality resident panel provided sufficient opportunity for tenants to share their views with Government, that measures to ensure sufficient tenant representation and influence on the advisory panel were too prescriptive, and that there was no need to bring providers of social housing within the scope of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 because the new access to information scheme enabled by clause 22 provides for the same right of access.

We were not convinced by these arguments, and we remain concerned that the Bill, as drafted, will not meaningfully empower tenants. We have therefore tabled amendments 36 and 37 and new clause 6, which taken together would ensure that tenants are adequately represented on the advisory panel established by clause 2 and able to influence how it operates; that the panel would have the ability to provide information and advice directly to the Secretary of State in circumstances in which it feels that is necessary; and that tenants and others have the right to access information held by providers on a range of key issues of concern, including fire safety and health hazards, beyond what they might secure as a result of any information and transparency scheme that might be—I stress the word “might”—established under clause 22. I commend them to the House.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. On new clause 6, he knows that I have an interest in freedom of information, and I introduced a private Member's Bill to do just this. The Freedom of Information Act applies to housing associations in Scotland, the Information Commissioner supports that, and there were endless examples in what the Campaign for Freedom of Information gave us in preparation for this debate of housing associations just refusing or ignoring requests from tenants about fire safety, damp and mould and other issues. Why should they be treated differently from council tenants, and why will the Government not adopt the FIA, which is designed exactly for this purpose, rather than use their own scheme, which would do a pale reflection of that in trying to enable tenants can find out basic information about their own safety?

Matthew Pennycook: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention; I could not have put it better. We are seriously concerned that clause 22 does not have the same effect as bringing providers within the scope of the Freedom of Information Act. We think that tenants, and tenant representatives and those acting on their behalf, should be able to enjoy those rights, so that they can get information of the kind that, as he rightly says, providers regularly refuse to give to tenants.

Before turning to the Government amendments that have been tabled since the Bill left Committee, I wish to speak briefly to new clauses 7 and 8, which stand respectively in the names of my hon. Friends the Members for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) and for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh). I turn first to new clause 7, or “Georgia's law”, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood

[Matthew Pennycook]

has named it, in reference to a constituent of hers who was forced into temporary accommodation for an extended period as a result of her teenage son being threatened by gang members at their family home.

In our view, new clause 7 is a sensible and proportionate amendment that would make a real difference to a small but significant minority of tenants in England who find themselves in the exceptional circumstance—I must stress that fact—of a police referral as a result of being subject to the threat of serious violence. Its effect—the protection of existing tenancy rights in the case of a forced move linked to a threat of violence and greater co-operation between registered providers to rehouse those affected in a social home—is clearly not unduly onerous, and the Government’s argument that such a measure would cause insurmountable problems with local authority allocations policies is entirely unconvincing.

The Minister gave a guarantee in Committee that the Government would work with my hon. Friend

“to see what more can be done in this area to prevent any more cases like that of Georgia and her boys emerging.”—[*Official Report, Social Housing (Regulation) Public Bill Committee*, 29 November 2022; c. 66.]

It is therefore incredibly disappointing that the Government have not been willing to bring forward an amendment of their own to ensure that others do not have to experience what my hon. Friend’s constituents were forced to go through. As such, if my hon. Friend pushes her new clause 7 to a vote, we will of course support it.

We also support new clause 8, because while we recognise that the Government are taking steps to address the issue of unscrupulous providers of supported accommodation by means of the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Bill, promoted by the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), we are in full agreement with my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden that the regulator should have the ability to inspect temporary accommodation. There is statutory guidance designed to ensure that existing minimum standards are met for all temporary accommodation, but we know that in practice bed and breakfasts, hotels and shared houses used by local authorities across the country to house homeless families are frequently substandard and often hazardous, because that guidance is rarely adhered to.

The truth is that with almost 100,000 households, and now more than 125,000 children, living in temporary accommodation, according to the Department’s own figures, local authorities have little leverage when it comes to deciding what standards they are willing to accept. A huge amount needs to be done to decrease the demand for temporary accommodation across the country, most of which is well outside of the scope of this Bill. But in the short term, stronger regulation and inspections could make a real difference, and in the most extreme cases they could save lives. On that basis, we support new clause 8.

Finally, I turn to the Government amendments that have been tabled in recent weeks. The bulk of them are uncontroversial and largely technical, and we support their incorporation into the Bill. I do, however, wish to touch upon Government new clause 1. Awaab Ishak’s untimely death from prolonged exposure to mould in the house his parents rented from Rochdale Boroughwide Housing should never have occurred and the fact that it

did, frankly, shames our country. The coroner was right to call it a “defining moment”, but it falls to this House to ensure that it truly is. It is therefore essential that we legislate to compel landlords to act quickly to remedy hazards of the kind that ultimately killed Awaab.

The regulator’s initial findings on damp and mould in social housing, published on 2 February, estimated that up to 160,000 social homes have notable problems with it, and a further 8,000 have hazards so severe that they pose a serious and immediate risk to health. Given the scale of the problem, landlords who fail to proactively review the homes and buildings they manage or lease for hazards, who deal with tenant complaints relating to such hazards ineffectively, or who blame damp and mould on lifestyle choices and myriad other factors, rather than taking responsibility, cannot be tolerated.

Government new clause 1 is a laudable effort at amending the Bill to ensure that social housing providers are forced to investigate and deal promptly with hazards that are a danger to the health of tenants. As the Minister said, it would allow the Secretary of State, by regulation, to set timescales to which social landlords must adhere in respect of remedying hazards or be in breach of a tenancy agreement, as well as specify what kinds of action must be taken. Enforcement will, of course, depend on access to legal representation, and in many cases legal aid. Government new clause 1 nevertheless provides an enforceable right that enhances the provisions contained in the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018, introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck). We commend the Government for tabling the new clause and we support it in principle.

However, we are convinced that Government new clause 1 could be strengthened in several important respects, and to that end we have tabled amendments (a) to (f). Taken together, they would set out on the face of the Bill the location of the relevant prescribed requirements at proposed new section 10A(2); make clear the extent of their application; detail the circumstances in which any provision of a lease or any agreement relating to a lease is void; and clarify where courts may order specific performance of certain obligations. We believe those changes would improve the clarity and functionality of Government new clause 1 and thereby make it stronger, and we hope the Government will give serious consideration to accepting them.

To conclude, this is without question an important and urgently needed piece of legislation, and we are extremely pleased it will complete its passage today. Everyone has a basic right to a decent, safe, secure and affordable home, and it is our sincere hope that by overhauling the regulation of social housing by means of this Bill, we will better protect the health, safety and wellbeing of social tenants across the country. We welcome the numerous concessions that the Government have made throughout the passage of the Bill, but we believe it is not yet the most robust piece of legislation that this House can possibly deliver, the achievement of which has been our objective from the outset. We will shortly have the opportunity to amend it further so that it is, and I urge the House to come together to that end.

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): May I start by drawing the House’s attention to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests

and, in particular, my role as a vice-president of the Local Government Association? That is an important starting point for why I so strongly welcome this Bill and commend the Government team, especially for new clauses 1 and 2, which are going to be the main focus of my contribution this afternoon.

It was immensely useful, and terrifying, having served as a London local authority councillor and as an office holder in the LGA, to see the things that we learnt about the regulation of our housing market following the Grenfell disaster. Local authorities across the country will welcome the fact that this Bill begins to bring a degree of definition to the situations where regulation that perhaps in the past had been vague could apply, and a greater degree of rigour, which enables a greater degree of accountability in respect of landlords who may be falling short in their responsibilities.

I wish to flag up the fact that some issues remain to be addressed, because although the model of Ofsted as a regulatory framework is a good one, the weakness of Ofsted is that it focuses its inspections through the role of the local authority and the local authority's powers in a diverse and complex education market are limited, just as they are in the context of a very diverse and complex housing market. I would simply say that, following the situation at Grenfell where large numbers of landlords suddenly realised that they would be required to address quite serious safety issues, we saw a number of examples around the country where private landlords with substantial blocks that were entirely occupied by tenants on social leases through the local authority essentially put those blocks into liquidation and walked away. Therefore, there was a need for a local authority in those kinds of situations to step in. How we deal with perhaps sharp business practices by landlords, who may seek, under a single brand, to register large numbers of individual properties or developments separately to try to evade—at least to some degree—the scope of regulation will be an ongoing challenge, and one that we already face in the buy-to-let market.

3.30 pm

The Bill comes at a very helpful time given the rising diversity of different types of social tenure. I am referring in particular to the proliferation of different types of new housing associations, the development of local authority housing companies coming to this market, as well as the traditional housing revenue account social housing, which has been the bedrock of social tenancies for such a long time.

I wish to share with the House an example from my constituency, which demonstrates why those elements of new clause 1 about the remedying of hazards and of new clause 2 about strengthening the powers of Government to issue guidance to providers can potentially make such a significant difference. I pay tribute to my constituent, Suzy Killip, a resident of Eastcote, who has worked extremely hard on behalf of neighbours, most of whom are social tenants, although not all, in a development that is managed by A2Dominion, a large housing association. My constituents have described their frustration at finding that complaints about substantial matters—including those relating to safety, the development of damp, the inappropriate or improper installation of equipment, for example ventilation in homes, the inadequate

installation of safety measures that were part of the planning consent on the development—are simply ignored. They feel this enormous sense of frustration that, under the current system where they, as residents of properties, are unable to bring these matters effectively to the attention of the landlord and get them remedied, they simply do not know where to turn. As a Member of Parliament representing them, I have experienced the same challenges when my letters have gone unanswered and ignored. I know that many of us in this House will have had similar issues relating to developments brought to our attention in our constituency surgeries.

It is especially clear when some of the housing associations, some of the landlords, have close relationships with developers. There is often an incentive on the part of the management company not to address issues, particularly those that arise with new builds, because they are concerned about the impact that it may have on their longer-term relationship as a business with that organisation.

Suzy Killip describes to me a situation where there has been a long-standing failure to address issues of damp, including in properties occupied by children and young people, as well as by people suffering from health problems, for whom the damp contributes to the seriousness of their ill-health. There are also issues with drainage that are causing unpleasant smells and the risk of foul water coming back into people's homes. Then there is the community centre that was much praised as the flagship of the development, which is still not in use 13 years after Hillingdon Council granted consent on what was a former Ministry of Defence site for an intended model development. That is as a result of a landlord who is simply not willing to engage with the people who are stakeholders and who therefore needs to be held to account by strengthened guidance.

We also see—I know that this is very common in planning departments in London local authorities—a greater enthusiasm for the “safer by design” theory. This is the idea that, by building in effective security measures into the structure of developments, we can reduce the impact of crime and antisocial behaviour. We have already heard Members talking about the impact that it may have on people needing to move home because of the risks that they experience. For those facing a situation where a landlord should have included those safer by design elements—perhaps they have been funded to, or have been granted planning consent on condition that those elements were included in the property but have not been—we need to ensure that there is a greater degree of rigour. In my view, new clauses 1 and 2, particularly that point about guidance—the detail of that guidance will be important—offers us a serious opportunity to make progress on that.

Will the Minister give an assurance on the issue of the brands of landlord who separately register sites, including quite large sites, under separate ownership? That is something that we see across all types of different businesses, it is not an uncommon practice, and there are often perfectly legitimate and appropriate reasons for doing it. However, I can certainly see A2Dominion, which is a sole social housing provider and which gives rise to almost all the complaints that I receive about social housing in my constituency, beginning to pop up in other places. I want to be assured that, having implemented effective new guidance—codes that have

teeth and effective powers for Government—we will not then find that, somehow, the rogue landlords are slipping out around the corners. I know that Ministers have been enormously keen to address that, and my constituents would be especially grateful to receive such an assurance, as it is at the forefront of their concerns.

That said, this is an extremely welcome Bill. I understand that there is some debate to be had about amendments to and fro, but it moves us into a much stronger position. The inspection of local authorities envisaged in the Bill would bring a degree of focus and clarity to what their role is in respect of different types of housing tenure. From my experience as a councillor in a local authority, where we went through the process of acquiring properties with the intention of making them fit for purpose for social tenancies, I can certainly say that all sorts of issues will often emerge through that process. Historically, there has not been an effective framework against which to set a rigorous inspection or through which to seek effective redress where problems have arisen. So often in the past, it has simply been a matter of opinion rather than something that can be found in guidance or clearly in legislation.

For all those reasons, I commend the Minister and the Secretary of State, who is now here, for the work that has been done on the Bill. It will be a big step forward in providing a much safer and more secure environment and the ability to remedy problems when they occur. Many tenants across the country would like to expect that as a right but sadly, in too many cases, it is still not provided by landlords, despite the fact that those landlords receive substantial amounts of money for the homes that they provide.

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): Greater Manchester and, indeed, the rest of the country was shocked and horrified by the tragic death of Awaab Ishak in Rochdale. His little lungs had been exposed to deadly damp and mould in the flat that he lived in with his family. They battled against it for a number of years, and even filed disrepair claims against the housing association. I think we are united in this House that, in one of the richest economies in the world, that should never have happened. I cannot imagine the pain and heartache that Awaab's family must feel every single day. Today, we embark on the first step towards making sure that no family should ever have to experience what they have experienced.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) cannot be with us in person owing to his ongoing treatment, but it should be noted that he has worked relentlessly with campaigners, with Government and with me and other colleagues across the House to ensure that the robust amendments needed to the legislation were made to honour Awaab's name and ensure the health and safety of all social housing tenants.

I also thank the amazing organisations that have been the ultimate driving force of the Awaab's law campaign: the Ishak family, their legal team, the *Manchester Evening News* and change.org for spearheading the campaign, and Shelter and Grenfell United for committing such energy, compassion and knowledge.

Very briefly, the campaign has four clear asks: to require social landlords to investigate the causes of damp and mould within 14 days of complaints being made, and report findings to tenants; to give social

landlords seven days to begin work to repair a property where a medical professional has flagged a risk to health; to ensure bids for new social housing properties are treated as a high priority if a medical professional has recommended a move; and to mandate social landlords to provide all tenants with the information that they need, in simple English and other languages, on their rights, on how to make a complaint and on what standards they can expect.

I thank the Secretary of State, the Minister and their team for speaking directly with the Ishak family, with campaigners and with my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale and me, and for tabling new clauses 1 and 4, which help towards those key goals. Indeed, new clause 1 provides that the Secretary of State “must make regulations” that ensure that landlords have to remedy hazards such as mould and damp in a timely fashion. Although I appreciate that the Government want to consult on the final form of those regulations, I cannot stress enough that they must include provisions, as the Awaab's law campaign set out, to set clear minimum safety standards, clear minimum timeframes for remedying any hazards, and an urgent priority move if the property is found to be unsafe. I am confident the Secretary of State will agree those are not unreasonable requests, and I hope that he will work hard throughout the consultation process to ensure that they are reflected in the final regulations.

I also support the amendments tabled by the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook), which seek to strengthen new clause 1 by protecting tenants from repercussions when calling on the new obligations, and by expanding court powers. I welcome, too, that Government new clause 4 gives direction that registered social housing providers must provide their tenants with information about their rights in making complaints. That is good, but it does not specifically commit to ensuring wider language accessibility. I trust that the Secretary of State and the Minister will address that point in the regulations.

In complement to the Awaab's law campaign, I also support new clause 6, which embodies Greater Manchester Law Centre's calls to make social housing providers subject to freedom of information requests. Without that change, social housing providers can and have refused to be transparent about important elements of their business practices, even though they are receiving public money in rent and support.

I also support new clause 5 and Government amendment 47 which detail that social housing managers must gain professional qualifications to protect residents and raise standards in the sector. That is a commitment that many have wanted to see since the Grenfell tragedy. I also support new clause 8, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for households in temporary accommodation. The new clause would enable the regulator to set standards for supported and temporary accommodation. I know that my hon. Friend will speak at length about that in due course, but it is an important change. I am a member of the all-party group, and research that the group commissioned, led by Justlife and the Shared Health Foundation, found widespread and horrific examples of the conditions in which temporary accommodation

residents were forced to live. In many cases, their accommodation was not fit for human habitation but they were frightened to say anything about it because of the risk of being made homeless. That is unacceptable.

I hope that the House will support all those amendments today, continuing the productive cross-party ethos that has been embodied in the passage of the Bill. It is important to state, however, that this legislation is one small element in a national moment of reckoning on the state of rented housing in this country. Citizens Advice suggests that more than half of private renters in England are struggling with damp, mould, excessive cold or a combination of those factors. Some 1.6 million of those affected are children. Private renters do not have access to the housing ombudsman for their complaints to be investigated independently, so millions of suffering families have no voice. They are trapped in homes that will ultimately put their lives at risk. I ask the Government to urgently introduce an equivalent Awaab's law for the private rented sector alongside an urgent, state-funded, national housing mission to build new social homes and bring existing ones up to a decent standard.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I rise to speak in support of new clause 7. First, I want to put on the record my role as a vice-president of the Local Government Association.

New clause 7 would protect the tenancy rights of social housing tenants who have to make an emergency move from their home because they or a member of their household are threatened with violence. It would be a small change in the law, but it would make a big difference. Losing the right to a secure, affordable home is a price that no one should have to pay for being a victim of crime. Yet that is what happens to far too many people who have to make an emergency move because the police say that it is not safe for them to stay in their home.

It is what happened to my constituent Georgia, an NHS employee, who had been very happy living in her housing association home with her children for nine years. One day, neighbours told Georgia that while she was at work, there had been loud banging on her door at home. She eventually coaxed her teenage son into telling her that he had been threatened by gang members. Georgia reported that to the police who told her that the matter was extremely serious, that they thought her son's life was now at risk and that she needed to leave her home immediately. So Georgia approached her local council who provided temporary accommodation in another borough. At that point, Georgia effectively joined the bottom of the housing waiting list.

The current priority needs system does not automatically award high priority for being a victim of a threat of violence. In the context of an intense shortage of social housing, that meant that Georgia effectively faced a wait of many years to be offered a new home comparable to the one she had been forced to leave. In the meantime, after she had been in temporary accommodation for six months, her housing association began the process of formally ending her tenancy.

3.45 pm

Georgia's whole life and the lives of her children were turned upside down—just because her son had been threatened, through no fault of the family. In the end, following my intervention, Georgia was offered another

tenancy by her housing association, but not before she and her family had suffered devastating and long-lasting consequences as a result of the destabilisation of their lives.

New clause 7 would protect the tenancy rights of social tenants who face circumstances similar to Georgia's by requiring their council or housing association to offer an equivalent tenancy in an area that is safe for them, as soon as one becomes available. It would also create a duty for social housing landlords to co-operate in the event that a tenant's current landlord did not own homes in an area in which it was safe for the tenant to live.

Georgia's law is supported by the National Housing Federation and Shelter. I am also grateful to MPs from the Labour, Conservative, Lib Dem and Green parties who have shown their support for the change since I first introduced it under the ten-minute rule a year ago. I am grateful to the Minister for giving consideration to Georgia's law in Committee, but I am deeply disappointed that the Government are refusing to support it today.

The Government's main argument has been that Georgia's law would interfere with the system of priority need and result in homes not being allocated to those in the greatest need, but that is based on a misunderstanding of how it would operate. The beneficiaries of Georgia's law are already social housing tenants; they are not new tenants seeking to jump the housing queue. The homes that they have had to flee will be returned to their landlord to allocate to those in the greatest need on the housing waiting list.

Far from increasing the burden on the social housing system, Georgia's law would prevent a whole cohort of people from spending long periods of time on the housing waiting list. Temporary accommodation is extremely expensive, so by ensuring that a group of people who are already social tenants can remain in social housing, Georgia's law would also save public money. It would not be a radical change in the law, because the best social landlords are already modelling good practice in this area.

The chief executive of one large housing association recently contacted me proactively to support Georgia's law in some detail. They said that

"we have seen first-hand the devastating impact that violence, in particular violence affecting young people, can have on the families and communities that we serve.

Our Empowering Futures Team works with partner organisations and the local community to help tackle the causes of violence that affect young people. However, as Georgia's Law so importantly highlights, too many families are forced to flee their homes and local communities due to the threat of gang related violence...our internal transfer policy gives high priority to residents at risk of violence or abuse. Our local Housing Managers work with residents to support them through the transfer process and to ensure they receive the wrap around support they, and their families, require.

We work with other social landlords to seek reciprocal arrangements if we do not have a home in the area best suited to the resident. We also work in partnership with Safer London, whose Pan London Housing Reciprocal supports Londoners who are at risk of abuse or violence in their borough. Since 2017 the programme has facilitated 227 moves, with 517 children and adults having moved to safe, secure homes.

While we do as much as possible to ensure that any...resident forced to leave their home maintains their secure tenancy, we welcome the legislation you are proposing, which would implement

legal protections and more formal processes. This would ensure local authorities and social landlords work in collaboration to ensure no social housing resident is made homeless due to the risk of violence to them or their families.”

Georgia’s law simply proposes that that good practice should be required from all social landlords.

Serious violence, and the threat of serious violence, is a scourge on those communities, particularly when it affects young people. We have a responsibility in this place to do everything possible to prevent serious violence, to limit its harms and to support those who are affected to recover and get their lives back on track. We must act to limit the harm whenever we have the opportunity to do so. Voting for Georgia’s law today is one such opportunity. It would help families who have suffered the significant trauma of having to flee their home to resettle and move on with the safety and security of a social housing tenancy. It would enable our housing system to be part of a public health approach to tackling serious violence. It would make a real difference to families such as Georgia’s, and it would stop a terrible injustice, because no one should become homeless because they or their child are threatened with violence.

It is regrettable that the Government have chosen to not support Georgia’s law. I urge the Secretary of State and the Minister to think again today, and I commend new clause 7 to the House.

Helen Morgan (North Shropshire) (LD): I apologise to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and to the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) for mishearing the names earlier. I add my support for Georgia’s law, and draw the attention of the House to the fact that I have recently been appointed as a vice-president of the Local Government Association.

I rise to speak to new clause 9 and amendments 41, 42 and 43, which stand in my name. On Second Reading, I put on record that my Liberal Democrat colleagues and I welcome the Bill. We will be supporting it, despite the fact that it has taken a long time to arrive, and we also broadly welcome the amendments tabled by the Government today. The amendments that I have tabled and will speak to today are intended to improve the legislation in the spirit of co-operation, and to ensure that there is fairness and accountability for people living in social housing and that, ultimately, everyone has a decent and safe home to return to at the end of each day.

Data from Shelter estimates that there are over 270,000 homeless people in the UK, and that a significant cause of those cases is a lack of social housing provision. Tragically, many people who become homeless find that there are no available social homes, and are often placed on long waiting lists for safe, permanent accommodation. Sometimes, they have nowhere to turn to other than charities, relatives or, indeed, their local Member of Parliament. Housing issues are one of the biggest and, frankly, most upsetting topics in my casework, and I know that my experience is not unusual among colleagues.

Amendment 41 would give the regulator the additional objective

“to safeguard and promote the interests of persons who are or who may become homeless”

due to a lack of social housing provision. On its own, that measure would not eradicate homelessness, but it would create an additional focus on finding a solution

to what is an unacceptable situation. This country has a chronic shortage of social housing, which is forcing families to live in dangerous and unsuitable conditions. Just this week, while I was out canvassing in my constituency, I chatted on the doorstep to a lady whose daughter uses a wheelchair, but they do not have any level access to their house. Her need has been assessed and she is in the gold band, at the top of the list for an alternative, but there is simply nothing available in North Shropshire at the moment that meets her family’s requirements. I have been dealing with a similar situation in relation to a constituent with breathing difficulties whose flat has just been treated for mould. Again, she has been given the right priority for a move with her family, but no suitable alternatives are available.

With nearly 1.2 million people on social housing waiting lists, it is not surprising that we all have examples in our casework such as those I have cited. I have spoken previously in this place about ensuring that when social housing is sold under the right to buy, the housing association or local authority receives 100% of the sale proceeds, in order to increase the likelihood of maintaining social housing stock at at least current levels. Such an amendment would be outside the scope of today’s Bill, but amendment 42 would require the regulator to provide a report to the Government about the adequacy of social housing stock, and to

“make recommendations to the Secretary of State on how to ensure that the provision of social housing is...sufficient.”

It would mean that this House has the opportunity to understand the state of our social housing stock, and to hold the Government of the day to account in ensuring that that stock is adequate.

Amendment 42 would also require the regulator to report to Government on progress with the removal of cladding and, again, make recommendations to ensure that progress is finally being made on that critical issue for people living in social housing. The tireless campaigning by so many after the Grenfell tragedy is the reason we are all here today debating this Bill. In my view, the Bill is a good opportunity to make sure that the necessary steps are being taken to ensure that social housing is safe and that progress is properly scrutinised. I do not think that these measures are onerous in nature. They would provide valuable information to the Government, and I hope that the Minister will consider accepting amendment 42, which I intend to move formally later.

Moving on to amendment 43, I note that in its current form, the Bill presents a discrepancy in notice periods before the Regulator of Social Housing conducts a survey. The registered provider of the premises is granted 48 hours, while the tenant is given a notice period of only 24 hours. Amendment 43 would ensure that registered providers and occupiers of the premises were treated equally. A similar amendment tabled by colleagues in the other place had cross-party support. The amendment would help to ensure parity in the relationship between tenant and housing provider and would not place an additional onerous requirement on any party, so I urge the Minister to consider adopting it.

The Bill has been brought forward as a result of the terrible tragedies at Grenfell and, more recently, the harrowing death of Awaab Ishak. I welcome the Secretary of State’s intention to prevent a repeat of such incidents in the future. New clause 9 would allow the Government to ensure that the Bill achieves its objectives and improves

the safety and quality of social housing both in its own terms and in comparison with the safety and quality of housing in the private rented sector. I echo the comments of the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey) on that point. The new clause provides an opportunity to identify areas for improvement and unforeseen consequences of a change in the regulatory environment.

My Liberal Democrat colleagues and I welcome this legislation. We fully support the objective of empowering those living in social housing to ensure that their homes are decent and safe, and we have put on record our view that we would have liked to have seen the Bill sooner. I urge the Government to adopt new clause 9 and amendments 41, 42 and 43. It is my view that they would improve the legislation in a manageable way and ensure that we improve not only the condition, but the availability of social housing and that we hold the Government of the day to account in making these improvements happen in reality.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): I rise to support new clause 8, which stands in my name and that of a number of other Members. The amendment is simple. It would make the regulator responsible for ensuring that local authorities enforce the homelessness code of guidance for temporary accommodation. It proposes that local authority housing departments are inspected in the same way as schools and children's social services departments are inspected by Ofsted to ensure that the standard required by the guidance is being met and that families who have been accepted as homeless, but cannot be placed in a permanent home due to shortage, are provided with suitable temporary homes.

Temporary accommodation is defined formally as being provided to people who are either awaiting the outcome of a homelessness application under section 188 of the Housing Act 1996 or waiting for an offer of suitable permanent accommodation. I find it hard to believe that any Member of this House who represents a constituency in London, the south-east, Manchester, Birmingham or Newcastle is not aware of the sort of accommodation in which homeless families are often placed in an emergency. With access to permanent social housing and private rented properties at an all-time low, councils are under extreme pressure to find temporary accommodation. The best national estimates we have are that around 1.6 million households are waiting for social housing. Over the past 40 years, the overall social housing stock has declined by 1.4 million homes.

In my authority of Merton—not known for being under the extreme pressure of other London boroughs—last year the council only had 72 two-beds, 34 three-beds and two four-bedroom units to offer all year. At the same time, the number of families in temporary accommodation has risen by 41% since April, from 243 to 343 households. Merton is not alone or unusual. Most London boroughs count their homeless families in temporary accommodation in the thousands. Tonight, there will be 99,270 families, including 125,760 children, sleeping in temporary accommodation at a massive cost of £1.6 billion. That is an increase of 71% between 2012 and 2018, and a further increase of 41% between 2018 and 2022. Hard-pressed local authorities are seeking out ever more temporary accommodation that is uninspected and further away. The code of guidance

specifies the nature and location of temporary accommodation. We all know that those are laudable aims, but they are not being met.

Throughout my speech, I will provide examples of where the code of guidance has specific standards that are not being met in practice. I want to make it clear that I do not blame councils for the situation they find themselves in. They are in a bind: they do not have access to enough social housing units, their funding has been consistently cut, they do not have access to the number of environmental health officers they need, and they have a never-ending list of homeless families that they are desperate to house. This is a toxic mix with tragic consequences.

4 pm

What bigger reason to act could there be than the number of children who have died in temporary accommodation? The all-party parliamentary group on temporary accommodation, using data from the national child mortality database, found that between 2019 and 2021 temporary accommodation was a contributing factor in the deaths of 34 children. Most of the children who died were under one. The most likely cause is a lack of safe sleeping provision, such as cots. In the fifth largest economy in the world, children are dying due to a lack of access to cots.

Other explanations were damp and mould growth or overcrowding. These conditions are prohibited under paragraph 17.17 of the homelessness code of guidance, which states:

“Attention should be paid to signs of damp or mould”.

How can signs of damp or mould be detected when the premises that homeless families are put in are not inspected?

Those tragic statistics are a conservative estimate. Of the child deaths reported between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2022, there are at least 200 individual records where homelessness or living in temporary accommodation was recorded as present for the child, their mother or in their family life at some stage. These deaths were preventable, and they are unacceptable.

In fact, the Children's Commissioner for England has described much of the temporary accommodation into which children are placed as

“simply inappropriate places for a child to be growing up.”

That is the reality for 125,760 children living in temporary accommodation. For example, one mother stated:

“I was discharged from hospital having given birth the day before into a hostel where I was the only woman. I was there with a new born baby, no cot, no nappies, and surrounded by men who had their own issues. It was very scary. I had left a relationship because of violence to keep my baby safe and I was in a really unsafe place.”

That is a clear breach of the code of guidance, which states in paragraph 17.6 that considerations should be given to the “risk of violence”.

Beyond the unacceptable conditions that we are housing children in, a general state of disrepair is widespread in temporary accommodation. For instance, one resident said:

“It's worse [than] a nightmare. The house is almost 50 staircases without lifts, cockroaches, and mice. I fell severely when I was pregnant. Leaking, damp, roof touching our head, tiny rooms, we sleep on the ground.”

That is a breach of multiple parts of the code of guidance. Another resident said:

“We have had three fires since I’ve lived here. All related to dodgy wiring.”

Needless to say, electrical equipment that does not meet the requirements is prohibited under paragraph 17.14 of the guidance. The resident also says that they

“cannot get repairs done through Council as it is out of borough”.

That leads me to my next point. One of the biggest problems with temporary accommodation, aside from the poor conditions and the disrepair, is the location. People are often sent miles away from home, without the new local authority even being notified of their arrival. At the end of June 2022, 26,130 households were in temporary accommodation in a different local authority area from the one to which they had applied. Those 26,130 households are further away from their family, friends, schools, jobs, church, synagogue or mosque—everything that keeps them safe.

The impact is particularly bad for children who are about to take exams. Imagine if your son or daughter were in year 11 or year 13, about to take their GCSEs or A-levels, and you could not get them to school because you were hundreds of miles away from home. No local school would accept your child at that stage in their education. That is another breach of the code of guidance, paragraph 17.53 of which states that councils should be “minimising the disruption to the education of children and young people...at critical points in time such as leading up to taking GCSE (or their equivalent) examinations.”

That is clearly not happening in practice.

I do not mean to criticise local authorities for these failures. In nearly all cases, councils are doing their best, but they are in a bind because they are under incredible pressure. Children experiencing housing instability are seeing their social relationships broken. Their academic performance is poor, their access to healthcare is limited and they are more likely to be psychologically distressed.

David Simmonds: The hon. Lady refers to securing children’s education during a move. I have constituents who have moved into the area, often after fleeing violence in other places, for whom that has been an issue. Does she agree that the proposed regulation of multi-academy trusts might be able to address that? At present, local authorities do not have any powers to direct an academy to take a child in order that they can sit examinations. If we restored that power to local authorities or introduced such a requirement on academies as an element of inspection, it would at least guarantee that parents who have to move could find a school in the new area at which their child could sit their GCSEs or A-levels.

Siobhain McDonagh: I would have no problem with changing the rules for multi-academy trusts, but I do not think that that alone would resolve the difficulty. Most schools would be loth to take a child in year 11 or year 13 because they would be in the second year of their exams and the curriculums would not match. Schools of all statuses are concerned about their performance.

The 26,000 families I described are forced to travel an estimated 400,000 miles each year to access temporary accommodation—the equivalent of going 16 times around the globe. On one day at the civic centre in my constituency,

the only temporary accommodation that could be offered to families was in Telford, 170 miles away from their home borough, and that is not unique. How can someone possibly start putting their life back together when they are 170 miles away from the borough they have been living in? And that was in Merton, which does not have the same problems as other London boroughs.

Across the UK, as I said, the total temporary accommodation expenditure has reached £1.6 billion, of which three quarters was funded by housing benefit. That is not money well spent. If we moved each family out of temporary accommodation and into social rented housing, we would save £572 million a year. As the Public Accounts Committee put it, not only is temporary accommodation

“often of a poor standard”,

but it

“does not offer value for money.”

I am aware that the Government have supported the Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), which would try to raise standards in exempt accommodation, but it is important to note that exempt accommodation is distinct from temporary accommodation. Exempt accommodation provides accommodation with extra support for more marginalised groups such as recent prison leavers, care leavers, those fleeing domestic violence and homeless people with substance dependence or mental health issues. Exempt accommodation is a problem of its own, with landlords exploiting the housing benefit system to profit from vulnerable people, but it should be noted that temporary accommodation is different. It represents people who are either awaiting the outcome of a homelessness application under the 1996 Act, or awaiting an offer of suitable accommodation.

I will finish by saying that, after nearly 30 years of Ofsted, we know that unless a school knows that Ofsted is coming, problems begin. A substantial proportion of outstanding schools that were not inspected for five years have recently been graded as needing improvement. Organisations—the best organisations—need to know that somebody is coming, and in a reasonable time. The same is true of councils that are meant to be ensuring that the standards and code of guidance are met. The Government clearly think that schools and children’s social services departments should be independently inspected. What is different about temporary accommodation for homeless families? The Government provide a national curriculum for schools. They do not just say, “That’s okay—I’m sure the curriculum is being followed.” They actually check to see that it is happening. We can talk about what we are going to introduce, such as different pieces of guidance for councils, but unless local authority housing departments are inspected in the same way that schools and children’s social services departments are, we can never expect the standards in temporary accommodation to be safe.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak again on this important Bill. I do so as a vice-president of the Local Government Association, and as a former shadow Housing Minister.

I would like to focus my remarks on the amendments relating to inspections. I also want to reiterate the importance of tenant empowerment, on which the shadow

Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook), and the Minister spoke eloquently. I think it is clear that, across the House, this legislation is considered to be highly significant, highly needed and certainly long overdue.

I welcome, as do other Members across the House, the constructive approach to the Bill, which will address the issues that matter to local authorities, housing associations, residents and, vitally, tenants. It will improve their access to swift and fair redress through stronger and more proactive consumer and citizen regulations. I hope that the cross-party work with key stakeholders will ensure that the Bill is effective and addresses the real issues of tenants, including through the professionalisation of housing management in the social housing sector. A number of new clauses and amendments in that regard have cross-party support.

I have said throughout the progress of this Bill that it is the voices of tenants and residents that should take centre stage. It is vital that we have a system of social housing regulation that puts the rights and interests of residents at its heart, and that deals with the historical stigma that social tenants have faced for years, as was highlighted by Grenfell United, by Shelter and, in tragic circumstances recently, by Awaab's family.

Like the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich, I would like matters to go further, to empower tenants and ensure that their voices will never again go unheard. I was disappointed, as was my hon. Friend, that the Government rejected a number of amendments in Committee. I therefore strongly support amendments 36 and 37 and new clause 6, tabled by my hon. Friend, which would ensure that much-needed representation of tenants on the advisory panel.

4.15 pm

On the need for regular inspections, although I am pleased with the intentions of the Bill, it is another aspect that needs to go further to ensure that we do not fail tenants and residents. Residents are at risk of being failed whether their landlord is a provider of more than 10,000 houses or fewer than 1,000. Therefore, it is essential that the Bill ensures that every registered provider will be subject to routine inspections, as has been argued across the Chamber, particularly on the Opposition Benches.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee held an inquiry into social housing regulation. I think we are waiting for a Government response to our report from several months ago, although we have had one from the housing ombudsman and the regulator. It was far from clear whether inspections by the regulator will go further than simply inspecting the framework of the organisations, instead going into properties and looking at what is done. The regulator had not quite taken that step in its response.

Mike Amesbury: As always, I have the utmost respect for the Chair of the Select Committee, and I look forward to the Minister's reply on that powerful and informed point.

We are in a social housing crisis. Tenants deserve so much better—the very best public housing that this country could provide. That is where we should be

going, whether the Government of today or a Labour Government in the not-too-distant future. Tenants deserve so much better. We should not hold back when it comes to the safety, health and wellbeing of tenants and residents. We must make the most of the Bill and act collectively with key stakeholders so that we do not have a repetition of the disasters of the not-too-distant past, such as the 72 people who lost their lives in the Grenfell tragedy and the most recent tragic death of Awaab, which has been referred to across this Chamber—my heart goes out to his family.

Everyone should feel safe in their home. It should be a place of sanctuary, not anxiety and worry. Let us not waste this opportunity as the Bill goes through its passage in the House. Let us be bold. Let us work together in this place.

Dehenna Davison: With the leave of the House, I will try to address the concerns raised by Members across the House. First, I thank hon. Members with all sincerity for their thoughtful and considered debate, not just today but throughout the passage of the Bill. We have dealt with things in a constructive manner, ultimately to try to strengthen the Bill to its fullest extent and provide the maximum protection for social housing residents.

I will seek to answer as many questions as I can, starting with Awaab's law. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey), my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Chris Clarkson), and the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd), who is not here today, for their constructive engagement following the devastating case of Awaab, which touched them and many of us in this House incredibly personally.

I thank the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook) for amendments (a) to (f) to Government new clause 1 relating to Awaab's law. However, we are clear that our current proposals already sufficiently achieve what the hon. Member is seeking to do. Prescribed requirements are already defined in new clause 1 and therefore do not need to be defined in the alternative way proposed. Moreover, new clause 1 already gives us the power to make provision ensuring that social housing providers' duty to meet requirements cannot be overridden or circumvented by the terms of the lease. We also think it important to be able to make provision enabling the landlord to inspect the property to ascertain whether there are any hazards present, provided reasonable notice is given if it is to be under an obligation to rectify prescribed hazards.

As I have made clear, we will consult on Awaab's law within six months of the Bill achieving Royal Assent. The consultation will inform the detail of the regulations that the Secretary of State will set for Awaab's law, including timescales and details on the prescribed hazards themselves. I hope that will reassure the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles, who raised concerns on that point. I reiterate the importance of setting requirements that deliver the best outcomes for residents, while being achievable, proportionate and evidence-based. I assure the House that with new clause 1, landlords will have no choice but to comply with new regulations and to take action to ensure homes are free of hazards that pose health risks to their residents. I therefore hope the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich will withdraw his amendment.

[Dehenna Davison]

On professionalisation, on which many Members expressed their concerns and passion, I am incredibly grateful for the broad support across the House for our amendment. I believe our approach is the right way to drive up professional standards in the sector, but we will of course carry out further engagement with the sector, including landlords, tenants and professional bodies, as we develop our approach to implementation. I hope that will reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), who is no longer in his place but who raised that point earlier.

New clause 6, tabled by the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich, seeks to extend the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to registered providers of social housing. I am grateful to him, and to the hon. Members for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) and for Salford and Eccles for raising their concerns. I think we can all agree that increasing transparency in the sector is hugely important, but I do not believe that new clause 6 is necessary or advisable at this stage. Development of the access to information scheme, one of the Government's commitments in the social housing White Paper, is already well under way. Through the scheme, private registered providers will have similar obligations as they would under the Freedom of Information Act. The tenants of providers, and their representatives, will be able to request information from their landlords in much the same way. I am also concerned—I am sorry to raise this point on another issue—that extending FOI to registered providers would increase the level of Government control exercised over the sector and may lead to the Office for National Statistics reclassifying housing associations. That is something we are incredibly concerned about.

On new clause 7, relating to Georgia's law, I want to put on the record my thanks to the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) for campaigning on this matter and for raising the really sad case of Georgia and her family. I am grateful to her for engaging with me in a really constructive fashion as we sought to find a middle road that the Government could accept in line with the new clause she is proposing. Unfortunately, we are unable to support it today, and I will explain why that is the case. I note the hon. Lady's additions to bring assured tenancies within the scope of her new clause, but I reiterate my concern, raised in Committee, about the new clause itself—if not its intent, which I think we can all agree is incredibly admirable. I remain concerned that binding housing providers with policies that remove flexibility to choose who they give tenancies to is not the right course of action. Those decisions are devolved for good reason.

Helen Hayes: Does the Minister accept the facts of the situation, which are as follows: the tenants who would benefit from this provision remain social housing tenants for the first six months that they are in temporary accommodation? We really are not talking about a shifting of priority among people who are on the housing waiting list; we are talking about rehousing existing tenants. The home that they vacate would then become available much more quickly precisely for those people who are genuinely on the housing waiting list.

Dehenna Davison: The hon. Lady raises a really strong point. As I outlined, our concern is about removing flexibility from social housing providers. Every social

housing provider and every area faces very different challenges. We want to ensure that they have the maximum flexibility to deal with those challenges. That is why, unfortunately, we cannot support new clause 7, but I thank her again for campaigning on this issue.

New clause 8 was tabled by the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), and I am grateful to her for meeting me to discuss her proposal further following Committee. I know how passionate she is about this issue, and her expertise has certainly brought a great deal to my knowledge and understanding of some of the problems faced by residents of temporary accommodation. She is right to say that we must drive up standards for all tenants, but what concerns me, as it did in Committee, is that this measure would be outside the scope of the Bill. We will certainly explore it with her to make sure that we drive up standards in temporary accommodation as well, but this Bill deals specifically with social housing, and we want to keep it tight to ensure that it achieves its desired aims.

Amendments 36, 37 and 38 deal with the advisory panel that will advise the regulator on a wide range of matters relating to social housing. As I said in Committee, I do want to see tenants at the heart of the changes we are delivering through the Bill—I am firmly committed to that—but I do not necessarily think the amendments are the best way to achieve that. The purpose of the advisory panel is to provide independent and unbiased advice to the regulator. I believe the separate resident panel that we have established is better placed to share views directly with the Government and Ministers. Its members have been asked to tell us what they think about our approach to improving the quality of social housing, and whether our interventions will deliver the changes that they want to see. We think that our approach is the right one.

A number of Members spoke about inspections, including the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Mike Amesbury) and the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich. The introduction of regular consumer inspections will be a key part of the proactive consumer regulation regime. It will strengthen the regulator's oversight of the sector, ensuring that he or she can identify issues early and take effective action when necessary. The system that we propose will be based on a robust risk profile, ensuring that when landlords are at the greatest risk of failure, or when such failure would have the greatest impact on tenants, they are subject to greater oversight. As the shadow Minister knows, we have already amended the Bill to require the regulator to publish, and take reasonable steps to implement, a plan for regular inspections. When developing the plan, the regulator will engage closely with the sector, including tenants, and it is right that we do not pre-empt that process.

Let me turn briefly to amendment 41, tabled by the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Helen Morgan). The Government are absolutely committed to preventing homelessness. Significant work has already been done to address this important issue, including the publication of the Government's bold new strategy "Ending rough sleeping for good". We are investing £2 billion in measures to deal with homelessness and rough sleeping over the next three years, and our work in this area is already making an impact. Since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, more than half a million

households have been helped to move into secure accommodation. I cannot accept the amendment, as I believe that the existing legislation can achieve the outcome that the hon. Lady is seeking.

Mr Betts: In an earlier intervention I mentioned the Select Committee's report and the fact that we are still waiting for a Government response, several months later. One of the issues that arose was the need to address problems such as damp and mould in properties. Some housing associations and councils will need to regenerate whole estates substantially and probably rebuild them, but in doing so they will be hit by Homes England's "no net additionality" rule. Homes England cannot fund any scheme that replaces poor homes with good ones if more homes are not provided. Will the Minister agree to look into that? It can be an obstacle to many important ways of addressing these problems.

Dehenna Davison: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue, and for bringing his intense expertise to the debate. I will certainly do that, and I will chase up the response to the Select Committee's report as well.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds) also brought considerable expertise to the debate, and I thank him for his support for the Bill. He asked about unscrupulous providers seeking loopholes. I hope I can reassure him by saying that we have deliberately designed the Bill to tighten the existing economic regulatory regime in order to prevent new types of provider from taking advantage of possible loopholes in the system and to ensure that we are future-proofing it against such issues.

I would like to thank hon. Members across the House who have spoken here today and particularly those who have been involved in the earlier stages of the Bill. Cross-party, this shows that we are all committed to driving up standards in social housing and to empowering tenants to ensure that we never again see an incident like the tragedies of Grenfell and Awaab Ishak. Together we have strengthened the Bill substantially, and with our amendments today will do so even further.

Question put and agreed to.

New clause 1 accordingly read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 2

POWER OF HOUSING OMBUDSMAN TO ISSUE GUIDANCE TO SCHEME MEMBERS

"(1) The Housing Act 1996 is amended as follows.

(2) In the italic heading before section 51, for 'complaints' substitute 'ombudsman'.

(3) After section 51 insert—

'51ZA Power of housing ombudsman to issue guidance to scheme members

(1) This section applies where a scheme is approved by the Secretary of State under Schedule 2.

(2) The housing ombudsman may issue to the members of the scheme guidance as to good practice in the carrying on of housing activities covered by the scheme.

(3) Before issuing, revising or replacing guidance under this section, the housing ombudsman must consult—

(a) the Regulator of Social Housing,

(b) members of the scheme, and

(c) individuals who may make complaints under the scheme.

(4) If the housing ombudsman issues, revises or replaces guidance under this section, the housing ombudsman must publish the guidance, the revised guidance or (as the case may be) the replacement guidance.

(5) Subsection (7) applies if—

(a) an individual makes a complaint against a member of the scheme,

(b) the complaint is made under the scheme or the conditions in subsection (6) are met in relation to the complaint, and

(c) it appears to the housing ombudsman that the complaint relates to a matter to which guidance issued by the ombudsman under this section relates.

(6) The conditions referred to in subsection (5)(b) are that—

(a) the complaint is made to the member of the scheme,

(b) the complaint is one that the individual could subsequently make under the scheme, and

(c) the individual has notified the ombudsman about the complaint.

(7) The housing ombudsman may order the member of the scheme to—

(a) assess whether the member's policies and practices in relation to the matter mentioned in subsection (5)(c) are consistent with the guidance issued by the ombudsman under this section in relation to that matter, and

(b) within a period specified in the order, submit to the ombudsman a written statement of the results of the assessment.

(8) If a member of the scheme fails to comply with an order under subsection (7) within the period specified in the order, the housing ombudsman may order the member to publish in such manner as the ombudsman sees fit a statement that the member has failed to comply with the order.

(9) If a member of the scheme fails to comply with an order under subsection (8), the housing ombudsman may—

(a) take such steps as the ombudsman considers appropriate to publish what the member ought to have published, and

(b) recover from the member the costs of doing so.

(10) In this section, "the housing ombudsman" means the housing ombudsman appointed in accordance with the scheme."—(*Dehenna Davison*.)

This new clause confers a power on a housing ombudsman to issue to scheme members guidance as to good practice in the carrying on of housing activities. The new clause also provides that in certain circumstances where a complaint is made against a scheme member the housing ombudsman may order the scheme member to assess whether its policies and practices in relation to a matter to which the complaint relates are consistent with the guidance.

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 3

ACTION AFTER INSPECTION

"(1) The Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 202 (inspections: supplemental), omit subsections (1) to (3).

(3) In section 203(12) (definition of 'inspector'), after 'this section' insert 'and section 203A'.

(4) After section 203 insert—

203A Action after inspection

- (1) After an inspection of a registered provider is carried out by an inspector under section 201, the inspector must produce—
 - (a) a written summary of the inspector's findings, and
 - (b) a written report about any matters specified by the regulator.
- (2) The summary and any report must be in the form specified by the regulator.
- (3) The regulator may specify matters, or the form of a summary or report, for the purposes of inspections generally or for the purposes of a particular inspection or description of inspection.
- (4) The regulator must give the registered provider a copy of the summary of the inspector's findings.
- (5) The regulator must also give the registered provider—
 - (a) a copy of the inspector's report, or
 - (b) a notice confirming that no matters were specified for the purposes of subsection (1)(b).
- (6) The regulator may publish—
 - (a) all or part of the summary of the inspector's findings,
 - (b) (where relevant) all or part of the inspector's report, and
 - (c) related information.”—(*Dehenna Davison.*)

This new clause replaces and changes provision about what the inspector and the regulator must do after an inspection. It enables the regulator to determine whether the inspector must produce a report (rather than just a summary of findings) and, if so, what matters the report must cover.

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 4

SECRETARY OF STATE'S DUTY TO GIVE DIRECTION ABOUT
PROVIDING INFORMATION TO TENANTS

“(1) The Secretary of State must give a direction to the Regulator of Social Housing under section 197(2A) of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 about setting a standard under section 194B of that Act (*standards relating to information and transparency*) for the purpose of securing that registered providers of social housing are required to provide their tenants of low cost rental accommodation with information about—

- (a) their tenants' rights in connection with the low cost rental accommodation and with facilities or services provided in connection with that accommodation, and
- (b) how their tenants can make a complaint against them.

(2) The Secretary of State must give the direction before the end of the period of six months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.

(3) In this section—

‘low cost rental accommodation’ means accommodation which—

- (a) is low cost rental accommodation (as defined in section 69 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008) provided by a registered provider of social housing, and
- (b) is not low cost home ownership accommodation (as defined in section 70 of that Act);

‘tenant’, in relation to low cost rental accommodation, includes other occupiers.”—(*Dehenna Davison.*)

This new clause requires the Secretary of State, within 6 months of Royal Assent, to give a direction to the regulator for the purpose of securing that registered providers of social housing are required to provide their tenants of low cost rental accommodation with information about the tenants' rights and about making complaints against their landlord.

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 7

REGULATOR DUTY TO ENSURE CONTINUITY OF SECURE
AND ASSURED TENANCY IN CASES OF THREAT TO SAFETY

“(1) The Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 is amended as follows.

(2) After section 92K insert—

“92KA A Duty to ensure continuity of secure and assured tenancy in cases of threat to safety

(1) Duty to ensure continuity of secure and assured tenancy in cases of threat to safety

- (a) a registered provider of social housing has granted a secure tenancy or assured tenancy of a dwelling-house in England to a person (whether as the sole tenant or a joint tenant), and
- (b) the registered provider is satisfied that there is a threat to the personal safety of that person or of a member of that person's household which means there is a risk to their personal safety unless they move.

(2) When subsection (1) applies, the regulator must ensure that the registered provider grants the tenant a new secure tenancy which is—

- (a) on terms at least equivalent to the existing tenancy; and
- (b) a threat of targeted youth or gang violence.

(3) In this section, a “threat to personal safety” means any threat of violence, including in circumstances of—

- (a) domestic abuse where the perpetrator does not live at the same address as the victim;
- (b) an escalating neighbour dispute;
- (c) a threat of targeted youth or gang violence.

(4) In assessing the threat under subsection (1)(b), the registered provider must act in accordance with any relevant police advice provided to—

- (a) the registered provider,
- (b) the tenant, or
- (c) any member of the tenant's household.

(5) In the event that a registered provider is unable to ensure the provision of an appropriate new secure tenancy pursuant to subsection (2), the regulator must ensure that the registered provider concerned co-operates with other registered providers to ensure an appropriate new secure tenancy is provided in a timely manner.”—(*Helen Hayes.*)

This new clause would require the regulator to ensure that tenants whose safety is threatened are granted alternative accommodation by their housing provider on equivalent terms to their existing tenancy. It also requires the regulator to ensure that a provider which is unable to provide appropriate alternative accommodation co-operates with other providers to do so.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 179, Noes 273.

Division No. 180]**[4.32 pm]****AYES**

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (<i>Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy</i>)	Betts, Mr Clive
Ali, Rushanara	Blake, Olivia
Ali, Tahir	Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Amesbury, Mike	Brown, Ms Lyn
Anderson, Fleur	Bryant, Sir Chris
Ashworth, rh Jonathan	Buck, Ms Karen
Barker, Paula	Butler, Dawn
Beckett, rh Margaret	Byrne, Ian
Begum, Apsana	Byrne, rh Liam
Benn, rh Hilary	Cadbury, Ruth
	Campbell, rh Sir Alan
	Carden, Dan

Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
Clark, Feryal
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, rh Yvette
Coyle, Neil
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Dalton, Ashley
Davey, rh Ed
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dixon, Samantha
Dodds, Anneliese
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, rh Maria
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Farry, Stephen
Foord, Richard
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Furniss, Gill
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glendon, Mary
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Dame Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanna, Claire
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Johnson, Kim
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Sarah
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen

Kyle, Peter
Lavery, Ian
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lightwood, Simon
Lloyd, Tony (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
Miliband, rh Edward
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Nandy, Lisa
Norris, Alex
Olney, Sarah
Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena
Osamor, Kate
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pollard, Luke
Powell, Lucy
Qureshi, Yasmin
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, rh Rachel
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Shah, Naz
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smyth, Karin
Spellar, rh John
Stevens, Jo
Streeter, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thornberry, rh Emily
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl

Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Western, Andrew
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitley, Mick

Whittome, Nadia
Wilson, Munira
Winter, Beth
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Gerald Jones and
Christian Wakeford

NOES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, rh Kemi
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baldwin, Harriett
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Sir Jake
Bhatti, Saqib
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Britcliffe, Sara
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Buckland, rh Sir Robert
Burghart, Alex
Butler, Rob
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
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
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James

Davies, Gareth
Davies, Mims
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Donelan, rh Michelle
Double, Steve
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, Sir James
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Fell, Simon
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, rh Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freer, Mike
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Glen, rh John
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, rh James

Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holmes, Paul
Howell, Paul
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, Jane
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kearns, Alicia
Knight, Julian (*Proxy vote cast
by Craig Mackinlay*)
Kniveton, Kate
Kruger, Danny
Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
Lamont, John
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Longhi, Marco
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Macleane, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Marson, Julie
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, rh Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Milling, rh Amanda
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morrisey, Joy
Mortimer, Jill
Morton, rh Wendy

Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
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
Pritchard, rh Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, rh Jeremy
Randall, Tom
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Richards, Nicola
Richardson, Angela
Roberts, Rob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Mary
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Selous, Andrew
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, rh Sir Alok
Shelbrooke, rh Alec
Simmonds, David
Skidmore, rh Chris
Smith, rh Chloe
Smith, Greg
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, rh Mark
Stafford, Alexander
Stephenson, rh Andrew
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Iain
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, rh Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
Trott, Laura
Vara, rh Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Sir Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallis, Dr Jamie
Warburton, David

Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wiggin, Sir Bill
Wild, James
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin

Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
Young, Jacob
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Scott Mann and
Robert Largan

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 1

FUNDAMENTAL OBJECTIVES

Amendment proposed: 42, page 1, line 10, at end insert—

“(2) In section 92K of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 (fundamental objectives), after subsection (3) insert—

“(3A) In undertaking its objective under subsection (2)(b) the regulator must report to the Secretary of State at least every three years on whether the provision of social housing in England and Wales is sufficient to meet reasonable demands, and must make recommendations to the Secretary of State on how to ensure that the provision of social housing is so sufficient.

(3B) The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament a copy of any reports prepared by virtue of subsection (3A).

(3C) In undertaking its objective under subsection (3)(a) the regulator must report to the Secretary of State on the progress of the removal of unsafe cladding and the remediation of other fire safety defects in social housing, and may make recommendations to the Secretary of State on further action required.”—
(*Helen Morgan.*)

This amendment would include in the regulator's objective a requirement to report to the Government on the removal of cladding. It would also require the regulator to report to the Government on the adequacy of the stock of social housing, and lay a copy of any such report before Parliament.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 180, Noes 273.

Division No. 181]

[4.46 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy
vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-
Addy*)
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Blake, Olivia
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brown, Ms Lyn
Bryant, Sir Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chamberlain, Wendy

Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
Clark, Feryal
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, rh Yvette
Coyle, Neil
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Dalton, Ashley
Davey, rh Ed
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dixon, Samantha
Dods, Anneliese
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, rh Maria
Eastwood, Colum

Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Foord, Richard
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Furniss, Gill
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Lloyd, Tony (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna

Miliband, rh Edward
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Norris, Alex
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, rh Rachel
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh John
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Gerald Jones and
 Christian Wakeford

NOES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim

Afriyie, Adam
 Aiken, Nickie

Aldous, Peter
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, rh Kemi
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Sir Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Butler, Rob
 Carter, Andy
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 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
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Mims
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, rh Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, Sir James
 Duguid, David

Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fell, Simon
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, rh Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Graham, Richard
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, rh James
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, Paul
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew

Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Knight, Julian (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
 Kniveton, Kate
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 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
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom

Quin, rh Jeremy
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Iain
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
 Scott Mann and
 Robert Largan

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 12

MORATORIUM ON DISPOSAL OF LAND

Amendments made: 4, page 11, line 30, leave out

“with the day after the day on which”
 and insert “when”.

This amendment changes the starting point of the moratorium so it begins when an insolvency event occurs, as opposed to the day after the event occurs.

Amendment 5, page 12, leave out lines 5 and 6 and insert—

“(d) a notice of the appointment of an administrator of the provider under paragraph 14 or 22 of Schedule B1 to the Insolvency Act 1986 is filed with the court under paragraph 18 or 29 of that Schedule;”.

Where there is an appointment of an administrator of a private registered provider, this amendment provides for the moratorium to start when the notice of appointment of the administrator is filed with the court (as opposed to when the appointment is made).

Amendment 6, page 12, line 41, at end insert—

“(eb) in subsection (3), for the words from ‘period,’ to the end substitute ‘period if—

(a) the regulator has made reasonable enquiries with a view to locating secured creditors of the registered provider, and

(b) where the regulator located one or more such creditors, each of them has consented to the extension.”.

This amendment amends the provision which enables the regulator to extend a moratorium to make it clear that the regulator can do so where the regulator has made enquiries but has been unable to locate any secured creditors of the registered provider (as well as where secured creditors have been located and agreed to the extension).

Amendment 7, page 12, line 41, at end insert—

“(eb) in subsection (5), omit the words from ‘if’ to the end;”.

This amendment widens the regulator’s power to cancel a moratorium so the regulator can cancel it for any reason.

Amendment 8, page 12, line 43, at end insert—

“(4) In section 147 (*further moratorium*), in subsection (3), for the words from ‘period,’ to the end substitute ‘period if—

(a) the regulator has made reasonable enquiries with a view to locating secured creditors of the registered provider, and

(b) where the regulator located one or more such creditors, each of them has consented to the further moratorium.”.

This amendment amends the provision which enables the regulator to impose a further moratorium to make it clear that the regulator can do so where the regulator has made enquiries but has been unable to locate any secured creditors of the registered provider (as well as where secured creditors have been located and agreed to the further moratorium).

Amendment 9, page 12, line 43, at end insert—

“(5) In section 151 (*appointment of interim manager during moratorium*), in subsection (4), for paragraph (b) (but not the ‘or’ following it) substitute—

“(b) when the regulator notifies the interim manager that there are proposals under section 152 which are agreed proposals;”.

(6) In section 153 (procedure for proposals made during moratorium)—

(a) in subsection (1), after paragraph (b) insert—

“(ba) if the regulator is able to locate any secured creditors of the registered provider after making reasonable enquiries, those creditors;”.

(b) after subsection (1) insert—

- “(1A) If no secured creditors are located for the purposes of subsection (1), the proposals made by the regulator following the consultation required by that subsection are agreed proposals for the purposes of this group of sections.”;
- (c) in subsection (2)—
- (i) for the words before paragraph (a) substitute ‘Where the regulator locates one or more secured creditors of the registered provider for the purposes of subsection (1), the regulator must, before making proposals, send a copy of draft proposals to—’;
- (ii) for paragraph (b) (but not the ‘and’ following it) substitute—
- ‘(b) the secured creditors located for the purposes of subsection (1),’
- (d) in subsection (3), in the words before paragraph (a) for the words from ‘The regulator’ to ‘bringing’ substitute ‘If the regulator sends draft proposals under subsection (2), the regulator must also make arrangements for bringing those’;
- (e) for subsection (4) substitute—
- ‘(4) If each secured creditor to whom draft proposals were required to be sent agrees to them by notice to the regulator, the draft proposals become agreed proposals for the purposes of this group of sections.’
- (f) in subsection (5)—
- (i) in the words before paragraph (a) for ‘Proposals’ substitute ‘Draft proposals’;
- (ii) in paragraph (a), for ‘proposals were sent’ substitute ‘draft proposals were required to be sent’;
- (g) in subsection (6)(b)—
- (i) for ‘its’ substitute ‘any’;
- (ii) for ‘the original’ substitute ‘draft’;
- (h) for subsection (8) substitute—
- ‘(8) The regulator may make proposals amending agreed proposals; and this section and section 152 apply to such proposals.’”.

This amendment makes a number of changes to the process by which proposals about future management etc of a registered provider made during a moratorium are agreed.

Amendment 10, page 12, line 43, at end insert—

“(7) In section 158 (*assistance by regulator in connection with proposals*), in subsection (1), for ‘the agreement of proposals’ substitute ‘the regulator deciding whether to exercise the power under section 152 to make proposals and (if proposals are made) the proposals becoming agreed proposals’.”—(*Dehenna Davison.*)

This amendment enables the regulator to give financial or other assistance to a registered provider during a moratorium while the regulator is deciding whether or not to make proposals.

Clause 21

STANDARDS RELATING TO COMPETENCE AND CONDUCT

Amendments made: 44, page 17, line 22, at end insert “(‘relevant individuals’)”.

This amendment provides a label by which to refer to the persons described so it is easier to refer to them again elsewhere in the provision.

Amendment 45, page 17, line 26, leave out from beginning to “, and” in line 27 and insert “relevant individuals”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 44.

Amendment 46, page 17, line 28, leave out “such” and insert “relevant”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 44.

Amendment 47, page 17, line 29, at end insert—

“(3) Standards under subsection (1) may require registered providers to secure that their relevant managers—

- (a) have a specified qualification in housing management or type of qualification in housing management, or
- (b) are working towards such a qualification or type of qualification.
- (4) A ‘relevant manager’ means—
- (a) a senior housing executive, or
- (b) a senior housing manager.
- (5) A qualification or type of qualification specified for a senior housing executive may only be—
- (a) a foundation degree, or
- (b) a qualification or type of qualification regulated by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation which is of a level not exceeding level 5.
- (6) A qualification or type of qualification specified for a senior housing manager may only be a qualification or type of qualification regulated by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation which is of a level not exceeding level 4.
- (7) Except as provided by subsections (3) to (6), standards under subsection (1) may not require registered providers to comply with rules about the qualifications to be required of relevant individuals.
- (8) In this section, ‘senior housing executive’ means a relevant individual who—
- (a) is an employee or officer of the registered provider,
- (b) has responsibility (solely or jointly) for the day to day management of the provision of services in connection with the management of social housing provided by the provider, and
- (c) is part of the provider’s senior management.
- (9) For the purposes of this section, an individual is part of a registered provider’s senior management if the individual plays a significant role in—
- (a) the making of decisions about how the whole or a substantial part of the activities of the provider which relate to social housing are to be managed or organised, or
- (b) the management or organisation of the whole or a substantial part of such activities.
- (10) In this section, ‘senior housing manager’ means a relevant individual who—
- (a) is an employee of the registered provider, and
- (b) is a senior housing and property manager for the registered provider.

(11) For the purposes of subsection (10)(b), whether an individual is a senior housing and property manager is to be determined by reference to the description of the occupation of senior housing and property management published by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education under section ZA10(5) of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

(12) The references in subsections (5) and (6) to the level of a qualification is to the level assigned to a qualification by virtue of general conditions set and published by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation under section 134 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

(13) For the purposes of this section, ‘employee’ includes a person employed under a contract of apprenticeship.”—(*Dehenna Davison.*)

This amendment is to enable the regulator to set standards to ensure that those with management responsibilities at a registered provider have, or are working towards getting, certain qualifications.

Clause 22

STANDARDS RELATING TO INFORMATION AND TRANSPARENCY

Amendments made: 11, page 17, line 36, at end insert “, including standards requiring information to be published”.

This amendment makes clear that standards set by the regulator under section 194B of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 (inserted by clause 22) may require information to be published.

Amendment 12, page 18, line 3, at end insert

“including information concerning—

(i) their tenants’ rights in connection with those things, and

(ii) how to make complaints against registered providers.”.
—(*Dehenna Davison.*)

This amendment makes clear that the regulator’s power under section 194B(1) and (2)(a) of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 (inserted by clause 22) includes power to require compliance with rules about the provision of information to tenants about their rights and about making complaints against their landlord.

Clause 28

INSPECTION PLAN

Amendment proposed: 40, page 23, leave out lines 23 to 26 and insert—

“(a) the inspection of every registered provider within four years of the commencement of this Act,

(b) the inspection of every registered provider at intervals of no longer than four years thereafter, and”—
(*Matthew Pennycook.*)

This amendment would ensure that the regulator is required to carry out regular inspections of every registered provider.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 180, Noes 276.

Division No. 182]

[4.57 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (<i>Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy</i>)	Cunningham, Alex
Ali, Rushanara	Daby, Janet
Ali, Tahir	Dalton, Ashley
Amesbury, Mike	Davey, rh Ed
Anderson, Fleur	David, Wayne
Ashworth, rh Jonathan	Davies, Geraint
Barker, Paula	Debbonaire, Thangam
Beckett, rh Margaret	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Begum, Apsana	Dixon, Samantha
Benn, rh Hilary	Dodds, Anneliese
Betts, Mr Clive	Doughty, Stephen
Blake, Olivia	Dowd, Peter
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Duffield, Rosie
Brown, Ms Lyn	Eagle, Dame Angela
Bryant, Sir Chris	Eagle, rh Maria
Buck, Ms Karen	Eastwood, Colum
Butler, Dawn	Efford, Clive
Byrne, Ian	Elliott, Julie
Byrne, rh Liam	Elmore, Chris
Cadbury, Ruth	Eshalomi, Florence
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Esterson, Bill
Carden, Dan	Evans, Chris
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Farron, Tim
Chamberlain, Wendy	Farry, Stephen
Champion, Sarah	Foord, Richard
Charalambous, Bambos	Fovargue, Yvonne
Clark, Feryal	Foxcroft, Vicky
Cooper, Daisy	Furniss, Gill
Cooper, rh Yvette	Gill, Preet Kaur
Coyle, Neil	Glendon, Mary
Creasy, Stella	Greenwood, Lilian
Cruddas, Jon	Greenwood, Margaret
Cryer, John	Griffith, Dame Nia
Cummins, Judith	Gwynne, Andrew
	Haigh, Louise
	Hamilton, Fabian

Hanna, Claire
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Johnson, Kim
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Sarah
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lavery, Ian
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lightwood, Simon
Lloyd, Tony (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
Miliband, rh Edward
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Nandy, Lisa
Norris, Alex

Olney, Sarah
Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena
Osamor, Kate
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Pollard, Luke
Powell, Lucy
Qureshi, Yasmin
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, rh Rachel
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Shah, Naz
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smyth, Karin
Spellar, rh John
Stevens, Jo
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thornberry, rh Emily
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Webbe, Claudia
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitley, Mick
Whittome, Nadia
Wilson, Munira
Winter, Beth
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Gerald Jones and
Christian Wakeford

NOES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, rh Kemi
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baldwin, Harriett
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Sir Jake
Bhatti, Saqib
Blunt, Crispin

Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Butler, Rob
 Carter, Andy
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 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
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Mims
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, rh Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, Sir James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fell, Simon
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, rh Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, rh James
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, Paul
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Knight, Julian (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
 Kniveton, Kate
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopresti, Jack

Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 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
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Sambrook, Gary

Saxby, Selaine
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Iain
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
 Scott Mann and
 Robert Largan

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 42

COMMENCEMENT

Amendments made: 13, page 37, line 1, after “Section” insert

“(Secretary of State’s duty to give direction about providing information to tenants) and”.

This amendment brings NC4 into force 2 months after Royal Assent.

Amendment 2, page 37, line 1, after “Section 38” insert

“and (Power of housing ombudsman to issue guidance to scheme members).”—(*Dehenna Davison.*)

This amendment brings NC2 into force 2 months after Royal Assent.

Schedule 2

AMENDMENTS TO RESTRICTIONS ON INSOLVENCY PROCEDURES

Amendments made: 15, page 41, line 11, leave out “and signed, by the petitioner,” and insert—

“(aa) be signed by, or on behalf of, the petitioner.”.

This amendment enables a notice of a petition for the winding-up of a registered provider, which is given to the regulator under section 104(2) of the Housing and Planning Act 2016, to be signed by someone acting on the petitioner’s behalf.

Amendment 16, page 41, leave out line 14.

This amendment removes the requirement for a notice of a petition for the winding-up of a registered provider, which is given to the regulator under section 104(2) of the Housing and Planning Act 2016, to explain why the petition is being presented.

Amendment 17, page 41, line 17, leave out “(b),” and insert “(aa), (b) or”.

This amendment enables the regulator to treat a notice which hasn’t been signed as validly given.

Amendment 18, page 41, line 17, leave out “or (d)”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 16.

Amendment 19, page 41, line 25, leave out “and signed, by the registered provider,” and insert—

“(aa) be signed by, or on behalf of, the registered provider.”.

This amendment enables a notice of an application for voluntary winding up of a registered provider, which is given to the regulator under section 105(4) of the Housing and Planning Act 2016, to be signed by someone acting on the registered provider’s behalf.

Amendment 20, page 41, leave out line 28.

This amendment removes the requirement for a notice of an application for voluntary winding up of a registered provider, which is given to the regulator under section 105(4) of the Housing and Planning Act 2016, to explain why the application has been made.

Amendment 21, page 41, line 31, leave out “(b),” and insert “(aa), (b) or”.

This amendment enables the regulator to treat a notice which hasn’t been signed as validly given.

Amendment 22, page 41, line 31, leave out “or (d)”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 20.

Amendment 23, page 42, line 3, leave out from “writing,” to end of line 4 and insert—

“(aa) be signed by, or on behalf of, the person who made the ordinary administration application.”.

This amendment enables a notice of an ordinary administration application in relation to a private registered provider, which is given to the regulator under section 106(3) of the Housing and Planning Act 2016, to be signed by someone acting on the applicant’s behalf.

Amendment 24, page 42, leave out line 7.

This amendment removes the requirement for a notice of an ordinary administration application in relation to a private registered provider, which is given to the regulator under section 106(3) of the Housing and Planning Act 2016, to explain why the application has been made.

Amendment 25, page 42, line 10, leave out “(b),” and insert “(aa), (b) or”.

This amendment enables the regulator to treat a notice which hasn’t been signed as validly given.

Amendment 26, page 42, line 10, leave out “or (d)”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 24.

Amendment 27, page 42, line 23, leave out “and signed, by the person making the appointment,” and insert—

“(aa) be signed by, or on behalf of, the person making the appointment.”.

This amendment enables a notice of appointment of an administrator in relation to a private registered provider, which is given to the regulator under section 107(4) of the Housing and Planning Act 2016, to be signed by someone acting on behalf of the person making the appointment.

Amendment 28, page 42, leave out line 30.

This amendment removes the requirement for a notice of appointment of an administrator in relation to a private registered provider, which is given to the regulator under section 107(4) of the Housing and Planning Act 2016, to explain the reason for the appointment.

Amendment 29, page 42, line 33, leave out “(b),” and insert “(aa), (b) or”.

This amendment enables the regulator to treat a notice which hasn’t been signed as validly given.

Amendment 30, page 42, line 33, leave out “or (d)”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 28.

Amendment 31, page 43, line 4, leave out from “and” to end of line 5 and insert—

“(aa) be signed by, or on behalf of, the person intending to enforce the security.”.

This amendment enables a notice of intention to enforce a security over property of a private registered provider, which is given to the regulator under section 108(2) of the Housing and Planning Act 2016, to be signed by someone acting on behalf of the person intending to enforce the security.

Amendment 32, page 43, leave out lines 6 and 7.

This amendment removes the requirement for a notice of intention to enforce a security over property of a private registered provider, which is given to the regulator under section 108(2) of the Housing and Planning Act 2016, to explain the reason for the person intending to enforce the security.

Amendment 33, page 43, line 10, after “paragraph” insert “(aa)”.

This amendment enables the regulator to treat a notice which hasn’t been signed as validly given.

Amendment 34, page 43, line 10, leave out “(b).”—(*Dehenna Davison.*)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 32.

Schedule 5

MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: 14, page 52, line 25, at end insert—

“(aa) in subsection (2)(f), for ‘and informing tenants’ substitute ‘tenants and providing them with information in connection with such consultation’.”.

This amendment is consequential on the insertion of section 194B of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 (standards relating to information and transparency) (by clause 22). It clarifies the scope of the existing power under section 193(1) and (2)(f) of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 to impose rules about methods of consulting and informing tenants.

Amendment 35, page 54, line 34, at end insert—

“43A After section 276A (inserted by section 33) insert—

‘276B Data protection

(1) This section applies to a duty or power to process information where the duty or power is imposed or conferred by or by virtue of any provision of this Part.

(2) A duty or power to which this section applies does not operate to require or authorise the processing of information which would contravene the data protection legislation (but the duty or power is to be taken into account in determining whether the processing would contravene that legislation).

(3) In this section ‘the data protection legislation’ has the same meaning as in the Data Protection Act 2018 (see section 3 of that Act).’—(*Dehenna Davison.*)

This amendment makes clear that nothing in Part 2 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 (which is amended by the Bill) requires or enables a person to disclose or otherwise process personal data if doing so would contravene the data protection legislation.

Title

Amendments made: 1, line 2, after “complaints;” insert “about hazards affecting social housing;”.

This amendment is consequential on NC1.

Amendment 3, line 2, after “complaints;” insert

“about the powers and duties of a housing ombudsman appointed under an approved scheme;”.—(*Dehenna Davison.*)

This amendment is consequential on NC2.

Third Reading

5.8 pm

Dehenna Davison: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I thank the Department’s Bill team, its policy and legal officials, and my amazing private office team, who have worked hard to deliver this legislation through both Houses. I also thank the House authorities, parliamentary staff, Clerks, Doorkeepers and hon. Members on both sides of the House who have participated in the debate today and at previous stages.

In particular, I sincerely thank the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook) for his time and his thoughtful contributions. Although we have disagreed about one or two aspects on the path to Third Reading, I hope that he will agree that the Bill delivers welcome change for millions of residents across the country by strengthening the powers of the regulator and empowering social housing tenants to hold their landlord to account.

The Bill is integral to this Government’s ongoing commitment to learning lessons from the Grenfell Tower fire and ensuring that such an appalling tragedy never happens again. I remain incredibly grateful for all the contributions from the community throughout, as well as their ongoing engagement with the Department. Specifically, I know that Grenfell United has long campaigned for mandatory qualifications to be introduced to the sector, bringing it in line with other sectors that provide frontline services. We have been listening, including to those in both Houses who spoke so passionately on the matter, and have been working hard to find a solution. I am very proud to stand before the House today having amended the Bill to deliver that critical change in the sector in order to benefit the experience of tenants.

At this point, it would be remiss of me to not acknowledge the coroner’s report that shone a light on the heartbreaking case of two-year-old Awaab Ishak in Rochdale. Words alone cannot help his family to hear from such an unimaginable and inexcusably preventable loss, but I hope they can find some degree of comfort in the amendment to the Bill made in his name, which will make clear to landlords that hazards such as damp and mould have absolutely no place in their tenants’ homes. We must do more to ensure that people are safe in their own home, and that starts with landlords providing high-quality accommodation and a high-quality service to all of their tenants. I sincerely hope that the residents and families of Grenfell, including Grenfell United, as well as the Ishak family can look on this Bill as part of their own legacy of delivering real change in the social housing sector for the people living in that sector, because they really need it.

I commend the Bill to the House.

5.11 pm

Matthew Pennycook: I start by thanking the Clerks, the House staff, and Library specialists for facilitating our debates on this important piece of legislation, and all the external organisations—including Shelter, the Chartered Institute of Housing, and the Greater Manchester Law Centre—that have engaged extensively with us on it.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): Will the shadow Minister give way?

Matthew Pennycook: I will.

Eddie Hughes: I apologise for the very early intervention, but as the Minister who was partly responsible for overseeing the transition from White Paper to Bill, I just wanted to thank the incredible team who sit behind the Minister in the Box for their work. I see some very familiar faces, belonging to some very committed individuals, and I was certainly very grateful for their contribution. I am sure the Minister was, too.

Matthew Pennycook: I welcome the hon. Gentleman’s intervention. I certainly thank that team, and I thank him for all the work he has done in this area as well.

I also thank the Minister for the constructive tone with which she has approached the legislation, as well as all hon. Members who have contributed to our proceedings at all stages, particularly those who took the Bill so ably through Committee. Lastly, I pay tribute on behalf of the Opposition to the work of Grenfell United and the Grenfell Foundation, which have pushed at every turn for this legislation to come forward and to ensure it is strengthened, and to the family of Awaab Ishak, who with dignity and fortitude have campaigned for—and will now have secured—a change in the law that I have no doubt will save lives.

We know from the circumstances leading up to the Grenfell Tower fire, those surrounding the death of Awaab Ishak, and countless other appalling cases that never attracted media attention that poorly maintained and managed social housing can literally kill. That is why it is so important that we overhaul the regulation of social housing, and that this Bill passes. It is almost six years since 72 men, women and children lost their lives

[Matthew Pennycook]

at Grenfell. More than four and a half years have passed since the Green Paper was issued, and more than two have passed since the White Paper was published. There is no question that it took the Government far too long to bring us to this moment, but we are extremely pleased that this necessary and urgently required Bill will complete its remaining Commons stages today.

The Opposition were determined to see the Bill strengthened in a number of areas, so that standards in social housing markedly and rapidly improve, tenants are able to pursue effective redress, and those tenants are empowered and their voices truly listened to. We welcome the various concessions and revisions that the Government have made, which without question have improved the Bill. However, as things stand, we do not believe that it is the most robust piece of legislation that this House could have delivered for tenants. We support the passage of the Bill tonight, because millions of those living in social homes across England need action now to address the plight of poor conditions and neglect and negligence at the hands of their landlords, but we hope that the Government will reflect further on the compelling arguments we have made for changes to further strengthen this vital piece of legislation.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed, with amendments.

Business without Debate

ESTIMATES (LIAISON COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 145(3)),

That this House agrees with the Report of the Liaison Committee of 27 February:

That a day not later than 18 March be allotted for the consideration of the following Estimates for the financial year 2022–23: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, insofar as it relates to adult social care; and Department for Education, insofar as it relates to childcare and early years.—(*Fay Jones.*) *Question agreed to.*

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

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

CIVIL AVIATION

That the draft Airports Slot Allocation (Alleviation of Usage Requirements) Regulations 2023, which were laid before this House on 31 January, be approved.—(*Fay Jones.*)

Question agreed to.

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

AGRICULTURE

That the draft Direct Payments to Farmers (Reductions) (England) Regulations 2023, which were laid before this House on 31 January, be approved.—(*Fay Jones.*)

Question agreed to.

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

That the draft Agriculture (Financial Assistance) (Amendment) Regulations 2023, which were laid before this House on 31 January, be approved.—(*Fay Jones.*)

Question agreed to.

Work of the Law Commission

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

5.15 pm

Sir Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): It is my pleasure to speak in this slightly early Adjournment debate on the work of the Law Commission. By that, I mean the Law Commission of England and Wales, as opposed to the Scottish Law Commission, founded in 1965, which does excellent work north of the border, and the Northern Ireland Law Commission, which sadly has not been functioning since 2015. On that note, as a member of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, I very much hope that as part of the normalisation of politics in Northern Ireland, we see that body working and contributing to better law and law reform in Northern Ireland. It is to the Law Commission of England and Wales that my remarks relate, and I am glad to see my right hon. Friend the Minister in his place.

First, I will talk about the purposes of the Law Commission. It is nearly 60 years since it was created by one of my predecessors, the noble Lord Gardiner. Since that time, it has enjoyed the stewardship of many distinguished senior judges and dedicated lawyers and civil servants. Its objectives remain clear: first, simplification and modification of the law; secondly, the law's codification; thirdly, the removal of anomalies in the law; fourthly, the repeal of obsolete and unnecessary enactments; and, finally, the consolidation of legislation. Its objectives have been restated in recent years in its reports, and they are worth stating here on the Floor of the House. They are as follows:

“To be the authoritative voice on law reform; To make a difference through our law reform work; To be proactive in promoting the need for law reform in key areas and achieve ‘good law’;”—

a term that I will adopt—

“To have a strong reputation in the UK and abroad for being effective in the delivery of law reform; To attract the best talent and be an excellent place to work.”

I am pleased that as part of the Law Commission's developing reform, back in 2020 when I was Lord Chancellor, I agreed a return to a full funding model for the Law Commission, with a focus on where law reform is most needed, rather it being a question of where the finances were available. While the cross-Whitehall funding source model, where other Departments were encouraged to work with the Law Commission on projects, was an interesting way to try to develop new initiatives on political priorities, it seemed to me that it did not provide the level of certainty needed for a longer-term view, for the retention of quality lawyers and researchers, and for the Law Commission to be able to plan with confidence over several years, rather than from year to year. The Law Commission works not just with the United Kingdom Government, but with the Welsh Government in Cardiff, and I will raise a very good example of that in a little while.

I draw the House's attention to the important contribution that the Law Commission has made to the law as it has developed over the past few years. When the issue of the abuse of intimate images—a sensitive issue particularly affecting many women and girls and young men in our society—raised its head, the Law

Commission was asked to review the law and publish its final recommendations last year. It created a new proposed framework that dealt with a range of issues that went well beyond the reform that we made to the law on upskirting, to deal with deepfake images and the like—current, relevant and important concerns of the general public. I am glad to say that the Government adopted those recommendations and that we now see them in the Online Safety Bill.

The Law Commission has fresh recommendations that merit close examination by Ministers in the Home Office. Last November, it produced a series of recommendations to reform the system for the recovery of the proceeds of crime—again, a germane and relevant issue when it comes to the need for those who profit from criminality to repay the proceeds of that conduct. In particular, I was struck by its sensible recommendations to accelerate confiscation proceedings, to allow the taking of assets if a particular order was not paid—a much stronger approach to enforcement—and to strengthen restraint orders themselves, which are so important at the early stages of confiscation of the proceeds of crime. The proposals in that report merit immediate adoption by the Government—if not in this Session than certainly in the final Session before the end of the Parliament.

I was struck by a report that the Law Commission published in 2020, which was compiled for the Commission by independent economists. They revealed in their analysis that if the Law Commission's recommendations were implemented for five key projects that they examined, the economic value of that implementation would exceed £3 billion over a period of 10 years. That is a striking amount of money involving only five projects. There are many more projects that the Law Commission has commissioned and completed, and I suspect the overall financial benefit to our country would significantly exceed even that hefty sum. In a wider analysis of 11 projects completed by the Law Commission, the independent analysts discovered that those projects would positively contribute to the lives of well over 27 million people in our country. This is therefore not a niche issue or a dry matter just for lawyers; it is a matter of public good and public benefit.

One of those five projects was the adoption of the sentencing code. For many years, the law of sentencing in England and Wales has been—from my own professional experience—a miasma of conflicting laws of various ages. It has often been more of a challenge for judges and lawyers to work out which provision applies in which area than it has been to focus on the outcome of sentencing, which surely has to be the justice of the case and the need for condign punishment.

The Law Commission's work on developing a consolidated code, which would be much easier for judges and lawyers to use and would reduce the danger of mistakes or the need for appeal, was very much the preoccupation of the Court of Appeal, and something that I thought merited reform. I am glad that, as Lord Chancellor, I helped drive through both the paving Act and the Act that established the sentencing code in 2020. Why did I do that? Again, it was not just because of an obsession with neatness, though I do like neat and tidy laws; it was because the estimate of the reduction of costs was a grand total of up to £256 million over a period of 10 years. That is no small beer when it comes

[*Sir Robert Buckland*]

to the criminal justice system, and I am proud that the Ministry of Justice did that during my time as Lord Chancellor.

There are many other examples of how the Law Commission has benefited this country. The creation of the Fraud Act 2006, which simplified the law of fraud, making it easier and more straightforward to understand and use in prosecutions, was the work of the Commission. The Care Act 2014, which ensured that the rights of carers and their families were better enshrined in law—again, something I was involved in as a Back Bencher—was also the product of Law Commission work. This is not merely dry talk for lawyers; this is about good law and good law reform protecting citizens and saving resources.

Law reform can ensure that new technology is better and more safely used and that the environmental protections we need in the light of climate change are in place to promote sustainable growth. Good law can lead to improvements in wellbeing and welfare by opening up opportunities and helping to improve health outcomes. Good law leads to clear and streamlined processes. It reduces inefficiency and increases predictability, which is great for businesses and good for investors, for our public sector and for all our citizens. There is a strong economic case for good law. Above all things, it helps to maintain the integrity of our legal system and of the rule of law itself. Achieving greater certainty in the law will reduce the need for litigation or challenge via the courts, which is a powerful way of ensuring that not only access to justice, but justice itself, is strengthened and deepened.

A busy Government with a packed agenda will say—I heard this many times during my long service on the Parliamentary Business and Legislation Cabinet Committee—that there is no time in the legislative programme for such worthy projects. My argument is simple: let us make the time, and let us make this a priority. I am not sure that it is simply a question of having more hours during the week to do the work; I think it is much more about our sense of priorities. To allude to something Aneurin Bevan said in another context, it is about the religion of priorities. For example, if the Government made a couple of slots for law reform available in each King's Speech, alongside the well-worn phrase that comes at the end of the Gracious Address about “other measures”, it could be incredibly helpful to business managers.

Law Commission Bills start in the Lords, where there is a special, well-established Committee procedure for suitably expert Members of that House to scrutinise and refine proposed legislation. In this House, we have Standing Order No. 59, which allows us to fast-track Law Commission Bills by referring them to a Second Reading Committee

“unless the House...otherwise orders”.

That is a very good head start, but I am not sure that it is enough for getting Law Commission Bills through this place.

Where the context and content of Law Commission Bills is entirely uncontroversial, there is no difficulty. Sometimes, however, although the content may not be controversial, the context is. There is always a danger present in the minds of business managers that the

scope of such a Bill may be just wide enough to allow amendments of a controversial nature. Let us take firearms legislation as an example. The criminal legislation on firearms is a mess: we have very good, tight firearms legislation in this country, but anybody who has read the Firearms Act 1968 understands that it needs consolidation and a thorough spring clean to make it much more comprehensible to practitioners and the general public. That seems uncontroversial, but inevitably there might be amendments to such a Bill that would be very controversial indeed. That is just one example that I am sure business managers would be concerned about, and no doubt the Leader of the House would have a view.

The Minister will say that these are matters for the House, not for the Government, but I think it would be helpful if he took the message to the Leader of the House—I know he will do so, because he is a former Paymaster General and knows the machinery of government—and asked her to work with the Procedure Committee. They could look again at how Standing Order No. 59 and the fast-track procedure in Standing Order No. 58 could allow Law Commission Bills to go straight from Second Reading to Third Reading without the need for a full Committee stage. That would be a sure-fire way to ensure that we can use Law Commission's recommendations more frequently and make good law more regularly.

I pray in aid a very good example from Wales. The Law Commission's report “Regulating Coal Tip Safety in Wales”, which was laid before the Senedd on 24 March last year, is very important in the context of the management of disused coal tips. I can tell the House from considerable knowledge, as a former Secretary of State for Wales and a proud Welshman, that the issue is very resonant and salient in many parts of south Wales, particularly the old coalfield.

The Law Commission report then allowed the Welsh Government to produce their White Paper in May last year. A full response is coming this month, and I hope that primary legislation will follow in this current Session of the Senedd. That is a good example in Wales of everybody working together. We also do it well here in the United Kingdom Parliament, or we can do it well, but I do think we need more moments such as that when sensible provisions, such as the ones I have outlined—and there are many more that the Law Commission has proposed—can be done.

Before I end, let me say that I am particularly pleased that the Government are going to act on a very important Law Commission recommendation on economic crime. We debated that legislation some weeks ago, and it is currently before the other place. That is another example of how we can use its work to great effect.

Finally, all the arguments we had about the law of nuisance were strengthened by the fact that the Government were acting on a Law Commission recommendation to codify the common law of nuisance and put it into statute. Those were the arguments that I deployed when I was at the Dispatch Box on Second Reading of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which is now law. There are many other examples I could give.

I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister, in his response, will pay more than lip service to what his colleagues in the Ministry of Justice are saying. I know that he, as a supporter of the Law Commission and the

work of Sir Nicholas Green and all the team there, will want to shower praise on them, and rightly so. What I am looking for from my Government is a sense of commitment to making sure that we can create more good law, and that law reform is not a mere adjunct for the lawyers, but is at the heart of what it will take to make this economy grow and make this country more productive in the future. That, of course, is the key challenge for our Government and, indeed, future Governments.

5.31 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Edward Argar): I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for securing this important debate and, more broadly, for his contribution to this country's criminal justice system as a lawyer, somebody who sat on the bench, a Justice Minister, a Solicitor General, and a distinguished and reforming Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice. There is much from his tenure in that office of which he should rightly be proud. I also had the privilege and the pleasure, when an Under-Secretary of State for Justice, of serving under his leadership. I will also highlight at the outset, in response to one of his comments—and with more than a nod to the Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones)—that many things are done very well in Wales.

Let me start by offering my thanks on behalf of the Government to Sir Nicholas Green and his team for the hugely valuable work that the Law Commission undertakes, working with experts and the public to make sure the law in England and Wales remains modern, simple and fair. The sheer scale and variety of its contribution to law reform since it was established is extremely impressive, and it is difficult to find an area of the law that has not been improved in some way at some time by its work and its recommendations.

As my right hon. and learned Friend has set out, the Law Commission was created by the Law Commissions Act 1965 for the purpose of recommending reform to the law. It is a statutory arm's length public body sponsored by the Ministry of Justice, and its principal objective is to promote the reform of the law by reviewing given issues and making appropriate recommendations for change. In making those reform recommendations, its main aim is to seek to ensure that the law remains fair, modern, simple and cost-effective.

A number of specific types of reform are covered by the 1965 Act and have been enacted by the Law Commission through its work. They include the simplification and modernisation of the law through recommendations on codification, the removal of anomalies, and the repeal of obsolete and unnecessary enactments. Its remit also covers the consolidation of legislation and the streamlining of overcomplicated law, as well as the formulation of new legal approaches to emerging high-profile social policy issues.

When determining what reforms to recommend, from time to time the Law Commission consults widely, taking views from judges, lawyers, Government Departments, the voluntary and business sectors and the general public, to help draw together new programmes of law reform that are then submitted to the Lord Chancellor for their approval before undertaking the work. It can also take on individual ad hoc projects referred by Government Departments.

Before the Law Commission decides to review an area of law reform, it considers them against certain criteria, including their importance or the extent to which the law is unsatisfactory and the potential benefits of reform. It considers whether the independent non-political organisation is the most suitable body to conduct a review of the law in that area. Lastly, it considers resources, so that full consideration is given to whether the valid experience of its commissioners and staff is engaged, whether funding is available and whether a project would meet the requirements of other work, if included as part of a programme.

It is fair to say that the Law Commission has a strong and well-founded reputation for considering immensely technically complex areas of the law, which can be significant for individuals and businesses. Its independence and commitment to open consultation is a key asset when trying to build consensus on sensitive issues across a broad range of different interests.

My right hon. and learned Friend rightly alluded to the economic value of the Law Commission's work. In analysis undertaken by two independent economists in 2020, the figures are impressive. Its five largest projects over recent years have generated a net present value of more than £3 billion over 10 years. Even its most technical codification projects can save money. For example, the sentencing code reforms enacted in the Sentencing Act 2020 are estimated to generate savings in the justice system of up to £250 million over 10 years. The Electronic Trade Documents Bill, based on Law Commission recommendations, is an example of the Law Commission's value and influence on Government business currently before Parliament. The impact assessment for the Bill estimates net benefits to UK businesses of £1.137 billion over 10 years when enacted. These are not insignificant sums.

Recommendations from at least four of its recent criminal law projects are currently in or about to be before Parliament. They include the protection of official data project, leading to new espionage offences in the National Security Bill; the modernising communications offences project, which has led to communications offences in the Online Safety Bill; the intimate image abuse project, alluded to by my right hon. and learned Friend, where the Government have publicly committed to partial implementation in respect of the sharing offences in the Online Safety Bill, reflecting the scope of that legislation; and the corporate criminal liability project, from which the Government have publicly committed to including a new "failure to prevent fraud" offence in the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill.

On the implementation of the Law Commission's work more generally, my right hon. and learned Friend has set out his concerns—if I can put it that way—that there can sometimes be unnecessary delays implementing its recommendations, and some may remain unenacted after publication. There are many reasons why some recommendations are not taken forward. Sometimes, there is a simple change of ministerial priorities or possibly, in recent years, of Ministers. There may be a lack of parliamentary time.

However, in addition to ministerial commitments, as he alluded to, a new parliamentary procedure was introduced for uncontroversial—if I may put it that way—consolidating Law Commission Bills. This procedure helps to reduce the time that this type of Bill spends on

[*Edward Argar*]

the Floor of the House, by providing for certain stages to be carried out in Lords Committee. That makes perfect sense where a Bill consolidates existing provisions without making substantive changes, and where that consolidation has been done by the experts at the Law Commission to accurately reflect the existing law passed by Parliament.

My right hon. and learned Friend mentioned Standing Order No. 59 and its procedures. I hear what he said, but any changes to Standing Orders would be a matter for the House to consider. He may wish to raise this matter with the Lord President of the Council, my right hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt), and I will ensure that her office is made aware of what he has said. The Procedure Committee may also wish to take a view on that. I am fortunate in that my Parliamentary Private Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Aaron Bell), is a member of that Committee, so I am sure he will be able, in that capacity, to ensure that it is aware of the views that my right hon. and learned Friend has expressed today.

Implementation rates can, of course, vary wildly year on year, depending on a number of factors. It is not unusual for implementation to happen some time after the publication of final reports. If we look at implementation over the last 10 years since 2013, 61 projects have been completed but only 13, or 21%, have been implemented, although 22, or 36%, have been accepted by Government either in full or in part. In the last five years since 2018, 27 projects have been completed, with only one, 4%, implemented in full or in part, although 12 reports have been accepted either in full or in part.

The more recent statistics are reflective of the fact that the last five years, as I think right hon. and hon. Members will agree, have certainly not been typical in parliamentary terms, in relation to the nature of what this House has had to deal with—hence the vast majority of projects that still require further consideration before they receive a Government response. Looking over a longer period, the overall figures on the implementation of the Commission's work are very impressive. In fact, between 1965 and 2022, 64% of Law Commission law reform reports were implemented, in whole or in part, with only 13% rejected or 5% superseded. Therefore, in total, about two thirds of all Law Commission recommendations have been implemented to date, with only a small fraction being explicitly rejected by Government.

Full details of the implementation status of all Law Commission reports—whether they have been implemented, are still awaiting a response or are in the process of implementation—will be set out in the next edition of the Government's implementation report, which is currently being drafted and is expected to be published shortly. Until it is published, I hope my right hon. and learned Friend will accept that I cannot pre-empt the status of any particular project, but I know he will take a close interest in it when it is published.

Impressive though the overall implementation rate is, there is always room for improvement. One obvious and immediate opportunity might come out of the increased engagement that the Government will have in the formation of the Commission's next, and 14th, programme of law

reform. As my right hon. and learned Friend will be aware—he certainly should be aware—that is the result of the new funding and operating arrangements he introduced in 2020 as Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice. They create a new model to give the Commission better financial stability during the year so it can better prioritise resources on established projects, while seeking new work. To facilitate that, the Commission now receives 100% of its funding directly from the Ministry of Justice. My right hon. and learned Friend has ensured that the Commission's foundations in respect of its resourcing are sound and provide a solid base from which it can move forward.

The majority of the work that the Commission undertakes is in programmes of work submitted for approval to the Secretary of State for Justice, as its sponsoring Minister, every four to five years. The Commission recently announced that it had decided to extend the timetable for finalising the content of the programme in view of the Government's focus on priorities for the remainder of this Parliament. Given the time remaining, it simply does not consider that now is the right time to establish a new long-term programme of work that would cover the next five years and beyond.

However, thanks to the new arrangements that my right hon. and learned Friend put in place, the work on its current and 13th programme, launched in 2017, can continue at pace, including on projects such as smart contracts, electronic signatures, automated vehicles, intermediated securities and modernising trust law. Others focused on the way in which the law works for the individual or businesses, such as on surrogacy, residential leasehold, unfair terms in residential leasehold, disposing of the dead, simplifying the immigration rules, employment law hearing structures, administrative review, museum collections and liability for chancel repair. I think that gives a sense of the breadth of the work undertaken by the Commission.

I am happy to report that the new model has already proven extremely successful since it was introduced, suggesting a fair degree of foresight on the part of my right hon. and learned Friend, allowing the Commission the flexibility to undertake more ad hoc work for Government, as well as the capacity to continue to work on any projects from its current 13th programme that are either yet to be started or completed. It is currently working at full capacity and is likely to remain so for some time. Given that the new funding model will rely on increased and proactive engagement between the Department and the Commission during its planning and development, more thought can be given to the prospect of implementation during the process.

The Commission has already consulted publicly on ideas for the projects that the 14th programme might contain, in addition to its own ideas on themes such as emerging technologies, the law following our exit from the EU, the environment, legal resilience and other ideas for simplification or codification of the law. It has continued to refine and develop those and all other ideas received since then. That in itself should present a much clearer picture to the Government of the likelihood of eventual implementation when they ask the Commission to take forward a piece of work in the new programme.

Let me end by reassuring my right hon. and learned Friend—my friend, indeed—that implementation will be a closely considered part of the approval process for

the next programme of work, and that the Government still fully intend to agree a new programme with the Commission in due course, allowing it to build on its work to date and the strong foundations put in place by my right hon. and learned Friend.

Question put and agreed to.

5.45 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 1 March 2023

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

Health and Wellbeing Services: East of England

9.30 am

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered health and wellbeing services in the East of England.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I am grateful to have secured this important debate, and to be joined by my colleagues from the east of England across all parties to highlight and discuss the many substantive issues relating to health and wellbeing in the east of England. I welcome my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Care, who will be familiar with some of these issues from the deluge of correspondence she has no doubt been receiving and the recent debates in this Chamber.

This debate follows the excellent one secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) on 31 January on the progress towards the Government's levelling-up missions in the east of England. He cannot join us for this debate, but I thank him for championing the levelling-up agenda in our region and other colleagues who have supported this, particularly those on the all-party parliamentary group for the east of England.

Today I will speak about some of the regional issues and the specific health and wellbeing issues that are relevant to Essex and my Witham constituency. The Minister will be familiar with the "Levelling up the East of England: 2023-2030" report and its commentary on health and wellbeing matters. The report highlights that, while many areas in the region excel, there is a significant number of places and communities where deprivation is affecting outcomes and opportunities and where we need to focus our efforts.

With the 2021 census data showing the east of England to be the fastest growing region in terms of population—up by 8.7% or just under 500,000 to 6.3 million people—it will come as no great surprise to Members that our region is, frankly, pressed. It faces challenges from the health and wellbeing pressures associated with a growing and ageing population. The Office for National Statistics projects that by 2041, the number of people in the region aged over 65 will have increased by more than 450,000.

In particular, the report highlights the data on healthy life expectancy. Both men and women are spending over one fifth of their lives in less than good health. In 2018 to 2020, average healthy life expectancy for men in the region was 64.6 years, compared with average life expectancy of 80.2 years; and for women, average healthy life expectancy was 65 years of an average 83.3 years. The challenge speaks for itself. Some of the figures are gradually improving, but this is a significant concern across the region. The scale and beauty of our region masks a number of health inequalities.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for leading the debate. One of the challenges we have had in my part of Essex for many decades is the difficulty of recruiting doctors, in part because no doctors were ever trained in Essex. It was fantastic news when, five years ago, thanks to the Conservative Government's policy and support, a new medical school opened in Chelmsford, training doctors in Essex for the first time. The first doctors will graduate in just a few weeks, and I am delighted to tell my right hon. Friend that the drop-out rate on that course is only 3%—the average across the country is 8%—and many of those new doctors want to stay working locally in our area, which is fantastic. Will she and the Minister join me in supporting Anglia Ruskin University's campaign to double the size of the medical school in Chelmsford?

Priti Patel: My right hon. Friend is correct. I remember having the opportunity to support the business case for the medical school around seven years ago, and I pay tribute to everyone who was involved in establishing that amazing medical school. In Essex in particular and in the east of England region, we are very proud to have the Anglia Ruskin University medical school. I have seen the campus—the size, the scale, the facilities—but also the enthusiasm of the students there. My right hon. Friend makes an incredibly important point, which is that we have to grow our own in Essex, and in the eastern region, and we need those students to be placed locally in GP practices to grow the footprint locally. I will come to that, particularly when I speak about primary care.

The point about the medical school, healthy life expectancy and the delivery of good health outcomes speak to the challenges we face in the region, which include heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, lung cancer, stroke, depressive disorders, falls and drug-related deaths. As our population grows, on top of the age profile changes that we are experiencing and will continue to experience, we will need more qualified GPs, but also medical specialists to serve those individuals and to support the community. The difficulties that we face comprise not only demographics, but the scale of the health challenges and, I say to the Minister, the issue of geography. The east of England is a diverse part of the country, and its rurality and coastal nature put pressure on services.

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that since we have been devolving powers and money to local integrated care systems, centralised NHS England appears deeply inefficient in many ways? In Clacton, we have private dentists up and ready to serve with the NHS, but they are unable to do so. The integrated care boards are going to absorb new commissioning powers, but without flexibility in NHS England rules, will we not just be shuffling a deck of cards?

Priti Patel: My hon. Friend is the voice of common sense on this. He will recall that we covered some of those issues in the debate we held here on, I think, 31 January. I spoke about the state being very inflexible and centralising too many resources, which need to be cascaded downwards to meet the needs of patient care.

My views on the size of the state are well known, but on this issue I think that, yet again, the centralised approach is wrong. It is simply not delivering the patient

[Priti Patel]

outcomes and the care that we need. We need more flexibility. ICBs are brand new, and they are finding their feet right now. We as Members of Parliament have to support them so that they can establish themselves and work with us to understand the needs of our constituents and communities. There is nothing worse than central Government funnelling cash to another centralised organisation and bureaucracy within a region, and that money going on, for example, NHS managers and bureaucracy, not the healthcare that is needed.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): Let me pick up the point about NHS dentistry, the commissioning of which, I am told, is about to be transferred to the ICBs. We probably all have a pretty grim constituency experience of people trying to access NHS dentistry. Does the right hon. Lady agree that it might have been a good idea to hand that power back to local areas quite a long time ago?

Priti Patel: The hon. Gentleman is right. For years, I have spoken about local healthcare provision. Practitioners know best, and it is not for central structures to dictate the needs of a local community. With that, there is the issue of access to services that matter so much. Dentistry has been controversial for too long. As a result, children are not accessing dentistry in the way they should, and health outcomes are absolutely shocking and appalling, particularly in young children.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on securing this debate. I recently had a meeting with Dr Nick Stolls, who for 20 years ran the local dentistry committee in Norfolk and Suffolk and is now the professional lead for dentistry and wellbeing for the integrated care board. He described work done by the British Dental Association that points out that Norfolk is almost a dental desert, with no dentists able to take contracts, in some cases because of NHS England's inflexibility. Does my right hon. Friend agree that reform is needed? Will she invite the Minister to agree that, as the British Dental Association said, fundamental reform of the NHS dental contract is urgently required to truly address the challenges that patients, dentists and the wider NHS are experiencing?

Priti Patel: I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. The British Dental Association has been pressing for reform probably for as long as I have been in Parliament, and I am very familiar with its case. My hon. Friend speaks very clearly about access and inflexibility. Importantly, if there is no flexibility in the system, there is no opportunity to provide services to meet local need accessibly and in a way that means people do not think they will be charged or subject to barriers to access.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the right hon. Lady. She was a very effective Home Secretary and it is good to see her just as active on the Back Benches—well done. This subject does not affect me personally, but I want to ask her about a similar issue: face-to-face GP appointments. It is vital for a GP to assess what they see as well as the words they hear. My constituents wish to have face-to-face appointments, but they seem to be restricted. Is the right hon. Lady experiencing the same problems? What would she suggest should be done to solve them?

Priti Patel: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. I have a whole section of my speech on GP access, particularly in the Witham constituency. That has been a contentious issue throughout my entire time as a Member of Parliament. He is absolutely right, and I have no doubt that his constituents and constituents in the east of England and across the country are facing the same challenges. There is a range of reasons for that, which I will touch on.

I think the Minister will be interested to know that in the east of England—this relates to facilities and access to care—per capita spend is £2,889, which is the lowest of any region and below the national average of £3,236. Like so much of the rest of the country, we face challenges. Ours is an ageing part of the country—our population is getting older—so we face disproportionate health and social care challenges and workforce demands. The east of England has the smallest number of nurses per 1,000 people of any region in the country. I urge Ministers to review not just the flexibility of dentistry contracts, but the east of England's metrics on healthy life expectancy—this comes back to the levelling-up report—and provide more certainty to the region to address the disparities, which affect constituents across the board.

I also ask the Minister to look at what can be done to reduce ill health and early death, particularly as a result of preventable factors. Prevention is rightly a significant feature of the NHS, but we have serious issues in the east of England. Health providers and local authorities across the region would be really keen to engage with the Government on that. I am going to volunteer them all, because they offer themselves up constantly for new pilots and initiatives; we are very proactive. I pay tribute to Essex County Council, which has done a great deal of work on this issue, and other key providers that have the ability, capacity and capability to provide services.

As well as support for the region's levelling-up ambition on healthy life expectancy, we are very keen to see improvements in wellbeing, where social prescribing comes into the mix. I say to the Minister and all our colleagues here today and people across the region that it is incumbent upon us to start to narrow that gap from top-performing areas. We need to start closing the gap, so that we start to see equity across these big challenges. As the levelling-up report has demonstrated, this is a difficult health indicator and target to measure, but we have the opportunity now to be innovative, and to work with new providers as well as our county council in the way that my hon. Friend the Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) has spoken about—a less bureaucratic and more flexible way that helps to drive local outcomes with our partners.

Vicky Ford: In my part of Essex, great work is already being done on levelling up. For example, it was never possible for people to get IVF in Mid Essex due to lower levels of funding, but that has now been levelled up, so that from 1 April, women will be able to get IVF treatment on the NHS in Mid Essex, which is really important to so many women who want to start a family.

Priti Patel: I thank my right hon. Friend for her comments.

I have some very specific Witham issues. The Minister and the Department will be familiar with my bundles of correspondence on the Witham health centre. One of the most important ways that health and wellbeing in Witham, in Essex and across the East of England can be improved is by strengthening accessible services that are delivered within the local community. We have already touched on this point. That applies to the provision of health services in Witham.

I never tire of raising the needs of my constituents across the constituency and in Witham town; it is growing as a constituency and a community, and we are very proud of that. We have seen some amazing outcomes—for example, in education, in our rail services and in the infrastructure that we have been pursuing—but there is more to do. We have seen hundreds of new homes being granted planning consent and thousands of homes being built, with more residents coming to my constituency. Ours is a fantastic part of Essex—I do believe that the only way is Essex. Importantly, we now have a blend of new families and families who have lived in Witham for many generations. Like many towns, we have a growing population of elderly residents living in care homes and homes around the town, and of young people as well—we are a commuter town—with young families. With that blend and that increase, we need a new health centre.

Since the start of the pandemic three years ago, the four GP surgeries in the town have seen their patient lists increase by nearly 3% to almost 32,000 people. Between the four surgeries, there are just 13 full-time equivalent GPs, giving an average patient to GP ratio across the town of about 2,440. That is about 50% greater than the national average. The patients to GPs ratios across those four surgeries range from 2,045 patients per GP to 3,150 patients per GP, and each surgery is well above the national average.

With so many patients—in fact, this has been the case throughout my entire time as Member of Parliament for the Witham constituency—many constituents regularly report not getting appointments, and far too many are unable to take action when it comes to dealing with their own health concerns. Cancer risks are being picked up too late. In the light of the health disparities that I have already raised, serious and debilitating health conditions will not be serviced and attended to in a timely manner.

This will be no great surprise to the Minister or anyone in the Department, and I apologise to no one for the vigorous way in which I keep on raising the need for a health centre. It is one of the key projects that I have campaigned for during my time as Member of Parliament. The money has to come directly to Witham town. With four GP surgeries and more than 30,000 patients, there is a clear and compelling business case. I have offered to write the business case for the GPs myself. I have done everything to facilitate the GPs coming together, which has been rather challenging; the Minister will be well aware of the business models that mean that GPs do not always want to reach agreement and work together. I am sorry to report that those models have been a major underlying problem.

Having a new facility—this is the key point—would mean more specialist treatments and services delivered locally. It would give local constituents the greatest assurance that, whether they have young children or

they are elderly, their needs will be taken care of within the town itself, and that there will be medical practitioners, therapists, nurses and others who can absolutely ensure that care is there for them. We should also bring in new providers and do much more on social prescribing. I am a great advocate of that, and we have to have a blended approach when it comes to access to primary care.

Giles Watling: On that point, I would like to bring up Clacton. We have a new community diagnostic centre, which is absolutely brilliant. I thank the Minister for that, but there was supposed to be a primary care hub, too. I had a meeting recently with one of our local GPs, and the primary care hub is not forthcoming at the moment. Hospitals such as the one in Clacton are very important because they take pressure off the bigger hospitals locally, such as those in Ipswich and Colchester. It is very important that we have a primary care hub, so I ask the Minister to respond to that.

Priti Patel: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments about his beautiful constituency and the healthcare needs.

I want to press the Minister. For too long, my constituents and the residents of Witham have been waiting for a medical facility—a new health hub, as we have dubbed it—and I am afraid that there has been inertia in the way that people have come together locally to drive this outcome. I give credit to the new ICB and to one of our NHS colleagues heading up the ICB, Dan Doherty, who is trying to get GPs to come together. We are looking at a new practice centre and locations are being discussed, but enough is enough. We need this to come together, and it needs central leadership. We have spoken about the centralisation of money and resources. The one thing that central Government could do that would actually make a difference is to say that the project needs to go ahead, and then to tell the local ICB and GPs, “You will get the resources, the help and the support, because it is your job and your responsibility to deliver for local constituents and residents.” That is key.

We are, proudly, a growing constituency, and Tiptree is another major population centre where there are challenges in health provision. Tiptree is a very famous village, although its village status is sometimes questioned because it is growing and growing. The village is famous for its legendary jam-making business, which has a royal warrant, and we are very proud of Wilkin & Sons. The medical practice there has 12,000 patients registered but has just two practising GPs, so although the practice has a range of healthcare professionals working there, the level of GP provision is too low.

To come back to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Clacton, if we are to stop the pressures on A&E—for my constituency, the pressures are on Colchester Hospital, which is where Tiptree faces, and the pressures on the Witham side are on Broomfield Hospital, towards Chelmsford—we have to ensure that our local practices are supported and that we increase our GP ratios. That also speaks to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) about the need to bolster the medical school and ensure that its graduates come to work in our GP practices. That is hugely important, and we in Essex absolutely believe that there is a great opportunity to

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increase GP provision. The medical school is outstanding. We want that link to be made and we need more GPs to come through from Anglia Ruskin. I will put in a shameless plug: come to Witham and Tiptree, and use the area as a network, through a new hub in Witham town, to then go further.

There have been interventions about dentistry, and I reiterate the point about the BDA's statistics: around 93% of dentists in the east of England are not accepting any new NHS outpatients, and the proportion for children is 81%. We should pause and reflect on those statistics, which I find astonishing because of the health and wellbeing implications. We see poor dental hygiene and tooth decay in children, which is simply unacceptable. The Government announced a package of measures to improve dental health and access to NHS dentists in November, but the issue seems to be deteriorating for lots of reasons.

I know that the Government are doing much more on prevention, but we need what we have seen from the Suffolk and North East Essex ICB, which provided funds for children aged between two and eight to experience supervised brushing in early years and school settings. I am a big believer in our schools, which can do so much for children's health and wellbeing. I said that we were all for innovation and pilots, and initiatives such as that should be supported across other schools to improve health and wellbeing with regard to dental care, and to show children what can be done and how to look after themselves. If we cannot get it right in the early years, frankly, we end up picking up the pieces later in life. This is about not just costs, but the wider health implications. There is so much preventive work we can do at the outset.

I will also take this opportunity to comment on our ambulance services across the east of England. I am sure that all of us here today—including you, Mr Hollobone, with Kettering Hospital—are all too familiar with the challenges for our ambulance services. Ten years ago, in 2013—I am sorry to say that I remember this too well—the East of England Ambulance Service was in crisis. There was a lack of investment in ambulances and paramedics, devastating concerns over patient care and appalling mismanagement of the board.

I pay tribute to colleagues across the east of England back then, because we came together, spoke with one voice and campaigned, to the extent that we forced the board of directors to resign and brought in new management—such was the scale of what was going on; it was appalling. The trust was turned around and I pay particular tribute to my noble Friend Earl Howe, who was a Health Minister at the time. Not only was he supportive, but he would sit in on meetings, come to the constituencies and sit with the ambulance trust. I also pay tribute to the successive chief executives at the trust who have improved plans and increased investment in ambulances and paramedics. It has been a slog, but we cannot overlook the hard work that has taken place over the past decade. I pay tribute to all those, in public service in particular, who gave up time with the trust to turn things around.

In January, I met the current chief executive of the trust, Tom Abell, and visited the call-handling centre in Broomfield, which my right hon. Friend the Member

for Chelmsford will know. They are changing things. The call handlers are first class and I pay tribute to them; they are dynamic and so engaged. They are also smart, agile and triaging calls, which makes a tremendous difference. We want to support that and the right kind of patient outcomes, and they really care about patient outcomes.

We have to recognise that our paramedics and ambulances continue to face delays. That is preventing them from being out in the communities and reaching medical emergencies and injuries, so we still have complaints. I would welcome the Minister's thoughts and insights on the east of England, and where further actions can be undertaken to improve services. I mentioned Broomfield Hospital in Chelmsford and Colchester Hospital for emergency care treatments. Importantly, those hospitals are part of the infrastructure and need to be reassured that the golden thread of integration reaches them, so that we do not see the appalling days of stacking that we saw many years ago and patients facing unnecessary delays.

Alongside that, we need reassurance and commitment from the Government to invest in and support hospitals, particularly in acute care settings in Essex and the east of England. I know that other colleagues will want to touch on that. An ageing population has more complex needs and our hospitals must be equipped to support that. Just as our ambulance service has been on a journey of improvement, the two hospitals have been on quite a journey of improvement. Broomfield was burdened with the most ridiculous private finance initiative costs when I became the Member of Parliament for Witham. I am afraid that those PFI costs—it was subjected to them by the previous Labour Government—were eye-watering, and the most horrendous debt had been put on the hospital at the time.

Colchester General Hospital has had one of the most interesting journeys. It spent long periods in special measures and required improvements, and it has now become integrated into the East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust. Many of the old issues have been resolved and there has been tremendous leadership there as well, notwithstanding the pressures faced during the covid pandemic. I pay tribute to everyone working at the hospitals who were involved in the turnaround plans. We have had periods pre and post pandemic with long waiting times.

Before the pandemic, Colchester hospital had a £44 million plan, which included the rebuilding of the day surgery unit and investment in a new orthopaedic centre. Those are important developments that we want to see come together. I look forward to hearing from the Minister, who is welcome to come to the constituency—or the region, I should say—at any time to see the panoply of issues that we have. Services need investment. There are improvements, but at the same time we need to get that golden thread, the integrated care, totally integrated.

As well as speaking about GP surgeries and hospitals, I will also mention our pharmacies, which play a vital role in providing health services to our residents. Pharmacies are located in the heart of communities. I have many brilliant pharmacies, and there are fantastic pharmacists around the country. They are the unsung heroes in our communities. We should recognise that they are desperate to play a stronger role in primary care. They want to help people to get treatments and help with prescriptions.

I urge the Minister to speak to community pharmacists. I was concerned when I recently met a community pharmacist in the wonderful village of Tollesbury, where I was informed that the funding that they had received over the past seven years has been squeezed by 30%. I have been in touch with the Department about that.

Community pharmacists say that without urgent intervention, pharmacies will close, because of pressures on funding associated with prescription drugs and the NHS tariff. Pharmacies are to a certain extent subsidising the prescriptions that they issue in the community. The concerns are such that we are now moving towards a large number of permanent pharmacy closures, putting the safe supply of prescription medicines at risk. I have also heard that there are opportunities for the Government to empower pharmacies to do more by providing a blueprint for the future of community pharmacy, but that has to be backed by investment, which we are not yet seeing—we are seeing a continuing squeeze.

This issue is a no-brainer. In any village, constituency or community that has a community pharmacy, people can go there to be reassured if they feel unwell and want advice, rather than putting pressure on local GPs or, worse still, hospitals. With the son of a pharmacist now our Prime Minister, there is a great opportunity for the pharmacy agenda to take greater precedence and priority across the NHS and in our communities, so I want to press the Minister on that.

As my Essex colleagues are still here, it would be remiss of me not to raise one of the most contentious subjects that we face in Essex: the pressures of mental health services in our county, which has been raised in this Chamber before. I am sorry to say this, but we have seen families left devastated when loved ones in the care of mental health services have lost their lives, and families are now frustrated when they seek answers from the bureaucratic side because of the lack of accountability and transparency in the NHS trust.

On 31 January, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford held a debate on the Essex mental health independent inquiry, and our concerns are not being allayed at all. The inquiry's chair, Dr Geraldine Strathee, has raised many concerns. I pay tribute to her for her diligent work and boldness in speaking out and raising concerns about the lack of transparency and people not providing evidence to the inquiry. Both she and the current chief exec of the Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust are encouraging and supporting staff to come forward to participate in this inquiry.

The Secretary of State, to his credit, has shown strong interest. He is trying to give us assurances that the inquiry may be put on a statutory footing, and we welcome that. However—I say this as a former Home Secretary who has been involved in setting up public inquiries into some of the most devastating issues—we would prefer evidence and information for the inquiry to come forward as soon as possible. I am conscious that—and I have said this to many of the families and victims—when inquiries are put on a statutory footing, it sometimes becomes harder for people to feel that they can come forward. The disclosure of names and personal details can become subject to some contention.

The point is that, for too long, families have been fobbed off with excuses and have had a lack of support. They have not been treated with respect and seriousness when they have raised concerns about their loved ones.

Many are victims that have experienced the most horrific abuse at the hands of the trust. We now need the inquiry to deliver the answers that everyone is seeking. I would like the Minister to give an update on where we are on that.

Let me turn to another important point that is linked to the inquiry. We are experiencing too many mental health issues across society, and that is devastating. There is much more that we can do now with a focus on mental health and wellbeing in our schools, colleges and universities. We must put a particular focus on our young people. I am deeply concerned to hear of young people self-harming. That is not the subject of this debate, but it has been a subject in the House around online safety, the forthcoming Online Safety Bill and the roles and responsibilities relating to the type of information that is put out on social media networks and things of that nature. This comes back to prevention, but there is more that we can do on education and awareness. However, we must have specialist practitioners locally and in the community to provide the essential support. I would welcome some insights from the Minister on what education providers are doing in this area.

As a former Home Secretary, I will take the liberty of raising the issue of policing and mental health. In the police and crime plan, the Government that I was involved in made it abundantly clear that the police should not be the automatic backstop and default in dealing with mental health cases and patients. That therefore uses valuable police resources and means hours spent sitting in hospitals and A&E because mental health facilities were just not accessible. That is changing thanks to the Government and the initiative that I and the former Policing Ministers put in place, but it speaks to the mental health ecosystem and the numerous pressures on it.

On education providers and schools, constituents have raised concerns with me about how the health services are supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities. The Minister will be aware that health partners have a role to play in education, health and care plans for young students. However, the delays are not just cumbersome, but deeply stressful for pupils, families, parents and households. I am sure that all Members present can wax lyrical about the challenges in securing services, including speech and language therapy, to help young people and support them with their needs.

I go on about this a lot, but I believe that the money must follow the student. I still think we do not see enough of that. I have a terrible case of a youngster with very specific needs—high needs—as part of his education, health and care plan. However, the money that has gone to the school is just not following him in the way that it should for outcomes. We all know about delays in securing autism assessments. That is simply not good enough. We know it has been exacerbated by the pandemic, but we must do more to address the issue.

I will come to a near-conclusion by touching on a few other areas. I have already mentioned Essex County Council, which—all credit to it—has a strong record on investing in health, social care and wellbeing. I know that it would welcome details of its public health grant; it is that time of the calendar year when funding allocations come up. The council is also involved in piloting Active Essex, exploring what more can be done through prevention

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and enablement in health and social care systems to improve independence and health through increased physical activity.

On health and social care, I pay tribute to Essex County Council and Councillor John Spence. He is a remarkable individual who is really championing this area. If I may say so, central Government should spend some time with us in Essex to look at the innovative ways in which we are driving outcomes. The council has also transformed day services. It has established the “Meaningful Lives Matter” programme, and it is working with local employers to support adults with learning disabilities and autism. As a former employment Minister, I believe the more we can do to support people to get them into meaningful work, the better. It has great outcomes for health and wellbeing. We want more of that.

The council has a care technology service, which was launched in 2021 and is supporting 5,200 people. Of course, we all believe in making use of technology, and technology to improve health outcomes and independence is crucial. People do not want to be centralised or institutionalised; they want to be able to access services and live their lives. We are seeing good outcomes for people experiencing memory loss.

The council is working with the three integrated care systems that cover the county and supporting hospitals with discharges, which is obviously important from the social care perspective. The Essex Wellbeing Service has evolved. I emphasise that it is using both statutory and community service resources to support health and wellbeing outcomes. I invite the Minister to come to Essex to meet our colleagues—not just John Spence but the leader of the county council, Councillor Kevin Bentley. We are on the cusp of a good degree of innovation.

I am also keen to support new schemes that can help physical and mental health and wellbeing. I have touched on social prescribing, but I am also about to launch a new initiative with schools called “Get Witham Growing”. Among other things, I will involve schools in growing cosmos seeds from the national plant collection, as well as food seeds. We can get much more holistic outcomes, as well as the education, health and wellbeing benefits. Frankly, we can plant them now for future generations. I encourage other hon. Members to pick that up as well.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford mentioned IVF support. Hormone replacement therapy treatments are also in the news. It is important to raise that point, because constituents have expressed concerns; people across the country would like reassurance from the Minister on that issue. I have already spoken about the health hub in Witham town, but phlebotomy services are something that we have raised consistently for over a decade. Access to blood tests is crucial; we want to see much more support in that area, both locally and across the region.

My final point is quite topical. I raise it because my constituency is growing. In fact, Essex is growing—not just from planting seeds; our population continues to grow. We have a lot of house building, with developments across Chelmsford, Clacton and Witham. They are not small. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford has Beaulieu Park, which is a massive development in

various phases. I have Tollgate, which consists of thousands and thousands of new homes. In Witham town we have phased development, which used to be the old Witham Lodge development. However, something is missing when it comes to planning.

That is the whole issue when we speak about pressures on local health services. We are not seeing developer contributions stack up to meet the needs of the growing local population when it comes to the moneys going to local councils, whether through the community infrastructure levy or section 106, to get long-term, sustainable investments. Currently, we see developers offer cash amounts based on a formula relating to the number of new dwellings being constructed. It is impossible to refuse applications on these grounds—that is a planning point. However, we need to ensure that the cash amounts made available to councils and the NHS for new facilities actually materialise, because the money is currently not following people and outcomes.

Vicky Ford: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right that the money for infrastructure that comes from developments needs to go to every sort of infrastructure that our households need. I was deeply shocked to learn that over the past four years, Chelmsford City Council, under Lib Dem leadership, has not allocated a single penny to the NHS. Indeed, neither of the two projects approved by the previous Conservative leadership—the Beaulieu Park and Sutherland Lodge medical centres—has moved forward under Lib Dem leadership. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is shocking, and yet another reason why we need to take back Conservative control of Chelmsford City Council this May?

Priti Patel: I absolutely agree. If I remember rightly, both my right hon. Friend and I have been involved in meetings with one particular health provider, which I will not name but which was totally inadequate, about Sutherland Lodge and another practice in my constituency.

The situation is untenable and totally unsustainable. I have pressed this point many times, but I would really welcome the Minister’s working with Ministers in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to secure those health contributions. It is a bone of contention—one that our constituents and their Members of Parliament are angry about. That Department used to be called the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. My constituency has been subject to proposals for a garden community on which millions of pounds were wasted, when money from central Government—from the old MHCLG—could have gone, via new homes, into our community to give us a health hub in Witham, which would have bolstered health services across the constituency and across Essex, because we are growing.

I have deliberately referenced many parts of the NHS and the challenges around health and wellbeing in the region. I hope that I have shown how interconnected many of these issues are; none of them sits in isolation. That speaks to a wider point raised in a previous debate. While the size of the state grows and grows, the lack of integration in our communities and at the grassroots is a sticking point. It is very challenging.

I thank colleagues for their contributions. Importantly, this is a real moment for the Government to start to integrate our statutory service delivery, not just through

the integrated care boards, but across local councils, and hopefully drive better outcomes in health and wellbeing across Witham, Essex and the east of England.

10.18 am

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel) on securing this important debate. I also congratulate the APPG for the east of England on shining a light on how the east of England is getting a raw deal in Government funding for public services.

Nowhere is that raw deal more acutely felt than in health and wellbeing services. In the east of England, per capita spend on health is the lowest of any UK region or nation, at £2,889 compared with £3,236 nationally. Combine that with the fact that the east of England has the highest population growth of any region, at 8.3%, and it is not difficult to see why, after 13 years of Conservative mismanagement, people are waiting far too long for GP, hospital and dental appointments, and even for an ambulance to turn up to a category 1 call, where there is a threat to life.

Figures released yesterday by the Royal College of Emergency Medicine show that the east of England has been the worst performing NHS region for the last four months, when measured against the four-hour standard. One in 11 patients who were admitted to hospital in the east of England waited 12 hours or more in an emergency department after the decision to admit them was made. That means that the sickest and most vulnerable patients disproportionately experience delays to care, which is why the excess mortality rate is going through the roof. Many of them are preventable deaths.

For years we simply have not had the investment in the workforce to provide enough medical staff, including doctors, nurses and midwives, to look after a growing ageing population with increasingly complex needs. Staff are burned out covering gaps in care, and exhausted after covid. The problems are so extensive that the Government do not seem to know where to start to fix the broken system. The urgent and emergency care recovery plan, announced just over a month ago, does nothing to get patients a GP appointment sooner, or to restore district nursing so that patients can be cared for in the community.

The Chancellor recognised the importance of investing in the NHS workforce while he was Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee. It is a shame that he does not put his money where his mouth is now, and broker a deal with nurses, ambulance drivers, paramedics and junior doctors to end the strikes that are causing so much disruption and stress to staff and patients alike. East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust employees will strike next week for the first time.

Many public service workers cannot afford the cost of living. Why will this Government not listen to them and consider offering them a fair wage for a day's work? This is not just any work; it is critical, life-saving and highly stressful work. My constituents in Bedford and Kempston want to see the end of these industrial disputes. They are sick and tired of the fact that nothing works any more in this country. They are tired of the Government blaming anyone but themselves for the state we are in. It is the Government's job to sort the disputes out, so they should get on and do it.

Giles Watling: Does the hon. Gentleman not appreciate that it would be far better to have a 5% wage rise when inflation is down at 2%, which would make the rise much more effective? One of the most effective things that we can do right now is bring inflation down and make wages actually mean something.

Mohammad Yasin: The hon. Member must know that these people have faced real-terms pay cuts for years. They are critical workers in our NHS; they deserve better. After many years, for the Government to offer them 5% during this cost of living crisis is not good enough. They should be concentrating on work, but they cannot pay their bills, they have to choose between heating and eating, and they are worried about their families. That is the problem. These people deserve better working conditions and pay than they are getting from this Government.

I put on the record how pleased I was to see the East London NHS Foundation Trust people and culture team named team of the year at the Healthcare People Management Association annual awards. It is time that the Government got their act together to release the capital funding to give the trust the go-ahead to build the much-needed mental health village in Bedford. The number of mentally unwell patients, including young people, who are forced out of the area to access treatment is alarming, and it is growing. How much longer do they have to wait for the promised in-patient facility in their area? My constituents deserve better community care and hospitals need relief, so I urge the Government to finally release the funding to build the facilities desperately needed in my constituency.

10.24 am

Feryal Clark (Enfield North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I start by thanking and paying tribute to the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel) for securing this important debate and her continued pursuit of the issue, but also for painting a comprehensive picture of the health and wellbeing disparities in her constituency and across the east of England. I welcome her comments about and the enthusiasm she showed for further including pharmacies in the way we deliver health. I support that wholeheartedly.

May I praise the important contributions made by all Members, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin)? It is clear that patients are being failed in all aspects of health and wellbeing services in the east of England. We have heard about many aspects of those services, but let me start by talking about the front door of the NHS, the GPs. Primary care and GP services are struggling, and patients are struggling to gain access to primary care. The latest patient survey tells us that those who are able to get an appointment are less and less likely to see a GP because of staff shortages.

The right hon. Member for Witham mentioned that patient numbers and needs are growing in the area, but we know that the number of fully qualified GPs in the east of England fell from 3,263 full-time equivalents to 3,020 in December 2022. Across NHS England, there is a shortage of 4,200 GPs, so I welcome the call from the right hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) for the number of medical school places at Anglia Ruskin to be doubled, although I would go further and say that we should do that across the country, maybe every year.

[Feryal Clark]

There is also a quality issue. Essex has five inadequate GP services, according to the Care Quality Commission, which is second only to London. Maternity services are also failing communities in the east of England day in, day out. At Mid and South Essex NHS Foundation Trust, such services have been found by the CQC not to have staff with the right qualifications, skills, training and experience to keep women safe from avoidable harm. Since last year, the use of gas and air pain relief at a hospital's maternity suite has been suspended on and off following a botched repair, which exposed some staff to high levels of nitrous oxide, and routine testing of the maternity suite revealed that midwives had been exposed to excess nitrous oxide levels during their shifts.

It is heartbreaking that services for mothers are so poor, and maternity services are unable even to provide the basics. Access to gas and air pain relief should be a basic when someone goes into maternity, and it is really disappointing that it is not available to mothers in the area.

Giles Watling: A moment back, the hon. Lady mentioned inadequate GP services and how some GP services fail, but is it not the job of us MPs to get involved? There were failing GP services in poor practices in Clacton. I got personally involved, we got new management in, and we turned things around. We, the MPs, can get involved. We got involved with what was then the local health authority, and we changed things. We can do that by getting together and being united with our health leaders.

Feryal Clark: I welcome those points, and I absolutely agree.

On mental health, the stories that the right hon. Member for Witham set out are devastating. I offer my sincere condolences to all those affected by the loss of loved ones between 2000 and 2020 at Essex mental health services. I also pay tribute to the families and the local MPs—especially the right hon. Member for Chelmsford, who is no longer in her place—for fighting for justice for the loved ones. A mental health unit should be a place of safety for patients, and it is heartbreaking that that was clearly not the case in Essex. It is imperative that the truth of what occurred in Essex is finally heard. As the right hon. Member for Witham said, it is vital that the families and loved ones get answers about what happened, and above all lessons must be learned. That is why the work of the Essex mental health independent inquiry is so important.

Concerns were raised in January, and the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien), said that he expected changes to be made. I will be grateful if the Minister can set out the steps the Government are taking to ensure that the inquiry can effectively investigate what went wrong and can make recommendations so that it never happens again. The inquiry is currently non-statutory. The Government said in January that they would not hesitate to change their approach if we do not see the change we need rapidly. Will the Minister tell us whether there have been any changes? Is there an update on that?

Although there are tragic extremes to health and wellbeing services in the east of England, they reflect issues that we see across the country, including patients not being seen on time and not receiving the care they need and deserve. That ultimately leaves them at risk at of adverse harm. Patients in the east of England—indeed, patients across the country—deserve more.

I would be grateful if the Minister set out the actions the Government are taking to improve care in the east of England and ensure access to primary care, safe maternity care and dentistry. Will she also give us a further update on the mental health inquiry?

10.32 am

The Minister for Social Care (Helen Whately): It is a pleasure to respond to this debate, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) on securing it. She brought her legendary laser-like scrutiny to healthcare in her constituency and the wider east of England region. As we would expect, she covered a huge amount of ground with passion and insight. She forensically dug into the detail and asked many challenging questions of me and the Government more broadly.

Several other hon. Members from the east of England made contributions, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), my hon. Friends the Members for Clacton (Giles Watling) and for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon), and the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner). From a little further afield, we heard from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)—he is no longer in his place, but it always a pleasure to hear his frequent and well-informed contributions to healthcare debates.

I welcome the work that hon. Members are doing in their constituencies to support their constituents' health and wellbeing. They are showing an interest in the activities of health and social care services in their areas, and are asking very pertinent questions. That is a very important way of driving improvement and holding the people closer to the frontline to account. I also thank them for the work they are doing, including in this debate and behind the scenes by lobbying Ministers such as me and others in the Department of Health and Social Care, to get the things that they rightly want for their constituents.

It was good to hear my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham pay tribute to Essex County Council; her comments chime with my experience of working with it. I had a call with the council on Monday to talk about the work we are doing together to reduce the number of patients in hospital waiting for discharge. I know it is working extremely hard. Its data is better than the average data across England. I heard some really good things about what the local authority is doing, working with the NHS to help patients get out of hospital more quickly, and to avoid going into hospital in the first place, which we know is better in general, particularly for older people who can lose condition if they have a long stay in hospital. I, too, have been very impressed by Essex County Council and the innovative, proactive approach that it is taking in these areas.

My right hon. Friend covered a huge amount of ground. I will respond to several of her points, but if I do not manage to cover every single one—not all of her points address areas within my brief; it might also take a huge amount of time—I am happy to ask my

ministerial colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care to follow up on those topics beyond my social care and community health brief.

I turn first to primary care, which is clearly a significant part of the points that my right hon. Friend and others have raised. She talked about the GP numbers in her area, in the context of a fast-growing population in the east of England. Nationally, we have an ageing population living with more health conditions, which is putting greater demand on our health services and, crucially, on GPs, who are not just the gatekeepers but also, in knowing the individual, have real expertise in understanding the complexity of people's health conditions. Those relationships are really important.

The GP-patient ratio is a particular concern for my right hon. Friend and other east of England colleagues. We have been boosting the primary care workforce, as she will know. The Government are on track to deliver our manifesto commitment of 26,000 more people working in primary care by 2024. We have already recruited more than 25,000 of those 26,000. On GPs specifically, there are more than 2,000 full-time equivalent doctors in general practice as of December last year compared with a year before. We are increasing the numbers of people working in general practice.

I realise that the pressures still remain and it takes time to make these changes; I also realise that there are disparities in the numbers of GPs in different parts of the country. Within a particular area, from one town to the next, there can be very different levels of GP coverage. This is very much a work in progress, and of course it takes time to train doctors, as we all know.

I was very glad to hear my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford speak about the Anglia Ruskin medical school, one of five new medical schools that we have opened. It is playing its part in delivering a 25% uplift—a record uplift—in the number of medical students training in England. I know that my hon. and right hon. Friends supported the opening of this medical school, which is really important.

The school is not only important for its contribution to increasing the number of future doctors across the country, but also because it is located in the east of England. That is no coincidence. This and the other medical schools—there is one close to my constituency in Kent—are particularly located in areas where there is a relative shortage of doctors, because medical school graduates are more likely to work when they qualify in the area in which they have trained. We would expect to see graduates from Anglia Ruskin medical school sticking around in that area, to help to address some of the shortages of doctors locally.

Another point about the new medical schools is that they are looking at how they train the doctors that we need for the future NHS, where more care needs will be out of hospitals. We know that people will be living longer with multiple health conditions. Medicine is shifting, and therefore students in the new medical schools are particularly likely to spend time as part of their placements in primary care and community care settings, and so will be ready and trained to work in those settings and to address some of the gaps in primary care, for instance.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Witham called for a new health centre; my hon. Friend the Member for Clacton also talked about a primary care hub. I have

been in contact with the Minister for Primary Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien), during the debate. I assure my right hon. Friend that he stands ready to meet her to discuss the proposal for a new health centre in Witham. I am sure he will also be delighted to talk to my hon. Friend the Member for Clacton about his campaign. We know these facilities are really important. We clearly need to make sure that we have the workforce to meet the demand, but having the right facilities can make a real difference to what services can be provided closer to people's homes as part of primary care and community care, rather than people having to go into hospital.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Witham and my hon. Friends the Members for Clacton and for South Norfolk spoke about access to dentists, which we know has been a huge challenge. Clearly, the pandemic has made a difficult situation harder, with a lot of appointments not happening during the pandemic because of the covid risks, so there is a backlog to make up. The Government recognised the challenge back in 2022 and made an additional £15 million of funding available for dentistry, of which £2 million was provided specifically to the east of England region. There has since been an increase in the number of dentists in the region. However, we recognise that there are ongoing challenges. Back in July last year, the Government announced a package of improvements to the NHS dental system as part of the plan for patients. The Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough, has oversight of dentistry and continues to work on improving the dental contract in order to improve access to dentists, and I am sure that he will make further announcements in due course.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Witham talked about the Essex mental health independent inquiry. I know how important it is that the inquiry makes progress, because all patients deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, and my thoughts are with those affected and their families. Following concerns from the chair, a discussion took place in January with the chief executive of the Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust, which has been taking action to encourage more staff participation in the inquiry. The Government continue to believe that a non-statutory inquiry remains the most effective way to get to the truth of what has happened, but we must ensure that this approach works and exhausts all possible solutions. There is an ongoing problem with staff engagement, and if the inquiry finds that it is unable to access relevant records, the position will be reviewed. I can assure my right hon. Friend that Ministers and officials are in regular contact with the inquiry and with NHS England colleagues, who are working closely with the trust to review progress.

Giles Watling: This morning I met Paul Scott, the CEO of EPUT. He assured me that, even though it is has been cumbersome and there have been problems with staff reporting back and so forth, the trust is reaching out and wrapping its arms around them. Although I feel that sometimes EPUT is a large and cumbersome body, he feels confident. Is the Minister equally confident?

Helen Whately: It is very good to hear that update. I refer my hon. Friend to the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member

[*Helen Whately*]

for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), who has oversight of mental health in the ministerial team and who can go further into the progress of the inquiry. It is good to hear that he is taking such an active interest in the work of the inquiry, because it is clearly important, and I thank him for that.

Hon. Members have touched on community diagnostic centres. We in Government see them as incredibly important, because we know that many patients across the east of England, and more widely across England, are waiting for a diagnosis for their condition. Waiting for a diagnosis can be one of the most worrying times, particularly if someone is concerned that they may have cancer, which is why the Government have been opening more community diagnostic centres across the country—an innovation to provide easier access to vital community diagnostic services and to speed up diagnosis. By separating some of these services from acute hospitals—the hot site, I suppose—we can ensure efficient processes to diagnose as many people as possible at pace. The good news is that we have recently announced the approval of two new community diagnostic centres via the mid and south Essex integrated care board, and there are more in the pipeline with other Essex integrated care boards. I encourage my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham and others to keep an eye on our progress with community diagnostic centres, as I am sure she is doing.

Finally, I want to talk about integration and the broader question of health and wellbeing in our communities. My right hon. Friend the Member for Witham spoke about the health challenges and disparities in her constituency and across the east of England. We see real differences and inequalities, not only in life expectancy but, crucially, in healthy life expectancy. That means people's ability to work and have fulfilling, independent lives, to have relationships and the quality of life we would like for everybody.

The Government are determined to improve that—for instance, under the auspices of levelling up in healthcare. Crucial to achieving that is the work of our integrated care system, the integrated care boards and integrated care partnerships. They bring together all the organisations across the national health service, local authorities, social care and third sector organisations, which play an important part in our health and social care systems. Indeed, joining up NHS organisations is an important part of that in its own right. All of us who spend time with the NHS in our constituencies know that it is not one thing; it is multiple organisations. Bringing them together, along with the wider health and social care system, is important.

It is crucial for our integrated care boards and integrated care partnerships to look at the needs of populations, looking at the population as a whole, and to set out strategies for reducing health disparities and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham talked about, for closing the gap—levelling up for those with a lower healthy life expectancy. That is absolutely crucial to the work of integrated care systems. It is relatively early days for these entities. The extent to which they are established varies around the country, but we are seeing an excitement and a willingness in those organisations to come together.

I have spoken to many chief executives and chairs of integrated care boards, as well as local authorities around the country. We have talked about integration many times before; it has been a buzzword for decades in health and social care. What I am hearing from the frontline is that this time it really feels like it is working and making a difference. As part of those conversations, I have spoken to many about the work they are doing on looking upstream at prevention, crucially, and the steps we can take jointly between the health system and local authorities to prevent ill health.

Feryal Clark: The Minister mentioned prevention and the role of local authorities. She will know that the public health funding formula for local authorities was set in 2013 and has not been reviewed. There are real disparities across the country in how they are funded. Do the Government have a plan to review that, to ensure that areas such as the east of England get the fair funding they deserve?

Helen Whately: The hon. Lady will know very well that we are under substantial fiscal constraints as a Government, recognising the extra spending we put in through the pandemic to keep our economy going and come out as strongly as we have. We also face challenges with inflation and the cost of energy. She will also know that in the autumn, against those constraints, the Chancellor showed the Government's commitment to health and social care by putting an extra £14.1 billion into health and social care, including a record funding increase for social care of £7.5 billion over the next two years.

The Government's commitment to health and social care should be clear to the hon. L. We are driving efforts behind the establishment of the effective working of integrated care boards and integrated care partnerships, because of the importance of joining up the system. It is not just about the public health budget; what we need to do to prevent future ill health and reduce disparities is much broader than that.

In conclusion, I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham and other hon. Members for this important conversation, which has shown the complexity and the interconnections in our health and social care system. It is important to have joined-up systems, not only to treat people in the here and now, but crucially to intervene earlier and prevent ill health. We want to achieve not only longer lives for our constituents, but healthier and happier lives.

10.50 am

Priti Patel: I thank you, Mr Hollobone, for chairing the debate, and all colleagues who have contributed today: my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), my hon. Friends the Members for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon) and for Clacton (Giles Watling), and the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon), for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin), for Enfield North (Feryal Clark) and for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner). I want to reflect on the wide-ranging nature of the debate, including in my remarks. The NHS is enormous and covers a range of matters and the east of England is a very large part of the country. I thank the Minister for her comments, support and encouragement. The debate was very much premised on the "Levelling Up the East of England" report and the Government have to start addressing the fundamental disparities and issues.

I want to touch on a few points made by the Minister and a couple of other colleagues. It would be helpful to have some follow-up from other Ministers with direct responsibility. I mentioned the report on levelling up and there is more for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to do in this space. Producing reports is one thing, but we have to drive outcomes. We want less centralisation and more integration. We have the ICBs, but a role for local government and specialist health providers is essential. The state cannot do everything. No disrespect to Labour colleagues, but if money were the answer, we would have all the best outcomes right now. There is no doubt about that. We have to have integration.

The hon. Member for Enfield North mentioned the fair funding formula. In the east of England, devolution is taking place in Norfolk and Suffolk. Cambridge has already gone through it. That could change outcomes tremendously through NHS integration and addressing the disparities that the report mentions. I want to emphasise the need for the Minister to go back to DLUHC and challenge it, because it needs to be on the hook for a lot of this. All colleagues in her Department have been helpful. I pay tribute to everyone in the NHS as well.

The hon. Member for Bedford touched on something very particular to me: the number of practitioners in the NHS, which we have raised in this Chamber before. Broomfield Hospital has told me that it is going overseas to recruit doctors and nurses. As a former Home Secretary who bolstered the NHS health and care visa, I think that we have to stand firm and stand by that as well as growing our own talent. We definitely need that in our medical hospitals as well. The NHS is becoming more and more blended, but we have to ensure that the skills are fit for purpose and meet the demographics of our local communities and our region, as well as the challenges of the report on levelling up health.

Every Member who has contributed to the debate, including the shadow Front-Bench spokesperson and the Minister, recognise the interconnectedness of driving outcomes, but there is a greater role to play at a local level. As a participant and an observer for 12 years as the Member of Parliament for Witham, I genuinely believe now that although the funding comes from the centre, the centre has to do much more to follow the money, people and outcomes. It is driving the outcomes that Ministers, the Department and central Government must be obsessed with, because there is too much of a lack of transparency and accountability. Given the billions of pounds that goes into the NHS, we in the Witham constituency in Essex and across the east of England are simply not seeing the outcomes that match the large sums of funding, so I hope that will change, and I hope we will be back in this Chamber—and the main Chamber—to keep pursuing this agenda across Government.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered health and wellbeing services in the East of England.

10.55 am

Sitting suspended.

Charity Sector Funding: Transparency

11 am

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): We now come to an important debate on charity sector funding, and I call Craig Mackinlay to move the motion.

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the transparency of charity sector funding.

It is always an enormous pleasure to have you chair a debate, Mr Hollobone.

The charitable sector has a long and proud history, with truly ancient charities still very much in existence, in particular in education and the almshouse sectors. There was a huge blossoming of philanthropy in the first Elizabethan period, and much of that tradition continues today, with service clubs, the Round Table, Lions Clubs, the masons, the Rotary and many thousands of other organisations, working daily through charity shops and a host of other activities to raise funds to assist in domestic and international projects, in particular at times of emergency, which we have seen in the situation in Syria and Turkey at the moment.

Domestically, charities have often filled gaps in society that Government could not, or perhaps should not even attempt to. We can safely say, however, that that has blurred over time, as we have moved to a situation where the demands and expectations of modern society are for the Government to meet and they are expected to solve, frankly, everything.

One of the oldest educational charities, the King's School in Canterbury, which is just a few miles over the border from my constituency, dates back to AD 597, now faces threat after nearly 15 centuries because of Labour's ambitions to tax such providers and users of education. I have numerous independent schools in South Thanet, the largest possibly being St Lawrence College, which is similarly under threat because of political game-playing and the usual politics of envy. I have called the debate not for that reason, but to question whether in some cases the "charitable" tag, with its incumbent benefits, is being stretched beyond credibility.

I have a number of strands for the Minister to consider. First, my fear is that too many charities, often financed by vast Government—that is, taxpayer-supported—grants that run into multiple billions annually are straying into the political arena. That is particularly true of many charities in the refugee and immigration sphere. I note one, Care4Calais, which receives no direct Government funding that I can see. However, there is complete opacity that I could not penetrate as to where its £1.6 million of funding—according to its most recent accounts—comes from.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Gentleman for securing the debate. We all want to ensure that our charity giving goes where we expect it to go. As he may be aware—this is factual, not me saying it for the occasion—Northern Ireland is the most generous nation per capita in the world. This matter is therefore incredibly relevant in my constituency. Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that when people donate money

[Jim Shannon]

after they see a registered charity number, there is a belief that the charity is accountable and that accountability means transparency and simple access to the accounts and spendings of any charity?

Craig Mackinlay: The hon. Member is quite right. That imprimatur of a charity registration number has always given people confidence that the charity has charitable aims and is being looked at properly by the Charity Commission and others, and it is often the reason that people are willing to give to such charities. I also note the extensive charitable sector in Northern Ireland.

Where does the income of many charities come from? It might often be from another charity, higher up the chain, which is a key thread in what I want to discuss. I note, too, that that Care4Calais charity has been under investigation by the Charity Commission since August 2020, but with no outcome as yet. We are getting towards the three-year anniversary, which in itself I find quite remarkable—the case of a £1.6 million institution is patently uncomplicated, and that leads to questions about the Charity Commission's competence and ability to investigate properly.

Refugee Action received £2.2 million in Government grants and contracts in its accounts to March '22. The British Refugee Council received £7.5 million in Government grants and contracts. That is close to half its revenue, yet I find that those selfsame charities, and many more, put up commentators to attack the Government—I have faced them regularly on the media—and in some cases take the Government to court on various migration issues, particularly the Rwanda situation. Care4Calais and Detention Action have got themselves involved in those activities.

I have no issue at all with whichever person, company or entity wishes to take the Government to court—that is a strength of our system that we do not see everywhere in the world—but the question for the taxpayer is, should such action be taken under the auspices of a charitable organisation whereby the donors receive tax relief, or indeed taxpayers themselves are in the funding chain?

Let me analyse what happened during the covid support period. There was £1,570 million—a truly exceptional sum—of Government funding under the culture recovery fund. That was distributed by the Arts Council. I found it bizarre at the time, although I do not know what other Members thought, that we were all provided with embargoed lists, which were provided at the same time to local media, yet we had had no input whatever to the grant allocation or the consideration of the suitability of the recipients, although we MPs have unique local knowledge of our patch.

I saw on those lists various institutions, charitable and commercial, in South Thanet that are often in receipt of five-figure grants. Looking through the list, I saw that they were often the same institutions that had been driving very unpleasant social media against me over long periods, some of it quite vile. This was overly political, and, bizarrely, these institutions are willing to bite the hand of the Government who are feeding and supporting them.

There is one local institution I would like to note, which is Faith In Strangers, in Cliftonville in my constituency. It achieved a planning consent for a venue based on a community workspace with incidental community music opportunities. Since then, that has shown itself to be nothing but a sham, and it has morphed into a full-on, late-night drinking and music venue. It causes so much noise and interference with long-term residents who live above that many have had to move out. One has taken to living in a camper van. This has rendered their life investment worthless.

To its credit, Thanet District Council initiated a licensing hearing on the venue. I invested four hours in assisting residents and making representations myself at the hearing, but this institution, Faith In Strangers, employed one of the most expensive, hugely skilled and, I have to say, very impressive licensing barristers in the country, and was supported by a local Labour councillor, who sided with a corporate nightclub over local residents. It was truly shocking. That private company received £160,000 across the two tranches of the culture recovery fund, and a further £5,000 from the Music Venue Trust—another charity in receipt of direct Government grant funding.

Let me summarise what we saw during that period. This was just in my constituency; there must be similar stories across the country. Taxpayers money, via Government grants, financed institutions with an overly anti-Government leaning, which loudly expressed their views, and funded institutions that had been making the lives of local people a misery. Those institutions then employed top notch legal support to quash residents' objections, which left me, the local MP, to try to pick up the pieces.

While many charities take care not to suggest who people should vote for, and hence have not come to the notice of the Electoral Commission—I must declare that I am a member of the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission—the activities of many of these charities are, by negative inference, hinting that a vote should not be cast for the Government in power.

There is an increasing case for the Electoral Commission to look more closely at the activities and pronouncements of many of these charities—not just on the issue of asylum and immigration, but more widely—when there is an obvious straying into politics. I am sorry, but that would have to apply to those charities that many of us would deem very good. Let me mention the Trussell Trust, for instance.

I have collected with the Trussell Trust, particularly at Christmastime—I am sure most Members have, and are very supportive of its aims—but I am increasingly worried as to its true objectives. I met the then chief executive officer at a parliamentary reception for the Trussell Trust back in 2016; I was, indeed, younger and a little more naïve in those days. As a chartered accountant and chartered tax adviser, I proposed a scheme to the CEO that could be put to His Majesty's Revenue and Customs to allow gift aiding of the food donations received under the gift aid small donations scheme. That could have triggered a 25% cash top up under the scheme. I followed the proposal up with the CEO, sending a detailed letter offering my services pro bono to promote a means by which such a scheme might be accepted by HMRC. I received no reply.

I am a big supporter of the founding ambitions of the Child Poverty Action Group, and I always buy its annual book, “The Welfare Benefits & Tax Credits Handbook”—it is an invaluable tool for my caseworkers. The group received close to £1 million in Government grants up to March 2022, and it is a very worthy organisation. However, I am afraid that the Government are often at the receiving end of very political campaigns. I do not know about the Minister, but I receive various campaign emails that the organisation promotes to its subscribers—standard form emails that we receive on a daily basis. That is purely political campaigning.

The Charity Commission does disclose Government grants received. There is a snapshot on the front page of the financial affairs of any charity one searches for, but it is rather opaque. As ever, I thank the House of Commons Library—it gathers a wealth of information for us, and as an institution it is unrivalled on the planet—which has tried to pull together various sources, public and other. It has become clear, however, that in the charitable sector, which now runs to many tens of billions of pounds a year, it is very difficult to find the true ambitions of many charities or their sources of funding.

The second strand of my debate is sub-funding by super-sized charities to non-charity organisations, or even to smaller charities down the chain. In those instances, the opacity becomes truly muddy, and I feel it is a means of directing overtly political funding. Stop Funding Hate led a campaign to put pressure on advertisers not to advertise on GB News when it started. Stop Funding Hate is not a charity, but a community interest company. It received a £50,000 donation from the huge Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Following the concerns that I raised with the Charity Commission, a review was undertaken, but it was decided that the aims of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation were within scope to allow such funding.

Let us stand back a bit, because I find that rather bizarre. A charitable institution advanced funding to a non-charity to put pressure on potential corporate advertisers not to spend money with a duly UK-licensed TV channel that it simply did not like. There is virtually no way of shining a light on the extent of this channelling of funds from charities to non-charities. For the first time in my experience, the House of Commons Library were similarly stumped by this inquiry.

My third strand is about the fact that, although Government grants are visible—albeit with some difficulty—local government gives huge amounts to the charitable sector. I have no particular issue with much of that; for instance, the bedrock of funding for Age UK is often via county and unitary authorities. But it is very difficult to find the amounts that are going through local government, unless one takes the trouble to trawl through the register that has to be published of spending over £500 within any council. My fear is that taxpayer funding is routinely channelled to chumocracy charities at the local level, virtually out of plain sight.

On this point, I will refer to Ramsgate Town Council. It has channelled taxpayer funds—small amounts here and there—to so-called charities and community interest companies, for which I can perceive no objectives for public good except that they are often chums of local Labour councillors. I raised that in relation to a project some weeks ago called the Ramsgate Arts Barge, which

has received funding from Ramsgate Town Council. I am a local taxpayer, and some of the precept that I pay goes to Ramsgate Town Council. Its latest accounts for the Ramsgate Arts Barge show the balance sheet in deficit, but the mere airing of my concerns, as a local taxpayer, elicited an outraged call from one of its directors threatening me with legal action.

Let me summarise that point. Taxpayer funding through local councils supports various charities. A local MP and local ratepayer who pays for all of that gets threatened with legal action for even querying whether such taxpayer funding—my funding—represents value for their local taxpayer pound. Thank heavens that I have legal privilege here today.

The Commons passed the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill a few weeks ago to provide greater disclosure of the ownership of entities and sources of funding, and the Bill is now in the Lords. We have increased the reach and activities of the Electoral Commission to ensure that all political funding that is designed to influence voters positively or negatively is open, transparent, published and backed up by the rule of quite stiff law. Yet we allow the charitable sector—unaccountable and hidden, but very influential and in receipt of vast amounts of taxpayer funding—to continue pursuing, in many notable cases, anti-Government activity to overturn the will of Parliament and attack legitimate and registered businesses that it has decided that it does not like.

This is an area of grave concern. I have been thinking about it for some years, but a number of things have come together to cause me to want to air it in this Chamber. I ask the Minister for new transparency rules throughout national and local government; that we publish amounts granted to charities in a clear way; and for proper disclosure of amounts granted down the line from charities to other charities and non-charities. I ask for the Electoral Commission to look more closely at the whole field of political campaigning that is done under a charitable umbrella.

In my view, the charity commissioners need to take a firmer view of core charitable activities. On behalf of taxpayers, I ask whether it is wise, fair or value for money for Government to pass billions of taxpayer funding annually—outside of core contracts, which are a slightly different issue—to the web of charities that now constitute a £50 billion-a-year industry and have well-paid CEOs and boards.

I fear that the charitable sector is the new area of non-transparent activity and funding. I am in favour of transparency; transparency is good, and it shines a light on activities. As an accountant, I always say, “Follow the money.” I welcome anything the Minister might say on this, but I certainly hope that the Government will agree with my view and take action.

11.18 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stuart Andrew): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Craig Mackinlay) for tabling this important debate on the transparency of charity sector funding.

The transparency of charity funding forms a central tenet in enhancing public trust in charities. I am delighted to have the opportunity to discuss this important issue

[Stuart Andrew]

and to highlight the regulatory framework in which charities operate. It is this framework that provides transparency about where a charity's funding comes from and how it is spent.

I acknowledge, as other hon. Members have, the huge contribution that charities make to the lives of individuals and communities up and down our country. There are over 169,000 charities on the Charity Commission register. Those organisations operate in areas as diverse as education, religion, sport, health, the environment, heritage, and arts and culture. My background in the charity sector makes me proud of its contribution to our society. The vast majority of charities are small in scale, operate on modest incomes and are run by passionate volunteers who are committed to helping others in their local communities, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) mentioned in relation to Northern Ireland.

The charity sector's income comes from a wide range of sources, including public donations, trading activities and Government grants and contracts. Therefore, the scale of the sector's finances necessitates strong, robust and independent regulation to ensure that funds are properly accounted for. In England and Wales, the role is carried out by the Charity Commission as the independent registrar and regulator. By ensuring that the sector is well regulated, the public can have trust and confidence that their generous donations are spent appropriately.

Members will know that the Charity Commission is an independent non-ministerial Government Department. It is answerable to the courts for its legal decisions and to Parliament for its work. The chair of the commission, Orlando Fraser, has spoken about his focus on charities' legal compliance and their accountability to the public for the money that they receive.

The Charity Commission plays an important role in ensuring that charities act within charity law to further their charitable purposes. All registered charities with an income of more than £25,000 are required to submit annual returns and accounts, including a trustees annual report, containing information about finances and activities. That enables the public to understand where a charity's income has come from and on which activities it has spent its funds. The register of charities gives assurance about and transparency over the more than £80 billion of annual income across those charities.

Public trust in charities remains higher than in most other parts of society, and that is a reflection of the value the public thinks that charities can bring. Charities are such an important part of society and I share the wish of my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet for them to be proactively transparent in how they use their money.

Unfortunately, there are a small number of cases of deliberate abuse of charity or serious mismanagement that puts charitable assets or beneficiaries at risk. In these cases, the commission has broad powers to intervene, investigate and take appropriate and proportionate regulatory action, ensuring charitable resources are used properly for the purpose for which they were provided.

However, I would point out that the Charity Commission is a small regulator with limited capacity and funding. It must therefore prioritise its resources where they will have the greatest impact. If hon. Members have any

concerns that charities are acting outside of their charitable purpose, they should absolutely raise them, as my hon. Friend has done, with the Charity Commission. The size and scope is obviously something hon. Members may wish to consider.

Funding other charities and non-charitable organisations can be an effective way to further a charity's purpose. However, charities must only fund activities that further their charitable purposes, and trustees must ensure they take steps to protect their charity's assets and reputation.

I am aware that Members have expressed concerns about the campaigning activities of certain charities. It is important to stress that non-party political campaigning can be a legitimate way for charities to spend their resources, so long as they act within charity law. The law is clear: to be a charity, an organisation must exist only for charitable purposes. A political purpose is not a charitable purpose and therefore any organisation that has political purposes cannot by any degree be a charity.

However, charities can engage in political activity that is actively intended to change or influence decisions taken by the Government where it helps deliver the purpose of the charity—for example, a health charity could engage in political activity for a change in a policy on a particular health issue if doing so furthered their purposes—but charities are prohibited from supporting political parties or politicians, and where they engage with political parties, charities must take a balanced approach. If concerns are raised about a charity's campaigning or political activity, it is of course right that the Charity Commission assesses those concerns and determines whether regulatory action is required. To help trustees understand the rules, the commission recently published an accessible five-minute guide. The guide supports its long-standing and longer-form guidance on this subject, and it is known as CC9.

Fundraising is a key source of income for charities. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet mentioned, the generosity of the public is evident in appeals such as the Disasters Emergency Committee's Turkey-Syria earthquake appeal, which has already raised more than £100 million. Again, because of the scale of fundraising, a strong regulator is required to promote best practice and assess concerns. That is why, in 2016, following a cross-party fundraising review, the Fundraising Regulator was established as the independent regulator of charitable fundraising.

While a significant amount of the sector's funding comes from donations, some charities receive Government grants and contracts to deliver important public services, such as healthcare and addiction services. However, it is important to note that nearly two thirds of charities do not receive any funding at all from the Government. To ensure that taxpayer money is well spent, Government grants must comply with the grants functional standard, which requires due diligence to be undertaken on all potential grant recipients before an award is made.

There are also strict rules preventing taxpayer money from being used on lobbying or political activity. Such funds must be used only for the purposes set out in the grant agreements. The Government are committed to their transparency agenda, and annual statistics for all grants distributed by the Government can be found on gov.uk. Members of the public can search for grants awarded to charities by downloading the latest grants

tables and filtering by a charity's registration number. However, I hear what my hon. Friend says about how easy or accessible that is, and I commit to looking at that to ensure we are getting it right.

I would also say that some campaigning done by charities has improved public policy—think of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, whose campaigning brought about legislation on the wearing of seatbelts—and no one would argue against that. What has changed in recent years is that debates have been polarised or divisive. My hon. Friend has raised a number of examples today, which I cannot comment on specifically right now, although I assure him I will look at them and write to him.

It is clear from today's debate that we share the same ambition to ensure charities continue to be supported through effective regulation. As I have highlighted, there are a variety of ways in which charities can demonstrate transparency in their funding and compliance in their use of public funds. I have heard my hon. Friend's concerns today, and I commit to raising them with the chair of the Charity Commission at our next meeting. In closing, let me once again thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate and all in attendance for such a valuable discussion. I commit to coming back to him as soon as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

11.28 am

Sitting suspended.

Homes for Ukraine Scheme Anniversary

[PETER DOWD *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the anniversary of the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship today, Mr Dowd. I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests for the excellent research support I receive from the Refugee, Asylum and Migration Policy Project and as the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on migration. I want to make special mention of and thank the Sheffield branch of the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain, with which I have been working to highlight the challenges facing Ukrainian refugees as they come to this country. The contributions of such groups have been extremely helpful and have better equipped us to learn lessons from the past year.

Since the war started in February 2022, more than 8 million people have fled Ukraine and some 6 million have been displaced internally. According to the British Red Cross, more than 160,000 of those who have fled have come to the UK. I think I speak for all Members present when I extend my huge thanks to all those who have opened their homes to refugees. While the war has shown the very worst of humanity, the resilience of ordinary Ukrainians enduring extraordinary violence, alongside the response they have received from our communities, has shown the very best.

A year into the war, it is time to take stock of our own response and the support we have extended to those fleeing the conflict. Now is a timely moment to highlight two problems facing the refugees who have come here: the shameful prospect of homelessness for some Ukrainian families, and the restrictions they face as they transition into private sector rented housing.

A new British Red Cross report, "Fleeing, fearing, facing the future", has found that homelessness is a key risk for Ukrainians in the UK. Government figures reveal that well over 4,000 Ukrainian households in England have been homeless or at risk of homelessness in the past year—a 97% increase on October 2020. According to data from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, in my own local authority area, a total of 30 Ukrainian households, half of which included children, have been homeless, offered homelessness prevention or relief duty services by Sheffield City Council. Of those households, 17 are here under the Homes for Ukraine scheme and 13 are here under the family scheme.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I am loth to interrupt the hon. Lady so early in her deliberations, but I wondered if she would like to take this opportunity to congratulate or comment on SNP-run Perth and Kinross Council, which has the third highest number, and the highest number per capita, of Ukrainian guests in the whole of Scotland, as well as the smallest number in temporary accommodation. That is because of building a positive relationship with the private letting sector and creating our own agency. Does the hon. Lady agree that P and K's approach of actively bringing together guests and hosts works, and that

[Pete Wishart]

being prepared to build on existing structures with existing relationships is the way to give good options to our guests from Ukraine?

Olivia Blake: I completely agree. Where things have worked well, we should be learning lessons and rolling those lessons out across the country—across all the countries of Great Britain. We need to take stock at this point to see where things have progressed and been valuable to the community, and where they have not worked so well.

We should be concerned about the figures I was just highlighting, which show that we urgently need to support people to either continue to stay with their hosts or move into their own longer term accommodation, especially as the conflict seems to be lasting a lot longer than any of us would have hoped.

The reasons behind the homelessness that many Ukrainian refugees face are multifaceted, ranging from the impact of the rising cost of living for hosts, the changing circumstances of hosts and guests, the inappropriateness of accommodation and difficulties being rematched with other hosts if the relationship breaks down. Sponsors were initially asked to host for only six months, but sadly there is no sign of the military conflict in Ukraine abating, which makes the precarious nature of the future for many refugees all the more worrying.

As the cost of living crisis continues to bite, many sponsors simply cannot afford to continue hosting, and I ask the Minister to consider that in her response. In November 2022, 18% of Homes for Ukraine hosts said that the rising cost of living was “very much” impacting their ability to provide support, which is double the proportion in July 2022, when the figure was 9%. Clearly, the impact on host families is getting worse, which is having a direct impact on Ukrainian refugees. The Government have announced that hosts on the Homes for Ukraine scheme will receive more financial support, which is increasing from £350 to £500 a month, but that is only after the people they are hosting have been in the UK for 12 months. The cost of living crisis is happening now, and that should mean action now to support refugee households.

At the same time, despite accounting for around a third of arrivals, and unlike under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, people hosting family members through the family scheme do not receive any monthly “thank you” payment, and are not protected from the increased council tax bills that come from having additional household members. Similarly, although local councils ensure that those on the Homes for Ukraine scheme receive a £200 per person interim payment on arrival, to help with the cost of food and essentials, Ukrainians on the family visa scheme do not receive the same support unless they are in Northern Ireland.

The Government need to take Ukrainian families’ risk of homelessness seriously and act quickly. The British Red Cross suggests that the Department should extend the interim £200 payment to everyone arriving on the Ukrainian family scheme to support people waiting for their first universal credit payment. Ministers should also consider increasing the monthly payment immediately for all hosts, no matter what scheme they are on, instead of waiting for people to have been here

in the UK for 12 months. At the moment, the costs are falling on hosts. Those hosting people who arrived in the UK through the Ukrainian family scheme should receive the same financial support as those hosting under the Homes for Ukraine scheme to support their continued hosting. Are discussions along those lines between the Home Office and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities already under way, and if not, why not? In addition, the Department should ensure that the council tax regulations are further amended so that hosts on the Ukrainian family scheme are also protected from increasing council tax bills, especially as they are not currently receiving any extra financial support in that way. Will the Minister set out the Government’s position on those simple steps, which could make a difference?

The second set of issues I want to raise relates to what happens after refugees leave their hosts. Our unfair and exploitative private rented sector is a huge barrier to many people’s living their lives as they want. For Ukrainians, the situation is no different. Even once they are ready to move on from their accommodation and strike out on their own, there are significant challenges. Without a UK-based guarantor, rental references or a deposit, it can be difficult for people to find privately rented accommodation. Although people on both schemes have the right to work and access public funds, including universal credit, the British Red Cross reports that across the UK many refugees struggle to afford the rent for longer term accommodation. Frozen local housing allowances also restrict access to private rented accommodation for those who work part time or are single parents, often with multiple children. The demographics of the Ukrainian refugees who are coming over here—many are mothers with children, which is a complexity of the war—should be borne in mind when we develop policy, so that these conditions, issues and individual circumstances are understood.

All that is supported by data. In my own city, of 322 families who arrived in Sheffield under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, only 44 have been moved into private rented accommodation to date. A survey by the Office for National Statistics published in December 2022 found that 69% of Homes for Ukraine hosts had guests looking to move into private accommodation, but 81% of them reported barriers when helping their guests to look for private rented accommodation: 67% could not afford to rent privately, 64% could not provide a guarantor, 57% could not afford a deposit or other up-front payments, and 43% had no suitable properties in the area that they had arrived in.

DLUHC has announced £150 million additional funding for local authorities across the UK to support refugees to move into their own homes. It was also announced that local authorities in England will get a new £500 million fund to acquire housing stock for refugees, and tackle homelessness in refugee communities. The announcement rightly said that not only those who arrived from Ukraine and Afghanistan but all those fleeing conflict would be included. I welcome those measures, but I know local authorities are unclear about how to use the funding. Will the Minister clarify the details? How will the £150 million one-off funding be allocated and spent, so that local authorities have more certainty when addressing growing housing needs? It should be noted that, in addition to that funding, there is support for local

authorities to implement rent deposit schemes where they do not already exist, and to ensure that eligibility criteria do not exclude people displaced from Ukraine. Last week, the Secretary of State told the House that his Department would investigate Government-backed rent guarantee schemes specifically to support displaced Ukrainians. What action are the Government taking in that respect?

The local association has raised with me the fact that a crucial part of making the transition to an independent life is access to skills and training. Many of the people who have come here are already highly qualified, but either their qualifications are not recognised, or they are struggling to find work that matches their qualifications. How are the Government working across Departments to ensure that refugees settling here can fulfil their full potential and find gainful skilled employment?

The toll of the war on those who have left Ukraine as refugees, fleeing the bombs raining down on their homes and neighbourhoods, has been immense. They have gathered their lives into suitcases or even less, unsure of what they will return to, whether they will return at all. Across the UK, and certainly in Sheffield, which is a proud city of sanctuary, the greeting they have received is a light in the darkness. It has represented the hope of refuge far from the violence and destruction. Now, a year later, it is time to transform hope into certainty, and turn the promise of safety into the opportunity of building new, secure and stable lives in the UK, free from the worry of homelessness and destitution. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response and those of other hon. Members, knowing they will care deeply about the issues I have raised, on how we can help refugees to build that life in the UK while they are here.

Thank you, Mr Dowd, for allowing me the time to debate this issue. It is important to keep it highlighted, learn the lessons from this scheme in our broader approach to refugees, and show solidarity to Ukrainians.

Peter Dowd (in the Chair): I remind Members that if they wish to allow as many as possible to speak in the debate, they should be brief.

2.43 pm

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I congratulate the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Olivia Blake) on securing such an important debate. I could not agree more that we need to keep this subject at the forefront of our mind. It has been over a year, but we must never forget what it was like at the beginning. I certainly do not forget waking up a year ago to those dreadful scenes on the news—Putin's maniacal aggression destroying homes, schools and hospitals, and turning communities into war zones. Understandably, millions were desperate to flee Putin's war machine.

The UK has a proud history of welcoming refugees fleeing war and persecution. It was right that we provided a safe and legal route for those fleeing the conflict. In the early days of the conflict, the focus was on getting Ukrainians into the UK. That was no small undertaking. I am sure many hon. Members here will remember the frustrations we had with the Home Office, which often took a "computer says no" attitude to visa applications.

We were dealing with incredibly complex, highly emotive cases of families separated and loved ones left behind in Ukraine.

I thank the teams in my constituency and Westminster offices who helped 114 Ukrainians travel to Oxfordshire. They spent hours and hours waiting to speak to UK Visas and Immigration and queuing outside the hub in Parliament to help those fleeing the conflict. I remember one case of a mother who was eight months pregnant and had a five-year-old child. She was in Italy and needed a visa within days or she would not be allowed to fly because her doctor would not give her the fly note. She was terrified about having to give birth with doctors she could not understand because she did not speak Italian. Luckily, we were able to sort out her visa.

Helping people get here to the UK was only the first piece in the puzzle. In the last year, 2,113 Ukrainians have arrived in Oxfordshire and settled. That is the fourth highest number out of any local authority in England. Yulia Horetska moved in with me and my family. Supporting her in her time of need has been an honour and a privilege. I know that that feeling is shared by many of the hosts. Many people wanted to host, but were not able to—maybe they did not have a spare room. We have gained a lot, so let us not frame this debate as though we were giving, because we also got.

Such help would not have been possible without the vital work that our councils have done alongside community groups and voluntary organisations. This has been a whole community effort. South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils provided fantastic wraparound support to settle guests in the districts, and Oxfordshire County Council helped. The councils co-ordinated and distributed grants and provided housing and homeless advice; they supported access to schooling, language lessons, medical services, benefits and employment advice. I give a special thanks to Adrianna Partridge at the Vale, who went above and beyond in leading the co-ordination of that effort. I am delighted to say that in February the councils decided to fund vital support for a further two years. We did not think we would get to a week, let alone a year, but we now need the certainty of the medium and long term.

I also thank the community groups and volunteers who have provided huge support and help for guests and hosts. St Michael and All Angels in Summertown run a Ukraine friendship centre every Wednesday, which I was lucky enough to visit. It provides English classes and children's activities. Hubs have been set up with citizens advice and the council to provide a one-stop shop and a co-ordinated place with translators, so that a Ukrainian family in need of help knows where to go and has one place to go get it.

As we mark the anniversary of the scheme, there are, as has been ably set out, a new set of challenges that I want to focus on. With Putin continuing to wage war, what began as a temporary stay, a short-lived safe harbour, now looks for many families to be more permanent. One sponsor said,

"As the children begin to form friendships through schooling and other local activities many refugees are seriously contemplating setting their roots down here in the UK."

Many hosts, with the best will in the world, are simply unable to continue their sponsorship arrangements for more than a year, so local councils are working hard to provide rematching.

[Layla Moran]

Councils are also trying to help guests into affordable independent living arrangements and to alleviate the pressure on homelessness services, but there is a problem of housing capacity in Oxfordshire. Ukrainians are struggling to access the private rented sector because referencing procedures can penalise people on universal credit and those with no credit history. There is a case for the Government stepping in pretty strongly on that point. One Ukrainian mother of two wrote to tell me about the problems that she faced. The host asked the family to move out and they searched for rented accommodation, but they were refused by numerous landlords because they do not have suitable proof of income or credit status. She said,

“We want to settle here, give our children some stability and keep them in the schools they have started, and we want to find more secure employment. We have degrees and are young, healthy and hard working. We thought the UK government would support us in settling here but we are completely reliant on the help of friends and neighbours.”

Eventually the family found accommodation, but it was over three hours away in West Sussex. They have been forced to move house, move schools, and change jobs. We have a desperate need of workers in Oxfordshire, so I was desperately sad to read that. Also, it is a huge upheaval for that family

Another issue that councils have identified is the temporary legal status of those in the UK under the scheme. At the beginning, we thought the situation would last for weeks or months, not years. Two years sounded generous, but we are now a year in and people are looking to move out and find new, permanent employment. However, when employers see that people have only a year left on their visas, that is a black mark against them when it comes to interviews. I hope the Government will ensure that an automatic extension is applied, which will give families and employers certainty if the situation continues. It is common sense to step in at that point and help people get on the job ladder; they will then pay taxes and contribute back, which is surely in everyone's interest.

Above all, the councils that have done so much are in desperate need of longer term funding solutions. They are doing their best, but with budgets already squeezed, there is a limit to the support they can provide. The Homes for Ukraine scheme has shown the UK at its best, with communities coming together and providing support for those in need. The Government has listened and there have been tweaks, but we now need them to put their shoulder to the wheel and work out how we are going to keep funding and supporting the scheme in the medium and longer term. The Ukrainians who have come to the UK have contributed so much to our families and our society. I hope the Minister agrees that we owe it to them, and to ourselves, to do that little bit more.

2.51 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Dowd. I congratulate the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Olivia Blake) on securing the debate and on the points and questions she put to Ministers. On behalf of the SNP group, one year on from Putin's illegal invasion, our party's message to Ukrainian arrivals is very clear: Scotland is your home for as long as you need it to be.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine last February, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has recorded over 8 million refugees from Ukraine across Europe, which is around 20% of the Ukrainian population. From the outset of the crisis, Scotland has stood ready to help. As the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, said at the time:

“Let people in and do the paperwork afterwards.”

When the Homes for Ukraine scheme was launched in March 2022, thousands of people across Scotland signed up to host Ukrainian refugees and the Scottish Government became a super-sponsor, enabling people fleeing the war to secure visas without having to arrange a private sponsor first. The super-sponsor scheme has been overwhelmingly popular, with local authorities, the third sector and local communities all working in partnership.

We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) about the work that Perth and Kinross Council is doing in that regard. We have had an excellent briefing from the British Red Cross that underlines what is happening in my hon. Friend's constituency. As of 17 January 2023, 314 people displaced by the conflict in Ukraine have arrived in Perth and Kinross through the Homes for Ukraine and Scottish super-sponsor schemes. That is the third highest for local authorities in Scotland by number and the highest number per capita.

The council has actively engaged with the private rental sector for over 10 years and has an in-house letting agency, which runs a charitable service. As a result, the agency is well connected to council services such as welfare rights, environmental services and council tax. The council chose to run the service separately from social housing, as it found that that did not work well in practice. The council was able to expand that service to accommodate those coming from Ukraine and did not need to build new relationships with local landlords. Relying on that existing system contributed to Perth and Kinross having the lowest number of households in temporary accommodation.

Pete Wishart: My hon. Friend is being customarily and particularly kind to my local authority, and I think it is worthy of congratulations for what it has achieved. By setting up an in-house agency, the council is able to properly connect with other council services, such as the welfare rights department, which has been on hand to serve the Ukrainian guests. It serves as a great example of what can be done when the right type of focus is applied by local authorities. We have done spectacular things in Perth and Kinross in the face of the crisis. Will my hon. Friend encourage other local authorities to look at Perth and Kinross Council as an example and perhaps replicate what it has done?

Chris Stephens: My hon. Friend knows that I come from a local government background—I was not a councillor but a local government employee—so I am passionate about its role in society, which enables it to address a number of issues. He is correct that Perth and Kinross Council has shown what local authorities, including SNP-controlled local authorities, can do, so I thank him for that.

In the past 12 months, nearly 23,000 people from Ukraine have secured safety in Scotland, and just shy of 19,000 of them arrived through the super-sponsor scheme.

That represents 20.4% of all UK arrivals—the most per head of any of the four UK nations. None of that would have been possible without the generosity and warm-heartedness of people across Scotland, who opened their hearts and their homes to Ukrainian arrivals.

The Scottish Government are supporting the scheme and have allocated over £70 million for the Ukrainian resettlement programme for 2023-24 to ensure that communities continue to receive help to rebuild their lives. That will build on the £200 million that the Scottish Government provided to support resettlement this financial year. The funding will help to ensure that those displaced by the war continue to receive a warm welcome in Scotland and are supported to rebuild their lives in our communities for as long as they need to call Scotland their home. All that, of course, depends on funding. I hope the UK Government will step up to the plate and ensure full and sustained funding is in place to allow those programmes to continue for the coming year and beyond. I will touch on that later.

The Scottish Government are taking action to allow arrivals from Ukraine to take the next steps in their lives in Scotland. As part of the safe and welcoming accommodation, the Scottish Government chartered two passenger ships, one of which is based in the Glasgow South West constituency. I have regularly visited the ship, which provides a very high-standard facility for guests, and the on-board accommodation is well received. Glasgow City Council is on hand, the Department for Education ensures that children have access to schools in the area and helps with their travel, and Department for Work and Pensions staff have been on the ship to ensure that Ukrainian refugees can find employment.

I support the principle that refugees who come to this country should be allowed to work. We need to look at giving the right to work to other people seeking sanctuary, because that is a problem in other parts of the immigration system. The focus should now be on matching people with suitable longer-term accommodation. The ship in Govan will no longer be there at the end of March, so work is being done to put in place a longer-term resettlement fund to ensure that people find accommodation. People are on the passenger ship temporarily, and they are very quickly able to find accommodation to rent. I have seen from my constituency case load that one of the problems is unnecessary delays for the Ukrainian refugees on the ship in receiving biometric residency permits. I hope the Minister will take that back to the Home Office to make sure the BRPs are provided quickly.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I agree with the points that my hon. Friend is making. Concerns have been expressed to me that there may be a need to further promote the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Does he agree? The people on the boat do not always have the option to move on somewhere else. There are still people trying to flee Ukraine because the conflict is ongoing, so the additional support and additional promotion of that scheme would be very welcome.

Chris Stephens: I agree. It is important that we continue to promote the schemes that are available. We must be a welcoming nation and say to those in Ukraine that there is a place here at the moment with quality education and access to employment to help them get on with their lives. Of course, some people want to go back, and

that is perfectly understandable. There are people from Ukraine who view this country as a refuge home, and they are hoping for the opportunity to return to their country.

The cost of living crisis has disrupted the finances of many hosts and local councils. I hope the Minister can talk about what funding will be made available to ensure that anyone who wants to continue with the Homes for Ukraine scheme is not priced out of doing so. It is important that we get those guarantees so we can take them back. The last year has placed unprecedented financial pressure on households, with the cost of living crisis playing havoc with people's finances. Many hosts who opened their doors to Ukrainian arrivals last March could not have fully appreciated how bad the cost of living crisis would become, with inflation spiking at 10.5% by December last year.

From January, the UK Government support available to local councils appears to have been cut from £10,500 to £5,900 for each arrival. That short-sighted decision seems to have been taken without any consultation of the devolved Administrations, and certainly without consultation of local authorities across the board. As a result, some hosts now feel that they simply cannot afford to continue participating in the scheme, which is a pity. The Local Government Association has warned of the growing number of Ukrainians presenting as homeless to councils, particularly the significant rise in those who arrived on the Homes for Ukraine scheme. That backs up the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss).

Data released last month showed that 4,295 Ukrainian households have presented themselves to councils as homeless. That is a 40% increase since November 2022. I hope the Minister can assure us that we are not simply passing the buck to local councils, and that there will be sustained funding. The uplift in the "thank you" payment to hosts from £350 to £500 is welcome, but that should be available to all volunteer hosts to meet the increasing cost of living since March. I hope the Minister can assure us that there is continuing dialogue with organisations such as the British Red Cross, which is saying that the increase could come too late and will not always be enough. I thank all those who have participated in the debate, and I look forward to the Minister's response.

3.2 pm

Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Dowd. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Olivia Blake) for leading this hugely significant debate during this hugely significant period. Only last week we marked the one-year anniversary of the Russian Federation's wholly unjust invasion of Ukraine.

My hon. Friend is an extremely doughty campaigner in this area. She eloquently made the case in her excellent speech. She was absolutely right when she spoke about the resilience of Ukrainians and the generosity of those opening their homes to them, showing the best of the United Kingdom. She was also right, and very clear, when she spoke about the unfair and exploitative private rental sector being a huge challenge for Ukrainian families leaving host families.

Skills and training for refugees are clearly important to enable them to fulfil their potential. The hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) spoke

[Paula Barker]

movingly about her personal experience of bringing a Ukrainian family into her home, and the benefits that it gave her. It is very much a two-way street, which is often forgotten. I thank her for sharing that, because it is hugely important. The hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) also spoke movingly. His passion for local authorities and the incredible work they do is clear to see—not just in this area, but each and every day in our local communities. It was particularly interesting to hear about the in-house agency system used in Scotland.

Clearly, there has been little disagreement during the debate, and that is really heartening. I join hon. Members in paying tribute to the amazing work done by local charities in this area. Indeed, the House is united in its support for Ukraine and her people. The Opposition's support for the Ukrainian war efforts against Putin's brutal aggression is unshakeable. As a member of NATO and an ally to Ukraine, we have a very real obligation to ensure that justice is done and Ukraine emerges as the victor in the conflict.

However, we cannot forget, as hon. Members have stated, that we have very real obligations here at home. We have deep obligations that extend to more than 200,000 Ukrainian individuals and the many families who have sought refuge and safety in these isles. I, for one, do not doubt the sincerity of the Government's intentions with respect to Ukrainian refugees; after all, the Homes for Ukraine scheme is the largest refugee scheme ever administered by this country. It is reflective of the generosity of the British people, with many thousands opening up their homes to welcome in the most vulnerable—often women and children.

Despite all that, the problems emerging on the ground are clear. In some instances, relationships are breaking down; host family circumstances have changed; and, to boot, conditions in the private rented sector are unforgiving and the welfare system is entirely inadequate. All in all, the data shows that more than 4,000 Ukrainian households are now turning to local councils for somewhere to live after their placement on the scheme has ended. More than 4,000 households are potentially facing homelessness or being referred to homelessness services.

As we have come to understand over the last decade, we have a Government who are inherently reactive to the big questions, rather than a Government focused on getting ahead of the curve. Back in November, I and many other voices from the Opposition were warning that unless the Government got a grip, we were going to face real issues, with our cash-strapped local councils once again being left to clear up the mess on the back of Whitehall short-termism.

At the onset of the war, the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy), asked the Secretary of State if he would put a safety net in place in case of placement breakdowns in the future. The Opposition probed the Department further, confirming that families left homeless in that situation would not be able to claim their housing costs under universal credit. Can the Minister advise whether that is being reconsidered? Sadly, no real answers were forthcoming at the time, so hopefully that can be clarified today. The refusal of the Government to give certainty to local authorities, host

families and refugees is not only profoundly wrong, but damaging to us on the international stage, and we are better than that.

In her response, I hope the Minister will talk about the ongoing discussions that her Department is having with the Home Office; be clear with us about local government funding and the assurances she can give on that; update us on lessons learned to date; and explain what funding will be available. As the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon said, rather than leaving it until the last minute, can we have something in place that will prevent any further distress to the Ukrainian families? I am particularly interested in the fact that all Members have spoken about the importance of education and skills, not only in the contribution to society but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam eloquently said, to enable these brave Ukrainian refugees to transform uncertainty into hope.

I will finish by urging the Government to truly heed the words of the Opposition, charities, the LGA, the APPG for ending homelessness and the Government's own MPs and peers, including the former Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel), and act quickly to save their blushes and, most importantly, to fulfil our obligations to the Ukrainian people who chose this country for sanctuary.

3.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Felicity Buchan): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I thank everyone for the constructive tone of the debate, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Olivia Blake) on her very comprehensive and interesting speech.

I thank the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) for her personal contribution to the Homes for Ukraine scheme, which is one of the most remarkable schemes this country has ever seen. It is because of the generosity and compassion of British people that we have been able to welcome so many Ukrainians to this country. The informed and impassioned contributions to the debate speak to the fact that, one year into this war, none of us has allowed there to be any creeping normalisation of the horrors we have witnessed in Ukraine. Our commitment to the people of Ukraine has not wavered, and it will not waver in the years ahead.

The debate is very important to me, not only because I am the Minister responsible for the Homes for Ukraine scheme, but also because my constituency of Kensington is the home of the Ukrainian community in London and, to an extent, throughout the UK. In my constituency, we have the Ukrainian embassy, the phenomenal St Mary's Ukrainian School, where the numbers have gone up astronomically, the Ukrainian community centre and the Ukrainian Institute London, so the subject is very important to me. I first visited the Ukrainian community before the invasion, when tensions were rising, and I have been with them on a constituency basis all the way. I am delighted to say that in my small borough of Kensington and Chelsea we have 423 registered sponsors under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, and 617 Ukrainians have arrived in the borough, 152 of whom are children.

From the moment the first tanks crossed the border into Ukraine, the stoicism, courage and determination shown by President Zelensky and the Ukrainian people have been a constant source of inspiration to us all. We have been clear from the get-go that if we want to live in a world where peaceful sovereign nations are free to choose their own destiny, Ukraine must win.

I will address the many points that Members have made, but I would like to start by emphasising that the Government and I are enormously proud of the support the UK is providing to Ukrainian nationals and their families. Most of all, we are proud that these schemes are being powered by the British people.

Olivia Blake: The Minister has referred to the housing issues, but one of the other uncertainties for families is the lack of clarity about family reunification rights under the different schemes and whether those will change over time. Will the Minister address that?

Felicity Buchan: I will address the different schemes and how they fit together in a few moments.

Before the Homes for Ukraine scheme even opened, thousands registered their interest in helping. As soon as it did open, thousands more opened their hearts and their homes to people whose lives had been torn apart by a conflict that they did not ask for. The scheme was the first of its kind in the UK and, since we launched it on 18 March 2022, we have welcomed a remarkable 115,800 people. When combined with the Ukraine families scheme, we have now helped to find over 163,500 people a safe and secure home.

At the outset, we vowed to keep the routes for Ukrainian refugees under constant review, and that is what we have done. The scheme did not stay static; it evolved as the weeks and months went on, including an extension to bring over unaccompanied children who were not travelling with a parent or legal guardian, with robust additional safeguarding checks. We have also adapted the scheme in terms of rematching. We have offered further money. The scheme is a living organism; it will potentially adapt further with time.

As a Government, we have been determined to reciprocate the generosity of the hosts who have come forward with offers of help. To that end, we have provided £1.1 billion to councils through a tariff for each arrival in their area to support guests and sponsors alike. In recognition of their generous support, all Homes for Ukraine sponsors will receive an increased “thank you” payment of £500 a month once guests have been in the country for over a year. We have extended the duration that sponsors can get “thank you” payments from one year to two years. Our absolute focus is providing stable homes for Ukrainians fleeing war and starting a new life on UK soil.

Let me take this opportunity before my concluding remarks to follow up on a few specific points. I will start with homelessness, because a number of Members raised it, and will go through our latest homelessness numbers. For the Homes for Ukraine scheme, it is 2,495. For Ukrainians as a whole, including the families scheme, it is 4,295. Homelessness is defined as a local authority having a duty to prevent and relieve, so, just focusing on the prevention part, a lot of these numbers will cover local authorities that are going in there to help people and put roofs over their heads. I want to be very clear

on that definition. Local authorities are doing their job in many of these cases and preventing. If one looks at the 2,495 number in the context of 115,000 arrivals under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, it is a small percentage. We do not want any Ukrainian to be homeless but, if one looks at the prevention and relief duties, it is a small percentage. As I said, it is a good thing that local authorities are doing their jobs and doing them incredibly well.

There are 735 households in temporary accommodation. What are the Government doing to support local authorities? I want to put it on the record that I think local authorities are doing a tremendous job. First, as I have already mentioned, the Government are providing £1.2 billion in tariffs. Those tariffs can be used for homelessness prevention—for example, to help guarantee private rental sector rents. We have also put a £150 million fund in place to relieve homelessness. I believe it was the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam who asked how that fund would be allocated. It will be allocated to the devolved authorities, and in England. We are in discussions with the devolved authorities—I have regular update calls with them—and are finessing the split of that fund. As soon as that has been done and we have agreed the split among the DAs, we will communicate the allocations to local authorities, but that is very much a work in progress.

Layla Moran: I thank the Minister for thanking local authorities, because they have done an extraordinary, incredible job—South and Vale have taken a wraparound approach and been very successful in driving down homelessness, not just in the scheme but across the entire district. I encourage the Minister to look not just at the raw homelessness numbers, but at local authorities that are efficient and have done that, often by taking resource from elsewhere and putting it into this team, which has stopped many people from being homeless or even getting anywhere close to that point. When the Government look at the allocation, will they not just assume that, because the numbers are not huge, there is not a problem elsewhere in the council? Indeed, the fact that there are very few has caused problems elsewhere in the council.

Felicity Buchan: That is a well-made point. As I say, we are looking at how we will allocate that money, but I hear what the hon. Member says.

Chris Stephens: The Minister is being typically generous in giving way. Might one of the reasons for homelessness or some of the other difficulties be related to the point I raised about biometric residence permits? What discussions is she having with the Home Office to make sure BRPs are issued quickly?

Felicity Buchan: When we are talking about homelessness under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, these are all people who are here with their visas, so I do not think it relates to the BRP scheme. However, I am happy to relay the hon. Member’s comments to the Home Office, as he has asked. To the extent that he has details about particular issues, if he could feed those in to me, I can pass them on.

We have also set up a £500 million fund for local authorities to purchase, build or redevelop homes, with an initial focus on Ukrainians and Afghans, although the aim over time is for those homes to be for the benefit

[Felicity Buchan]

of the local community. We are very focused as a Government on homelessness prevention; indeed, we want to prevent homelessness from ever happening. In the last fiscal year, 2022-23, we spent £316 million, but we got an extra top-up from the Treasury of £50 million to alleviate winter homelessness, which makes £366 million. These are big sums of money, and in December we announced £654 million over two years for homelessness prevention.

Let me turn to the private rented sector. I had a look at the last Office for National Statistics survey, in which 17% of those surveyed were in the PRS; however, I am conscious—and clearly I have heard—that there have been issues with some Ukrainians accessing that sector. Sometimes it has been because of a lack of credit history in the UK; sometimes they have been unable to put down deposits. We have encouraged local authorities to think innovatively about how to use the tariff to help people access the private rental sector—an awful lot of local authorities have said that people are using the £10,500 that was received last year to put down deposits. We would encourage them to look at those solutions. Local authorities know best what the funding situation is in their local area.

We are also working very closely with the LGA and the National Residential Landlords Association to get to the bottom of any problems and see how we can incentivise landlords to get round these issues, because it is quite clear that a lot of Ukrainians would like to be independent. While many sponsors are prepared to go longer than six months—in fact, I had another look at the ONS data, and 90% of sponsors said that they were prepared to go longer than six months, while 60% already have—clearly, access to the private rental sector is an important option for Ukrainians. It is something that my Department is working on with a lot of focus. As I say, we are encouraging best practice. We are also funding the strategic migration partnerships to share that best practice among local authorities.

A lot of Members talked about the importance of English for speakers of other languages—ESOL—and skilled employment, and I could not agree more. I chaired a cross-Government meeting last week, attended by a Minister from every Department, where we talked about how we can ramp up that provision of English language classes and ensure that professional qualifications are recognised. Clearly, professional qualifications are recognised by independent bodies, so we cannot tell the Nursing and Midwifery Council what it should approve, but we encourage it to focus on this. There are issues that these bodies need to take into account. It is a focus of Government; I am working very closely with the Minister responsible, the Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade, my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), on that matter.

I would like to pick up on a few other issues that were raised, such as that about council tax. I want to make it very clear that people who arrive in the UK under the Homes for Ukraine scheme and are living with people will be disregarded for the purposes of council tax. Let us say you are a single person and you get the single person discount. If you bring in two Ukrainians under

the Homes for Ukraine scheme, you are still one single person for the purposes of council tax, so you will still get the 25% discount.

Olivia Blake: Will the Minister give way?

Felicity Buchan: I think the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam is about to disagree with me—I give way.

Olivia Blake: Not to disagree—that is correct, and it is fantastic. But again, this is a problem in the Ukraine family scheme. People are not getting that extra payment, but they are getting the extra cost of turning from a single-person household to a multi-person household. That is the question for me, really: what can you do to ensure that these schemes are equitable to allow stability? As you rightly pointed out, people are leaving both the Homes for Ukraine scheme and the family scheme because of difficulties with the cost of living.

Peter Dowd (in the Chair): Order. At the risk of being pedantic, there are a lot of “you”s going on here. Can we address points through the Chair, if Members do not mind?

Felicity Buchan: This may be a good opportunity for me to talk about how the schemes came about, and our thinking. First, I stress that both schemes give those who have arrived a three-year visa and, very importantly, the right to work, be educated and receive benefits here. The Ukrainian arriving here has the same rights under both schemes.

The family scheme came about because we wanted to extend the most compassion that we could very quickly. It was a temporary and more generous alternative to the family route, and it extended the number and type of family members who could come in. Homes for Ukraine is a very different scheme. It is unique. It is for those fleeing conflict who cannot rely on family support. As I say, individuals have the same rights under both schemes. The difference comes about because in one scheme there are no thank-you payments. We think that is appropriate, because in the family scheme people come over as family members, whereas in the Homes for Ukraine scheme, they have no connection to their host, so we think it appropriate to offer the host a thank-you payment.

The other difference is that the tariff payment to local authorities is paid under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. That is important because of the obligations on local authorities to, for instance, carry out safeguarding checks and ensure integration into the community. Those obligations are specific to the Homes for Ukraine scheme. I want to give hon. Members our logic as to why we see the schemes as separate, but the important point is that the individual has the same rights under both.

Alison Thewliss: I appreciate what the Minister says about why she makes those distinctions between the Homes for Ukraine scheme and the family scheme. However, a case that I dealt with in my constituency involved a person whose parents had come under the family scheme. The parents could not stay with their daughter, because she had only a one-bedroom flat, so there was no room for them. Those parents ended up being put up by my constituent—she wanted to help and had the space to do so—but my constituent was not entitled to any support payments for that. That made

things quite fractious for the host, because she was not hosting them on the same basis as other hosts. Does the Minister agree that, for the people who fall in between those two stools, those circumstances seem quite unfair?

Felicity Buchan: There have been one or two examples, such as that of the hon. Lady's constituent, where hosts thought that they were potentially hosting under the Homes for Ukraine scheme but were not. On homelessness under the family scheme, local authorities have an obligation to deal with homelessness regardless of which scheme a person comes under. I want to make that clear, because the £150 million fund is to relieve homelessness. It is not ringfenced, and it is for local authorities to decide how it is spent.

Let me pick up the point about housing benefit. We have amended the eligibility criteria to ensure that arrivals from Ukraine under one of the Government schemes are eligible for housing assistance from day one of their arrival. I believe there was also a question about family reunification. That does not fall within my remit; it is a Home Office matter.

Let me conclude. At every stage of this process, we have developed our humanitarian schemes in close consultation with Ukrainian leaders and, very importantly, the diaspora community in the UK to ensure that what we offer responds to their needs. The needs of Ukrainians will continue to be at the heart of our approach. I am hugely proud of what we have all achieved, cross-party, by putting politics to one side and instead focusing our collective efforts on supporting Ukraine and its people through the war. Today's debate, with the strength, passion and commitment that has been on display, has left me more convinced than ever that Ukraine can and will win the war.

I will finish by thanking most of all the sponsors in the UK. Without their generosity and compassion, the scheme would simply not have been possible. On behalf of this House, thank you.

3.35 pm

Olivia Blake: Apologies for my earlier use of "you", Mr Dowd. I want to say a massive thank you to everyone who has taken part in today's debate. We heard about personal experiences from the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran), and about the innovative schemes in Perth and Glasgow. It is important that we look across UK borders—or should I say devolution lines?—to make sure that we learn as much as we can about how the schemes are working.

I was privileged to work closely with host families in my area. I hosted joint surgeries, so that we could share experiences, and hear from people going through the process, which was iterative. That approach at Government level is important, so I thank the Minister for addressing the concerns raised. We might have to agree to disagree on the issues around the difference between the two schemes, as things are a bit more complicated in reality than they were outlined as being.

I forgot to mention the question of how we monitor the number of people returning to Ukraine. In Sheffield, 34 families have returned to Ukraine. According to the Sheffield branch of the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain, that was primarily because of an inability to get private rented sector housing. Information of that kind is key to our understanding, and gives us the opportunity to improve the scheme.

I thank everyone for taking part in this debate. I am grateful that time was allowed for us to consider the issues. Although the scheme has been a success, we can always learn lessons, so that we can make sure that, in the medium to long term, we give our full support to the people of Ukraine.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the anniversary of the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

3.38 pm

Sitting suspended.

Authorised Push Payment Fraud

4 pm

Peter Dowd (in the Chair): I will call Kirsten Oswald to move the motion and then the Minister to respond. As is conventional in 30-minute debates, there will not be an opportunity for the Member in charge of the debate to wind up.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered authorised push payment fraud.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Dowd. I am pleased to bring forward this debate, because I have had protracted discussions with a business in my constituency that has been targeted by fraudsters, resulting in some of its clients losing thousands of pounds through authorised push payment scams. Those scams deceive an individual into unknowingly transferring funds to a criminal. They now represent the largest type of payment fraud in the UK, both in the number of scams and value of losses.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I do not normally intervene this early, but this issue is critical for my constituents in Strangford—and indeed for everyone, I suspect. I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing forward this debate. The latest figures are astounding: £249.1 million was lost to APP scams in the first half of 2022. That indicates how prevalent these scams are. Messaging about these scams is not as effective as it should be. Does she agree that more steps need to be taken to safeguard vulnerable people who are losing money? They are not great at tech, and have been taken advantage of.

Kirsten Oswald: I share the hon. Gentleman's concerns. In 2021, losses to this type of fraud totalled £583.2 million. That represents a 38% increase on the previous year. It is worth noting that a lot of cases of authorised push payment fraud go unreported, so those figures are likely to underestimate the true amount lost to these scams. As he suggested, the impact of fraud can be devastating. Victims can lose substantial sums of money. The impact on their health and wellbeing cannot be over-stated. Research from *Which?* showed that 71% of fraud victims felt that their experience had a detrimental impact on their stress levels; 63% said it was harmful to their mental health, and 39% said it affected their physical health.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I too am very grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing this subject before the House. She is right to mention the huge damage this fraud can cause to individuals and families, including in my constituency. I have two constituents who were caught up in the episode that she described. Does she agree that progress in making compulsory both full reimbursement and the code has been slower than we would like? It is crucial that we make fast progress on ensuring that full reimbursement and full compliance with the code are in place by the end of this year.

Kirsten Oswald: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is absolutely right, both about the people we are discussing who are directly affected, and about the framework generally. Progress is needed now. I will come back to both those points.

My constituent owns a successful business. Despite proper security controls, its email server was unfortunately infiltrated by sophisticated fraudsters, who then sent emails to business clients. The emails sent by the scammers looked just like genuine emails that would be sent from the business. That allowed the fraudsters to cloak their identity. I have heard of other cases of this, too. It is worth stressing that the emails were sent to clients who were due to make payments, which made the fraudulent emails seem entirely credible. This type of fraud is highly sophisticated. In fact, it is a huge and growing industry, which should be of deep concern to us all. I hope to hear the Government's reaction to it from the Minister. Little wonder that many people unknowingly end up transferring funds to fraudsters when the scams are so sophisticated and complex.

My constituent's case was only one type of APP scam, namely that of impersonation. There are other types. For example, there are purchase scams, in which a victim is tricked into buying goods or services that are never received. They are regularly found on Facebook and Instagram, and victims are lured in by the promise of cut-price goods. Quite commonly, it will be something like a reduced-price games console, which the victim pays for online but does not receive. Another type of APP fraud is the investment scam: victims are tricked into handing over money for bogus investment schemes that never materialise. Romance scams are obviously less common, but are deeply distressing; people are persuaded to make a payment to a person online with whom they believe they are in a relationship, but who they have never met.

The need to prevent all those types of fraud is paramount. An individual can take steps, particularly in cases such as the one I outlined, to ensure that their money is transferred to the correct bank account. For instance, a straightforward step is to never hesitate to question a payment request robustly. Ideally, an individual should make contact via means other than the ones through which the payment request was made. They should not just reply to an email or click a link, but find another way of contacting the business. We are essentially asking consumers to be responsible for working out where a sophisticated and complex crime is being committed. We need to strike the right balance, and recognise that those actually responsible for this terrible crime are the criminals.

A client of my constituent's business was asked by their own bank to confirm with the business that it had requested a payment before the bank proceeded with the transfer. At that point, the business became aware that there had been an intrusion into its systems, and it took proactive steps to prevent customers from making any further payments. I welcome the way the business has dealt with the issue throughout.

I welcome the efforts made by several banks to introduce confirmation of payee services. They check the account name and details to ensure that the payment arrives at the correct destination, providing an additional layer of security. However, only some banks have set up such services. TSB Bank believes that all payment service providers should be required to introduce confirmation of payee services, because it seems that organised criminal gangs have shifted to using banks that do not have those checks enabled. It is noticeable, certainly to me, that there is not a unified view in the banking sector on how best to prevent this kind of scam, or on the issue of

mandatory reimbursement. The UK Government could do more to take the lead on bringing the banking and payment sectors together to solve these issues. I would welcome the Minister's thoughts on that.

I thank Lloyds Banking Group, which took the time to meet me this week, ahead of the debate, to discuss these issues and some of the cases I am raising. I hope that a satisfactory conclusion can be reached. My hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) very clearly laid out the distress caused to the people who are caught up in these situations. I encourage Lloyds to look further at this particular case, but I am grateful for its positive discussions with me about fraud prevention.

In total, four clients of my constituent's business were targeted by fraudsters. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East suggested, the first case involved a couple unknowingly transferring £40,000 to an HSBC-held bank account. They have been reimbursed over £19,000 by their bank, which is the Bank of Scotland. The second case involved an individual who, again unknowingly, sent £12,500 to an HSBC-held bank account. In the third and fourth cases, clients received emails asking them to transfer money to fraudulent HSBC-held accounts, but thankfully they did not do so.

The contingent reimbursement model is a voluntary code that 10 firms covering 21 banking brands have signed up for. That code aims to reduce the occurrence and the impact of authorised push payment scams. It was designed to give people confidence that if they fell victim to that kind of scam, they would be reimbursed if they had acted properly. The responsibility for reimbursement, according to the contingent reimbursement model code, lies solely with the sending bank.

With that in mind, I return to the case that I outlined, where only half the funds have been returned. I wonder how that can be. The couple has been reimbursed £19,555 by the Bank of Scotland—the sending bank, if you like. Now, the Bank of Scotland has signed up to the contingent reimbursement mechanism, so I would have expected it to reimburse its client to the tune of the full £40,000. However, it did not do that and instead suggested that HSBC should refund the other half of the £40,000 because it was the bank with whom the fraudulent account was held. The individual who mistakenly sent £12,500 to an HSBC-held account has in fact received no reimbursement at all.

Both those cases are now with the Financial Ombudsman Service. I hope—although I am not sure this will be borne out in reality—that there will be a sensible resolution to the situation, because none of these people deserves to be impacted in the way that they have been. It is important to stress that terms such as “blame” and “fault” are used too often in these conversations, in a way that is both unhelpful and unfair, given the sophistication of these scams. The only people to blame for authorised push payment scams are the criminals who create these fraudulent ventures, not the people who fall victim to what are designed to be highly convincing criminal efforts to part them from their money.

With that in mind, I would like to make several points to the Minister. First, the banking sector must improve its internal mechanisms for identifying accounts engaged in fraudulent activity. During my correspondence with HSBC regarding the situation I have set out it stated:

“HSBC undertakes robust due diligence as part of our account opening process, and has payment screening in place to identify fraud.”

I have no doubt that HSBC has internal mechanisms to detect potential fraudsters, and I do not seek to suggest otherwise, but my constituent's clients were targeted by fraudsters with four different accounts, all of which were held by HSBC. We should remember that this particular case of fraud was stopped at an early stage, so I cannot say how many potential frauds the fraudsters may have wanted to carry out or how those would have related to particular banks. However, all the cases I am aware of involved HSBC, so HSBC—and every other bank—can and must do more to identify and shut down accounts engaged in fraud.

Secondly, I welcome the move towards making the contingent reimbursement model a mandatory code covering all banking firms. I note that clause 62 of the Financial Services and Markets Bill, which is currently in Committee in the other place, enhances protections for victims of authorised push payment scams by putting a duty on the Payment Systems Regulator to take regulatory action on APP scam reimbursement, ultimately giving it the power to make reimbursement mandatory across the faster payments service.

The introduction of a voluntary contingent reimbursement model code has resulted in the rate of victim reimbursement rising from 19% in the first half of 2019 to 41% in 2020. With a mandatory CRM, I am sure that that number will rise further, meaning that more and more victims of this type of fraud should receive reimbursement. Some banks, such as TSB, offer an authorised push payment scam refund guarantee, fully reimbursing all authorised push payment scam victims up to £1 million, unless the customer has been grossly negligent. Some 97% of fraud claims with TSB have been refunded since the refund guarantee was introduced, which is well above the industry average and should give food for thought to others.

Last November, the Payment Systems Regulator consulted on a package of measures to combat authorised push payment scams, including mandating reimbursement for victims. The regulator is now consulting on specific proposals that would put that mandatory reimbursement in place for all online and mobile payments. In line with protections for other payments and financial services, reimbursement would be on all payments over £100, and a time limit of no less than 13 months would be set for claims. A mandatory reimbursement code would ensure that, regardless of what bank or building society individuals choose as their provider, they would be protected from massive financial loss due to these scams.

To come back to the situation I am dealing with, two clients of my constituent's business have lost £20,000 and £12,500 each. These are significant sums of money. Who could possibly afford to lose them? I welcome all legislative changes that will help to bring about a mandatory reimbursement code, but what steps will the UK Government take to ensure that people who have been affected before the code comes into place are reimbursed, particularly where their payment service provider signed up to the voluntary code but failed to carry through on its commitment, as the sending bank, to reimburse?

I would also like to hear the Minister's views on social media firms and tech giants taking fraud more seriously and on what action they can take to stop fraudsters using their platforms to target people. It is also incumbent on them to take steps to clamp down on bad actors but, at the moment, they have no financial

[*Kirsten Oswald*]

incentive to remove fraudsters from their platforms, because banks are ultimately held responsible for refunding lost money. That is a conversation that needs to take place with Government.

I welcome some of the progress that has been made and the action by banks, Government and other organisations but, although mandatory reimbursement is desirable, some are still concerned about how it will be enforced. The Treasury Committee recently published a report entitled “Scam reimbursement: pushing for a better solution”, which highlighted some of these concerns. That report supported the principle of mandatory reimbursement but noted concerns about how the plans would be implemented. The Payment Systems Regulator proposes that Pay.UK will make, maintain and enforce reimbursement rules. That is problematic for several reasons set out in the report. Pay.UK is not independent; it is an industry body and guaranteed by the very banks and other service providers it would be asking to reimburse fraud victims. More worryingly, it is not a regulator and lacks the powers necessary to enforce its rules, so there could be foot-dragging and other challenges.

Stuart C. McDonald: The other reason the Treasury Committee gave for not liking that solution was the potential for further delay and kicking the can down the road. Given the earlier point that this has been ongoing for a few years, the last thing we need is more delay.

Kirsten Oswald: It is almost as if my hon. Friend had read the end of my speech. He is absolutely right; that is it in a nutshell. We want to prevent fraud, punish fraudsters and ensure that victims are reimbursed. That is the way to reduce the harm that these scams cause. Surely, we should all support those principles. I ask the Minister to give serious consideration to the credibility of the Payment Systems Regulator’s current suggestions, to look closely at how social media interacts with these systems and to commit to listening to victims such as those I have talked about today.

To conclude, I ask that the banks involved in the cases I have outlined give serious consideration to their part in the challenges that people are facing through no fault of their own. They should look to ensure both that people are reimbursed and that they clamp down on fraudsters using their services.

4.17 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Victoria Atkins): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I commend the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (*Kirsten Oswald*) for securing this debate, which addresses an issue that she clearly cares about deeply. I know from my own constituency and from conversations with colleagues across the House that it is, sadly, one that we see across the country, which is why the Government also care deeply about it. It is a growing issue and demands urgent intervention.

As the hon. Lady set out articulately, authorised push payment scams are becoming increasingly sophisticated and often target the most vulnerable in our society. Because they are so sophisticated, they are also able to target professionals, businesses and so on—people who would otherwise consider themselves to be alive to these sorts of risks. It is a very clever form of fraud.

Under the European regulatory system that we have inherited, there is no statutory or regulatory requirement for banks to reimburse the victims of these scams. Although the creation of a voluntary reimbursement code has improved matters, reimbursement for victims has, as the hon. Lady set out, been inconsistent across banks and for victims, and only about half the stolen money is reimbursed. As a result, many victims are left facing significant losses; in the worst cases, they can lose their life savings. From the hon. Lady’s descriptions, we know the impacts that that can have on people and businesses. We are acutely aware of the impact of this type of fraud, so we are determined to help victims and to crack down on these scams and the impact that these fraudsters have on people and businesses.

Front and centre of those efforts is our action on victim reimbursement. As part of the Financial Services and Markets Bill, we are introducing world-leading legislation to protect people as a matter of urgency. Once passed, the Bill will remove legal barriers in retained EU law that currently prevent regulatory action on reimbursement by the Payment Systems Regulator. That will enable the regulator to mandate reimbursement for any payment system under its supervision. However, the legislation goes even further: it will also place a specific duty on the regulator to implement a reimbursement mandate for the faster payments system within six months. I hope that the hon. Lady and other hon. Members will be assured that there will be swift regulatory action once the Bill receives Royal Assent.

This issue does not just require timely action; it also demands effective action. We are confident that the regulator has the appropriate objectives, expertise and powers to design the details of mandatory reimbursement in a way that ensures strong and consistent protections for victims. In its recent consultation on the matter, it stated its intention to require firms to fully reimburse victims of all APP fraud occurring through faster payments, with very limited exceptions. That would ensure that victims are reimbursed in the vast majority of cases and at far higher rates than under the existing voluntary reimbursement codes.

Kirsten Oswald: I hear what the Minister says. What does she think about the people I described in my contribution, who will not be covered by the measures she outlined?

Victoria Atkins: I was going to attempt to answer the question posed by the hon. Lady later, but I will answer it now. Regarding current victims, the legislation is not retrospective—she will know that it is very rare for this place to pass retrospective legislation—but we expect banks to honour past voluntary commitments. That may well be something that the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, who has primary responsibility for this area, has put his mind to. I will ask him to write to her with his thoughts on it.

Given that the hon. Lady has intervened on me, I will respond to the interesting points she raised about social media and tech companies. I will do the same as on the previous point, and ask the Economic Secretary to the Treasury to write to her. From my own portfolio, I know some of the challenges with the use of social media when it comes, for example, to repayment agents who are not behaving as they should. As the hon. Lady says,

the ability of fraudsters to present themselves as legitimate, by stealing people's business logos or details, is highly sophisticated. It requires a joined-up reaction from across Government, law enforcement and so on.

That brings me to what we are doing across Government. Although this is an insidious form of fraud, it is not the only one our constituents face. We will therefore shortly publish a new, broad-based fraud strategy, which will detail how we will prevent fraud, so that people do not lose their life savings and money in the way the hon. Lady set out and we can crack down on these gangs.

In the meantime, the Treasury has worked diligently with the Financial Conduct Authority and the Payment Systems Regulator on the roll-out of fraud prevention measures such as confirmation of payee, which the hon. Lady referred to, which can help and has been designed to stop some forms of APP fraud and accidentally misdirected payments. I know that the hon. Lady and other hon. Members will welcome the regulator's action to mandate that service for the vast majority of faster payments transactions, and I highlight its intention to achieve near-universal coverage in the near future.

The Treasury continues to assess industry proposals for legislation to enable further delay to high-risk payments. The hon. Lady asked me about internal banking processes, and that is one way that we have looked to address that form of fraud.

The regulator has consulted on further measures to prevent payment fraud, including enhanced information sharing between payment providers so that scammers can be identified and shut down quickly. That is in addition to mandating confirmation of payee, which I have already described. That will enable payers to check that they are, in fact, sending payments to the right person.

In short, we very much understand why the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire has raised this important issue. We share her determination to tackle it, and look forward to working with law enforcement agencies, banks, the regulators and colleagues across the House to ensure that our constituents are protected from this invidious form of fraud, which I know we all want to see stopped.

Question put and agreed to.

4.26 pm

Sitting suspended.

Poverty: Food Costs

4.30 pm

Peter Dowd (in the Chair): As I indicated, there may be Divisions, so Members should bear that in mind.

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of tackling poverty and the cost of food.

It is a pleasure to serve for the first time under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I thank my colleagues for turning up today; there is very good attendance and I am sure they are all going to be very supportive.

The world's farmers produce enough food on this planet to feed 1.5 times the global population. It is enough food to feed 10 billion people; there are currently about 7.6 billion people on the planet. In the UK we waste about 10 million tonnes of food every year, and yet we have seen a reported increase in food bank use. Takeaway sales are up year on year; the market is set to reach £23 billion this year, with us British people spending an average of £641 a year on takeaway food—and yet we see a rise in food bank use. We have a big obesity problem in the UK, and it is spiralling out of control. It is costing our NHS a massive £6 billion annually. That is set to rise to £9.7 billion each year by 2050—and yet we see a significant increase in food bank use.

No one should go hungry in the UK—we know that. We produce enough food across the world to wipe out global hunger.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member on securing this debate, and want to open an invitation to not only him but everybody here. I am the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on ending the need for food banks. The issue is clearly something the hon. Member cares about. Our annual general meeting is later this month; I hope to see him there.

Lee Anderson: That is a very kind invitation and I will do my very best to attend—thank you for that. Like I said, 40% of food goes to waste; that is 2.5 billion tonnes that we throw away each year on this planet. If that food was given to the people who need it, we could give chronically undernourished—*[Interruption.]*

Peter Dowd (in the Chair): Order. I am sorry, but there is a Division. We will be back here in 35 minutes, at seven minutes past five.

4.32 pm

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

5.7 pm

On resuming—

Lee Anderson: To recap, I was talking about the amount of food wasted, not only throughout the world but more specifically in the UK. The UK has cut down its food waste in recent years, but we still throw away far too much edible food. The UK creates 9.52 million tonnes of food waste per year, according to the Waste and Resources Action Programme—WRAP, for short.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Gentleman for bringing this tremendous debate forward; I am looking forward to making a contribution. Does he recognise that the likes of Asda, Tesco and some of the other larger shopkeepers already have a system in place for food waste? In my constituency of Strangford, in Newtownards town, all the stuff at its end date is put out for community groups, which can take advantage of it. Some of the big stores are already making steps in the right direction.

Lee Anderson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I am going to speak about big stores such as Asda later, but the hon. Gentleman is quite right that they are doing their bit at the moment—I would like to see them do a little bit more.

A lot of the wasted food is disposed of during the manufacturing process. Some is disposed of by the retail and hospitality sectors, but a big chunk of waste comes from households all over the country, which are throwing away food on a daily basis.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP)
rose—

Lee Anderson: I will certainly give way.

Patricia Gibson: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this debate forward. What he says about wasted food is very important; the waste of food is something that most of us find very difficult to see, but it is criminal. He may not be aware of this, but on Scottish television last summer there were news stories over a number of weeks about soft fruit rotting in the fields because of a lack of seasonal agricultural workers to pick it. Does he agree that we need to take action to get workers in to pick that fruit?

Lee Anderson: I thank the hon. Member for her intervention, and she makes a good point. I am not fortunate enough to get Scottish TV where I live; we do not quite get the signal. Yes, there is a problem in the agricultural sector with seasonal workers. I did have a solution, but I was shouted down when I first got to this place. We have 90,000 people languishing in jails in this country, and we are about 90,000 people short for picking fruit and vegetables. I think that would be a good start. If we have a labour shortage, we need to look inwards.

I will move on. The hospitality sector alone tosses away about £3.2 billion of food a year, according to WRAP. Households could cause 70% of the UK's food waste, throwing away about 6.6 million tonnes of food, of which 4.5 million tonnes is actually edible. That is far too much, especially at a time when nearly 70% of UK households are worried about their energy prices; I am worried about my energy prices. Some people think it may mean they are not able to buy enough food to carry on, according to the Food Foundation.

Overall, 6.4 million tonnes of completely edible food is thrown away every year. I think that is criminal. The consumable food that we waste costs the UK about £19 billion a year, which adds up to £284 for every single person in this country. Households alone get rid of edible food worth £13.8 billion. If we split that between all the UK's 28.1 million households, each home would save £491 per year. Food waste presents a significant problem due to the volume of waste produced each year. In fact, it is estimated that in the UK alone, we

throw away around 9.5 million tonnes of food waste annually, most of which will end up in an already overcrowded landfill.

Every day, I get emails and messages on social media from people saying that we have starving children in the UK, and that we voted not to feed schoolchildren. That is dangerous and misleading.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member on securing this really important debate. The Food Foundation published an opinion poll today on extending free school meals to every child whose household is on universal credit. The poll showed that almost eight in 10 of the hon. Gentleman's constituents support that policy. With more than a quarter of children in his constituency living in poverty, will the hon. Gentleman join me in calling on the Chancellor to extend free school meals to every child living in poverty?

Lee Anderson: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. There is a myth in this country that if people are on universal credit, they are in poverty. I will dispel that myth right now. We have people—not just in my constituency, but all over the country—who are on universal credit, but have a household income of more than £40,000 a year. Now that is not poverty. If people in London on universal credit work a few hours, there is a loophole in the universal credit system meaning they can top up their wages by £30,000-odd a year. That is not poverty. Being on universal credit alone is not an indicator that a family are in poverty, so I totally dismiss that idea.

But I do admit that some families in this country are struggling, and they need our support. A few months back, I visited a school in Ashfield after concerned parents contacted me because the breakfast club had been stopped. The school had stopped providing free breakfasts because the private funding it had secured had run out. Those parents were concerned not about their own children, but about the more disadvantaged children from the poorer families in the area. So I contacted the school and asked what I thought was a reasonable question: "Why are you giving every single child a breakfast in the morning?" I did not get a breakfast, and my kids got a breakfast at home, so it is something new to me. The school told me that people were struggling to feed their own children at home.

I also asked if the school had asked for a donation from any of the families. The families I was speaking to wanted to make a donation to the school, but it said no. When I asked why, it could not answer me. Then I asked, "Why are some families unable to feed their children at breakfast? Why can't they give them a slice of toast or whatever?" The school struggled to answer me. Eventually, it said, "Well, it's the cost of living crisis, isn't it?" I thought, "How much does Weetabix and a bowl of milk cost?" Not even the 30p that I'm famous for—it probably costs a lot less than that.

I wanted to help, so I went on to ask if I could meet the parents who were struggling, to give the whole holistic approach and see where they were going wrong, if we could help and if they had debt, budgeting or social problems. That was nearly four months ago, and I have still heard nothing back. Why have I got nothing back? I'll tell you for why: there is a reluctance in certain parts of this country, now, about getting to the root of the problem. It is far too easy to say that there is a cost

of living crisis. Yes, we know that people are struggling, that food prices are up and that energy prices are up. We know all that, but we cannot keep throwing taxpayers' money at people. That is what it is: it is taxpayers' money—our money, our constituents' money.

Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab) *rose*—

Lee Anderson: I will gladly give way.

Ian Byrne: We are talking about communities struggling. A report last week said that the minimum universal credit paid should be £120. We have got people receiving £85, so they are already down before we even factor in the rent. Does the hon. Gentleman understand the magnitude of the crisis that people are facing now regarding rent, food and the cost of everything? Is that coming through in his constituency? It is certainly coming through in mine, and it is certainly coming through in the national picture as well.

We have got to understand and quantify the magnitude of the problem. Also, how do we solve it politically? It is not by saying that someone should be able to afford a Weetabix and a pint of milk. How do we solve the problem of millions of people going hungry?

Lee Anderson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. Yes, I do live in the real world. When I talk about these things in this place, I am talking on behalf of my friends, family, neighbours and constituents. I will take no lectures from anybody in this place about living in a deprived area.

Patricia Gibson *rose*—

Lee Anderson: I will gladly give way.

Patricia Gibson: I was listening carefully when the hon. Gentleman said that he wanted to meet the people using the service in his constituency that he talked about. He said that he wanted to see what the problems might be for people who were struggling to afford food, and that he had had no response in four months to his offer to speak to them to understand their circumstances better. I grew up in poverty—deep poverty. If my mother had the opportunity to discuss with a local MP why she was struggling, I do not think she would have taken that invitation up. That is quite a difficult conversation, and it can be quite intrusive.

Peter Dowd (in the Chair): Order. Before Lee Anderson comes in, I remind hon. Members that, although I accept that people are passionate about this issue, the more interventions there are, the less time there is for people who have not intervened. I ask Members to bear that in mind. It is a matter for hon. Members, but I will be clear and unambiguous on the time.

Lee Anderson: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. I might say that if her mother had had a first-class Conservative MP like myself, maybe she would have been more comfortable coming for that advice. *[Interruption.]* It's true.

I speak as a former adviser for a citizens advice bureau; I worked there for about 10 years. If hon. Members want to know about poverty, come and have a chat with me, because I saw these people on a daily basis. The people I used to see came with all sorts of problems—social problems, debt problems, benefits problems—and a lot

of them had to rely on food banks. The first thing we used to do was go through an income and expenditure sheet with the service users. In most cases, there were lots of savings to be made. These people had not had the best start in life, a lot of them, and they needed help—a bit of education and a bit of support—with their bills and debts. They were paying ridiculous Provident loans off at high interest rates. They needed support; what they did not need was money thrown at them. Ten years later—it took me 10 or 15 years to learn this—I was seeing the sons and daughters of those families, who were coming to see me with the same problems that mum and dad had had 10 years before. We were not actually breaking the cycle; we were not supporting people.

I did a bit of work with my local food bank last year, as hon. Members will probably be aware—it was reported in some newspapers. I was delivering meals from the food bank to vulnerable families with an award-winning local chef; he works at a really good restaurant. After a few days of delivering meals, he said to me, "This is totally wrong. These people need proper help. They need teaching how to budget and how to cook a meal from scratch." What we learned at the food bank was that people could not make a meal from scratch. They were struggling to cook a vegetable properly—to batch cook, to freeze stuff. He gave me a challenge. He said to me, "I can feed a family of five for 50 quid a week." I said, "No, that's nonsense. That's rubbish—you can't do that." He said, "I'll challenge you."

So we went to the food bank and got the people invited to the college. There were schoolchildren there, as well as four MPs, including me, and the chef, and there were also some TV people. The day before, I got £50 and went with some schoolchildren to the local Aldi with a shopping list from the chef. The next day, we went back to the college, batch cooked five different meals and put everything in little packs, which we put away and delivered later to vulnerable families. And it worked out at 30p per meal.

I am not saying that people can cook on that scale at home—that is ridiculous—but what we are trying to prove is that if you learn how to cook from scratch, you get the right ingredients and you batch cook, you can save a hell of a lot of money and make nutritious meals on a budget. Obviously, after that I was tagged as "30p Lee". I don't mind, because every time it comes up, somebody asks me, "Why do they call you 30p Lee?" When I tell them, they completely understand—so keep firing away and calling me 30p Lee.

Funnily enough, after this exercise I wrote to every single Labour MP inviting them to my food bank and to take part in it. I got two or three dismissive responses, but nobody else bothered to reply. The challenge was there, but nobody bothered to come.

What upsets me—this gets to me a little bit—is that there is a culture in some deprived areas where people are so dependent on food banks that it is like a weekly shop for them. One particular family who I was really trying to help were going to the food bank two or three times a week to get their groceries, but then I would see them in McDonald's two or three times a week. My goodness. I do not want to stop little children going for a treat once in a while, but this is all about priorities. If you are really struggling for money and are going to a food bank two or three times a week, you should not be

[Lee Anderson]

going out for fast food and getting takeaways every week. I know people are going to start sighing and ah-ing and saying, “He’s wicked and he’s cruel,” but those are the facts.

I never went for a McDonald’s when I was a kid, and I come from poverty. My mum and dad really struggled to feed us. He was a coalminer who worked seven days a week, and my mother was a factory worker. At the weekends, my dad did his garden. We had vegetables in there from top to bottom, and it also had chickens, rabbits and ducks. That was our food bank. We had nowhere else to go—that is what we did. We provided for ourselves. We have lost that over the past 20, 30 and 40 years, but we need to remind ourselves of where we have come from and to have those traditional values that our parents had. Food banks are being abused; I know that, because constituents tell me every single day about people making it up, telling lies or whatever. Food banks are abused by people who do not need them. We should target the food banks.

Ian Byrne indicated dissent.

Lee Anderson: You can shake your head all you want. [Interruption.]

Peter Dowd (in the Chair): Order. As I have said, I appreciate that this is a passionate subject, but I do not want people shouting across the Chamber. And can people stop saying “you”? They must address their comments through the Chair.

Lee Anderson: Thank you, Mr Dowd, and I do apologise. I get passionate about this subject, which is very close to my heart.

Ashfield, Mansfield and Bolsover are deprived areas. Many of the red wall seats are very deprived. They are deprived for a reason—we all know why, but I am not going to go into that now. We are going to see more and more fast food outlets—McDonald’s, KFC and others—springing up everywhere. They are springing up every 10 minutes in my area alone. Why are they coming to these deprived areas? It is because they know that there is a market there. We say that poorer people tend to use these places, and I know that that is true.

Food bank use is increasing in places such as Ashfield, yet obesity is also increasing in the same poor areas. Why is that? What we need is a proper food strategy in this country; I do not think we have had one for years. We have not had one since the 1970s. [Interruption.] You can laugh, giggle and scoff, but that is true. Why was it that in the 1970s, in the schools that I went to and all over Nottinghamshire, there were no obese children and we were fit and healthy? We did not have much money, but we ate less junk food and had a better diet and healthier lifestyles.

Ian Byrne: Last year, Henry Dimbleby gave the Government a national food strategy, which took around four years to complete. That is there; the Government have got that. That’s your food strategy.

Lee Anderson: Maybe it was a poor choice of words. What I meant was that we have not had that proper culture in this country for decades—that personal responsibility of feeding ourselves. I like to hark back

to the days when I was growing up, because they are on my mind at this moment in time. We were a lot poorer; we had less money and less food, but we seemed to manage okay. I think we could all do a little bit more. [Interruption.] Whatever! You can chip away all you want, mate.

I hear this nonsense about junk food and processed food being cheaper than fresh food. It is not. The chefs who I speak to say that is absolute rubbish. You can still go and buy a big bag of veg for a couple of quid, and a bit of meat, and make wholesome, nutritious meals and batch cook. I have done that before. Parents have done that before. We can do it with a little bit of effort, education and training. People always bleat on about the Government.

Wendy Chamberlain: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way again; he has been very generous with his time. When I visited the constituency of the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) with the APPG on ending the need for food banks, one thing we saw was kettle packs. Because people do not have access to equipment to make the nutritious food that the hon. Gentleman is referring to, they are forced to utilise kettles or other means. Does he accept that some people do not have the means to make that nutritious food in their own homes?

Lee Anderson: We had that problem with our food bank, which I helped out at. We were giving people vouchers to put the gas and electric on their meters. Then we had a complaint that they did not have any pots or pans, so we gave them pots and pans to make their food with. Then we had a complaint that they did not have a fridge or a cooker. Then we showed them how to apply for white goods, energy support grants and stuff like that through their utility companies. So there is no excuse.

We could go on and make excuses all day. We live in a great country, and there is a lot of support out there to get all these things—not just food, but the stuff to cook it in and help with energy bills. This Government have provided billions of pounds of support over the past two years, especially through covid. They have spent over £500 billion of taxpayers’ money.

I will close now because I know quite a few people want to speak. I will finish by going back to the “30p Lee” thing. It comes up every single day on social media. I made a little list earlier of celebrity chefs—millionaire chefs—who can make meals on a budget. Lesley Negus can make a meal for 20p. Jack Monroe can make a meal for 20p. The website frugal.org.uk has meals for 25p. Savvy Meals can do meals for under a quid. Even the BBC has recipes for meals under a quid. Jamie Oliver—£1 wonders. Asda has recipes for meals under a quid. Toogoodtogo.com—under a quid.

I mentioned the food blogger, Jack Monroe. She was celebrated last year in the *Daily Mirror* for producing a meal for a staggering 11p. These people are celebrated; they are national heroes. Yet when a Conservative MP tries to help a local food bank and people in his own community, he is called “30p Lee”. Like I say, it don’t matter to me.

I am not going to bang on. Somebody contacted me today from Derbyshire—not my constituency. She said:

“As a retired foster carer for Derbyshire, I taught our looked after children cooking skills. Batch cooking and storing meals in zippy bags (re-useable) and massively space saving for the storing

in a second hand small chest freezer (for £30). Meals that cost pence to make (proven by costing out on a spreadsheet so extra skills learned there!) The key is the motivation to do this type of cooking when you can make the time, but the advantages of convenience and cost speaks for itself. They could feed themselves when independent for £20 a week. Indisputable!!!!

What a great lady!

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Peter Dowd (in the Chair): Six people want to speak. I will call the Front Benchers at 17.43 pm, so at best people have two minutes each.

5.29 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I will go at a rate of knots. I thank the hon. Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) for bringing this debate to the Chamber. The issue is of even more importance to us in Northern Ireland than it is anywhere else, because of the astronomical rise in production costs in Northern Ireland, rising transport costs, and the cost of the insidious Northern Ireland protocol. Food inflation has accelerated to record levels, and many households suffered a challenging Christmas due to soaring prices. The price of food in Northern Ireland has risen by 13.3% in the last month, up from 12.4% in the previous month; if we add those together, that is 25% in the last two months.

A friend of mine, Glyn Roberts, who is the chief executive of Retail NI, said:

“With cost pressures right across the supply chain, food inflation is becoming a huge challenge for households. Our members are doing everything they can not only to mitigate this and to limit prices increases for hardworking families in their grocery basket. With a ‘cost-of-doing-business crisis’, the most expensive business rates in the UK, rising energy costs, inflation and a fall in spending, 2023 is going to be the biggest ever challenge for Northern Ireland’s high streets.”

The most recent statistics, for the 2020-21 period, suggest that some 316,000 people, or 17% of the population, in Northern Ireland live in relative income poverty before housing costs, and 12% of the population—approximately 223,000 people—live in absolute poverty before housing costs. Some 92,000 children live in absolute poverty—that is 21% of children in Northern Ireland. The number of children in poverty has risen in the last few years.

I am ever mindful to adhere closely and clearly to your timing indications, Mr Dowd, so I will finish with this. These figures are stark and clear. What is also clear is the fact that what may seem like a small increase in the cost of food to some of us in this Chamber is in fact a very difficult barrier to healthy food. We must step in to secure affordable access to good food for our constituents—especially for those in Northern Ireland, who paid the price for the Brexit deal. Work must be done, and it must be done now.

5.31 pm

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) for giving us what I think everyone looked for in his contribution. I suspect that everyone can leave happy with what they have heard and with what they came for.

In my two minutes, I will focus on my hit list of people who have annoyed me over the past year. We know that food inflation is running much higher across the country than the inflation rate overall; it is roughly 17% at the moment. We also know that inflation is a tax on the poorest, so the cost of food does matter. The poorer someone is, the higher the rate of inflation they experience because so much of their budget goes on energy and food. Retailers know that, but they avoid tackling it.

There is a convenience store on an estate called Grange Park in my constituency. It is known locally as Harrods, because of the extortionate prices it charges for basic goods. That is a classic example of the poverty premium; someone either pays more to buy locally, or they pay the bus fare to go to the large Tesco at Mereside on the outskirts of town. The consumer campaign *Which?* found that Tesco Express costs people 8% more on average. I accept that smaller stores have higher running costs, but that should not stop supermarkets equalising those costs so that they do not penalise those who have no choice but to shop there.

I tried to speak to the chairman of Tesco, John Allan, about this. He told Laura Kuenssberg in October that Tesco had

“a moral responsibility to look after people who, in the real world, are being impacted by”

the cost of living. Well, here is one way he could do that: by talking to me about what my constituents in Blackpool experience. Clearly, he finds the Leader of the Opposition a more interesting person to go and talk to than me. How offensive; I am an interesting person too. Come to see me, Mr Allan; it is not as grand as Canary Wharf, but come up to Blackpool—but he would not come up to Blackpool. He agreed to meet with me, but then he cancelled. I am now trying to beg him yet again to come and meet with me, as he did the Leader of the Opposition. Let us talk about how Tesco can really help my constituents and do a better job.

5.33 pm

Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I thank the hon. Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) for securing the debate, and for his certainly interesting take on tackling food poverty.

I want to make it clear at the outset that the catastrophe of hunger and poverty in our communities is the result of political choices made by this Government. If a Government cannot ensure that everyone has enough to eat—and not just to eat, but to thrive—they are a Government that is fundamentally broken. The time for sticking plasters is surely over. We need to legislate for a right to food and enforceable food rights, and to ensure that the Government of today are held accountable for the cost of food and ensuring nobody goes hungry.

I pay credit to Mayor Sadiq Khan. I am so happy that he is sorting out universal free school meals and introducing them in London for all primary school children, which is an essential part of the right to food. It is a fantastic move forwards, but it is clear that our communities are in crisis at the moment. I pay tribute to all the workers taking industrial action in defence of their communities, including the teaching staff in West Derby, who were out on the picket line yesterday. The

[Ian Byrne]

17% rise in the price of food is the biggest rise since 1977 and comes alongside the sharpest fall in wages since 1977. Food inflation up, wages down—do the maths.

It is really important to look across the piece at how people are being demonised. The demonisation of those in food poverty is an act of political cowardice by an Administration bereft of ideas to solve the problem, and lacking humanity toward the millions who are suffering and looking to the Government to lift them up and not punch them down. If reliance on charity alone was considered a sufficient guarantee for basic human needs in the UK, previous generations would not have legislated for universal state schooling and a national health service. The current horrific situation demonstrates that we need the same vision and ambition when it comes to food security. It cannot wait a moment longer.

5.35 pm

Robin Millar (Aberconwy) (Con): It is a privilege to serve under you, Mr Dowd. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) for bringing this debate to us. I start by paying tribute to the many in my own constituency who are dedicated and devoted to helping those in need in a variety of forms, not least by preparing and delivering food through food banks. I thank them and acknowledge the good work that they do.

In the two minutes I have, I would like to draw attention to the inadequacy of our approach to poverty. This debate is about

“tackling poverty and the cost of food”

and I congratulate the hon. Member for Ashfield on not calling it food poverty. I have written an essay on this, “A Common Sense Model for Poverty”, which highlights the inadequacy of a purely financial measure of poverty. In the context of food, a simple example is that the price of a bag of pasta has risen from 50p to 95p. That is the food premium that my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield mentioned. The impact of that price rise is far bigger at the bottom of the affordability scale than at the top.

I will give three very quick observations. First, there are structural problems in our economy because it has accelerated the capacity to produce food through, for example, businesses focusing on adding value through processing to foods to make them more convenient, rather than focusing on nutrition or health. That is the maximising of profit, again at the expense of local food producers, and the supply chain suffers for it. I doubt that farmers who are worried about feed, fuel and fertiliser are seeing the benefits of many of the price rises in our shops. Finally, businesses are concentrating on the markets that can pay, not the local and global markets that need the food themselves. When it comes to health, we are all after a hot, filling and nutritious meal. That is well within our grasp.

I would like to conclude by mentioning the social benefits of food. The most powerful projects that I have seen are about bringing people together around the making and breaking of bread, so our approach needs to change. Market drivers introduce unhelpful factors—

Peter Dowd (in the Chair): That is time.

5.37 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) on securing this debate. A mark of having brilliant parents—and I had brilliant parents—is that you do not realise that you were brought up in poverty until later, when you look back. One thing I can say about food poverty is that there is something worse than being in poverty and that is to be made to feel guilty about being in poverty. There is something worse than virtue signalling: vice signalling. There is something better than both: actual practical virtue. I praise my food banks and the food share schemes in Westmorland and Lonsdale and elsewhere in Cumbria.

I want to focus my minute and a bit on those who produce our food. I am desperately concerned that what Britain is doing at the moment with its agricultural policy is reducing the amount of food that we produce, which will inevitably increase the cost of that food. The Government's transition from the common agricultural policy to the environmental land management scheme would actually be one of that rare, rare species—a Brexit benefit—if it was done properly, but it is not being done properly. In my constituency, we have a thousand farms. All of them will lose at least 35% of their basic payment this year. Two per cent. of them have qualified for the new sustainable farming incentive. We need to pause the phase-out of the basic payment scheme, so we can protect our farmers and stop the eradication of our ability to produce food. We need to look again at the perverse incentives in some aspects of ELMS, which give big cheques to very large landowners for clearing off their tenants, which is morally outrageous and will again reduce our ability to produce food. It is a foolish approach to pit nature against farming when they work beautifully together.

If we lose farmers, we lose not only our ability to look after our environment, our natural landscapes and our biodiversity, but our ability to produce food. We need to go on to international markets to buy the food that we do not produce ourselves, which pushes up the costs of food for the poorest people on the planet. Protecting our farmers means producing food for us locally and keeping food prices down domestically and abroad.

5.40 pm

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Dowd.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) on securing this welcome debate, but I do not agree with many of the things he said. He thinks that people who use food banks are abusing them, cannot budget or cook properly, have access to huge amounts of food waste—

Lee Anderson: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Fleur Anderson: The hon. Member had plenty of time to speak; I have only two minutes. He has just made provocative statements completely detached from the facts as I have seen them at my local food bank and from visiting so many people in my constituency. In Southfields and in Roehampton with its Community Box, food banks are doing a fantastic job, but no one going to them wants to go there; they want to be able to go to the shops to choose their food and provide for their family.

In Sherwood, the Minister's constituency, 1,233 emergency three-day food supplies were given out last year, and in my borough of Wandsworth, 10,000 emergency food supplies were given out. There is a reason for the huge increase in the need to go to food banks, and that is that the system is entirely broken after 13 years of the Conservatives breaking that system.

The people I meet who have gone to food banks are the best at budgeting, at working shifts, at making ends meet and at never wasting food. They do not want to visit food banks, but they are a lifeline in emergency times. Instead of blaming people who go to food banks, the hon. Member for Ashfield should have been looking at the two-child benefit cap, the bedroom tax and the frozen local housing allowance. I commend Sadiq Khan for bringing free school meals to London schools—they will make a huge difference.

In London, housing is the main issue, so I lead with some questions on that to the Minister. With the Budget coming up, will he speak to his right hon. Friend the Chancellor to urge him to use it to end the freeze on the local housing allowance, restoring it so that it covers the cheapest third of rents in an area? With April looming, will the Minister reassure my constituents by ruling out any increase in the Government's energy price cap from April, but instead pass on recent falls in the gas price to households, so that they will not need to rely on food banks anymore?

5.42 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I will be as brief as possible. With inflation at a record high, rising again to reach 17.1% in the four weeks to 19 February, one quarter of people say that they are struggling financially, versus one in five this time last year. That is why people are going to food banks. There are social, physical, mental health and economic costs, as food inflation is one of the largest contributing factors to general inflation. Basic foodstuffs such as bread and milk have soared in price. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has shown that more than 17 million households across the UK go without essentials and 13% admit that they have skipped meals. How can we hear such statistics and not be ashamed?

The Trussell Trust reports that food bank use is soaring, as the cost of living in general bites into households. Food bank users tend to be those who are destitute, disabled or in single-parent households. Those on universal credit are not well off, and they often have to contend with the five-week wait for the benefit and being put in the ludicrous position of having to pay back benefit from their universal credit when they receive it. Given that a bank would never give a loan to those on universal credit, I have never understood why the state thinks that such people are able to pay back from the pittance they receive from Government. All that does is drive people further and further into poverty, which drives them further and further from work. Who does that benefit? Our welfare state is simply not doing enough to support people.

The hon. Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson), who introduced the debate, talked about how he had spoken to and met people in poverty. Perhaps he has noticed that poverty bleeds into every aspect of someone's life. Material poverty breeds poverty of self-esteem, of world

view and world horizon, of ambition, of health and of life outcomes. He has seen these things, I suppose; I have lived these things. He actually said, "I have seen these people." Well, I was one of them, and I can tell him that they are not living high on the hog, and it is ludicrous to say so.

The hon. Gentleman wants to speak to people who are poor, but they would not come and speak to him. I would gently say to him that it is staggeringly insensitive of an MP, who is on a pretty good wage by anybody's measures, to think he should be able to lecture those who are living and struggling on universal credit or low pay. I would not take kindly to that; indeed, I do not know many people who would take kindly to being told by somebody who is well off what they were doing wrong as they struggled to survive and feed their family every day.

I am a great fan of the novels of Charles Dickens, and as I was sitting listening to the hon. Gentleman, for all the world he reminded me of Mr Scrooge—without the compassion. Add into these difficulties the economic damage of Brexit and it is not good enough to tell people who are struggling that they need to buck up—that they need to work more shifts, try harder and buy containers to batch cook. It simply is not good enough. It is complacent and staggeringly insensitive, and when the Minister gets to his feet and offers a perhaps more measured approach, I hope he will tell us what more he can do to help families and households who are struggling. I know that he will tell us what has already been done, but he will appreciate that that is not enough when we have children going hungry, families relying on food banks and no end to this pain in sight, because the soaring food inflation is not expected to ease any time soon.

5.47 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Dowd. I congratulate the hon. Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) on securing this debate. I am also grateful, as ever, for briefings from Sustain and the National Farmers' Union, among others.

The rise in food poverty and the emergence of food banks is one of the most shameful and baleful consequences of 13 years of Conservative Government. In 2010-11, the Trussell Trust was operating 35 food banks; last year, it was 1,400. While we all applaud its work and we are extraordinarily grateful to our local food banks—I pay tribute to the volunteers and supporters in my city of Cambridge—our goal must be to put food banks out of business by ensuring that they are no longer needed. Let us be clear: although there are unwelcome shortages on supermarket shelves, the issue with food poverty is a money problem, not a food problem. There is enough food in our communities, but not everyone has enough money to access it. That is the problem that needs to be resolved. I would like to hear from the Minister just what discussions he has had with colleagues on how they intend to tackle this problem.

We have had some powerful contributions to the debate, particularly from my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, West Derby (Ian Byrne) and for Putney (Fleur Anderson). We should indeed be angry about how our country has got to this state. It increasingly feels like a country drowning in a worsening cost of

[Daniel Zeichner]

living crisis, high inflation, rising food prices and stagnating growth. Up and down the country, too many of our constituents are suffering constant anxiety about how they will make ends meet. We heard this week that energy bills will continue to rise in the coming year, which combined with wages failing to keep up with inflation means that people will be poorer. That means less for essentials, including food.

The figures from the Food Foundation make grim reading. In April 2022, 7.3 million people, including 2.6 million children, were in food poverty across the UK. Data out today, again from the Food Foundation, shows that the number of households where children are experiencing food insecurity has nearly doubled in the past year. In January 2023, 21.6% of households with children reported that their children had directly experienced food insecurity in the past month—an estimated 3.7 million children—compared with 11.6% the previous January.

Another clear indicator that people are suffering food poverty is the rising number of people who are turning to food banks. In 2021-22, the Trussell Trust supplied 2.2 million three-day emergency food parcels to food bank users. It is expected that the next annual figures will show a marked increase. That is a view supported by November's data from the Trussell Trust, which shows that 1.3 million emergency food parcels had been provided to people in the six months between April and September 2022, a third more than during the same period in 2021.

It just goes on: the latest ONS figures, released just two weeks ago, showed inflation of food and non-alcoholic drink prices—up 16.8% in the year to January 2023. The consequences are severe. In January and February, more than four in 10 adults said they had to spend more than usual in the previous two weeks to get what they normally buy when food shopping. In November and December, about one in seven adults said that in the previous two weeks they had been worried about running out of food before they had money to buy more. That rose to one in four adults with dependent children, and 29% for adults living in the most deprived area in England.

I am afraid that everything is going in the wrong direction and I ask the Minister to reflect on why that is the case. What has gone so wrong over the last 13 years to cause such a surge in food bank use? When does he think we will no longer need food banks—or are they a permanent feature for the Conservatives? There are some practical things the Government could do. Just why did they pull the funding for FareShare after its successful trial to tackle food waste? That scheme helped to cover the extra costs to small-scale farmers, growers and producers of redistributing their good-to-eat waste food rather than letting it go to waste. The trial resulted in 85% more fruit and vegetables reaching frontline charities and community groups. The Government funding ended in 2020 and, despite widespread calls, has not been continued. Why not, and why have the Government been so parsimonious when it comes to the suppliers of school meals, which face endlessly rising costs but have to try to provide nutritious meals with only a few extra pence?

Much more could be said, but I am conscious that this is a short debate. Disgracefully, we now live in a country where food poverty has become endemic. It is a record of which the Conservatives should be ashamed.

5.51 pm

The Minister for Food, Farming and Fisheries (Mark Spencer): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) on securing the debate. Given the time restrictions, it will be difficult for me to respond to all the points that have been made, but I will start by recognising the impact that high food prices are having on household budgets.

High food prices are a result of many different factors, including agrifood import prices, domestic agricultural prices, domestic labour and manufacturing costs, the exchange rate for sterling—and not least, of course, Putin's illegal war in Ukraine and the aftershocks of the pandemic, which are having a global impact, with food prices rising at home and abroad. Other countries are experiencing high food price inflation, with 16% being recorded in the euro area in December last year. Rising food prices are a big contributor to the high levels of inflation that people are currently experiencing. However, we have seen a slight fall in the official food price inflation figures for January. We will continue to watch and monitor the situation as food price inflation continues to move around.

Given the impact of high food prices, tackling inflation is the Government's No. 1 priority. We plan to more than halve inflation this year, and we are monitoring all key agricultural commodities so that we can work with the food industry to address the challenges that it faces. Low-income households are most affected by high food and energy prices, which is why we have provided a package of support to help people with rising food costs. The Government have already committed £37 billion to support households with the current exceptionally high cost of living, £1 billion of which has gone towards help with the cost of household essentials.

Looking forward to April, the Government will uprate benefit rates and the state pension by 10.1%. The benefit cap levels will increase by the same amount in order to increase the number of households that can benefit from these uprating decisions. In addition, for 2023-24, households on eligible means-tested benefits will get up to £900 in cost of living payments, which will be split in three payments of about £300 across the 2023-24 financial year. A separate £300 payment will be made to pensioner households on top of their winter fuel payment, and individuals in receipt of eligible disability benefit will receive a £150 payment.

In order to better understand who is currently experiencing food poverty, we introduced a set of questions into the family resources survey to measure and track food bank use from April 2021. The first results of those questions are due to be published very soon, subject to the usual quality assurances.

The Government spend around £1 billion annually on free school meals, and protections are in place to ensure that eligible pupils keep their free school meal entitlement even if their household circumstances change. The end date for that has now been extended to March 2025. The latest figures from the Department for Education

show that around 1.9 million pupils are claiming free schools meals, which equates to 22.5% of all pupils, up from 20.8% in 2021.

Daniel Zeichner: Will the Minister address the pressures on school meal providers, which have faced hugely increased costs and have had little extra help to provide nutritious food?

Mark Spencer: Of course, we recognise that there are cost pressures throughout the whole food supply chain. That is why the Government are offering huge amounts of support to households to try to cope with that. However, we acknowledge that there are challenges—not just in schools but in the Prison Service, the NHS and many Government Departments. That is why we need to address inflation, which is one of the Government's highest priorities.

We continue to work with food retailers and producers to explore a range of measures that they can take to ensure the availability and affordability of food. It would be remiss of me not to mention the recent issues that we have experienced with the supply of certain fruit and vegetables to supermarkets in the UK. We are continuing to engage with industry throughout this period, and I hosted a roundtable with retailers this week to explore with them their contractual models, plans to return to normal supplies and contingencies for dealing with supply-chain challenges. I have also asked them to look again at how they work with our farmers and how they buy fruit and vegetables so that they can further prepare for these unexpected incidents. In the meantime, I reassure hon. Members that the UK has a highly resilient food supply chain, which was demonstrated during the covid-19 response. It is well equipped to deal with situations with a potential to cause disruption.

I want to address the comments made by the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron). He tried to divide the House this evening on the statutory instrument that provides funding for ELMS. That is a real disappointment and a misunderstanding of the challenges that we face. In effect, he tried to keep English farmers tied to the EU's bureaucratic and tiresome common agricultural policy by trying to shout down that legislation.

Tim Farron: Will the Minister give way?

Mark Spencer: I will give way in a moment. The hon. Gentleman made a point about wealthy people. Under the CAP, 50% of the budget went to 10% of landowners, and it did little to support food production or environmental improvements. With the new schemes, we are trying to ensure that nature works hand in hand with those who produce food.

Tim Farron: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. He will know that all parties here are united in our support for the principles of ELMS, and we think that moving to public money for public goods is the right thing. I said on the record just a few moments ago that the CAP was one of the worst aspects of the European

Union, and it is one of the few reasons to celebrate not being in it. The key thing is that the Minister's party and the Government supported, proposed and promised £2.4 billion of ringfenced farm support. I am sure that he will confirm that that money is not being spent at the moment, because the basic payment scheme has been withdrawn and the new schemes are being taken up by a fraction of those to whom they should be available. That means he has broken that promise to farmers.

Mark Spencer: No, I absolutely stand by that commitment. We will spend £2.4 billion of taxpayers' money every year in this Parliament. If we fall short and spend only £2.3 billion this year, we will roll that forward and spend £2.5 billion next year. In rolling out those schemes, farmers clearly needed time to adjust, have a look at those new schemes and ensure that they could bid and understand the process that is taking place. It has taken a while to get those schemes right, but we worked with farmers to ensure that they were right. We have now rolled them out, and there are huge numbers of farmers bidding for capital grants on slurry and equipment, to enter into sustainable farming incentive agreements and get involved with countryside stewardship. That is the right thing to do and the right way to go forward.

I am conscious of time, Mr Dowd, because I want to give my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield time to respond. I thank him for introducing this debate. The Government have a shared ambition to ensure that our food system delivers healthy and affordable food for everyone. I thank him and other colleagues for engaging in this debate.

6 pm

Lee Anderson: I am grateful for the opportunity to respond. I will be very brief. I am little disappointed with some of the divisive comments from the Opposition. I don't do divisive politics. I like to debate sensibly. It was interesting that I accepted every single intervention, but the Opposition would not accept one. That is what debates should be all about—accepting interventions.

Some of the divisive language was awful. I did not say that "everybody" was abusing the food bank system or that "everybody" who uses a food bank cannot cook or budget—I said, "some people". We should be very careful with tone and delivery because of tomorrow's headlines in the papers. It leads to hatred, nastiness and threats. All I am going to say is that the Opposition need to be very careful with the way they speak in this place, because it does lead to some horrible and divisive behaviour.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the matter of tackling poverty and the cost of food.

6.1 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 1 March 2023

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

Nuclear Decommissioning and Radioactive Substances Consultation

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Andrew Bowie): The UK Government and devolved Administrations are today publishing for consultation proposals to update policies on nuclear decommissioning and the management of radioactive substances, including radioactive waste.

We use radioactive substances in many different products and processes: to treat and diagnose serious illnesses, to deliver research and development, and in industrial processes. In some parts of the UK nuclear power continues to provide low-carbon electricity to our homes and businesses. Nuclear power will continue to be an important source of low-carbon electricity as we work towards reaching net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Most uses of radioactive material generate radioactive waste, which needs to be managed. The waste can occur as gases, liquids or solids. Radioactive substances policy covers the management and use of radioactive materials and how any subsequent wastes and legacies are then managed to ensure that people and the environment are not exposed to unacceptable risks.

The last overarching policy document on the management of radioactive waste, Command Paper 2919, “Review of Radioactive Waste Management Policy: Final Conclusions”, was published in 1995. Since then, the regulatory and policy landscape has changed significantly, not least with the advent of devolution and the creation of new regulatory bodies and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority. Some parts of the Command Paper have been updated and replaced with new policy documents. Furthermore, new policies have been developed that did not originally feature in Command Paper 2919.

The UK Government and devolved Administrations consider it time to replace Command Paper 2919 and the separate policy documents that have superseded some parts of it with a consolidated UK-wide policy framework. In doing so, we aim to set out clearly those policies that are pursued jointly by the UK Government and devolved Administrations and any separate policies that apply in any one nation.

The proposals update, clarify and consolidate a number of policies into a UK-wide policy framework and facilitate speedier and more cost-effective decommissioning and radioactive waste management. They aim to create clearer and more consistent policy objectives across the UK, to reduce unnecessary burdens and to unlock more innovative and sustainable ways of working, realising significant savings for industry and the taxpayer whilst maintaining high standards of safety, security and environmental protection.

The consultation is in two parts. Part I sets out policies that we are proposing to amend. The proposals are aimed primarily at driving improvements in nuclear

decommissioning and managing radioactive waste. Part II is a draft of the proposed UK-wide policy framework as it would appear if the policy changes being consulted on in part I were implemented.

I am placing copies of the consultation in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS589]

TREASURY

Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Commodity Derivatives and Emission Allowances) Order 2023:

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Andrew Griffith):

Many of the rules that govern the buying, selling and organised trading of commodity derivatives and emission allowances are set out in the Markets in Financial Instruments Regulation (MiFIR). MiFIR is one of two pieces of ELI derived legislation—the other being the second Markets in Financial Instruments Directive (MiFID II)—which together underpin what is referred to as the MiFID II framework. As part of the onshoring process, the MiFID II framework was amended to address deficiencies arising as a result of the UK’s withdrawal from the EU and the end of the transition period.

The UK played a significant role in designing the MiFID II framework, and the Government believe that the resilience and effectiveness of the UK’s capital markets have been significantly strengthened by the post-crisis reforms that they implemented. Although the regime is working well in many areas, the EU approach to regulation—where the same rules apply across member states to facilitate a single market in financial services—means that many of the MiFID II framework requirements were not designed specifically for UK markets. In other areas, it is clear that the framework has not delivered its intended benefits, has led to duplication and excessive administrative burdens for firms, or has stifled innovation.

Following the UK’s exit from the EU, in July 2021, the Government launched the wholesale markets review (WMR) consultation with the aim of creating a simpler and less prescriptive regime that meets the needs of UK markets while maintaining high regulatory standards. As part of this, the Government consulted on changes to streamline the process for determining when a firm trading commodity derivatives or emission allowances needs to be authorised as an investment firm. These were welcomed by industry and the Government committed to take them forward when they responded to the consultation in March 2022. The Chancellor also committed to streamline the process for determining when firms who trade commodities as an ancillary activity need to be authorised as an investment firm, as part of the Edinburgh reforms that were announced on 9 December 2022.

This order delivers on that commitment. It will simplify the process for firms while resulting in the same regulatory outcome. The FCA will put in place a simpler and therefore lower cost regime for determining when a firm that trades commodities or emission allowances as an ancillary activity does not need to be authorised as an investment firm.

As required under the enhanced scrutiny procedure set out in schedule 8 to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, the draft order and explanatory memorandum

will be published online for a period of at least 28 days before the instrument is formally laid in Parliament for affirmative debate. This is required under paragraph 14 of schedule 8 to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 because the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Markets in Financial Instruments) Regulations 2017 which are being amended were originally made under section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972. To read the full draft statutory instrument and explanatory memorandum, please visit:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/draft-si-for-firms-who-trade-commodities-or-emission-allowances-as-an-ancillary-activity

[HCWS591]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Actions to Improve Police Standards and Culture

The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp): Recent reports from His Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and fire and rescue services (HMICFRS) and significant high-profile incidents of police criminality and misconduct, such as the horrific crimes of David Carrick, have rightly raised concerns regarding police standards and culture.

In January, the Home Secretary announced a series of actions being undertaken by the Home Office and the police to ensure that police vetting is fit for purpose, that officers who fall short of the standards expected of them are identified and dealt with appropriately, and that concerns around policing cultures are being addressed to rebuild public confidence.

On Monday 27 February I convened a roundtable with senior leaders from across the policing sector to review progress on these commitments and to ensure that activity is being co-ordinated to drive up police standards and improve culture.

In relation to police vetting, the Home Secretary has commissioned His Majesty's inspectorate of fire and rescue services to undertake a rapid review of progress being made against the 43 recommendations in their 2 November 2022 assessment of police vetting and counter-corruption capability. The National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) are co-ordinating the forces' responses to the inspectorate's report and, at the roundtable, reported significant progress in implementing a suite of changes to ensure that police vetting is more robust and consistent. HMICFRS will publish its rapid review in April.

In addition, the Home Secretary asked the College of Policing to refresh its statutory vetting code of practice to strengthen legal obligations on Chief Officers and provide clarity to forces across England and Wales. The college has published the revised statutory code yesterday for a three-week public consultation (available on the College of Policing's website). Following consideration of that feedback and Home Secretary approval, the revised code will be in force by the summer. I also welcome the work being undertaken by the College of Policing to overhaul the police code of ethics which is expected to be published for public consultation next month.

Across police forces, significant activity is underway to identify individuals who fall short of the high standards the public expect of them and to deal with those individuals

appropriately. This includes the work being co-ordinated by the NPCC, under the leadership of Chief Constable Serena Kennedy, to check all police officers and staff against the police national database (PND) to ensure that no actionable intelligence in relation to potential police misconduct or criminality has been missed.

As of this date, all force HR records have been prepared for the data wash which will conclude by the end of March, cross-checking over 326,000 officers and staff against relevant PND records. Forces will then interrogate this data and take action to investigate where necessary.

Where officers are found to have potentially breached standards of professional behaviour, it is of vital importance that those who are not fit to serve the public are swiftly dismissed. On 18 January, the Home Office launched a review of the effectiveness of the police dismissal process to determine how improvements can be made. The call for evidence has now ended and the Home Office have received submissions from a wide range of stakeholders. These will now be analysed, with the output from a new data collection, to inform proposals for change. This work will be complete by the end of April and the Government are committed to implementing reforms, including via legislation, as soon as practicable thereafter.

Alongside this, it is essential for public confidence in policing that we have an effective independent process for investigating the most serious complaints about the police. That is why I am announcing today the start of an independent review of the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) led by Dr. Gillian Fairfield (Chair of the Disclosure and Barring Service), whom the Home Secretary has charged with considering the IOPC's effectiveness, efficiency, governance and accountability. The review's remit is tightly defined to avoid infringing upon or impacting ongoing investigations, which are rightly independent from Government, the police and complainants. A summary of the review's terms of reference will be published on gov.uk and a copy will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Dr Fairfield has been asked to submit her final report and recommendations for internal review in autumn 2023. I shall inform the House of the outcome of the review at its conclusion and a summary of its key findings will subsequently be published.

As well as driving up standards in police vetting and dealing with misconduct, the Home Secretary has been clear that policing needs to address the root causes of poor, and in some cases toxic, cultures. This will be a key focus of part 2 of the independent Angiolini inquiry that was established in the wake of the murder of Sarah Everard to understand how a serving police officer was able to carry out such a horrendous crime. Part 2, which will look at broader issues for policing, will start later this spring, following a public consultation on the terms of reference that ended last week. The Inquiry will also look at the appalling case of David Carrick, in terms of reference published on 7 February 2023.

The Government and our policing partners are determined to deliver on these commitments to help rebuild confidence and trust in policing. This is what the public expect and the decent, hardworking majority of officers deserve. I will update the National Policing Board, chaired by the Home Secretary, on 8 March on progress and provide the House with updates in due course.

[HCWS590]

Petitions

Wednesday 1 March 2023

PRESENTED PETITIONS

Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

Child Maintenance Services

The petition of Craig Bulman,

Declares that the petitioner is concerned regarding the number of suicides that have been linked with the activities of the CPA and the CMS, notes that incorrect assessments and inflation of arrears may have played a factor in the mental health of those who committed suicide.

The petitioner therefore requests that the House of Commons urge the Government to open an independent investigation into the Child Maintenance Service and their assessment procedures.

And the petitioners remain etc.

[P002810]

Child Support Act

The petition of Craig Bulman,

Declares that the petitioner is concerned with section 33 of the Child Support Act 1991 and its compatibility with Article 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998; notes that the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) is securing liability orders for debts that are not owed and are in dispute; further notes that no evidence is provided by the CMS to substantiate the debt is owed by the paying

parent, further declares that Section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998 states that it is unlawful for a public authority to act in a way which is incompatible with a convention right.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to address these concerns surrounding section 33 of the Child Support Act 1991 and its compatibility with Article 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002808]

Detachment of Earnings Orders

The petition of Craig Bulman,

Declares that the Child Maintenance Service's current policy on the enforcement of Detachment of Earnings Orders is not in accordance with the principles it should apply; notes that the CMS must provide factual evidence to the Paying Parents employer and Bank Manager that arrears are owed before such enforcement can commence; further notes that if arrears are in dispute DEO's must not be enforced bank accounts must not be garnished and liability orders must not be granted; furthermore that the burden of proof lies upon the accuser to prove with factual evidence that a debt is owed by the Paying Parent.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to take into account the concerns of the petitioner and work with the Child Maintenance Service to prevent the improper use of the Detachment of Earnings Orders.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002809]

Ministerial Correction

Wednesday 1 March 2023

WORK AND PENSIONS

Social Security (Additional Payments) (No. 2) Bill

The following is an extract from Second Reading of the Social Security (Additional Payments) (No. 2) Bill on Tuesday 21 February 2023:

Mims Davies: On the points about housing support, I am working with colleagues at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on quality and provision. My party strongly continues to focus on opening up the benefits and freedom of home ownership and all that it gives. The 2020 local housing allowance

rates were raised to the 30th percentile—a significant investment of £30 billion—and we have since maintained that increase.

[Official Report, 21 February 2023, Vol. 728, c. 189.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Mims Davies):

An error has been identified in the speech I gave on Second Reading of the Social Security (Additional Payments) (No. 2) Bill.

The correct statement should have been:

Mims Davies: On the points about housing support, I am working with colleagues at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on quality and provision. My party strongly continues to focus on opening up the benefits and freedom of home ownership and all that it gives. The 2020 local housing allowance rates were raised to the 30th percentile—a significant investment of **£1 billion**—and we have since maintained that increase.

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MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Wednesday 1 March 2023

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WORK AND PENSIONS	5MC
Social Security (Additional Payments) (No. 2) Bill	5MC

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons*,

**not later than
Wednesday 8 March 2023**

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