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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Tuesday 7 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

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Access to Mental Health Services

1. **Rachel Hopkins** (Luton South) (Lab): What steps he is taking to improve access to mental health services. [903903]

18. **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): What steps he is taking to improve access to mental health services. [903922]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Barclay): We are investing an additional £2.3 billion a year by 2023-24 so that 2 million more people can access NHS-funded mental health support.

Rachel Hopkins: Research by the Royal College of Psychiatrists shows that between July 2021 and July 2022, referrals to child and adolescent mental health services increased by 24%. Labour has set out a fully costed plan to recruit 8,500 new staff. Why have the Government failed to produce their own plan to recruit more mental health staff to reduce waiting times?

Steve Barclay: We are recruiting more mental health workers, with 7,400 more full-time equivalents in September 2022 compared with September 2021. That reflects the significant additional funding we are providing—the extra £2.3 billion going in by 2023-24.

Jeff Smith: Perinatal mental health problems affect one in four new or expectant mothers, and 40% of deaths in the first year after pregnancy are related to mental health. What steps are the Government taking to improve support for women with perinatal mental health needs, particularly in the light of the women's health strategy?

Steve Barclay: The hon. Gentleman raises an extremely important subject. As well as the additional investment and extra workforce we are putting into mental health, we are looking at this issue as part of our strategies in other areas—for example, our suicide strategy—and examining our capital investment. There is a range of measures to address this very important issue.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): My right hon. Friend is aware of the evidence on the use of psychedelic drugs for more effective mental health care. Last month Australia, having assessed the evidence on psilocybin, started the rescheduling process, and Australians suffering from

depression will be able to access this medicine from July. In the USA, the Food and Drug Administration has recognised psilocybin as a breakthrough therapy for depression. In Canada, the special access programme allows physicians to request a licence for assisted therapy under certain conditions. Our drug laws remain based on a 50-year-old, unevidenced, prejudiced assessment and nothing else. The Home Office has never commissioned evidence on psilocybin. Does my right hon. Friend understand that this is a primary public health issue, on which he should lead?

Steve Barclay: I recognise the close interest my hon. Friend takes in this matter, and he is right to draw the House's attention to international best practice. I agree that we should take an evidence-based approach in which we look at the data shared with regulators in other countries, such as Australia. I am happy to draw the point he makes to the attention of our regulators.

Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con): Anorexia affects many young people. One of my constituents had to give up work to look after her daughter, who was diagnosed with anorexia nervosa and made a number of attempts to overdose—the latest just two weeks ago. The daughter is also suspected to be suffering from an obsessive compulsive disorder and an autism spectrum disorder, but has been told that the wait for diagnosis is over two years. Will my right hon. Friend outline what support we can give my constituent and her family? Have we thought about providing personal budgets, so that if the NHS is unable to treat an individual, they can seek treatment outside the NHS?

Steve Barclay: My right hon. Friend raises an important issue, and I am happy to look into the individual case she describes. Our wider objective in providing extra funding is to ensure that we treat more people, with 2 million more people accessing NHS-funded mental health support by 2023-24 and the number of patients in talking therapies last year up by a fifth from the year before.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): There is a mental health staffing crisis of the Government's own making. Figures out last week show that there are more than 28,000 mental health vacancies in our NHS, which is up on the year before and the year before that. Are we seeing a pattern here? The number of mental health nurses is down 5% since 2010, but do not worry, Mr Speaker: just so the Secretary of State is aware, Labour has a plan to recruit and retain more mental health staff and to get waiting times down. Can he put a word in with the Chancellor in case he wants to nick that too?

Steve Barclay: It is always good to find a plan that the hon. Lady actually agrees with the shadow Health Secretary on. As we know from her questions, that is not always the case, not least on the use of the independent sector. What we do know is that she has a habit of writing her questions before she hears the previous answer. I just reminded the House of the 7,400 more staff in mental health in September 2022 compared with September 2021. Obviously she had written her question before that point.

Bereavement

2. **Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): What assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the report by the UK Commission on Bereavement entitled "Bereavement is everyone's business", published in October 2022. [903904]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield): I thank the UK Commission on Bereavement and everyone who contributed their experience of bereavement for their input into the report. We are working across Government and with the bereavement sector to consider how the wide range of findings from the report can inform future policy and make a difference to those who are bereaved.

Matt Warman: When my parents died just six weeks apart from each other, I know I would have benefited from practical and emotional support. The UK Commission on Bereavement has a number of excellent recommendations. Does the Minister agree that, among those, the idea of integrating support and information about bereavement into palliative care and end-of-life care is one that the Government should look at taking up?

Maria Caulfield: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, who has done so much work in this space campaigning for others to have a better experience than he had with the tragic loss of his parents. I can give him an absolute commitment that we are working with partners across health and palliative care to ensure that bereavement support is an integral part of palliative and end-of-life practice. The new Health and Care Act 2022 means that integrated care boards must commission those services, and NHS England has published new statutory guidance on palliative and end-of-life care to give ICBs the information they need, which includes giving bereavement support to those facing a loss.

Doctor Numbers

3. **John Stevenson** (Carlisle) (Con): What steps he is taking to increase the number of doctors. [903905]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Barclay): We have opened five new medical schools in Sunderland, Lancashire, Chelmsford, Lincoln and Canterbury as part of our wider drive to increase the number of doctors.

John Stevenson: Does the Secretary of State agree, first, that we must train enough of our own doctors, rather than depend on overseas doctors? Secondly, does he agree that it is important that the less traditional educational institutions are allowed to open or expand medical schools, as they are often in areas where doctors are in short supply?

Steve Barclay: I agree with my hon. Friend, and that is why we had a 25% increase in the total number of medical school places. On the specific point he raises, we have developed the new apprenticeship route for medical doctors so that we can start to have more training through that route and not just through the undergraduate route.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): As well as recruiting doctors, how do we retain doctors? A doctor in my constituency says that at the end of the day he takes home £100 a week. That is less than a decorator. What are the Government doing about retaining good doctors like my constituent?

Steve Barclay: It is worth pointing out to the House that the vacancy rate for doctors has fallen compared with where it was before the pandemic. That is often not the narrative that is put out there, but the right hon. Lady is right to highlight the importance of retention. It is obviously better to retain a doctor, given the cost and time it takes to recruit, and that is about looking at a combination of pay issues, about which we are talking to trade union colleagues, and non-pay issues, which are often a real factor in the quality of work that doctors are doing and often shapes retention issues.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): I am afraid that talk is cheap. I was at Worcester University's medical school yesterday, where I was told directly by the vice-chancellor that that university, which has great facilities, can only recruit international students because the Government will not fund places for domestic students. The NHS has asked for medical school places to be doubled. Labour has a plan to double medical school places, paid for by abolishing the non-dom tax status. Why do the Government not swallow their pride and adopt Labour's plan in next week's Budget?

Steve Barclay: First, as I said a moment ago, we are funding a 25% increase in medical undergraduate places, and we have given a commitment to a workforce plan, as the Chancellor set out in the autumn statement. The question that the shadow Secretary of State should address is his party's opposition to international recruitment. We have more than 45,000 doctors who have been recruited internationally, yet the Leader of the Opposition says he wants to move away from international recruitment, which is an important source of additional doctors.

Cardiac Arrest

4. **Mary Glendon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): What steps his Department has taken to improve survival rates for out-of-hospital cardiac arrest cases. [903906]

The Minister for Social Care (Helen Whately): There are 60,000 suspected cardiac arrests every year, and I want more people to survive them. That is why we are increasing the number of defibrillators around the country. We now have over 46,000 defibrillators in England, and in December we announced a new £1 million community defibrillators fund to boost that number by at least 1,000.

Mary Glendon: I am pleased that the Government have committed to a £1 million fund to increase the number of defibrillators in the community. However, 72% of sudden cardiac arrests take place in the home, less affluent areas have lower access to public defibrillators and access is difficult in rural areas. Will the Minister make it her policy to require all new buildings, including residential accommodation, to have a defibrillator in the same way that smoke alarms are required?

Helen Whately: A specific objective of the community defibrillators fund is to make sure that defibrillators are installed in places where they are most needed, particularly places where there is higher footfall, as well as places where people are at greater risk of cardiac arrest. That is appropriate to make sure that we have defibrillators where they are most needed, so that we can reduce the number of people dying from cardiac arrest.

Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con): Two great organisations in Peterborough, Gemma's Hearts and the Brotherhood Foundation, exist to try to place more defibrillators in the community, such as those at the Lime Tree pub in Walton and the Chestnuts community centre in Eastfield. How will the community defibrillators fund work with voluntary organisations such as the two that I have mentioned to ensure that we have equitable access across places like Peterborough?

Helen Whately: It is fantastic to hear about organisations in my hon. Friend's community that, like many around the country, are acting at the grassroots to increase the number of defibrillators. Very soon, we will publish the criteria for the fund that I have just announced, opening it up for bids from organisations such as those, and I look forward to bids from them.

New Hospitals

5. **David Simmonds** (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): What progress his Department has made on building 40 new hospitals. [903907]

13. **Afzal Khan** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): What his Department's (a) budget and (b) timetable is for the delivery of 40 new hospitals. [903916]

15. **Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): What his Department's (a) budget and (b) timetable is for the delivery of 40 new hospitals. [903918]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Barclay): The Government are committed to building 40 new hospitals, which is why we have confirmed an initial £3.7 billion for the first four years of the new hospital programme.

David Simmonds: One of those 40 new hospitals is Hillingdon Hospital. At the start of this year, Hillingdon Council granted planning consent for the proposed new hospital, which is much awaited by my constituents. Will my right hon. Friend tell me when we might expect building work to commence?

Steve Barclay: As my hon. Friend knows, I have been to Hillingdon to look at the scheme. I am aware of how essential it is to his local area. He will know that on 22 February, the Prime Minister spoke at Prime Minister's questions of the Government's commitment to building 40 new hospitals, and I hope to announce something on that very shortly.

Afzal Khan: The conditions at North Manchester General Hospital continue to worsen. Last month, theatres were forced to close for six weeks following a ceiling collapse. It is four years since the Government announced the rebuild under the new hospital programme, but little

progress has been made. In January, the leader of Manchester City Council wrote to the Secretary of State offering to host a meeting to discuss the project. Will he commit to accepting the invitation?

Steve Barclay: I or another member of the ministerial team will, of course, meet the leader of Manchester council to discuss this. We are making progress. The hon. Gentleman will have seen progress, for example, at the Royal Liverpool and the Northern Centre for Cancer Care, but I confirm our commitment to the 40 hospitals programme and hope to say more on that shortly.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: I heard the responses from the Secretary of State, and it must be really hard for him to keep up the pretence about these mythical hospitals. Here is the reality of what is happening in hospitals around the country. South Tyneside District Hospital was award winning. Despite widespread opposition from all of us at the Save South Tyneside Hospital campaign, we have seen a loss of key services and a downgrading of other services. Despite the work of the amazing staff, the hospital now requires improvement. Why is his Government forcing that decline?

Steve Barclay: The Government have committed an initial £3.7 billion, which indicates our commitment to the new hospital programme. As I said, I will have more to say on that shortly.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Kettering General Hospital serves my constituency, and work has already started on building a new hospital—one of the Boris hospitals—so I do not know what all the fuss is about. The Government are getting on and doing the job. Is that correct?

Steve Barclay: It is. As my hon. Friend will know from another of my visits, which was with him to Kettering, the enabling works are progressing. That is in no small part a tribute to the work that he and neighbouring MPs have done to strongly make the case for Kettering. I know that he will continue to do so, and I look forward to working with him on that.

Health Inequalities

6. **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help tackle health inequalities. [903908]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Neil O'Brien): We announced in January that we will publish a major conditions strategy, which will apply a geographical lens to each condition to address disparities in health outcomes. We have doubled the duty on cigarettes since 2010 and now have the lowest smoking rate on record. We are investing an extra £900 million through the drugs strategy, increasing funding by 40%, and to fight obesity we have introduced the sugar tax and measures such as the extra £330 million for school sport.

Dr Huq: The daily dump of WhatsApp messages in the papers reminds us of covid and the disproportionate deaths suffered by black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. What with that and the figures showing a

20-year gap between life expectancies in our nation's most affluent and poorest wards, why is it that the Government scrapped a proposed White Paper on health inequalities?

Neil O'Brien: As I just said, we are driving forward all that work through the major conditions paper. In addition, we have the Start for Life programme, with another £300 million to improve young people's start in life. We are absolutely committed to tackling health disparities and driving forward work on all fronts.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Vaping was designed as a stop-smoking device for adult smokers, but the flavours, colours and disposable vapes have become a fad for children, encouraging those who have never smoked to take up vaping. What are the Government doing to prevent that?

Neil O'Brien: My hon. Friend is quite right. It is something that we are looking at very closely, as she knows from previous conversations. While vaping can be an aid in quitting smoking—it helped about 800,000 people to do so last year—we must stop its use being driven up among children.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): We are just 24 days away from a new financial year. Last week, more than 30 public health leaders said that the delay to releasing the public health allocation for 2023-24 was “putting public health services at risk”.

Early years support, addiction treatment and stop-smoking services should not have to pay the price of this Minister's incompetence. He must apologise for treating councils and the health of our communities with such contempt. When will the public health grant be announced?

Neil O'Brien: The public health grant will be announced within days, not weeks. When it is announced, the Opposition will see that, as well as generously funding public health, we will be funding an extra £900 million on drugs spending to transform treatment and an extra £300 million through the Start for Life programme. We will continue to ramp up support for public health.

Childhood Obesity

7. **Lee Anderson** (Ashfield) (Con): What steps he is taking to help reduce childhood obesity. [903910]

8. **Nicola Richards** (West Bromwich East) (Con): What steps he is taking to help reduce childhood obesity. [903911]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Neil O'Brien): The Government are committed to addressing childhood obesity. We have introduced calorie labelling for on-the-go food and brought in the sugar tax. To drive up activity, we are spending £330 million a year on school sport through the PE premium and investing £300 million in new facilities through the youth investment fund. We are also spending £150 million a year on healthy food schemes such as school fruit and vegetables, nursery milk and the Healthy Start scheme.

Lee Anderson: A top local chef in Ashfield agrees with me that cooking meals from scratch is far cheaper and more nutritious than having processed foods and ready meals. Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be a good idea to start teaching children basic cooking skills in school so that they can enjoy a healthier diet as part of our fight against obesity?

Neil O'Brien: My hon. Friend is totally right. As well as the funding that I mentioned for healthy eating in schools, cooking and nutrition are part of the national curriculum from key stages 1 to 3, which aims to teach children how to cook and apply those principles of healthy eating, but I am sure there is more that we can do together.

Nicola Richards: The announcement of the Government-backed trial in Wolverhampton to introduce a Better Health: Rewards app is welcome, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Jane Stevenson), who has campaigned hard for it. My constituency also suffers from poor health outcomes, including excessive levels of childhood obesity, with one in three year 6 children being overweight or obese. How will the Minister monitor the success of the trial? Will he consider extending it to areas such as West Bromwich East?

Neil O'Brien: The Better Health: Rewards pilot that we are funding in Wolverhampton is very exciting, and more than 10,000 residents have already registered with the app. We will be monitoring the lessons of the pilot closely and looking at how we can apply them more broadly.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): For such families it is about not necessarily the right food, but the cheapest food, which means that, in many cases, young children become obese through no fault of their own. What can be done to help families to buy healthier foods on a budget that is often minimal?

Neil O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman is completely correct. As well as the actions that we are taking on healthy eating and obesity, that is exactly why we are spending £55 billion to help households and businesses with their energy bills this winter—one of the biggest packages in Europe. It is also why we have the £900 cost of living payment for 8 million poorer households, we are increasing the national living wage to its highest ever level, and we are spending £26 billion on the cost of living support this year. He is completely right and I commend his work on it.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): The Scottish Government aim to halve childhood obesity by 2030, but dealing with the consequences of a poor diet alone is not enough. It is essential to address the underlying causes, such as child poverty. What representations has the Minister made to his Cabinet colleagues about the Department for Work and Pensions and the damaging effects of some of its policies on public health outcomes?

Neil O'Brien: I met the SNP's public health lead last week and had an excellent conversation with her. As well as the sugar tax, we have introduced calorie labelling; volume and location restrictions on high fat, salt and sugar products, which come in from October; the advertising watershed from 2025; and all those other measures, such as school sport and the youth investment fund. We have done all that because we share exactly those concerns about obesity and we are driving forward work to tackle it.

Waiting Times: Cancer

9. **Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): What assessment he has made of the adequacy of waiting times for cancer referrals, diagnosis and treatment. [903912]

The Minister for Social Care (Helen Whately): More people are coming forward to get checked for cancer. Last year, more than 10,000 urgent GP referrals were made per working day and more than 100,000 patients were diagnosed with cancer at an earlier stage, when it is easier to treat.

Tim Farron: I thank the Minister for her answer. In south Cumbria, 27% of people diagnosed with cancer wait more than two months for their first treatment, and in north Cumbria that figure is 44%. Let us imagine how terrifying it is for someone to be told that they have a dangerous disease, but that they may need to wait two months for the first intervention—people are dying needlessly. I draw her attention to the campaign run jointly by the all-party parliamentary group for radiotherapy and the *Express*, which seeks a £1 billion boost to increase capacity and update technology in radiotherapy. Will she meet me to specifically consider the bid for a radiotherapy satellite unit at the Westmorland General Hospital in Kendal, so that we can cut waiting times and save lives?

Helen Whately: As the hon. Gentleman said, if someone suspects that they have cancer, it is extremely worrying for them to have to wait for a diagnosis—or for the all-clear, as happens for the majority of people—or, if they have had their diagnosis, for treatment. That is why we are working hard to speed up access to cancer diagnosis and treatment, and we are looking at all the options to do that. To give him some examples: NHS England is driving ahead to open new community diagnostic centres, 92 of which are already operational; rolling out faecal immunochemical testing for people with possible lower gastrointestinal tract cancer; and rolling out teledermatology to speed up the diagnosis of skin cancer. We are also seeing backlogs coming down.

Ambulance Response Times

10. **Antony Higginbotham** (Burnley) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve ambulance response times. [903913]

17. **Sarah Atherton** (Wrexham) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve ambulance response times. [903921]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Barclay): We published the urgent and emergency care recovery plan, which set out a number of measures to improve patient flow within hospitals, which has an

impact on ambulance performance. In addition, we are purchasing 800 new ambulances, which will be on the road this year.

Antony Higginbotham: The Secretary of State will be aware that, in 2007, the last Labour Government closed the accident and emergency at Burnley General Teaching Hospital. When I speak to my constituents about ambulance wait times, the one thing that they always return to is bringing back the A&E at Burnley, which the Labour Government took away. I have raised this issue with Health Ministers since the day I was elected, so will he set out whether it will ever be possible to bring back the A&E that Labour closed? Will he meet me to discuss it?

Steve Barclay: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the consequences of closures such as that, PFI or other issues that are still felt in communities such as Burnley. He will also know that it is for the integrated care board to look at commissioning decisions and I know that he will make his case powerfully to that board.

Sarah Atherton: The Welsh Labour Government have a service level agreement with the Welsh ambulance service to hand over patients to hospital within 15 minutes. At the Wrexham Maelor Hospital, this target is consistently missed, and a recent handover took eight hours 36 minutes. Does the Secretary of State agree that the Welsh Government need to stop playing the blame game and start working in partnership for the betterment of patients?

Steve Barclay: My hon. Friend raises an extremely powerful point. It is not only those targets in Wales that are being missed. She will know that people are almost twice as likely to be waiting for treatment in the Labour-run Welsh NHS than they are in England: 21.3% in Wales compared with 12.8% in England. She will also know that the number of two-year waits for operations in Wales, at over 50,000, is considerably higher than that in England, which is below 2,000.

Helen Morgan (North Shropshire) (LD): On 30 January, the Secretary of State agreed to meet me and my colleagues who represent the other parts of Shropshire to discuss the particularly acute issues that we have been seeing at our hospitals. That meeting is not in the diary. Will he commit to arranging that as soon as possible, so that we can get these issues addressed?

Steve Barclay: I apologise to the hon. Lady because she raises a perfectly fair point. I will do all I can to expedite that meeting.

NHS Backlogs: Eye Healthcare

11. **Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): What assessment his Department has made of the impact of NHS backlogs on eye healthcare. [903914]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Neil O'Brien): The elective recovery plan sets out how we are tackling backlogs, including in eye care. As well as having over 4,900 more doctors and 11,000 more nurses than last year, we also have 92 community diagnostic centres operational and 89 surgical hubs, and we are boosting capacity in 180 trusts with expanded wards and modular theatres. Two-year waits have been virtually eliminated, and we now aim to eliminate 18-month waits by April.

Marsha De Cordova: The backlogs have meant that the number of patients waiting for ophthalmology treatment has increased by 41% in the last three years, and that is over 630,000 people in England. Average waiting times have increased substantially, and the number of patients starting treatment within 18 weeks of referral has dropped to 62%. We know that delays to treatment can and will lead to avoidable sight loss, and we need a plan to tackle the eye care crisis in the NHS. I recently visited the fantastic eye department at St Thomas's Hospital, which is doing an incredible job in managing this. Will the Minister back my plan for a Bill and visit the brilliant service that it is delivering?

Neil O'Brien: This is exactly why we are investing the extra £8 billion in elective recovery. Ophthalmology 52-week waits are coming down from 42,000 to just under 27,000. But can I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for her passion for this subject? We had a Westminster Hall debate the other day and she had to run to be there—such is her passion—but she made it. I thank her for all her work on this matter.

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): When my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary joined me at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in King's Lynn, he saw the new West Norfolk eye centre, which is enabling an extra 2,000 appointments and 2,000 more injections every year to help to deal with the backlogs. Does that not just demonstrate the difference that new buildings can make to better patient care, but underline the importance of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital being added to the Government's new hospitals building programme, which I know he is working hard to achieve?

Neil O'Brien: The Secretary of State will have taken note of my hon. Friend's representations.

Hormone Replacement Therapy: Cost

12. **Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP):** What steps he is taking to help reduce the cost of hormone replacement therapy for people with menopause symptoms. [903915]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield): This is a great opportunity to remind the House that, from 1 April, women will be able to apply for an HRT prepayment prescription for less than £20 a year to pay for all their HRT, whether they are on patches, gels or dual hormones.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): Although these cost reductions are welcome, England is still the only UK nation not to offer free prescriptions. Instead, the UK Government are penalising those who are experiencing menopause who need these medications to improve their symptoms. Will the Minister not consider following Scotland's lead and scrap prescription charges to better provide accessible menopause support?

Maria Caulfield: I remind the hon. Lady that about 60% of women in England who are on hormone replacement therapy are already exempt from prescription charges, but we are reducing the cost by hundreds of pounds a year for the remaining women who do pay. We respect the Scottish Government's decision to provide

free prescriptions, but it would cost us in England £651 million a year to provide free paracetamol to millionaires and we do not think that is the best use of taxpayer money.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): With International Women's Day tomorrow, I want to pay tribute to the menopause warriors—all the amazing individual women and organisations who have forced this issue up the agenda, including my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris). It was her private Member's Bill that made Ministers finally agree to cut the cost of HRT prescriptions, but questions remain. Will all products that help with menopause symptoms be eligible for the prescription prepayment scheme? What are Ministers doing to end the ongoing and unacceptable shortages in HRT that are causing women such anxiety, and if this issue is such a priority for the Government, why has not the menopause taskforce met since June last year—let me warn the Minister, the warriors do not want to wait?

Maria Caulfield: It is a shame that, on International Women's Day, the shadow Minister cannot welcome the progress we are making on the menopause. Labour could have done this. We are the first Government to reduce the cost of HRT for women. [Interruption.] The shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), wants to listen because this is important for women. All licensed HRT products will be available on the prepayment certificate. On the issue of shortages, over 70 products are available to women. Last year, 19 of them were facing a shortage. Thanks to the work of this Government, that is down to five products, and Utrogestan, a product widely used by women, is now back in stock and is being distributed to pharmacies. We are passionate about making HRT more available. There has been a 50% increase in the number of women getting HRT prescriptions. That is a tremendous success for women and we are reducing the cost.

Members: Correspondence

14. **Esther McVey (Tatton) (Con):** When he plans to reply to the letter of 24 January from the right hon. Member for Tatton on non-covid excess deaths. [903917]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Neil O'Brien): In my letter to my right hon. Friend, I noted that it is likely that a combination of factors has contributed to potential excess deaths, including high flu prevalence, ongoing covid-19, and the disruption to the treatment and detection of conditions such as heart disease. But I know she is very thoughtful about this and follows it closely, and I will endeavour to get her more details.

Esther McVey: I am pleased my question has now resulted in a response, for which I am grateful. However, from that response, I was none the wiser as to how the Government have explained the non-covid excess deaths we have seen. So can the Minister give us an insight into the reasons for the non-covid excess deaths since the pandemic?

Neil O'Brien: Even if we just take one disease such as cardiovascular disease, there was disruption to screening, to referrals and to treatment from the covid pandemic. It was noted at the time that that would happen and there would be consequences from it, but let me set out in more detail to my right hon. Friend all the exact facts and figures on this, because I know she has been following it closely.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): When the Minister dug out the letter from the right hon. Member for Tatton (Esther McVey), I wonder whether he also stumbled upon my letter of 8 February to the Secretary of State about the desperate need for new intensive care investment at Northwick Park Hospital in my constituency, and whether he might expedite a reply on that issue.

Neil O'Brien: I am sure the hon. Gentleman's question will indeed expedite it.

Primary Care Staff Numbers

16. **Dr Kieran Mullan** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): What progress his Department has made on increasing the number of primary care staff. [903920]

19. **Layla Moran** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): What steps is he taking to increase the number of GPs. [903923]

20. **Robert Courts** (Witney) (Con): What progress his Department has made on increasing the number of primary care staff. [903925]

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Barclay): Since March 2019, GPs have recruited over 25,000 staff such as pharmacists, physiotherapists and mental health practitioners, and we are on track to hit our 26,000 additional staff commitment.

Dr Mullan: As a doctor myself, I will be very happy to see one of those many fantastic professionals the Secretary of State mentioned, including pharmacists and physios, in the primary care setting, but I understand from local GPs that patients do not always have the confidence to do that and 111 is not necessarily directing people to see the wider team. Can we ensure 111 is set up to direct people to different professionals, and can we do something to promote and educate the public on how fantastic that wider healthcare team is in primary care?

Steve Barclay: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, which is why I commissioned through NHS England a review of 111. It was initially designed for a different purpose. That allows the GP service to be the front door it has become in the NHS. Through the chief executive of Milton Keynes University Hospital, we have done significant work on the NHS app, so it can better enable patients to get to the right place for the care they need.

Layla Moran: In January, over 45,000 people in Oxfordshire waited more than two weeks to see their GP and 12,000 waited over a month. The top reason given when I visited surgeries was that they simply cannot recruit the doctors they need. For example, Kennington health centre has been forced to close part

time because it cannot find a replacement for a retiring partner. That is clearly unsustainable. Will the Secretary of State consider introducing a weighting for GPs in areas of high cost of living outside London? Will he meet me to discuss the specific issues in Oxfordshire?

Steve Barclay: The hon. Member is right to highlight the pressure on primary care, which is why, in the answer I gave a moment ago, I said it is also about looking at the wider skills mix within primary care. She mentions doctors specifically. We have 2,200 more doctors in general practice than before the pandemic. It is about having the right skills mix alongside the doctors to meet the significant increased demand since the pandemic.

Robert Courts: Demand for GP appointments in Oxfordshire is indeed acute. It is driven in part by the need to continue to treat people with long-term medical conditions. Will my right hon. Friend consider what can be done to rebalance the system, so that instead of dealing with people when they present with acute symptoms, more is done to ensure people can be treated at the primary and community level?

Steve Barclay: My hon. Friend highlights an absolutely brilliant point, one I am extremely seized of, which is: how do we get detection much sooner, looking at genomics, screening and identifying issues before the patient is even necessarily aware that they have a condition. Early care delivers far better patient outcomes but it is also far cheaper to deliver. That prevention, as he highlights, is extremely important.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): The primary care crisis in Plymouth is getting worse, but there is a cross-party solution in Plymouth, which is to build a new super health hub, the Cavell centre, in the city centre. The Government have withdrawn the £41 million funding for that, but the Minister's predecessor offered to put pressure on Devon's integrated care board to see what could be funded locally and whether there is a national-local partnership that could deliver this pioneering pilot project, which could really improve healthcare in Plymouth that would be a model for the rest of the country. Will the Secretary of State look at Devon's ICB and whether he could put pressure on that ICB to fund that pioneering project?

Steve Barclay: The hon. Gentleman reasonably highlights that the commissioning is a decision for the ICB, but also rightly draws attention to the opportunity to look at different models, for example, how we look across communities at economies of scale, and how we combine that with modern methods of construction to deliver projects far more quickly. I am happy to look, with Devon ICB, at the issue he raises.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I really welcome the increase in patient care staff in GP practices in my constituency, but can I appeal to the Secretary of State to fix the problem with the taxation of GPs' pensions, which is forcing many into early retirement just when we need their services the most?

Steve Barclay: My right hon. Friend is a very experienced parliamentarian and will know that issues of tax are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, but I draw her attention to "Our plan for patients", which sets out a package of NHS pension scheme measures.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): NHS dentists form a really important part of the primary care workforce. However, in places such as York, we have a complete desert, where my constituents just cannot receive NHS dentistry. What is the Secretary of State going to do for my constituents, so that their oral health needs are addressed?

Steve Barclay: We will set out to the House in due course a recovery plan to deal in particular with primary care but also dentistry. We recognise that, notwithstanding the fiscal support that was offered to protect dentistry through the pandemic, it is an area of acute interest across the House. The Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien), will be saying more on that very shortly.

Cost of Living: Mental Health

21. **Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): What recent assessment he has made of the potential impact of the cost of living crisis on long-term trends in levels of mental ill health. [903926]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield): Last year, £50 million was invested through the promotion of the better mental health fund in 40 local authorities that have the most deprived parts of the country. That is to boost prevention and early intervention and to support those hardest hit by the pandemic and the cost of living.

Angela Crawley: The Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland found that 52% of Scots are concerned about the impact that rising prices are having on their mental health. Poverty is a key driver of poor mental health, and those already struggling with poor mental health and money worries are likely to be the hardest hit. What discussions has the Minister had with her Cabinet colleagues on the consequences of policies, such as the punitive sanctions regime, that are shown to increase anxiety and harm to people's mental health?

Maria Caulfield: This Government have been supporting people with the cost of living through the £37 billion package, and £15 billion of targeted support for those most in need. That includes £150 of help with council tax, £400 for electricity, the 8 million people supported by the £1,200 payment and paying towards half of people's energy costs. This Government are serious about helping people with the cost of living at this time.

Theo Clarke (Stafford) (Con): I welcome the Government's commitment to tackling mental ill health, in particular the recent funding that we have received in Stafford for a new crisis assessment centre at St George's Hospital. What further steps are the Government taking to improve access to mental health support, especially in our schools?

Maria Caulfield: I thank my hon. Friend for her hard work securing that funding for the crisis centre in her constituency. These centres make such a difference, because they are based in the community and can intervene at an earlier stage when someone is facing difficulty. They are on top of measures such as our

mental health ambulances, which will also respond to people in crisis, and supporting our local communities to deal with mental health as well as those with a mental illness.

Access to Primary Care

22. **Mrs Paulette Hamilton** (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): What steps he is taking to improve patient access to primary care. [903927]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Neil O'Brien): We have increased real-terms spending on general practice by more than a fifth since 2015. We are growing the workforce, with 2,200 more doctors and 25,000 extra primary care clinicians compared with 2019. We have the most GPs in training ever, up from 2,600 to 4,000. In January there were 11% more appointments in general practice than in the same month before the pandemic. I pay tribute to the work that general practitioners are doing.

Mrs Hamilton: Under the Tories, the number of qualified GPs has fallen to a record low, which is hitting local communities across the UK very hard. In January, in Erdington, Kingstanding and Castle Vale, more than 2,000 people had to wait more than a month for a GP appointment. Is it not the case that the longer the Tories are in power, the longer patients will have to wait?

Neil O'Brien: As well as the 2,200 extra doctors in primary care, I mentioned the 25,000 extra other clinicians. That means that in the hon. Lady's constituency there are 55% more staff working directly with patients than before.

Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con): At a time when GP and A&E services are under pressure, I am pleased to see the ministerial team's focus on helping people to see a doctor when they need to. Does the Minister agree that walk-in centres, such as ours in Norwich city centre, are helpful, popular and necessary?

Neil O'Brien: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right; walk-in centres are a key part of primary care. We are looking at how they can do more, and I pay tribute to all the work they are already doing.

Topical Questions

T1. [903928] **Tonia Antoniazzi** (Gower) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Barclay): On Friday I was proud to announce the winners of the third round of the artificial intelligence in health and care award. Winners included projects within the NHS that identify women at risk of stillbirth, help with neurological conditions, find lung blockages and assess the quality of transplant organs, as well as a number of projects focused on cancer, identifying people's predisposition and its presence. Since its inception in 2019, the AI in health and care award has invested more than £123 million in 86 promising projects, supporting more than 300,000 patients. AI will come to save countless lives in the NHS in the years to come, and that begins with the investment today.

Tonia Antoniazzi: The Secretary of State should know that I am the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group for access to medical cannabis under prescription, for children with intractable epilepsy. The situation is as intolerable as ever. Both product supply and cost are causing families great pain, and their children are desperate. I urge the Secretary of State to meet me to discuss convening a roundtable to help identify solutions to the crisis of lack of access. I am still awaiting a response from his Minister from 18 January 2023.

Steve Barclay: I am very aware of the hon. Lady's work as chair of the APPG, so I am not surprised that she asks about that important issue, which she has been assiduous in raising. I will flag up the follow-up with my ministerial colleague. I draw the hon. Lady's attention to the fact that the National Institute for Health and Care Research remains open to research proposals in this area. I encourage her to ensure through her work on the APPG that bids are made to generate the evidence that the clinicians who make decisions on prescribing need.

T6. [903933] **Sarah Atherton** (Wrexham) (Con): Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board was taken out of special measures in 2020 without any tangible improvements. Last week, the board walked out en masse because it no longer had faith in the Welsh Labour Government. The health service is now back in special measures. The Welsh Government run the NHS in Wales, so if the First Minister of Wales were to ask, would the UK Government step in to support them?

Steve Barclay: We are always happy to assist colleagues across the United Kingdom as part of our commitment to the Union. My hon. Friend is right to highlight current performance in Wales. As I have said, patients are waiting twice as long for hospital treatment in Wales as in England, and more than 50,000 people in Wales are waiting for more than two years for their operation.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): When nurses and paramedics voted to take strike action, the Secretary of State refused to negotiate and said that the pay review body's decision was final. He has now U-turned, but not before 144,000 operations and appointments were cancelled through his incompetence. Will he now apologise to patients for this avoidable disruption?

Steve Barclay: What the hon. Gentleman omits to remind the House is that at the time the demand from trade unions was for a 19% consolidated pay rise, which is very different from the basis on which talks have been entered into. The point is that we are in discussions with trade union colleagues. Trade unions and the Government have a shared purpose—to address the very real challenges that we recognise the NHS workforce have faced, particularly in the context of the pandemic—and a shared desire, which is to focus on patients and ensure that they get the right care to support them.

Wes Streeting: I think patients know who to trust, and it is nurses, not the Secretary of State. The Government have still learned nothing: despite a 98% vote in favour of strikes, the Secretary of State was sent to meet junior

doctors without a mandate from the Prime Minister to negotiate. What is the point of this Health Secretary if he is in office but not in charge?

Steve Barclay: I have come to the House literally from a meeting with the trade unions: I met the NHS Staff Council this morning. Once again, hon. Members on the Opposition Front Bench are writing their questions before they see what is actually happening.

T8. [903935] **Lee Anderson** (Ashfield) (Con): Sean Lynk, aged 30, in Ashfield, took his own life just before Christmas. No one saw it coming. Male suicide takes the lives of 12 young men every day in this country. It is the biggest killer of young males under the age of 40. Sean's father Graham is coming next week to watch me speak in a Westminster Hall debate on male suicide, so could somebody from the Health team please meet Graham and me next Monday?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield): I thank my hon. Friend for raising this important issue. We are launching a prevention of suicide strategy, and male suicide will be a particular focus, as it is a high-risk group. The debate next week will be answered by a Minister in the Department for Education, because it relates specifically to the national curriculum, but I am very happy to meet my hon. Friend and his constituent.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): Unprotected sun exposure causes skin cancer, and some 16,000 cases are diagnosed each year. Affordable sunscreen is therefore essential for protection. Will the Secretary of State help to tackle the issue by supporting the Sun Protection Products (Value Added Tax) Bill, a ten-minute rule Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for East Dunbartonshire (Amy Callaghan) that would remove VAT on sun protection products?

The Minister for Social Care (Helen Whately): Sun exposure is one of the most significant causes of cancer. That is one reason why we are working so hard with the NHS to reduce backlogs for people who are waiting for cancer diagnosis and treatment, including by rolling out teledermatology across the NHS to reduce diagnosis times. However, the hon. Gentleman's question about VAT and skin cancer is a matter for the Treasury.

T9. [903936] **John Penrose** (Weston-super-Mare) (Con): Finding and fixing the underlying causes of health inequalities has defeated Governments of all types for decades. Less well-off British families still live significantly shorter, sicker lives than richer families, cramping their life chances and making it harder to avoid or escape poverty. The long-expected health inequalities White Paper is essential to changing that. Does the Secretary of State expect it to be published this month? If not, will he meet me to discuss it?

Steve Barclay: As we heard earlier from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien), the major conditions strategy report will deal with those issues. However, it is also important to consider the variation in performance between integrated care boards and how we can raise the bottom quartile to the level of the top quartile—there

is far too much variation within the NHS—and to be data-driven, so that when it comes to genomics and screening we can target the outliers more precisely. That is what is behind the issue to which my hon. Friend has rightly drawn attention.

T2. [903929] Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Will the 10-year cancer plan feature the distinctive approach that is required in relation to the early diagnosis of brain tumours?

Helen Whately: Cancer will be a substantial part of the major conditions strategy. We will be looking at the major causes of ill health in the country, of which cancer is, of course, one. Part of that will involve ensuring that we are good at diagnosing cancer, because the earlier it is diagnosed, the more treatable it is, and hence the better the outcomes for people with cancer will be.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Health and Care Committee.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): I welcome today's announcement of the appointment of Professor Deanfield as the Government's prevention champion with a focus on cardiovascular disease, one of the main causes of which is, of course, smoking. May I ask where we are with an updated tobacco control plan, and whether the Minister will look again at the introduction of a "smoke-free fund" paid for by the tobacco industry to boost those new public health budgets?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Neil O'Brien): We will be setting out our next steps on smoking shortly, but we already have the lowest smoking level on record: it has fallen to 13%, partly as a result of the doubling of duty on cigarettes and partly owing to the introduction of a minimum excise tax. We will be investing £35 million in the NHS this year to ensure that all smokers who are admitted to hospital are given NHS-funded tobacco treatment.

T3. [903930] Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Recent analysis from Macmillan Cancer Support shows that 2022 was the worst year on record for cancer waiting times. Will the Minister consider the introduction of an urgent support package for UK cancer services in the upcoming Budget to support our hard-working staff and to ensure that there is additional capacity to deal with the current pressures on the system?

Helen Whately: It is indeed a worrying experience for people to be waiting to know whether they have cancer or, having received a diagnosis, to be waiting for treatment. However, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that more people are currently coming forward for cancer checks, more people are being treated for cancer, and the NHS is reducing some of the backlogs following the pandemic.

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): I welcome the Government's actions to deal with obesity, but it remains an increasing health issue for our nation. Does my right hon. Friend agree that educating children and parents about healthy eating should be a top priority—

Steve Barclay *rose*—

Sir David Evennett:—and may I urge his Department to increase its campaigns on the consequences of obesity?

Steve Barclay: My right hon. Friend's question was so good that I was eager to answer it early. He is right to highlight this issue, which is being dealt with as part of a wider thrust within Government work on prevention, which is how we can empower the patient. That means getting more data to patients and using genomics and screening to ensure that they are better informed and can therefore opt to take decisions on healthy eating, rather than the state trying to impose those decisions on them in a top-down manner.

T4. [903931] Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): I chair the all-party parliamentary group on osteoporosis and bone health. Our recent report, supported by the Royal Osteoporosis Society, showed that an investment of just £27 million pounds a year in fracture liaison services would deliver more than £600 million pounds of savings for the NHS over five years. Will the Minister meet me and the ROS to discuss our report, and will he commit himself to ending the postcode lottery by providing 100% coverage for FLS for over-50s in England?

Steve Barclay: I am happy for a member of the ministerial team to meet the hon. Lady, who has made a compelling case about the return on investment. We will obviously need to scrutinise it in more detail, and I am sure that my colleagues will look forward to doing so.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): The Secretary of State is aware of Medway's case for being part of the Government's hospital building programme. It was the hardest-hit area during covid-19, and it has some of the greatest health inequalities in the country, and one of the busiest accident and emergency units in Kent. Will the Secretary of State visit Medway with me to witness our urgent need, so that we can be part of that hospital building programme for the future?

Steve Barclay: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the issues in Medway and those in Kent as a whole. When I met the chief executive of Maidstone Hospital yesterday, we discussed some of the innovation that it has introduced and the benefits of that innovation across the board. As for the new hospitals programme, I remind my hon. Friend of the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 22 February, when he confirmed the Government's commitment to that programme.

T5. [903932] Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): Every day, the families of women who took the drug Primodos in the 1960s and '70s continue to suffer the consequences of a lifetime of disability. Baroness Cumberlege's review made it clear that Primodos caused avoidable harm and that the families should be given redress, so why have the Government recently refused three mediation requests on behalf of those families?

Maria Caulfield: The hon. Gentleman will know that we have huge sympathy for those affected by Primodos. He will also know that there is a legal case at the moment so I am unable comment at this time, but I am happy to discuss it with him further.

Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): Over the past year or so, Bedfordshire's fire service and ambulance service have taken innovative steps to co-operate

to bring response times down. They are now working on a plan to deepen that co-operation. Will my right hon. Friend facilitate a meeting with the leaders of the fire service and ambulance service in due course when that plan is ready?

Steve Barclay: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the community services that we are doing as part of our urgent and emergency recovery plan, looking at how we deliver care quicker through innovative models. One of those involves better co-operation with the fire service.

T7. [903934] **Samantha Dixon** (City of Chester) (Lab): York and Chester have many similarities, and it would appear that a complete absence of any access to dental services is another one. Can I impress on the Minister the urgency of improving access to NHS dentistry, because it is essential that my constituents do not have to travel for miles and worry for months?

Neil O'Brien: We will be setting out further steps shortly, but there are 6.5% more dentists doing work for the NHS than in 2010 and we have started the reforms with more units of dental activity bands and a minimum UDA.

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend accept that about one third of the activity that takes place in GP surgeries could be transferred to pharmacies? What is he doing to promote that policy and deal with the British Medical Association's reluctance to co-operate?

Steve Barclay: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the fact that a number of services that GPs currently offer could be performed by pharmacists, and we are looking at that in the context of the primary care recovery plan. This is also about looking at how we can relieve some of the workload pressure within primary care, and that is why we have recruited 25,000 additional staff to support GPs. It is also why we have over 2,000 more doctors in primary care.

T10. [903937] **Ian Byrne** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab): Some 30% of disabled people, including many of my constituents, are having to cut back on using essential medical equipment at home due to rising energy bills. Some 70,000 people have signed the charity Sense's petition calling for long-term ongoing support for disabled people and their families. Will the Secretary of State deliver that support as a matter of urgency?

Neil O'Brien: That is exactly why we are spending £55 billion this winter to help households and businesses with their energy bills. That is one of the largest support packages in Europe.

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that community-based drop-in mental health services such as the Link centres in North Devon are vital to remote rural communities? Will he urge Devon County Council not only to continue those services but to improve and extend the model?

Steve Barclay: It is for schemes such as those that my hon. Friend highlights that we are investing a further £2.3 billion a year in mental health services, and that in turn is facilitating an extra 2 million patients accessing NHS-funded mental health support.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): More than £300 million of the NHS dentistry budget is set to be clawed back by NHS England at the end of this month. That is not because of a lack of demand; it is because the Government's NHS dental contract is broken and dentists are walking away from NHS work. Will the Government ringfence these funds, rolled over to next year, so that people who desperately need dental treatment can get those appointments?

Neil O'Brien: That is exactly why we will continue to reform the contract as the hon. Lady suggests, and it is why we have started allowing dentists to do 110% of their UDAs, but she is right and we will go further.

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, including my co-chairing of the all-party parliamentary group for hospice and end of life care. Now that integrated care boards have a duty to commission palliative care, what steps is my right hon. Friend taking to assess delivery? Will he join me in calling for the North East and North Cumbria ICB to listen to the hospices in the Tees Valley, which would save our hospices and save the NHS money?

Steve Barclay: My hon. Friend is right to draw the House's attention to the extremely important work of hospices and to the fact that commissioning decisions are devolved to the integrated care boards so that they can target funding in the way that best serves local communities. He is quite right to lobby on their behalf and I am sure that his relevant ICB will take note of that.

Mr Speaker: Before we come to the statement on the Illegal Migration Bill, I wish to make a brief statement.

I am aware that there are a number of cases before the courts that relate to the subject matter of the Bill. Given the national importance of the issues to be discussed, I am prepared to exercise a waiver and allow brief references to those cases. However, I would ask Members to exercise caution and not to refer in detail to issues that are being considered by the courts.

Illegal Migration Bill

12.35 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the Government's Illegal Migration Bill.

Two months ago, the Prime Minister made a promise to the British people that anyone entering this country illegally will be detained and swiftly removed—no half measures. The Illegal Migration Bill will fulfil that promise. It will allow us to stop the boats that are bringing tens of thousands to our shores in flagrant breach of both our laws and the will of the British people.

The United Kingdom must always support the world's most vulnerable. Since 2015 we have given sanctuary to nearly half a million people, including 150,000 people from Hong Kong, 160,000 people from Ukraine and 25,000 Afghans fleeing the Taliban. Indeed, decades ago, my parents found security and opportunity in this country, for which my family are eternally grateful.

Crucially, these decisions are supported by the British people precisely because they are decisions made by the British people and their elected representatives, not by the people smugglers and other criminals who break into Britain on a daily basis. For a Government not to respond to the waves of illegal migrants breaching our borders would be to betray the will of the people we were elected to serve.

The small boats problem is part of a larger global migration crisis. In the coming years, developed countries will face unprecedented pressure from ever greater numbers of people leaving the developing world for places such as the United Kingdom. Unless we act today, the problem will be worse tomorrow, and the problem is already unsustainable.

People are dying in the channel. The volume of illegal arrivals has overwhelmed our asylum system. The backlog has ballooned to over 160,000. The asylum system now costs the British taxpayer £3 billion a year. Since 2018, some 85,000 people have illegally entered the United Kingdom by small boat—45,000 of them in 2022 alone. All travelled through multiple safe countries in which they could and should have claimed asylum. Many came from safe countries, such as Albania, and almost all passed through France. The vast majority—74% in 2021—were adult males under the age of 40, rich enough to pay criminal gangs thousands of pounds for passage.

Upon arrival, most are accommodated in hotels across the country, costing the British taxpayer around £6 million a day. The risk remains that these individuals just disappear. And when we try to remove them, they turn our generous asylum laws against us to prevent removal. The need for reform is obvious and urgent.

This Government have not sat on their hands. Since this Prime Minister took office, recognising the necessity of joint solutions with France, we have signed a new deal that provides more technology and embeds British officers with French patrols. I hope Friday's Anglo-French summit will further deepen that co-operation.

We have created a new small boats operational command, with more than 700 new staff; doubled National Crime Agency funding to tackle smuggling gangs; increased enforcement raids by 50%; signed a deal with Albania, which has already enabled the return of hundreds of

illegal arrivals; and are procuring accommodation, including on military land, to end the farce of accommodating migrants in hotels.

But let us be honest: it is still not enough. In the face of today's global migration crisis, yesterday's laws are simply not fit for purpose. So to anyone proposing de facto open borders through unlimited safe and legal routes as the alternative, let us be honest: there are 100 million people around the world who could qualify for protection under our current laws. Let us be clear: they are coming here. We have seen a 500% increase in small boat crossings in two years. This is the crucial point of this Bill. They will not stop coming here until the world knows that if you enter Britain illegally, you will be detained and swiftly removed—back to your country if it is safe, or to a safe third country, such as Rwanda.

That is precisely what this Bill will do. That is how we will stop the boats. This Bill enables the detention of illegal arrivals, without bail or judicial review within the first 28 days of detention, until they can be removed. It puts a duty on the Home Secretary to remove illegal entrants and will radically narrow the number of challenges and appeals that can suspend removal. Only those under 18, medically unfit to fly or at real risk of serious and irreversible harm in the country we are removing them to—that is an exceedingly high bar—will be able to delay their removal. Any other claims will be heard remotely, after removal.

When our Modern Slavery Act 2015 passed, the impact assessment envisaged 3,500 referrals a year. Last year, 17,000 referrals took on average 543 days to consider. Modern slavery laws are being abused to block removals. That is why we granted more than 50% of asylum requests from citizens of a safe European country and NATO ally, Albania. That is why this Bill disqualifies illegal entrants from using modern slavery rules to prevent removal.

I will not address the Bill's full legal complexities today. *[Interruption.]* Some of the nation's finest legal minds have been and continue to be involved in its development. But I must say this: rule 39 and the process that enabled the Strasbourg Court to block, at the last minute, flights to Rwanda, after our courts had refused injunctions, was deeply flawed. Our ability to control our borders cannot be held back by an opaque process, conducted late at night, with no chance to make our case or even appeal decisions. That is why we have initiated discussions in Strasbourg to ensure that its blocking orders meet a basic natural justice standard, one that prevents abuse of rule 39 to thwart removal; and it is why the Bill will set out the conditions for the UK's future compliance with such orders.

Other countries share our dilemma and will understand the justice of our position. Our approach is robust and novel, which is why we cannot make a definitive statement of compatibility under section 19(1)(a) of the Human Rights Act 1998. Of course, the UK will always seek to uphold international law, and I am confident that this Bill is compatible with international law. When we have stopped the boats, the Bill will introduce an annual cap, to be determined by Parliament, on the number of refugees the UK will resettle via safe and legal routes. This will ensure an orderly system, considering local authority capacity for housing, public services and support.

The British people are famously a fair and patient people. But their sense of fair play has been tested beyond its limits as they have seen the country taken for a ride. Their patience has run out. The law-abiding patriotic majority have said, “Enough is enough.” This cannot and will not continue. Their Government—this Government—must act decisively, must act with determination, must act with compassion, and must act with proportion. Make no mistake: this Conservative Government—this Conservative Prime Minister—will act now to stop the boats. I commend the statement to the House.

12.45 pm

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): A record 45,000 people crossed the channel on dangerous small boats last year, up from just 280 four years ago. In that short time, the Government have allowed criminal gangs to take hold along the channel and along our border. At the same time, convictions of people smugglers have halved; Home Office asylum decisions have collapsed, down 40%; the backlog and costly, inappropriate hotel use have soared; removals of unsuccessful asylum seekers are down 80% on the last Labour Government; and legal family reunion visas for refugees are down 40%. That is deeply damaging chaos, and there is no point in Ministers trying to blame anyone else for it. They have been in power for 13 years. The asylum system is broken, and they broke it.

We need serious action to stop dangerous boat crossings, which are putting lives at risk and undermining border security. That is why Labour has put forward plans for a cross-border police unit, for fast-track decisions and returns to clear the backlog and end hotel use, and for a new agreement with France and other countries. Instead, today’s statement is groundhog day. The Home Secretary has said:

“Anyone who arrives illegally will be deemed inadmissible and either returned to the country they arrived from or a safe third country.”

[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] Only that was not this Home Secretary: it was the last one. And that was not about this Bill: it was about the last one, passed only a year ago and which did not work. As part of last year’s Bill, the Home Office considered 18,000 people as inadmissible for the asylum system because they had travelled through safe third countries, but because it had no return agreements in place, just 21 of them were returned. That is 0.1%. The other 99.9% just carried on, often in hotels, at an extra cost of £500 million, and it did not deter anyone. Even more boats arrived.

What is different this time? The Government still do not have any return agreements in place. The Home Secretary has admitted that Rwanda is “failing”, and even if it gets going it will take only a few hundred people. What will happen to the other 99% under the Bill? She says that she will detain them all, perhaps for 28 days. Can she tell us how many detention centres the Government will need in total and how much they will cost? Even if she does that, what will happen when people leave 28-day detention? Will she make people destitute, so that they just wander the streets in total chaos? They will include torture victims, Afghan interpreters and families with children. Or will she put them into indefinite taxpayer-funded accommodation? Never returned anywhere because the Government do not have agreements

with Europe in place, never given sanctuary, never having their case resolved—just forever in asylum accommodation and hotels. She may not call it the asylum system, but thousands of people are still going to be in it.

What will the Bill mean for the promises we made to the Afghan interpreters who served our country but who were too late to make the last flight out of Kabul as the tyranny was closing in upon them? The Government told them to flee and find another way here, and they told us to tell people that as well. But the resettlement scheme is not helping them and, if they finally arrive in this country this afternoon, perhaps by travelling through Ireland to get here, they will only ever be illegal in the eyes of a Government who relied on the sacrifices they made for us.

If the Government were serious, they would be working internationally to get a proper new agreement in place with France and Europe, including return agreements, properly controlled and managed legal routes such as family reunion, and reform of resettlement. Instead, this Bill makes that harder, unilaterally choosing to decide no asylum cases at all, but expecting every other country to carry on.

If the Government were serious, they would be working with Labour on our plan for a major new cross-border policing unit to go after the criminal gangs. Instead, the deputy chairman of the Conservative party, the hon. Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) said yesterday that we should not go after the gangs because they have existed for “thousands of years”. That is the disgraceful Tory attitude that has let the gangs off of the hook and let them take hold. One smuggler told Sky News yesterday that three quarters of the smugglers live in Britain, but barely any of them are being prosecuted and the Government still have not found the hundreds of children missing from asylum hotels who have been picked up by criminal gangs.

The Government could be setting out a serious plan today. We would work with them on it, and so would everyone across the country. Instead, it is just more chaos. The Government say “no ifs, no buts”, but we all know that they will spend the next year if-ing and but-ing and looking for someone else to blame when it all goes wrong. Enough is enough. We cannot afford any more of this—slogans and not solutions, government by gimmick, ramping up the rhetoric on refugees and picking fights simply to have someone else to blame when things go wrong. This Bill is not a solution. It is a con that risks making the chaos worse. Britain deserves better than this chaos. Britain is better than this.

Suella Braverman: I thank the right hon. Lady for her remarks, but—forgive me—after five minutes of hysteria, histrionics and criticism, I am still not clear: I have no idea what Labour’s plan is. I will assume that the shadow Home Secretary is still committed to scrapping our Rwanda partnership, as she said last year, and I will assume that the Leader of the Opposition still wants to close immigration removal centres, as he promised during his leadership campaign. The shadow Home Secretary talks about safe and legal routes; I wonder what number Labour would cap that at. Would it be 500,000? A million? Five million? She should be honest with the House and with the British people: what she really means is unlimited safe and legal routes—open borders by the back door.

[*Suella Braverman*]

The right hon. Lady says get serious, so let us look at the facts. The British people want to stop the boats. It is one of the five promises the Prime Minister made to the British people, but stopping the boats did not even feature in the Leader of the Opposition's five big missions. Is it because he does not care or because he does not know what to do? We all know why, and I think the British people know why: it is because, deep down, the Leader of the Opposition does not want to stop the boats and he thinks it is bigoted to say we have got too much illegal migration abusing our system. It is because Labour MPs would prefer to write letters stopping the removal of foreign national offenders. It is because the Labour party would prefer to vote against our measures to penalise foreign national offenders and to streamline our asylum system.

Those are the facts. Labour is against deterring people who would come here illegally, against detaining people who come here illegally and against deporting people who are here illegally. That means that Labour is for this situation getting worse and worse. Perhaps that is fine for the Leader of the Opposition and most of those on the Labour Front Bench, but it is not their schools, their GPs or their public services, housing and hotels filling up with illegal migrants.

Perhaps that is why, even before seeing the Bill and engaging on the substance, Labour has already said it will not support its passage through Parliament. Is the Leader of the Opposition committing that the Labour Lords will block it? The British people want to stop the boats. The Conservative Government have a plan to stop the boats. This Prime Minister will stop the boats. If the people want closed minds and open borders, they can rely on Labour.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Never have I heard such fabricated rage against genuine attempts to come up with practical solutions for this problem, from a Labour party that has consistently been a policy vacuum on any practical solutions at all. I support this Bill, particularly the provisions for sustainable safe and legal routes for genuine asylum seekers.

My specific question for the Home Secretary is this. When the Home Affairs Committee visited Calais recently we were told that, when the Rwanda scheme was announced, there was a big upsurge in migrants in France approaching authorities asking about staying in France, because there was a deterrent factor. That has not happened because the Rwanda scheme has not got off the ground. When she sees her counterparts in France on Friday, can we suggest that the French might like to join us in a joint Rwanda-type scheme, since they face the same problems? Can they do more? We have safe and legal routes to stop people getting in the boats: to arrest them and stop this illegal trade at source on their side of the channel.

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. Deterrence is the key theme running through these measures. We want to send the message loudly and clearly to people smugglers and people thinking about crossing the channel: do not do it. Do not hand over your life savings, do not get in to that flimsy dinghy and do not risk your life, because you will not be entitled to a life in the UK.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): The SNP stands proudly behind the refugee convention and the European convention on human rights. We believe that all who seek asylum and refugee status deserve a fair hearing and we are 100% behind the clear statement from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees that there is no such thing as an illegal asylum seeker.

Despite the dreary dog-whistle rhetoric, the Home Secretary's Bill will not lay a solitary finger on people smugglers or people traffickers, but it will cause serious and devastating harm to those who have already endured incredible suffering. Afghans let down by the Government's utterly failed relocation schemes will be locked up and offshored. People who have fled persecution in Syria, Eritrea or Iran will remain blocked from the asylum system. The policies that have seen hundreds of children go missing from hotels will be enshrined in her Bill. The world-leading modern slavery legislation piloted through by one of her predecessors is about to be ripped to pieces without a single shred of justification. That is what this appalling Bill looks set to deliver, and that is why we will oppose it every step of the way.

If every country followed the Home Secretary's example, the whole system of refugee protection around the world would fall to pieces. It is not just that system that will be trashed by this Bill, however, but the UK's reputation as a place of sanctuary. She spoke about an overwhelmed asylum system, but the only thing that has overwhelmed the asylum system is the Conservative party's incompetence and mismanagement. One of her own ministerial colleagues described the Rwanda plan as "ugly, likely to be counterproductive and of dubious legality", and that beautifully encapsulates what is in this Bill.

I have two questions for the Home Secretary. First, what happens if an Afghan arrival cannot be removed to Afghanistan, France, Rwanda or anywhere else? Will he or she eventually be admitted to the asylum system? If so, after how long? Secondly, when the Prime Minister meets President Macron, will he be telling him that the UK is prepared to leave the European convention on human rights?

Suella Braverman: A lot of passion and fury and fire—I only wish the Scottish Government would bring so much passion to their approach to accommodating asylum seekers, when Scotland currently takes one of the lowest numbers of asylum seekers in our United Kingdom. Our measures set out a comprehensive and coherent plan, combining fairness and compassion.

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Con): Now then. When asked by a reporter if foreign rapists and murderers should be deported to the country they came from, the lawyer of the Opposition replied that it depends. Well, I say get rid. Can the Home Secretary confirm that the Bill will indeed get rid of foreign rapists and murderers?

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend is right to point out the shameless position that the Labour party has adopted. We have passed measures to make it easier to remove foreign national rapists, drug dealers and murderers. What does the Labour party do? It writes letters to stop us.

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

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): In the Home Affairs Committee report on channel crossings, which was published last summer, we found that small boats have not overwhelmed the asylum system as the Home Secretary is claiming. The backlog has been allowed to grow since 2013, and is now at over 160,000. We said in that report:

“Poor resourcing, by successive governments, of staff and technology in the Asylum Operations function in the Home Office, has been a significant factor in this collapse.”

Our report also found that the Government should deal with the backlog, expand safe and legal routes and negotiate a returns policy with the EU. Can the Home Secretary tell the House what progress has been made on expanding safe and legal routes and on a returns policy with the EU?

Suella Braverman: I think it is clear for everyone to see that our asylum system has been overwhelmed by unprecedented numbers of people arriving here and by the very high numbers being processed currently. We have made good progress, both with the EU and with our counterparts in France, and that is why I am very much looking forward to the Anglo-French summit this Friday, which our Prime Minister will be leading with the French President, to discuss this issue in more detail.

Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con): The balance of creating a strong enough deterrent to cripple the gangs and render the routes unviable, and being fair, is absolutely key, so I appreciate the needle that the Home Secretary is trying to thread and the effort that she has put into this solution. Could she confirm that, under this plan, as the deterrent measures kick in and the asylum backlog is worn down, safe and legal routes will reopen from countries outside Syria, Afghanistan, Hong Kong and Ukraine, and could she give an estimate of when they will reopen?

Suella Braverman: We have several schemes open to people from all nationalities to come here via safe and legal routes. We will, thanks to the Bill, have a more comprehensive discussion and a decision endorsed by Parliament—one that has more legitimacy in how we go forward on allowing safe and legal routes into this country.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): As a child of migrants, can I tell the Home Secretary how much I deplore her seeking to smear migrants as a whole as criminals and rapists? Can I also assure the House that I will never vote for legislation that would have led to my parents being detained and dumped in Rwanda?

The Home Secretary talks about detention and deportation. Where is she going to detain these people? There is not the capacity to detain these numbers of people. In terms of deportation, the only arrangement we have is with Rwanda, which has told us that it can take only 200 people. Her tone, her legislation and her proposed actions are deplorable and unworkable. Even at this late stage, will she reconsider?

Suella Braverman: With respect to the right hon. Lady, it is wrong, naive and inflammatory to conflate people who come here legitimately, abide by our laws and come here on a legal basis with those who come here illegally, break our laws and put themselves and others at risk. I urge her to choose her words carefully.

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): I welcome the Home Secretary's statement and the measures that she has set out. What would be her key message to my constituents, who are angry about the use of hotels to house asylum seekers in and around Cannock Chase?

Suella Braverman: The message I would send to my right hon. Friend's constituents is that we need to stop the boats coming here in the first place. Once we succeed with that objective, through the measures in the Bill, we will be able to stop them being accommodated in hotels.

Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab): The Rwandan Government have said that they are able to take only 200 people. Can the Home Secretary tell the House what will happen to the 44,800 others who are waiting in the system? Does she believe that the £120 million that has gone to Rwanda is value for money? Will she confirm that an additional £12,000 per refugee will be added to the Rwanda bill for processing costs?

Suella Braverman: I am incredibly proud of what the Conservative Government achieved in securing the agreement—the ground-breaking, world-beating agreement—with our friends and allies in Rwanda. I put on record my thanks to my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) for leading that work. Our scheme with Rwanda was upheld by the High Court at the end of last year. That is a big step forward in our litigation, and we look forward to working with our friends in Rwanda to deliver the agreement.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Although it has been all over the press this morning, West Lindsey District Council has still not been officially informed that the Home Office is planning to place migrants at former Royal Air Force Scampton. We announced just yesterday, after two years of work, a £300 million scheme to have the best ever handover of a Ministry of Defence base—the Home of the Dambusters: business, tourism and heritage. Will the Home Secretary assure me that if she overrides our objections and places migrants there, she will work closely with me and the council to ensure that that is strictly temporary and in no way upsets the best deal that has ever come to north Lincolnshire?

Suella Braverman: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Immigration is working intensively to secure bespoke, appropriate and—importantly—sustainable asylum accommodation around a range of locations within the United Kingdom. We are working with local authorities and Members of Parliament. We want to make the right decision for communities, and that is why all dialogue is welcome.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): Torpiki Amrakhil, an Afghan journalist and former announcer on Radio Afghanistan and on the radio station of the United Nations assistance mission in Afghanistan, drowned

[Wendy Chamberlain]

in Italian waters on the way to Europe. Given the brutality of the Taliban regime and precarious security situation in neighbouring third countries, it is shocking that there is no specific safe route for at-risk Afghan women and girls. We have failed the people of Afghanistan at every stage, and the UK is an outlier in that regard. What steps is the Home Secretary taking to create a specific safe route or to at least ensure that existing promises are kept?

Suella Braverman: Unspeakable tragedy is occurring in the channel and through all maritime routes around the world because of the global migration crisis. That is why it is absolutely essential that the UK takes a robust but compassionate approach. That is at core a humanitarian package of measures that sends the message to people: “Do not come here illegally.”

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend’s statement. Once we strip away the rhetoric, of course, the key to all this is how we save the lives of the people who are dying while trying to get across the channel and are abused by the traffickers. I listened very carefully to her statement, and I understand all the other features—although we may have a debate about the numbers that she quotes on modern-day slavery problems—but could she expand a little on the issue that stopped the migrants being taken to Rwanda last time, which was the intervention of the European Court of Human Rights? I did not really hear anything in the statement to suggest that anything has changed on that matter.

Suella Braverman: My right hon. Friend is right to identify the difficulties that we had in effecting flights to Rwanda in the summer of last year. As I mentioned, the Strasbourg court issued a rule 39 order pursuant to an opaque process at the last minute without UK representation or right of challenge. We will introduce some detail in the Bill to address that scenario and inject some conditions upon which we will deliver the measures in rule 39.

Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): Empty slogans, chaos and broken promises are all we have heard from the Home Secretary today. Return of failed asylum seekers has collapsed by 80% since Labour left office in 2010. Is that not an extraordinary level of incompetence by this Government?

Suella Braverman: What I find to be irresponsible and, frankly, incompetent is the Labour party voting against our measures to remove foreign national offenders, to streamline our asylum system and to take a firm line on illegal migration.

Darren Henry (Broxtowe) (Con): I broadly welcome the announcement today and measures being put in place to prevent dangerous crossings of the channel, but how precisely will they affect the migrants who are living in hotels near my inland midlands constituency and move them to more appropriate accommodation, perhaps on military land, as the Home Secretary mentioned?

Suella Braverman: Our 10-point plan announced in December deals with the issue of asylum accommodation. It is unacceptable that over 40,000 people are being accommodated in hotels all over the country, at a cost of £6 million a day. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Immigration is therefore working intensively with other Departments and local authorities throughout the country to identify and procure sustainable and appropriate asylum accommodation.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The Home Secretary has often said that she would be quite happy if the United Kingdom left the European convention on human rights, and when the Justice Secretary gave evidence to the Joint Committee on Human Rights last year, he said that the Government were not ruling out leaving the convention. The Home Secretary said in her statement that she cannot make a definitive statement of compatibility with the ECHR under section 19 of the Human Rights Act 1998, which comes as no surprise to most of us. Is the plan behind the Bill simply this: the legislation will go through in the certain knowledge that the domestic courts of the United Kingdom will find that it is incompatible with international law and the ECHR; and then the Tories will fight the next general election on a promise to take the United Kingdom out of the European convention on human rights? That is the whole point of this, is it not?

Suella Braverman: I refer the hon. and learned Lady to her comments on the Rwanda partnership about a year ago. Many people here denounced it as unlawful, cruel and illegitimate, yet not very long ago we had an exhaustive and authoritative judgment from the High Court saying the exact opposite—that it is compliant with human rights, compliant with the refugee convention, and lawful.

Jackie Doyle-Price (Thurrock) (Con): The House will remember that in October 2019, 39 illegal migrants were found to have perished in the back of a lorry in my constituency. Following that incident, Essex police and their counterparts in Belgium tracked down and prosecuted a number of people in connection with those crimes. Will the Home Secretary confirm that in the dialogue with France this week, lessons will be learned from that case, and that tracking down the traffickers is very much a part of how we tackle this problem?

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to alight on the issue of the criminal gangs and people smugglers, and the importance of the pan-European criminal work that is ongoing to break their business model. We have had about 500 arrests and closed down 50 or so gangs, and work continues intensively with our French counterparts to stop this criminal and evil activity.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): The Home Secretary told the House earlier that she is confident that these proposals are compatible with the UK’s international obligations. Does that extend to articles 31, 32 and 33 of the 1951 refugee convention?

Suella Braverman: The Bill introduces measures that we consider to be compliant with all our international obligations—in fact, we are certain.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): The Bill is very much in the right direction. As my right hon. and learned Friend has just indicated, she needs to consider disapplication of parts of the Human Rights Act that would otherwise enable judges to water down the legislation and the Government's proper objectives. If we do not deal with Strasbourg judgments and orders, these new proposals cannot work. I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend will expect amendments to be tabled in Committee. Will she discuss these with us, including aspects of the European convention on human rights and the refugee convention?

Suella Braverman: As we embark on the process of parliamentary scrutiny, my right hon. Friend the Immigration Minister and I will engage fully with all Members of Parliament to hear their concerns and ideas about the Bill. I refer my hon. Friend to clause 1 and the specific disapplication of section 3 of the Human Rights Act, which is an interpretive clause; that will help in this regard.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I have nearly 2,000 people, I think, who have exercised their legal right to claim asylum living in hotels in my constituency—probably more than any other Member of Parliament. I welcome them into my constituency. I have toured the hotels, met many of them and held advice sessions. They come from Afghanistan, Iraq, Kurdistan-Iraq, Iran and Eritrea, and many come from Syria. Some of have shown me their wounds from torture; many are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. They have been in the hotels for 12 to 18 months.

I am amazed by the range of skills and qualifications these people have. They just want employment. They want to be able to contribute. They want a job and to contribute to our society and our economy, but they are trapped in this system because of the lack of processing. I take up their cases and get sheets of the same three or four-sentence responses, and the cases move no further. Could the Home Secretary at least provide the House with a monthly report on how the processing of their cases is proceeding?

May I say one final thing, Mr Speaker? Will the Home Secretary please tone down her inflammatory language? It is putting these people and those who represent them at risk.

Suella Braverman: We are making good progress in bearing down on the legacy backlog in our asylum system. We have increased the number of decision makers and streamlined the decision-making process, and we are increasing productivity. We will continue to bear down on that because it is a big factor in the hotel accommodation issue.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): This is always one of the toughest issues in government, but we are not the only country facing it. Look at the transformation Greece has effected of the situation in the Aegean over the past six or seven years. Although the Bill will change many of the legal aspects, ultimately it is about how we make the system work in practice. What reassurance does my right hon. and learned Friend have that we will be able to create the relevant amount of detention capacity and the necessary amount of removal

capacity without affecting other vital immigration and removal work, such as the removal of foreign national offenders?

Suella Braverman: May I put on the record my thanks to my hon. Friend? As an excellent Home Office Minister, he shepherded through many of the measures in the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 that are now being implemented to combat this challenge. We are building on the achievements of that legislation.

We will roll out a programme of increasing immigration detention capacity, and we are working intensively on that now.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): Safaa, a Syrian refugee, escaped from Daesh to save her life. She thinks the Government's plans will make others in her situation feel suicidal. She told me:

"With the UK Government policy, when you arrive, the dream is broken, it is gone. Still, my family have settled in Wales and contribute to society."

I want to say to Safaa that she is welcome and that we want her to stay as long as is necessary. What does the Home Secretary have to say to Safaa?

Suella Braverman: I am proud of our track record of welcoming people through humanitarian routes who are fleeing war, persecution and other conflict, whether from Afghanistan, Syria or Hong Kong. That is a record of which I am proud.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I very much welcome the Government's renewed commitment to dealing with illegal migration. I am a Kent Member of Parliament, and we are at the frontline of illegal immigration. We are repeatedly told by Government that tough measures will be taken, yet the numbers have gone up. My constituents want tough, decisive action. The Home Secretary says we will be having discussions with our French counterparts. In 2010, we signed the Lancaster House agreement with France on defence and security. How will these new measures address the challenges to ensure that we have tough, decisive action to deal with illegal migration?

Suella Braverman: We struck a new deal with France at the end of last year. That saw an increase in the number of French personnel patrolling the French beaches. I saw a new development, with British Border Force officers being located in France, working side-by-side with French police officers. It has led to greater collaboration and intelligence-sharing, so that we can clamp down on the people-smuggling gangs.

Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): My grandfather, his brothers and his cousins came to this country in boats, but they came through the British merchant navy and were proud British mariners. They came in, set up in Newcastle and helped the war effort. I am a descendant of them, and this Home Secretary is bringing forward legislation that she knows is not workable. She will not be able to achieve any of this. If we look at the record, she does not have any return agreements. If we look at the policies for what she is going to do with people who are here, she cannot do anything. Is it not the truth that the Bill is purely to do with her political agenda to get votes in red wall seats, but that the

[Mr Khalid Mahmood]

expense of doing so is xenophobia and racism, which is not conducive to the interests of our constituents or the country?

Suella Braverman: It is irresponsible to suggest that someone who wants to control our borders and who says that the numbers are out of control and that we need a firm but compassionate line on migration is racist. That is irresponsible, it is wrong, and it should not be put forward.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I warmly welcome the principle of the Bill, not least because the whole House knows that the people traffickers are immoral and utterly heartless, but the elephant in the room, as has already been alluded to, is the ECHR. Unless we can somehow face it down, we will remain tied up in legal knots in our own domestic courts and ultimately in Strasbourg. Can the Home Secretary assure the House that when we see the Bill, it will contain specific measures to do that, so that the Bill will achieve its purpose?

Suella Braverman: My right hon. Friend is right to highlight the legal complexity of this issue. There will be measures relating to rule 39 orders, and I refer him to the disapplication of section 3 of the Human Rights Act. That sends a message to the judiciary about how Parliament intends the Bill, when it becomes an Act of Parliament, to be interpreted in the courts.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): My constituent risked his life working for the British forces in Afghanistan. He and his family were invited to the Baron hotel, but because of an explosion, they could not make it, and his family now live in fear in the region. We have been told that because he is a British citizen, his children are not eligible for the Afghan relocations and assistance policy scheme. When it comes to splitting up families in that way, Russian war protesters, Iranian democracy protesters or the Afghan judges we have heard about, this Government are failing to provide any safe or legal routes. Is that not what is pushing people into boats and into the arms of the smugglers?

Suella Braverman: The hon. Lady is wrong. We have welcomed almost 500,000 people to the UK who are fleeing persecution, fleeing conflict and fleeing war, from Afghanistan, Syria, Hong Kong and Ukraine. She should acknowledge that great achievement that this country has secured.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I concur with my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), who proved that deterrence works—of course deterrence works. I commend the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister for tackling this difficult issue. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, particularly when it comes to economic migrants, there is plenty of room for the wealthy west to do more in their countries to prevent them from coming here in the first place?

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend is right, as usual. This is where those on the left just go wrong. They naively believe that everyone on a boat is always fleeing persecution, war and conflict. The reality is that many

of these people are young, fit and healthy men. Many have paid thousands of pounds to come here and many of them are economic migrants, abusing our asylum laws and our generosity.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): This is a most foul and shameful policy, which depends on dehumanising and criminalising some of the most vulnerable people on this earth, and it is most certainly going to be in contravention of the European convention on human rights. The European Court of Human Rights is overseen by the Council of Europe, and if this Government are determined to break the European convention on human rights, I am certain it will lead to a challenge of the credentials of the delegation from this Parliament to the Council of Europe. Will the Government confirm that their policy is to face suspension or exclusion from the Council of Europe in pursuit of this plan?

Suella Braverman: The package of measures I have brought forward represents a humanitarian set of measures that will, above all, deter people from making a dangerous and sometimes fatal journey in the wild hope that it will lead to a better life in the UK. People must not take the journey, they must not risk their lives and they must not come here illegally.

Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con): I welcome the Home Secretary's strong statement today, which many of my constituents will fully support. It is a perverse system that while the small boat crossings continue, someone's ability to claim asylum is reliant on their physical fitness or ability to pay. I thank her for being absolutely clear that many tens of millions more people would want to and are entitled to claim asylum than we could ever hope to welcome. In contrast to the calls for open borders from those on the Opposition Benches, we have to be pragmatic and fair. Does she also agree, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) said, that the western world has to unite and deal with poverty in developing nations? Until developing nations are assisted to develop with education, business and trade links, we will see an acceleration of this problem.

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend talks about pragmatism and fairness, and ultimately we are seeing a global migration crisis in which more than 100 million people will be displaced throughout the world. Many of them will want to come to the United Kingdom. The simple truth is that we will not be able to take in everyone who wants to come here, and we therefore need to develop a system that is fair, compassionate and pragmatic.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), I have hundreds of asylum seekers living in hotels in my constituency, and I have met many of them. They have fled war and terror. They want to work and their children are in school. They are living in shocking conditions, while murky layers of contractors and subcontractors are skimming off significant profits. Why is there nothing in the Bill to address the collapse of immigration decision-making that leaves these people in limbo?

Suella Braverman: Our 10-point plan has many elements. We need to introduce legislation to stop the boats coming in the first place. We then need to bear down on our asylum backlog, so that the number of people accommodated in hotels and in limbo is dramatically reduced. That is the fair thing to do. It is the compassionate thing to do.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): People coming across in small boats are smuggled. They spend thousands of pounds to get here. People who are trafficked come here without paying any money or are duped and forced into exploitation. However, many coming across in small boats claim exemption under the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Has the Home Secretary taken that into account? I am emphatic that this abuse is damaging the genuine victims of human trafficking.

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It used to take 100 days to consider a modern slavery claim. It now takes more than 500 days, because there has been a massive influx of people claiming to be victims of modern slavery, which impedes our ability to help genuine victims of modern slavery, which is not good for anyone.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Does the Home Secretary recognise that it is positively Orwellian, as well as morally repugnant, to seek to ban people from seeking asylum unless they use safe and legal routes, as those routes barely exist and, where they do exist, they do not function? One of the very few legal routes is the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme pathway 3, which is a total shambles. As of January this year, according to the House of Commons Library, not one person has arrived in the UK via that pathway. Instead of this shameful, divisive, dog-whistle legislation, will she urgently open and make work safe and legal routes as the only way to stop the small boats?

Suella Braverman: The hon. Lady's faux outrage is commendable, but the reality is that that is not borne out by the facts. We have accepted nearly 500,000 people through safe and legal routes for humanitarian reasons. That is a track record of which I am proud—I wish she would be, too.

Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): We have heard a great deal from Opposition Members setting out precisely what they think of my constituents, who believe that we need to control illegal immigration and that the issue of small boats in the channel is a top priority that needs to be brought under control, precisely because it demonstrates that the Government are listening to their priorities and are making sure that this country can control its borders. That being the case, we all hope that the legislation will succeed. Will my right hon. and learned Friend promise that, if it is frustrated by the European convention on human rights, we will commit to leave the convention because, in the end, leave it we must if the legislation is stalled?

Suella Braverman: As we saw last year, the fact that the Strasbourg Court issued a rule 39 order pursuant to an opaque process in which the UK was not represented was deeply regrettable. We are addressing that issue in

the Bill to avoid that scenario playing out again. In our view, the Bill complies with our international obligations and we must take these measures promptly.

Dame Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): The Home Secretary has just said that, when she stops the boats, the Bill will introduce an annual cap on the number of refugees the UK will resettle via safe and legal routes. That is really putting the cart before the horse. She knows perfectly well that the legal routes are barely there and are failing, so will she consider immediately piloting more and better safe and legal routes from countries such as Afghanistan, where people's lives are in constant danger?

Suella Braverman: Forgive me, but that question displays the Labour party's naivety and lack of realism. It is not right to say that everyone coming here is doing so for genuine asylum or humanitarian reasons, which is why we need to take a measured, compassionate and pragmatic approach.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): My constituents are concerned about the number of boats coming across the channel, and they and I welcome the Government's measures to resolve the problem. The Rwanda scheme remains unenacted and is mired in court action. Some of my constituents are wondering why the democratic will of the Parliament that they have elected is taking so long to be realised. How will my right hon. and learned Friend ensure that the Bill that she has announced today will not face the same fate?

Suella Braverman: The Rwanda partnership has been tested rigorously in the High Court, which is why I welcome the judgment of senior judges, who upheld the partnership as being lawful and compliant with human rights laws and the refugee convention. It is a big step forward in vindicating the decision on the partnership that we struck with our friends in Rwanda, and we will wait for the outcome of further litigation.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): Between October and December last year, one in three people making the journey came from Afghanistan. The Government say that Afghans should use safe and legal routes to get here, but by their own figures only one Afghan was relocated in the month of December through the Afghan relocations and assistance policy scheme. Those left behind include people who sacrificed everything in support of the UK's mission in Afghanistan. Many of them have been brutally murdered by the Taliban and many more will undoubtedly be killed. Can the Home Secretary say that she will honour the commitments made to those who served alongside us in Afghanistan and, if she will honour those commitments, how will she ensure that they receive safe passage?

Suella Braverman: As I have mentioned quite a few times, but it bears repetition, we have been proud to welcome 20,000 people from Afghanistan who have fled the troubles and the Taliban. We have a family reunification scheme to enable family members to join their family here. That is a record of which we should be proud and I encourage the hon. Gentleman to support it.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Ind): Can the Home Secretary reconfirm that the Bill will stop illegal entry being a route to our asylum system,

[*Andrew Bridgen*]

and what effect does she think that it will have on the number of people willing to pay evil people traffickers to cross the channel?

Suella Braverman: Deterrence is a core aim of these measures. We need to send the message that, if someone comes here illegally on a boat, paying a people smuggler, they will not have an entitlement to life in the UK. That is why I urge everyone here to get behind the Bill.

Claire Hanna (Belfast South) (SDLP): Like many who are genuinely interested in supporting those who want to solve these problems, I have concerns about this approach, both in principle and in practice. The issues in communities that the Government uses as a straw man are, in fact, the result of a decade of systematic underfunding and neglect in health, housing and education. Instead of scapegoating the vulnerable, encouraging conspiracy and aggression, when will the Home Secretary get a grip on the chaos in her Department, whose processing rates have collapsed, along with conviction rates for people smugglers? When will she stop scapegoating and start solving?

Suella Braverman: Far from scapegoating the vulnerable, this is about protecting the vulnerable. This is about empowering our authorities properly to support genuine victims of modern slavery. This is about enabling a swifter resolution of genuine asylum claims. This is about enabling greater, safer and legal routes. This is not scapegoating—this is about protection.

Sir Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): If moving people to Hereford is the solution, may I welcome everything that my right hon. and learned Friend has said? We British people have rights as well, so can she put her shoulder to the wheel for my constituents, too?

Suella Braverman: This is about our humanitarian approach, but it is also about fairness. My hon. Friend is right—the British people's famous sense of fair play and generosity has been tested beyond limit, which is why it is necessary to go further than we have gone before and make sure that we have a robust scheme in place that actually stops the boats.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): The Home Secretary must have been shocked to discover that she and her party have been in charge of the Home Office for the past 13 years, during which time the backlog of asylum claims has done nothing but mushroom. The number of children who have been waiting more than a year for their asylum application to be considered has risen twelvefold. Rapid decision making is part of the effective deterrence which she claims to want. Why was this allowed to happen, when will she get a grip and why does passing the same piece of legislation yet again make a difference?

Suella Braverman: If we go down the path of comparing backlogs, the Labour party will be found wanting. The backlog with which we are dealing bears no comparison whatsoever with what the Labour party left us with in 2010.

James Daly (Bury North) (Con): I warmly welcome the legislation. Will the Home Secretary confirm that running through it is the central theme that the only route to asylum in the UK is a safe and legal route, with an annual cap on the number of refugees? The annual cap is the crucial point. This is democratic accountability. Migration must be based on the country's capacity and capability to house and support people. We cannot have open borders, whatever the other side pontificates. May I ask my right hon. and learned Friend when we will vote on the migration cap? I welcome her statement, as it is exactly what my voters want—well done to the Home Secretary.

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend speaks a lot of sense. The British people did not vote for 40,000 people to arrive here on small boats. They did not vote for our immigration laws to be broken. They voted for representatives to serve in this place to speak up for them. That is why I urge every Member of this House to get behind this Bill and stop the boats.

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): According to the statistics quoted by the Home Secretary last year, 17,000 referrals took on average 543 days to consider. Among those were the asylum seekers staying in a hotel in my constituency. I have engaged with them, along with my MSP colleague Stuart McMillan, on an ongoing basis since they arrived. The Home Office has not. It has not talked to those guys; it has not stopped the process. Would the Home Secretary consider expanding the shortage occupation list to allow them to work? Those young men want to contribute to the society in which they have been welcomed.

Suella Braverman: Aside from humanitarian routes into this country, we also have an extensive points-based system, which we developed post Brexit. Thanks to our freedom on migration, we have issued a record number of work and study visas in the last year alone. People who want to come here for legitimate reasons should go through our points-based system.

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): My constituents on the south Kent coast have seen with their own eyes the rapid increase in small boat crossings in the past few years. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that our priority must be to stop these dangerous journeys, and that the most effective way to do that is to demonstrate that they cannot be a shortcut into the asylum system and will not lead to permanent residency in the UK?

Suella Braverman: Getting into a flimsy dinghy wearing a thin polystyrene excuse for a life jacket, paying thousands of pounds, breaking our laws and putting one's life at risk is not the way to come to the United Kingdom. That is what this Bill is all about.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): The Home Secretary will be aware that the bulk of the 500,000 people she says have come through safe and legal routes are from Ukraine and Hong Kong. Regarding Afghanistan, she will also know that, in the whole of the last year, since the new safe route was put in place, only 22 individuals from Afghanistan have been accepted through that route. Is it any surprise to the Home Secretary, then,

that 8,500 Afghans made a small boat crossing to the UK last year? Having rendered meaningless any safe and legal route from Afghanistan, where does the Home Secretary believe she derives the moral authority to criminalise those 8,500 people simply because of their mode of travel?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. It is really important, if we are going to get everybody in, that the questions are very short, as the answers have been. It is really important for colleagues to remember that.

Suella Braverman: Regarding Operation Pitting, we have received 20,000 people from Afghanistan—fleeing the Taliban, fleeing conflict and fleeing persecution. I am very proud of Britain's track record. That is one among many safe routes through which people have come to the UK.

Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con): The people of Doncaster and Don Valley have welcomed people from all around the world, including recently through the Ukraine scheme, but they also now realise that we are full. Will the Home Secretary confirm to the House and to the people of Doncaster whether an illegal immigrant who arrives on our shores would ever be granted leave to remain?

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend is right. We are at unsustainable levels of people coming here illegally. It is putting unsustainable pressure on our accommodation, our public services and our resources. That cannot continue. That is why we need to adopt a different approach when it comes to dealing with asylum cases.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): The Prime Minister stood at the Dispatch Box last week and committed that the Government

“will remain a member of the ECHR”—[*Official Report*, 27 February 2023; Vol. 728, c. 594.]

because leaving it would break the Belfast/Good Friday agreement. Does the Home Secretary agree?

Suella Braverman: We are clear that the measures in the Bill comply with our international law obligations. We are pleased to be proceeding with it and I encourage the hon. Lady to back it.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): I hope the whole House will welcome and support my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals, because my constituents have rightly been frustrated by our inability thus far to tackle illegal migration and control our borders. This is not about demonising genuine refugees or turning our back on those in need, but about stopping illegal activity and ensuring that our long tradition of offering safe haven to those who are truly persecuted is not undermined by those who abuse our hospitality and break our laws.

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Making progress on stopping illegal migration will enable us to better support genuine victims of modern slavery or human trafficking with asylum. That is what this country is about, and I am very proud of that.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): The Government will shortly be announcing their sixth immigration Bill since I arrived in the House in 2015, which tells us everything we need to know about their failures on immigration policy. However, I want to ask about the content of the Bill. Will the Home Secretary tell the House that she will not seek to revisit ouster clauses to prevent judicial review and that she will be mindful of the 2019 Supreme Court ruling that the presence of such clauses does not prevent a judicial review challenge based on an error of law?

Suella Braverman: I hope that the hon. Gentleman, on closer inspection of the Bill, will see what we have put forward. We will dramatically reduce the avenues and options for legal challenge, which are often used to thwart removal. It is important that we do that—within the law—to ensure that our operations can be delivered effectively.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on the introduction of this legislation. She has made it clear that she intends to secure that the only route to asylum in the UK is a safe and legal route with an annual cap on the number of refugees. That is the correct and humane approach. Does she agree that those who advocate another approach are doing no favours to the migrants or indeed to their own constituents?

Suella Braverman: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Having safe and legal routes, capped and legitimised through a decision by Parliament, is the right way to support people seeking refuge in this country—not perpetuating an evil trade in people smuggling.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Afghan refugee children who were about to take their GCSEs in schools in my constituency have been forced to move 200 miles from the hotel they have spent the last 18 months in to other hotels. No school places were arranged for them in the places where they were going, and the Home Office initially denied that they had been moved at all. Is that the level of competence the Home Secretary is happy with? Will she look at those cases and at her whole policy on immigration, which is just failing?

Suella Braverman: When we introduced measures to streamline our asylum process and hasten decision making, the Labour party voted against them. Seriously, the hon. Gentleman cannot now complain when there are challenges with accommodating people, because they are waiting for an asylum decision and they are being housed in hotels.

Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con): My constituents are rightly proud of this country's historic record of providing sanctuary to those in need, but they are deeply unhappy about the numbers of small boats crossing and the economic migrants. They are also deeply distressed to see men, women and children losing their lives in the channel at the hands of people traffickers. Will my right hon. and learned Friend do all she can to ensure that these plans strike the right balance, ending these illegal and dangerous crossings, but also ensuring that we can provide sanctuary to those who arrive here legally?

Suella Braverman: Yes, these measures make it clear that if someone is going to be exploited by people smugglers to embark on a treacherous and illegal journey so that they can come here to make a spurious asylum claim, they will not be able to settle here and will not have a life in the United Kingdom. Safe and legal routes will be available to them.

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): It is the oldest trick in the book. When poverty is rising and the rich are getting richer, when wages are falling and people are struggling, the powerful say that the problem is not really bosses or Government cuts, but migrants and refugees. That is what is happening when the Home Secretary whips up fear about an invasion on the south coast and announces this pledge to cut up our commitment to the UN refugee convention. She is demonising people who come here by boat while refusing to create new safe and legal routes for refugees. How many refugees will she lock up before she accepts that we need a compassionate approach, not this callous and cruel policy?

Suella Braverman: I refuse to take lectures from a Member of Parliament who wrote a letter to the Home Office to ensure that a foreign national offender, who had been convicted of serious and heinous crimes, was not deported from this country. That person then went on to murder—a shameful stain on the Labour party.

Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con): I am reassured by what I have heard from the Home Secretary: that the operation of this excellent Bill will not be frustrated by the European convention on human rights. As we have heard, however, Opposition Members will be encouraging their friends in the activist lawyer community to do everything they can to use Labour's rights framework to obstruct the law. I hope that she will work with us to strengthen the Bill and defend it from that. On safe and legal routes, which we absolutely need, I encourage her to make more use of the community sponsorship scheme, which has been useful for Ukrainians.

Suella Braverman: The community sponsorship scheme is a good scheme that enables the settlement of people who are seeking refuge in this country. My hon. Friend talks about activist lawyers. I will tell hon. Members who the biggest activist lawyer is: he is leading the Labour party.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): This is not being done in our name. We did not vote to leave the ECHR, we did not vote for Brexit, and we did not vote for refugees fleeing unimaginable horrors to be detained and deported to Rwanda. Does the Home Secretary not have a shred of compassion for what people—children and families—are going through? Will she create more safe and legal routes so that people can actually access safety, rather than being stuck rotting in war zones?

Suella Braverman: The hon. Lady talks about what people did or did not vote for. The British people did not vote for 45,000 people to come here illegally or for £6 million to be spent every day on hotel accommodation. The British people did not vote for the abuse of our generosity. The compassionate thing that we need to do is pass this Bill.

Mark Fletcher (Bolsover) (Con): I warmly welcome the Home Secretary's statement and intent. We have had a policy of housing illegal migrants and asylum seekers in hotels up and down this country, which has caused massive community tensions and put strains on public services. Can she confirm when that will end and how much that will save the British taxpayer?

Suella Braverman: We are spending £3 billion a year on supporting the asylum backlog and £6 million a day on hotel accommodation, which is valuable taxpayers' money that should not be diverted to those purposes. We need to stop the boats, bear down on the backlog and save the British taxpayer valuable money.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): My office deals with outstanding asylum cases week in, week out, as I am sure do those of many MPs up and down the country. Despite promises that the situation would improve, we are still waiting an unacceptably long time for updates from the Home Office. Why is there nothing in the Bill to address the fact that 160,000 people are currently awaiting a decision—a 60% increase on the previous year?

Suella Braverman: We are making good progress on bearing down on the asylum backlog. We have increased the number of decision makers, we have improved the levels of productivity, we have streamlined the guidance, and we are making sure that we are processing the claims individually, on a case-by-case basis, more swiftly. That is how we will remove people from hotel accommodation and bear down on the costs.

Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con): I strongly support the Illegal Migration Bill, which is a major step forward in stopping the small boats. Can my right hon. Friend provide more details on how it will radically narrow the number of challenges and appeals that can suspend removal?

Suella Braverman: We have made it clear that there will be a duty on the Home Secretary to make arrangements for a removal, and that removal will be suspended only in the event that the claimant can establish that they face a serious risk of irreversible harm should they be removed. In all other instances, that person will be removed and they can make their claim from the safe country or the country to which they have been removed.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): York is England's only human rights city and we have welcomed asylum seekers. It is a privilege to provide a safe haven for them, but this legislation is a real affront to those values. Can the Home Secretary publish the legal advice on how her legislation is compatible not only with international law but with the European convention on human rights?

Suella Braverman: As a former Attorney General, I know that the Government abide by the Law Officers' convention, which means that neither the fact nor the content of legal advice is disclosed. That would be a decision for the Attorney General. We are very clear, however, that our Bill complies with international obligations, so we urge all hon. Members to support it.

Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): I thank the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister for listening to me and many people in Hinckley and Bosworth and across the country who want illegal immigration and the boat crossings to stop. Can she tell us practically how long she expects it to take to bring the legislation forward? More importantly, will Border Force have the resources to implement it?

Suella Braverman: We are introducing the Bill today and we hope that the parliamentary authorities will allow us to move swiftly on its progress. We want to start scrutinising and voting on the measures put forward as quickly as possible, because we want to get them on the statute book and operationalised as soon as possible. It is an urgent challenge and we need to move quickly.

Mrs Paulette Hamilton (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): I am the daughter of immigrants. My parents' generation faced injustice through the mistakes made by the Windrush scheme, which are taking years to unravel. Last year set a record high for small boat crossings, with 46,000 arrivals. Why on earth should our constituents trust the Conservative Government, when under them, small boat crossings are going up rather than coming down?

Suella Braverman: I am glad that the hon. Lady mentioned Windrush, because I am proud of our achievements to date to right the wrongs that were committed. More than £60 million has been offered or paid out to the claimants and we are resolving many of the outstanding cases. I have engaged closely with members of the steering group and with Bishop Webley, and I am encouraged by the progress that we are making to resolve the issue.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): Will the Home Secretary confirm that the Bill will prevent illegal migrants, especially the 80,000 from EU accession countries, from abusing our modern slavery laws to prevent their return home? On supporting the most vulnerable, will she confirm that she will create more legal migration routes, alongside an annual quota, and encourage the Department for Work and Pensions to do more to provide skills to refugees who have the right to work so that they can contribute to our country in the way that they want to?

Suella Braverman: One of the benefits of the measures in the Bill will be an enhanced ability to support genuine asylum seekers and genuine victims of modern slavery and human trafficking. Our ability is severely impeded at the moment, because of the overwhelming number of claims in our system, many of which are illegitimate and spurious. They are clogging up our system so that we are unable to properly support those who genuinely need it.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): When the people of Clydebank, Dumbarton and the Vale of Leven contact me, they wonder why the Conservative and Unionist party is creating a new Bill of dubious moral and legal standing when it could just continue the long-running strategy of driving public services into the ground, making Britain poorer than all of our northern European neighbours and therefore decreasing the pull factors of migration. Finally, they wonder about the Home Secretary's incredible—and I

think absurd—claim that 100 million people are ready to come to the UK, and they want to say to the Home Secretary that it is going to take a lot more than a Bill copied and pasted from the Policy Exchange paper to make a difference.

Suella Braverman: The hon. Member's so-called absurd claim is actually backed up by the United Nations. More importantly, it is frankly naive to suggest that everybody coming here on a boat is a genuine asylum seeker fleeing for humanitarian reasons. The reality is that many of these people are economic migrants who are abusing our asylum system, and that is what this Bill aims to stop.

Gareth Bacon (Orpington) (Con): The right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) said that we need solutions, not slogans, so could my right hon. and learned Friend please tell me of a single proposal the right hon. Lady has made that is anything more than an empty slogan? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree with me that Labour Members do not have a plan, and they do not really want one either because they simply do not take this issue seriously?

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Leader of the Opposition made a grand show of his five great missions to fix the country. Tellingly, he omitted stopping the boats. Either he does not care about illegal migration, or he does not know what to do about it.

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): The people in my constituency were outraged by the fact that last year there were just four prosecutions for people smuggling a month, while 46,000 people crossed the channel. Why is there nothing in this Government's widely trailed plans to tackle these criminal gangs?

Suella Braverman: Tackling the criminal gangs at the root of this problem is absolutely essential. That is why we have increased our funding to the NCA to ensure that there is better operationalising, better intelligence sharing and better co-operation with European partners, and that is why I am very pleased that many criminal gangs have been shut down and 500 convictions have been secured.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): The Ukraine and Afghanistan schemes clearly show the enormous compassion of the British people, but the reality is that the abuse of the system, particularly the use of hotels for people seeking asylum, saps that compassion. Does the Home Secretary agree with me that we have to end the use of hotels and that this Bill will be a crucial part of that? Can she say when she hopes to be able to lay out a plan to put a timetable on ending the use of hotels?

Suella Braverman: I know from my hon. Friend's representations that in his community there are particular challenges with people in hotels. We are using hotels to accommodate asylum seekers because there are too many people coming here illegally. Once we stop the business model of people coming here illegally, we will be able to stop the use of hotels.

Chris Evans (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): There has to be a strong deterrent when these criminal gangs are found people smuggling. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones) has said, there were only four prosecutions per month against 46,000 crossings last year. How is the Home Secretary going to target the criminal gangs? When they are caught, they have to know that they are going to be punished for their evil trade.

Suella Braverman: I actually joined a dawn raid with the National Crime Agency a few months ago as it was going to arrest a people smuggler. There is a huge programme of work ongoing to ensure that there is proper intelligence sharing, proper resource and adequate funding to take a tough line against the criminal, evil people-smuggling gangs.

Anna Firth (Southend West) (Con): Constituents in Southend West will warmly welcome the fact that this Government are taking a clear stand against illegal immigration, breaking the business model that the vile people-smuggling gangs depend on and stopping the boats. However, one of the most common complaints I hear on the doorstep is about expensive hotels housing asylum seekers while homelessness, sometimes including our armed forces veterans, is on the rise. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree with me that that is not just unfair on the British taxpayer, but deeply unfair on those genuinely in need who are waiting patiently and legally for a roof over their heads?

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to speak for the good people of Southend West in the way she does. The reality is that we have far too many people coming here. They put pressure on our accommodation, and therefore we are now forced to accommodate them in the expensive hotel estate. That cannot continue. It is costly, it is inappropriate and, frankly, it is unfair on the asylum seeker, because it is no fit place to stay for an indefinite period of time.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): Imagine being a Tory Home Secretary whose party is supported by barely one in five people having the arrogance to stand up in this Chamber and talk about a patriotic majority being taken for a ride. Imagine having the absolute audacity to stand up in this Chamber and tell this House that there are 100 million people around the world and they are all coming here. No, they are not. The only way this Minister can prove that this is anything other than crass, dog-whistle politics is to answer the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) from the Front Bench: if she was serious, why would she be bringing forward legislation that barely lays a glove on the people smugglers?

Suella Braverman: Mr Deputy Speaker, I will tell you what is audacious. It is for SNP Members to naively claim that everybody coming here is a genuine refugee or asylum seeker, and then to fail to take their fair share of accommodation. They have wholly failed to properly accommodate asylum seekers, demonstrating a paltry number compared with the rest of the United Kingdom.

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): I always enjoy crossing swords with the Opposition. The people of Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke will warmly welcome what the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister have delivered today, although they would be even warmer if we at the very least said we would be derogating from the ECHR in this particular case. However, while Labour Members use their confected outrage on the Opposition Benches here in Westminster, Stoke-on-Trent Labour members keep their heads buried in the sand, with councillors and candidates refusing to make any comments on immigration policy, because they know what the people of Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke think. They refused to sign a petition to empty the hotels in Stoke-on-Trent, which I started and brought to this House. Will the Home Secretary tell me when the people of Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke can expect to see their hotels cleared and emptied, and will it be as soon as possible?

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to point out the failure by the Labour party to properly address this subject. The Leader of the Opposition does not mention it in his five big missions, because he does not care and he does not know. Labour Members vote against every measure we put forward to deport foreign national offenders and streamline our asylum system. They would scrap the Rwanda partnership. They write letters to stop our deportation of serious foreign criminals. That is what today's Labour party is like. Colleagues, the fight-back starts now.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): Britain is and should remain a beacon for LGBT rights, so can I ask Home Secretary a particular question about LGBT asylum seekers who are coming to the UK, fleeing persecution because of their sexuality—who they love and who they are—and who do not come from a country where there is an existing safe route? Will they be deported back to that country where they are being abused, or will they be deported to Rwanda, where the FCO's travel advice says:

"LGBT individuals...experience discrimination and abuse, including from local authorities"?

Can the Home Secretary reassure a gay MP here like myself that we are not turning our back on LGBT asylum seekers who are fleeing appalling abuse simply for being themselves?

Suella Braverman: What I would gently say to the hon. Gentleman is that the fundamental objective in this legislation is to stop people leaving safe countries to come to the United Kingdom and claim asylum. That is the fundamental principle running through our international obligations, whether it is the refugee convention or other conventions. If people are coming here from a safe country, they really should not be claiming asylum in the first place.

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): I was horrified to hear that those on the Opposition Benches feel that this is about xenophobia and racism, scapegoating and dog-whistle politics. This is a simple matter of fairness—fairness for my constituents, who work hard and do the right thing, who see other people who arrive here illegally able to access the taxpayer-funded housing and support that they themselves struggle to access. They have been

frustrated by delays and problems in implementing these measures to prevent that from happening, so can my right hon. and learned Friend give her absolute assurance that she is willing to do whatever is necessary to get the outcomes that my constituents deserve?

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend is right. His constituents deserve fairness, pragmatism and compassion in controlling our borders. It is not racist to say there is too much illegal migration. It is not racist to say we cannot go on spending £6 million on hotel accommodation. It is not bigoted to say people should not be breaking the law to come here. It is fair, it is pragmatic and it is compassionate.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): I represent an airport seat and have a number of hotels currently in use in my constituency, but for 19 months one hotel in particular has since the fall of Kabul been used by Afghans. Is it a competency issue that we cannot process their claims, or is it a confidence issue? I think it is a confidence issue, because the civil service has lost confidence in this Administration carrying out any effective policies whatsoever.

Suella Braverman: I encourage the hon. Gentleman to keep in mind the global and indeed European dimension to this problem. Other EU nations are grappling with unprecedented levels of illegal migration. Some countries are saying they are going to stop accommodating people and instead let them abscond willingly. Some countries are accommodating migrants in sports halls and inappropriate accommodation. This is a global challenge and we have to take measures to deal with it.

Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con): This Parliament and this nation must be sovereign when it comes to controlling our borders. It is completely unacceptable that a foreign court can seek to inhibit the wishes of the elected Government of the day. Although I strongly welcome the measures outlined by the Home Secretary, what assurances can she give to the House that these new measures, and indeed our Rwandan policy, can be implemented without interference from foreign judges?

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend is right to highlight concerns about the process to which we have been subject from Strasbourg. That is why there is a clause in the Bill relating to rule 39, and we will be closely specifying the details of what we are going to propose. In the meantime, I greatly welcome the vindication by the High Court of our Rwandan partnership in December. We now proceed to the Appeal Court and we wait to see what the courts and their justices decide.

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): Wandsworth is proud to have welcomed refugees for hundreds of years and to be a borough of sanctuary. This Bill sounds like a charter for lawyers. This retreat of failed policies relies on returns to third countries; that was in last year's Nationality and Borders Act 2022, but 99% of people were not returned because the Government do not have return agreements. Will the Home Secretary give us a list now of the return agreements currently being negotiated and the deadline for reaching those new agreements, because we will need to know before we vote on this Bill?

Suella Braverman: We have been in negotiations with several countries, which is why I welcomed the agreement the Prime Minister struck with Albania at the end of last year. Let me be clear: we welcome the contributions of Albanians who come here lawfully, but we need to work together with the Albanian Government to properly relocate back to Albania those who do not have a legal right to be here.

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): People in Stoke-on-Trent are fed up with being ignored and having their generosity taken for granted, and I fully support the measures being introduced today. Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that these actions will be taken swiftly and we will see deportations of those here illegally as soon as possible?

Suella Braverman: The matter is now urgent and we need to move quickly. That is why we have brought the Bill forward today. We hope to proceed with a swift timetable in Parliament. I urge all Members of Parliament to support this Bill; we must scrutinise it effectively, but we want to get on and get the powers on to the statute book and deliver them in material terms as soon as possible.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): Every week I have more asylum seekers asking for my help to progress their claims. Some have waited for up to a year; most have waited several. They are left languishing at home, awaiting an appointment or a decision and are desperate to get on with their lives; many are now blighted with mental and other illnesses. Is this latest stunt by the Home Secretary not yet another attempt to direct attention away from her failure to deal with the escalating backlog, which has grown constantly for years on end?

Suella Braverman: The challenges the hon. Gentleman describes that are faced by asylum seekers are exactly why he should support the Bill. We want to reduce the number of people coming here illegally. We want to reduce the number of people waiting for a decision in the asylum backlog. Only by supporting this Bill will we be able to support the genuine asylum seekers in this country.

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): I welcome the proposed legislation, but the reality is that we need the confidence of the British people in our immigration system. To give additional confidence to local residents in Carlisle and other provincial towns and cities, will the Minister agree to an immediate moratorium on the use of hotels?

Suella Braverman: When someone is waiting for an asylum decision, there is a duty on the Home Office to accommodate them and provide them with appropriate support. Therefore, we have been forced to use hotel accommodation in many towns and cities across the United Kingdom. It is important that appropriate support is provided to asylum seekers to avoid destitution and homelessness.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I have the situation in my constituency where businesses are unable to recruit staff yet living upstairs are asylum seekers who are unable to work. The Home Secretary has talked about the cost to the UK of housing asylum seekers; when is she going to get realistic about this and allow people waiting for their asylum claims to be decided to access the world of work?

Suella Braverman: Many people, such as those who have come here under the Afghan relocations and assistance policy, the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme or the Ukrainian scheme, are able to work in this country, and many of them do. I encourage all Members to support people in those communities to find work through their local jobcentres.

Paul Bristow (Peterborough) (Con): Does the Home Secretary agree that, despite the noise and howls from Opposition Members, we are forgetting that these measures will save lives—that people would otherwise be drowning in the channel or suffocating in the backs of lorries? Stopping the boats is the compassionate thing to do, and the only thing Labour's open border policies would do is enrich people smugglers and risk death in the channel.

Suella Braverman: Fundamentally, these are humanitarian measures that we are bringing forward with precisely the goal my hon. Friend sets out. We need to stop people dying in the channel. We need to stop people being exploited by criminal gangs. We need to stop the criminality. That is why I encourage everybody to get behind the Bill.

Richard Foord (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): As of September last year, the backlog of asylum applications stood at 115,000 and might include some economic migrants. The average waiting time for an initial decision is 20 months. Does the Home Secretary recognise the moral hazard here: economic migrants coming here in small boats have no incentive to guard against the risk of entering those boats, because others have been protected by her Government against the consequences of being returned when they get here, which damages the protections for genuine asylum seekers?

Suella Braverman: The vast majority of people arriving via small boats have chosen to make that journey of their own free will. They have paid money, and they are largely young, healthy men. There is no good reason in many instances for them to claim asylum, and they should not be abusing our asylum rules to do so.

Tom Randall (Gedling) (Con): On behalf of all the residents of Gedling who have raised the issue of small boats with me, may I warmly welcome the Home Secretary's statement? Will she confirm that the forthcoming legislation will end the morally reprehensible practice whereby smugglers are a de facto part of the asylum process, and does she agree that, given the dangers of cross-channel smuggling, a robust approach is right, fair and humane?

Suella Braverman: One of the root causes of this problem is the proliferation of sophisticated, well co-ordinated and well-resourced criminal gangs operating across transnational boundaries on the continent. That is why we have increased resources for the National Crime Agency and increased co-operation and intelligence sharing with the French. Only by working together with our European partners will we be able to smash the business model of the people smugglers.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): For myself, for the Secretary of State and for many there is a need to help and protect the vulnerable. Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that with the better weather there will undoubtedly be a rise in the numbers making illegal crossings? Does she believe that we should engage further

with the French authorities to facilitate legal migration in a more structured way? Will the Bill enable those who seek asylum legally to be processed efficiently, while sending the clear message that if they come here illegally, asylum will automatically be denied?

Suella Braverman: We institute in the Bill some procedural requirements and limitations on legal claims, and time limits for bringing those claims. The aim is to reduce attempts to thwart removal and detention, and it strikes the right balance between fairness and compassion.

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con): On behalf of the people of Bassetlaw, I warmly welcome the Bill introduced by the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister, which we have been crying out for. The Opposition often speak of safe and legal routes, which of course we already have, but does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that what they actually mean is that they support open borders, blanket approvals and amnesties for those who want to want to cheat our system, cheat our constituents and cheat genuine refugees?

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend puts it very well. Labour's policy on this issue is indeed open borders. A former Labour Home Secretary did grant an amnesty to asylum seekers. It is about ensuring that illegal migration continues through the back door. That is not what the British people voted for; that is not what this Parliament will vote for.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): It will not have escaped the Home Secretary's notice that despite what I have no doubt have been the best efforts of her Government Whips, they have not found a single Member of Parliament from a Scottish constituency to have a single good word to say about the Bill. The fact is that Scotland's MPs, Scotland's Government, Scotland's local authorities and Scotland's people speak as one in saying that our biggest complaint about the UK asylum system is that her Government will not allow us to welcome as many refugees and asylum seekers as we want to. May I make a suggestion to the Home Secretary? Will she agree, even on a temporary pilot basis, to allow the Scottish Government to take control of our asylum system? We will see whether the best way to deal with asylum seekers is to treat them like human beings or to treat them in the way she wants to treat them.

Suella Braverman: All the Scottish National party can point to is a track record of failure when it comes to discharging its humanitarian duties to asylum seekers. It totally failed to support Ukrainians and had to hand over responsibility to the UK Government. It totally failed to take its fair share of refugees in comparison to other parts of the UK. It is failure, failure, failure from the SNP.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): Does my right hon. and learned Friend think it is fair to deduce from today's debate that the Labour party thinks it is totally fine to turn up here illegally and stay here for as long as you want? Does she think it is fair to assume that it opposes any kind of cap on refugee numbers? Does she agree that that is hardly surprising, bearing in mind that the leader of the Labour party, in a different guise, said that there is a

"racist undercurrent which permeates all immigration law"?

That was the Leader of the Opposition when he was a human rights lawyer. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree with me that the Labour party should just be honest about what it is: pro open borders, anti any control on immigration and completely out of step with the majority of people of this country? It will be exposed.

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend puts it very powerfully. That is what Labour's policy is: uncontrolled immigration, open borders, an amnesty for asylum seekers and a total disregard for what the British people want.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): How can we know if someone is a genuine asylum seeker or not, unless they are allowed to make a claim and that claim is fairly and independently assessed? When was the last time the Home Secretary actually met another human being who had come here on a small boat? Has she ever listened to their stories of what they have gone through and what their hopes for the future are? Or does she just look them in the eye and tell them they are not welcome here?

Suella Braverman: The reality is that we need to all work together now to find a pragmatic, compassionate and fair solution to this problem. That is why I have introduced these measures today and why I encourage all Members to support them.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): Last week, we saw with the revised Northern Ireland protocol deal what progress can be made when we work collaboratively with our European partners. Rather than the sabre-rattling content of this statement, is not the reality that the most effective way to deal with the issue of small boats crossing the channel is to work in full collaboration with our European partners? Is it not the case that the number of small boat crossings has increased substantially since Brexit?

Suella Braverman: The reality is that we have developed much closer co-operation with our French partners on this very issue. That is why I am pleased that we struck a good deal with them at the end of last year. The Prime Minister is heading to Paris—I will be accompanying him—later this week to talk further with our French partners on how to tackle this issue, among many others.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I thank the Home Secretary for her statement and for responding to questions for an hour and 50 minutes.

Science and Technology Framework

2.25 pm

The Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Michelle Donelan): The creation of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology marks a watershed moment for science, innovation and technology in the UK. We now have a Government Department that focuses on a single mission: to make the UK a science and technology superpower. Science and technology is absolutely critical to the UK's future prosperity and security, and to the health and wellbeing of our citizens and our environment. That is why it is a central pillar of the integrated review. Countries that embrace science and technology will be prosperous and secure, home to the innovators and technology companies of the future. Those that don't, won't.

My vision for DSIT starts from an extraordinary position. Last year, the UK joined only China and the US in having a technology sector worth over \$1 trillion. Despite our relative size, Britain outperforms our closest competitors and we are a main challenger nation to the US and China in many areas. We have four of the world's top 10 universities. Just eight of our university towns are home to more unicorns than the whole of France and Germany combined. However, when other countries are investing further and faster in science and tech, we must do the same. We have an incredibly unique and powerful platform from which to grow and innovate for the benefit of the British people, which is why I have said I plan to take a ruthlessly outcome-focused approach to this new Department.

I will ensure that in both the short term and the long term, our work is based on improving people's daily lives in ways they can feel and see around them. The Government's vision for the future is an NHS that uses artificial intelligence to find, treat and reduce illnesses such as cancer and heart disease, so we have more time with our loved ones. We should have local transport services that allow us to travel faster, safer and cleaner than our parents did. The schools of the future should be powered by the kinds of technology that unlock hidden talents in every child, no matter where they live. As the "Department for the Future", our focus will be on how science, technology and innovation can ensure the British people live longer, safer, healthier and happier lives.

Such an important goal requires immediate action, which is why in my first few weeks as Technology Secretary I have been focused relentlessly on action and delivery. I see this as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to send a clear signal around the world that Britain plans to lead the way in science, innovation and technology. The key steps we have taken are as follows.

Yesterday, we published the UK science and technology framework, which sets out our goals and vision for science and technology in an enduring framework that will see us through to 2030. It has been developed in close collaboration with the UK science and technology sector, and represents a commitment to scaling our ambitions and delivering the most critical action needed to secure strategic advantage through science and technology. The framework is the strategic anchor that Government policy will deliver against, and to which the Government will hold themselves accountable. It sets out 10 things that the Government must do to sustain strategic advantage in science and technology.

[Michelle Donelan]

First, we must identify the technologies most critical to the UK's objectives. Secondly, we must signal the UK's science and technology strengths and ambitions both at home and abroad to attract talent and investment and boost our global influence. Thirdly, we must boost private and public investment in research and development for economic growth and better productivity.

Fourthly, we must build on the UK's already amazing talent and skills base. Fifthly, we must finance innovative science and technology companies. Sixthly, we must use Government procurement to stimulate innovation in key sectors and technologies. Seventhly, we must take international opportunities to shape the global science and technology landscape through strategic international engagement, diplomacy and partnerships.

Eighthly, we must ensure that science and technology objectives are supported by access to the best physical and digital infrastructure that will attract talent, investment and discoveries. Ninthly, we must leverage post-Brexit freedoms to create world-leading pro-innovation regulation and influence global technological standards. Tenthly, we must create a pro-innovation culture throughout the UK's public sector to improve the way our public services run.

We have also taken immediate steps. The delivery of this new framework will begin immediately with an initial raft of projects worth around £500 million, of which £370 million is new money. That will ensure that the UK has the skills and infrastructure to take a global lead in game-changing technologies. That includes £250 million of investment in three truly transformational technologies to build on the UK's leadership in AI, quantum technologies and engineering biology. That funding will help a range of industries tackle the biggest global challenges such as climate change and healthcare and will form part of our commitment to the five key technologies, which include semiconductors and future telecommunications.

We have also published Sir Paul Nurse's "Independent Review of the UK's Research, Development and Innovation Organisational Landscape", with recommendations to make the most of the UK's research organisations, testing different science funding models to support a range of innovative institutional models, such as focused research organisations, working with industry and partners to open up new funding opportunities. Up to £50 million will spur co-investment in science from the private sector and philanthropists, to drive the discoveries of the future, subject to business cases. The Government are already in talks with Schmidt Futures, a philanthropic initiative by Eric and Wendy Schmidt, about additional support of up to \$20 million as part of that work.

Some £117 million of existing funding will create hundreds of new PhDs for AI researchers, and £8 million will help to find the next generation of AI leaders around the world. A £50 million uplift to world-class labs funding will help research institutes and universities to improve facilities, so that UK researchers have access to the very best labs and equipment that they need to keep producing that world-class science. A £10 million uplift to the UK innovation and science seed fund, totalling £50 million, will boost the UK's next technology and science start-ups, which could be the next Apple, Google or Tesla.

We have outlined plans to set up an Exascale supercomputer facility—the most powerful compute capability, which could solve problems as complex as nuclear fusion, as well as a programme to provide dedicated compute capacity for important AI research, as part of our initial response to the future of compute review, which was also published yesterday. Some £9 million in Government funding will support the establishment of a quantum computing research centre in Daresbury in the north-west.

On next steps, each of the 10 framework strands has a lead Department tasked with putting in place a clear action plan, to which they will be accountable during the year. Delivery against those plans will be overseen by the National Science and Technology Council, which will hold Departments to account and drive pace. Alongside the development of those ambitious plans and the framework, we have also set out our initial work under each of the 10 priorities, which will include our skills and talent base.

On priority technologies, we will develop a pro-innovation approach to regulating AI, which will be detailed in our White Paper in the coming weeks. On R&D investment, we will respond to the Tickell review of research bureaucracy, and Sir Paul Nurse's review of the research, development and innovation landscape. We will work with industry and partners to increase inward investment by the summer recess. On financing innovative science and technology companies, we will build on the strong track record of the British Business Bank to strengthen support for the UK's science and technology companies.

This ambitious plan will focus on getting actions out the door now, as well as a plan for the future. This Government are both reactive and, crucially, proactive when it comes to science and technology, to ensure that we can be a superpower by 2030.

2.34 pm

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State to her place, and I thank her for the advance notice of her statement.

I welcome the framework. It will take pride of place on my virtual bookshelf next to the Government's innovation strategy, the R&D road map, the science plan, numerous grand challenges, industrial strategies, sector deals and two UKRI reorganisations. We have seen nine changes of Science Minister in five years. Britain is a world-leading science nation, and we deserve a framework with a longer shelf life than a lettuce, especially given the shortage of salad items under this Government.

It is good to see the Government setting out the principles for identifying the scientific capabilities that we need to protect and grow, and the outcomes that we wish to see from science, as well as seeking to increase STEM skills in teaching and support for start-ups and spin-outs. On the eve of International Women's Day, and as a chartered engineer, I enthusiastically welcome the ambition to diversify the science and technology workforce. Let us work together to make that ambition a reality.

I have a number of questions for the Secretary of State. How do the five critical technologies in the framework relate to the 17 sensitive areas in the National Security and Investment Act 2021, and the five key growth

industries in the autumn statement? When will each critical technology have the appropriate regulatory framework that she talked about? Science-driven industries critical to our future prosperity, such as space, autonomous vehicles, batteries and steel, are not even mentioned. Labour has committed to an industrial strategy council on a statutory footing. Do Government have an industrial strategy?

The framework rightly says that procurement is key to innovation. Why, then, have the Government objected to our amendments to the Procurement Bill to ensure that procurement is not captured by cronyism? The Government committed to £22 billion of science funding by 2027. Will the Secretary of State say what the current funding commitment is now? How much of the £370 million mentioned in the framework is truly new? If it is new, how is she paying for it? The Government promised that science spend will double, but the framework talks of raising science spend outside the greater south-east by only 40%. That suggests that our regional centres of innovation will not benefit from this increased funding. Is that all she has to say about the importance of regional innovation? What of the clusters that the Science Minister talks up so much?

Start-ups and scale-ups are key to sustainable green growth, but the £10 million uplift to the seed fund mentioned here would not meet the early-stage funding requirements of one future Google. Will the Government adopt the recommendations of Labour's start-up and scale-up review to drive innovative growth across our country?

The biggest question is what is not in the framework—Horizon Europe, the world's biggest science programme. Did the Secretary of State really think that she could get through the statement without even mentioning it? Thanks to the Tories, our brightest and best UK scientists are still having to choose between the funding that they desperately need and the country that they love. British research and British business are feeling the chilling impact of not being part of the world's greatest scientific collaboration. Can the Secretary of State confirm that now that the Windsor framework has been agreed, Horizon association will follow? Specifically, will the Chancellor's Budget next week include association funding?

Labour believes that innovation and science are critical to building strong and self-sufficient national and regional economies. We see a clear path from investing in scientific research to the jobs that people can raise a family on. With our ambitious national missions, Labour would stoke the innovation engine to drive high-skilled growth, access new and diverse talent pools and catalyse regions that have been left out of science investment. I fear that this framework is another wish list designed to be shelved or scrapped at the earliest convenience of a Government addicted to sticking-plaster policies. Only a Labour Government, with our long-term industrial strategy, will deliver the science sector and the jobs that our country needs.

Michelle Donelan: I thank the hon. Member for her comments, but in reality it is this Government who are here today delivering jobs and a better future for the British public. As I said in my statement, we are focusing not only on actions today, but on a strategic long-term approach to ensure that we are a science and technology superpower by 2030.

The hon. Member said that there are more technologies than the five that we have identified. Of course there are. The ones we have identified are the key strategic ones, but there is a great deal of work that my ministerial team and I are doing. On funding, we are investing £20 billion by 2024-25, as we have said on the record. The £370 million that we announced yesterday is a new spending commitment that we had not previously outlined. On geographical spread across the nation, we have made a strategic commitment to ensure that 55% of the spend is outside the south-east.

The framework that we have set out is just one part of the work that my Department is doing. Let us not forget that it was established just four weeks ago. In one month, we have not only published a comprehensive framework plan, but got on with key actions to drive the agenda forward. This Government mean business. We have worked very hard in the past few weeks to talk collaboratively with industry and with researchers.

I am not going to take the Opposition's word about what is wrong. Let us have a look at what experts and people on the ground have to say. Professor Sir Ian Boyd, president of the Royal Society of Biology, says:

"Science and technology is already a central plank of modern life. Putting this centre-stage in government strategy is essential and welcome."

Professor Julia Black, president of the British Academy, says:

"The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology's announcements reaffirm the Government's ambition to put the UK at the forefront of global research, development and innovation".

I could go on all day long, because our announcement has been wholeheartedly welcomed.

The hon. Member asked about Horizon. This is an announcement about our framework—that is what is on the annunciator screen—and not about Horizon, but I will answer her question anyway. We have not changed our position on Horizon. For the past two years, we have tried to associate. It was in the original deal, and we welcome the comments from the EU. Of course, terms would have to be favourable for the UK—we have lost two years—and we would have to ensure value for money for the taxpayer. We cannot wait around for another two years, because we want to put our researchers first. That is why we have done the responsible and right thing and worked up a plan B, which stands ready should we need it, but our position on Horizon has not changed. We look forward to continuing our conversations with the EU.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I call the Chair of the Select Committee on Science and Technology.

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): It is a great pleasure to welcome my right hon. Friend and her ministerial team to their positions. It has been some years since a Science Minister stood at the Dispatch Box as a Secretary of State; I hope that she and her team will have a very successful tenure. I warmly welcome the priority that the Government are giving to science and technology at one of the most exciting times for it since the first industrial revolution. My Committee looks forward to welcoming her to discuss her work and the framework.

I have a few specific questions. First, can my right hon. Friend commit that the £1.65 billion from the science budget that was returned to the Treasury last

[Greg Clark]

week as part of the supplementary estimates will go back to the science budget and has not been lost? Secondly, I am interested in what she says about Horizon. Will she say when the negotiations will begin? She rightly says that they cannot go on forever, but how long will she allow them to continue before plan B is enacted? Finally, what mechanisms are in place to ensure that in areas such as battery technology, which is a responsibility of her Department, of the Department for Business and Trade and of the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, there is a united and coherent approach across Government so that investors know what the policy is and who to deal with?

Michelle Donelan: My ministerial team and I look forward to working with my right hon. Friend's Committee. It was good to speak to him yesterday. As I said then, funding remains available to finalise association with EU programmes. In the event that we do not associate, UK researchers and businesses will receive at least as much as they would have through Horizon over the spending review period.

The Government have stepped in to continue to support the UK's world-leading R&D sector. We have extended the Horizon guarantee until the end of June 2023, as we announced yesterday. The Government have provided £882 million to date via UKRI through the guarantee and they will still deliver their commitment to invest £20 billion per annum in research and development by 2024-25. That is not impacted by the £1.6 billion to which my right hon. Friend refers.

On Horizon, as I said to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah), we have not changed our position. We continue to try to associate with Horizon, and we look forward to engaging in more deep and meaningful conversations with the EU on what is possible as we work out the potential options. I will keep my right hon. Friend and this House as informed as possible as plans develop.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I welcome the creation of the new Department and welcome the Secretary of State to her position. I thank her for advance sight of her statement.

The framework should be seen very much as a starting point. I have to say that the Secretary of State's comments on Horizon will not give the sector much assurance at the moment. That view is echoed by the Royal Society, which says:

"The extension of the funding underwrite announced today is a welcome intervention"

as a safety net,

"but it is yet another sticking plaster, when the ultimate goal needs to be speedy association".

Sir Paul Nurse's review also describes Horizon Europe association as essential, so we need a timeframe for when a decision on Horizon will be taken. We have been hearing from the Government for three years that their intention and hope is that there will be such an association, but we need a timeframe.

Dr Tim Bradshaw of the Russell Group has said that the £370 million of new funding falls far short of the £1.6 billion that had been earmarked for research

collaborations with the European Union, so it would be useful to know how the Government can continue promoting science in the UK when they are driving down funding in comparison with what was provided before Brexit.

The framework commits to establishing "competitive advantage in attracting international talent to the UK",

but Royal Society analysis has shown that work and study visa fees are up to six times higher than in comparable science nations. What plans do the Government have to reduce visa fees in line with other science nations?

The Secretary of State has chosen future communications as an area of focus. In 2020, a \$500 million stake was invested in OneWeb to support such communications. Can the Secretary of State update the House on the progress of the OneWeb investment in terms of future communications?

Finally, we have been asking about the semiconductor strategy for many months now. When is it likely to be published?

Michelle Donelan: On Horizon, the hon. Member seems to be rewriting history, which is slightly disappointing. We have tried for two years to associate. It was the EU, not this Government, that linked the issue with the Northern Ireland protocol. We now stand ready to continue those conversations. The £1.6 billion was earmarked for Horizon. We were not able to affiliate and associate with Horizon, which is why the money is no longer available, but we stand committed in terms of our record investment of £20 billion, which we have pledged for 2024-25.

On the conversation around attracting talent, we think it is very important that we are supporting industry and the opportunities available, so there are jobs in this country for people to come to and so they will want to forge a life here.

The semiconductor strategy will be out imminently. We have been doing a great deal of work to ensure that it comes out in exactly the right place.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): The Secretary of State will know that there are acute shortages of teachers in STEM subjects. She may well also know that we on the Science and Technology Committee looked into the lack of diversity in the STEM workforce, but there are only limited references to that in the framework. Yesterday, the Minister for Women, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), set out plans to increase the number of women working in STEM. The Prime Minister has made it clear that he wants to see all children studying maths until the age of 18, and I know that the Education Secretary is passionate about STEM subjects at school. However, it is not entirely clear where the Secretary of State's Department sits in all this. Will she clarify the position? Which is the lead Department when it comes to ensuring that we improve STEM uptake and, indeed, diversification in both schools and workforces?

Michelle Donelan: On the way the framework will operate, in many of the areas, there will be a lead Department, but we will be working to hold the Departments to account, while also collaborating with them. The Department for Education will lead on the

education and skills element, but we will of course work closely with it, because we have a vested interest in ensuring that the framework delivers and we can meet that goal of a science and technology superpower by 2030. However, I want to reassure my hon. Friend that the examples given in the framework are intended to provide a flavour of what every Department will be doing; they are not an exhaustive list. Departments will be coming up with more policies and ideas over the coming years, but they will all have to be linked with the framework, because this is a Government who will be strategic and relentlessly focused.

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): The Secretary of State says that her ambition is to send the message around the world that the UK is a leader in science and technology, and I share that ambition, but, sadly, the Sir Paul Nurse review of research and development—published today—says that funding provided by the Government is limited, and below that of other competitive nations. In fact, the UK is 27th out of 36 OECD nations when it comes to Government funding of R&D. If the Secretary of State is serious about this ambition, as I truly hope she is—and it would be helpful if she listened to what I am saying—will she commit today to assuring the House that, by next year, the UK will be No. 1 among all the OECD nations in respect of Government funding of R&D?

Michelle Donelan: What I can do is reaffirm the commitment that by 2024-25 we will have a record level of R&D spending in this country: £20 billion. Rather than simply standing here announcing endless pots of money, we are being strategic in our spending, and working with the sector when we come up with our policies and plans.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): I welcome the statement and wholeheartedly support it, but may I remind the House that science is a global endeavour? If we are to deliver on the ambitions set out in the framework, we will need to work with our partners. May I ask my right hon. Friend to look at the visa system in particular to ensure that it does not act as a barrier to attracting world-leading scientists and technicians to the UK to help us to deliver on those ambitions?

Michelle Donelan: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. Part of the framework is about our international collaboration with partners. Of course we need to grow our own talent, a point made earlier by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark), but we also need to attract talent, and to ensure that our visa system—as well as many other factors—enables that to happen. I will continue to work on that issue across Government.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): Horizon is about collaboration, not just money. May I urge the Secretary of State to impress that on the Prime Minister? She will also be aware that confidence in the life sciences sector is fragile at present, whether it be in relation to R&D tax credits, the voluntary scheme for branded medicines pricing and access, or Horizon, and that we have fallen from fourth to 10th among the best countries in which to conduct late-phase clinical trials. What is she going to do about that?

Michelle Donelan: The Minister of State, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), has taken the lead on that, and we are working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there are challenges that we need to address, and over the coming weeks and months he will see that this is a Government taking action.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): How will the Government respond to America's Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, which offers such a wide range of tax breaks, favourable Government contracts and favourable regulation to onshore much more science and technology, and threatens to divert investment from the UK?

Michelle Donelan: It is, of course, important for us to create a favourable economic climate for business to prosper. As for regulation, it will be at the heart of our work. We have already commissioned Sir Patrick Vallance to publish a report on the regulation of emerging technology, which will be published imminently, and we will be doing “deep dives” into how we can get the regulatory framework right in order to support innovation, technology and science that is based in the UK.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I welcome the Secretary of State and her team. I hope she will join me in celebrating the achievements of Oxfordshire's researchers, not just at the universities but in the great science parks: they are, I am sure, four square behind her visions. One of the big issues that they raise with me is the “attracting talent” strand, so I am glad she has raised that subject. Horizon Europe is a big part of it, but it was not just the money but the ecosystem that was important to those researchers. However, will the Secretary of State look again at the visa system, and specifically at the costs? Analysis from the Royal Society shows that the cost of obtaining a visa for researchers to come to our country is about six times higher than the cost among our competitors. Will the Secretary of State speak to the Home Office about that?

Michelle Donelan: What we really want to do is provide the research community with complete clarity and the certainty that they have not been able to have for the last two years while we have waited around trying to associate with Horizon. As I said at the outset, we want that process to be relatively swift. As for the question of visas, of course we want to attract the brightest and the best. Part of yesterday's announcement was about how we are going not just to wait for people to want to come here, but to be proactive and to utilise our global talent network to go out and find them and to persuade them of the value of locating and working in the UK.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend and constituency neighbour to her position. Does she agree that one area of outstanding science in the United Kingdom is in the Arctic and the Antarctic? Our polar scientific research is superb, thanks to the National Environment Research Council, the British Antarctic Survey and the 78 universities with first-class polar research departments. I have not had a chance to read her framework paper, but what more can the Government do within the framework to encourage

[James Gray]

polar research, which is so superb in this country but needs more co-ordination and, of course, always needs more encouragement from the Government?

Michelle Donelan: I commend my hon. Friend for all the great work that he does and has done consistently over the years. I know that he held a meeting here to dive deep into this issue again and to raise its profile. Of course the work is important geopolitically, but it is also important to addressing net zero. We work closely with partners. Our approach is global, not just internal, which is key to the framework.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I should declare an interest, in that I have a long-standing experience and love of the higher education system. I also co-chair the Higher Education Commission with Lord Norton.

I like a lot of the stuff that the Secretary of State has said today, particularly what she has said about having a much more focused Department, but I should warn her that my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) is right: morale is low in the higher education sector and we need to put that right. We also need the resources of good management in universities. We must make them open to dialogue and partnership with local businesses, small businesses and big businesses. I ask the Secretary of State please to look closely at that innovation and enterprise.

Michelle Donelan: This is at the heart of the Nurse review, which talks of the diversification of the research sector and how we can open up the opportunities that the hon. Gentleman has described. As a former higher education Minister, I know only too well the challenges that universities can face in this regard. My policy is always an open-door policy, and I work closely and in collaboration with the universities to break down some of those barriers and create those opportunities.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. The third element of her framework plan was growing private and public investment to boost productivity. Does she agree that what is crucial is not just the development of new ideas but their implementation, because that is how productivity will be boosted? Will she ensure that there is a focus throughout Government on implementation and scale-ups, given that all Departments can play a role in the delivery of progress?

Michelle Donelan: My hon. Friend is right. It is not just about the funding; it is also about the implementation, the focus and a strategic approach, which is why this Government want to lead from the front. We need to focus not just on start-ups but on scale-ups, which is one of the things that has held us back in the UK, especially in the tech sector. My Department will play a critical role in supporting the industry to tackle this.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): York has already framed its future economy, whether through Buy Yorkshire, with 4,000 more jobs for our city and region, through digital and advanced rail, which is currently providing 5,500 jobs and has the ability to

grow, or through the emerging digital creative sector, which is an exciting innovation across York. However, the Government have been slow in giving that support and getting the money out of the door. We are frustrated because we want to press ahead, so how will the Secretary of State deliver for our city?

Michelle Donelan: I pledge to meet the hon. Member and listen carefully to the challenges that she has experienced, so that we can address them not just in her area but in other areas.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): I welcome the joining together of these strands of Government, not least because of the broadband programme, and my right hon. Friend truly has the opportunity to be the Secretary of State for growth. That is hugely important. Does she agree that it is the UK's leading role in the regulatory space that allows us potentially to be a world leader in the regulation of areas such as artificial intelligence, where there is not only a vital national security angle but a vital economic opportunity that we can seize at this unique moment in that technology's history?

Michelle Donelan: Exactly. As my hon. Friend points out, this is about regulation to create innovation, and we need to get those regulatory frameworks right. We also need to look at the behaviour of the regulators themselves, at how they interact with one another and at the burden they place on researchers and businesses alike.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement. Small and medium-sized tech companies provide a vital engine of growth in our economy, particularly in the Thames valley and in towns such as Reading. Can she say more about what her Department is doing to support these vital small and medium-sized businesses?

Michelle Donelan: Indeed. When we talk about our science and technology agenda, this is not just to support big tech; it is to support all businesses, including those small and medium-sized ones, which we hope to be able to support to scale up and continue to grow and create jobs. At the heart of our plans, the hon. Gentleman will see how we can support them in a range of different ways through the 10-point plan and by being strategic across Government, from our approach on skills to our approach on regulation. And let us not forget that this Department is coming forward with a number of pieces of legislation, including the Data Protection and Digital Information Bill, which will help to support businesses to get rid of some of that unnecessary burden, and the digital markets Bill, which is focused on freeing up some of those small businesses and unlocking opportunities for growth.

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): I welcome the framework and also my right hon. Friend's commitment that the Government will soon be publishing the national semiconductor strategy. Does she agree that this is a fantastic opportunity to highlight not just the leading role in the world that British companies play in semiconductor design, but the attractiveness of the UK for investment in advanced manufacturing, particularly in compound semiconductors?

Michelle Donelan: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. Our work in semiconductors is important not just for national security but for economic security, and we have some key strengths when it comes to research and development for semiconductors, and our compound semiconductor manufacturing sector. We will continue to support semiconductors and come forward with that strategy in the coming days or weeks.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): Research projects at Welsh universities face an immediate cliff edge with the end of European funds, which will run out at the end of the month, endangering 60 projects and 1,000 jobs. This affects the whole of the UK, but there is a specific issue in Wales due to the concentration of European funding there over the years. Can I therefore use this statement to ask the Secretary of State whether she will discuss with the Treasury the need to announce bridge funding in the Budget next week to protect these projects while the replacement funding is settled?

Michelle Donelan: I am aware of this issue, as is my ministerial team, and we pledge to meet the hon. Member to discuss this in detail in the coming weeks.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): The Secretary of State knows that we are technologically and scientifically ready for the small and medium reactors that we need to roll out across the United Kingdom. They are world beaters. Will the Secretary of State include this in all the principles that she is putting forward today, because it is absolutely vital? We need the energy and we also need to sell these reactors, because they are superb.

Michelle Donelan: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. This highlights how the Department will be working hand in hand with other Departments. On this agenda, we will be working closely with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. It is our Department that will be focusing on innovation and the technologies of tomorrow, but it is incumbent on us to work with the other Departments to deliver them in time to be ready for tomorrow.

Richard Foord (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): The issue with Horizon is that UK-based researchers were able to take more from the scheme than the UK Government contributed to it. *The Times* reports today that the Prime Minister is said to be sceptical about Horizon:

“He thinks it’s a very expensive way to fund a lot of small academic collaborations which don’t really change the world.”

Does the Secretary of State recognise that science is an international endeavour, that incremental developments in science do change the world and that the UK would be a net beneficiary of Horizon if only we could associate?

Michelle Donelan: The entire point of our announcement yesterday was that we believe that science and technology can change the world. We also believe that they can change people’s lives here in the UK, and that is why we made our announcement on the actions we are taking

now and on the long-term framework, so that we can be proactive as well as reactive. As I have said on Horizon, our position has not changed.

Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): As somebody with a maths degree, I am naturally very supportive and enthusiastic about a Government Department dedicated to science, and I very much welcome the new framework to proactively position the UK as the science superpower. I can confirm that my constituency, where almost every village has a science park, will do more than almost any other constituency to try to turn that vision into a reality. We already have a thriving herd of unicorns, a vibrant community of Nobel prize winners and laboratories everywhere stacked full of researchers, a lot of whom were funded by the Horizon programme. I welcome the Secretary of State’s statement that the Government want to reopen negotiations on Horizon and that they are open to that. I accept that she cannot commit to the outcome of negotiations while they are going on, and it is good that she has a plan B in her back pocket, but negotiations create uncertainty and I wonder what reassurance she can give to my formerly Horizon-funded researchers that they will not lose their funding until we get a long-term solution.

Michelle Donelan: I agree with my hon. Friend that we need to provide researchers and academics with that clarity and certainty. That is exactly why we yesterday extended the guarantee by another three months so that they can be confident, as we have talks with the EU, that there is a system in place.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): I welcome the Prime Minister’s creation of this Department and warmly welcome my right hon. Friend to her position as Secretary of State. I also welcome the £370 million that is being invested. In drawing up this framework, what lessons have been learned from the covid-19 pandemic and, in particular, from the success of the vaccines taskforce under Kate Bingham, whose position was, I remind the House, shamefully undermined by the Opposition?

Michelle Donelan: We have taken a great deal of learnings from the operation of the vaccines taskforce, and we have been deploying those learnings, as we can see from the life sciences missions that we have put into process. One of the key learnings relates to the work we do with industry, and also our ability to work much more quickly and to cut through red tape and regulation. My hon. Friend will see from my Department a relentless focus on cutting down that regulation, getting the regulatory framework right and cutting away some of the unnecessary bureaucracy that is holding back our nation from excelling even more.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): I welcome the Government’s new science and technology framework, but will my right hon. Friend set out how the life science vision works within it and also speak of the amazing and rewarding jobs that will come with it?

Michelle Donelan: The framework that we set up yesterday is the strategic overarching plan for how we get to be a science and technology superpower. Of

[Michelle Donelan]

course, we are working on many other strands to ensure that we can drive forward those policies to achieve those goals, including the life science vision.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): You have had some good exercise, Mr Fell.

Simon Fell (Barrow and Furness) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker—last but not least.

I warmly welcome this statement, and I welcome the Secretary of State and her fantastic team to the Front Bench. This statement is great news for science, and the £370 million deposit towards turning the UK into a science superpower is welcome. My constituents will be glad to hear it, as we are trying to get the Ulverston life sciences cluster off the ground. Will the Secretary of State agree to meet me and the GSK taskforce to see how it can best engage with the strategy and take it forward?

Michelle Donelan: I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend to discuss what is happening in his constituency. I think it will improve his constituents' lives with more jobs and better paid jobs, but it will also improve the lives of all our constituents. This is how we drive forward our economy, how we grow our economy, how we create better paid jobs, how we improve our healthcare and how we tackle climate change. My constituents are asking me for all those things, and it is this Government who are delivering this proactive, outcomes-based approach.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement, and for responding to questions for more than three quarters of an hour.

BILLS PRESENTED

ILLEGAL MIGRATION BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Suella Braverman, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Dominic Raab, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary James Cleverly, Secretary Gillian Keegan and Robert Jenrick, presented a Bill to make provision for and in connection with the removal from the United Kingdom of persons who have entered or arrived in breach of immigration control; to make provision about detention for immigration purposes; to make provision about unaccompanied children; to make provision about victims of slavery or human trafficking; to make provision about leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom; to make provision about citizenship; to make provision about the inadmissibility of certain protection and certain human rights claims relating to immigration; to make provision about the maximum number of persons entering the United Kingdom annually using safe and legal routes; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 262) with explanatory notes (Bill 262-EN).

ONLINE ABUSE (REPORTING) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Christine Jardine, supported by Wera Hobhouse, Munira Wilson, Helen Morgan, Sarah Olney and Richard Foord, presented a Bill to require social media companies to publish reports setting out the action they have taken to address online abuse against women and girls, and other groups of people who share a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 March, and to be printed (Bill 263).

Pension Contributions

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

3.11 pm

Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require employers to pay pension contributions into a pension scheme of the employee's choosing; and for connected purposes.

This is the moment that the House has been waiting for all day. I have a problem, and I am not the only one with this problem. In fact, many millions of people have this problem too. The value of the problem is huge—at least £37 billion—and its scale is matched only by the level of public ennui. Yes, I am talking pensions, and not any old pensions but lost and deferred pension pots.

The occupational pension system in this country was designed for a time when most people had a job for life, but gone are the days of retiring after 40 years of service at one company, leaving with a gold watch and a gold-plated pension. It is now the norm to hop between jobs. The average person will now have 11 employers over their lifetime. I am in my 50s, and I now have nine different pensions.

Millions of people have been building up multiple pension pots, one for each job. This has been massively accelerated by the Government's highly successful introduction of auto-enrolment in 2012, which brought pension saving to new groups that had previously been absent from the system, including low earners. Participation in workplace pension saving among eligible employees increased from 55% in 2012 to 88% in 2021, which is a welcome development, but the result is an explosion in the number of people with multiple deferred pension pots. Sometimes the pots are quite large and sometimes very small, containing just a few hundred pounds or even less.

The Pensions Policy Institute estimates that there were 8 million deferred pension pots in 2020, and I have seen other estimates of up to 11 million. Unless something is done, the PPI estimates that the number will rise to 27 million by 2035. Data from the Association of British Insurers suggests there are 2.2 million deferred pots containing less than £1,000. These pots are difficult to manage and easy to lose. The PPI estimates that the value of lost pension pots has grown from £19.4 billion in 2018 to £26.6 billion last year.

This makes it hard for people to track their total pension savings and, therefore, to plan properly for retirement. Charges for these small pots can erode their value to literally nothing, leading to greater poverty in old age. Managing these small pots can be loss-making for pension companies. It is a lose-lose situation for pension members and pension providers and, overall, it erodes public support for pension saving.

The Government recognise the problem and have taken various steps over the years. They made it possible for pension holders to consolidate pension pots, which is welcome, but it can be fearsomely difficult because of the overwhelming bureaucracy. Later this year, the Government are launching a pensions dashboard. Again, this is welcome, and it will give people a single view of all their pension pots in one place. It will make it easier

for people to see how much they have in savings, and for them to manage those savings. It might even reunite some people with their lost pensions pots. Those are both good initiatives, but neither tackles the problem of multiple pots being created in the first place.

The Government are now looking at further measures to tackle the multiple pot problem. A small pots working group was launched in 2020, and the Government launched a consultation on the issue at the end of January 2023. As the name implies, the working group's focus is on small pots. Although there is no set definition, a small pot generally contains less than £1,000 and has been inactive for over a year. Small pots are a particular issue for pension providers because there are so many of them and because they lose money, but there is also the issue of multiple larger pots.

The solution chosen by the Government will shape the pension landscape for a generation, so it should benefit both pension members and pension providers. The Government need to make sure that we do not end up with a solution that works well for the pension industry but less well for pensioners.

The consultation launched in January by the Department for Work and Pensions seeks evidence on three proposed solutions to the multiple pots problem, as the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Laura Trott), is well aware: first, a default consolidator; secondly, a system in which the pot moves with a pension member to a new employer's scheme; and thirdly, a member exchange. All three solutions have merits, but another policy, which is not being actively considered at the moment, has been adopted by many other countries—the so-called pot for life.

The objective of a pot for life, sometimes known as the lifetime provider model, is that workers have a single pension pot that they can easily manage and know the extent of their savings. Their own pension contributions, and those of their employer, are paid into that pot. Members can remain with the same provider for their whole working life, even when they switch job. They can change provider if they want, but it is their choice. On starting a new job, the employee gives their bank account details so that their salary can be paid, and their pension details so that their pension contributions can be paid. It is a solution that puts engaged pension members, rather than their employer or pension provider, at the centre of the system.

The pot for life is different from the “pot follows member” solution, in which the employer chooses the pension provider, such as their corporate scheme, into which the existing pension pot of new employees is transferred. In the “pot follows member” regime, someone who has 10 jobs over their lifetime will have their pension transferred between 10 providers. This can be expensive and confusing. A person with two part-time jobs will end up with two different pensions, through their two different employers, at the same time.

All this is solved by the single lifetime provider, or single pot, model. Countries from Australia to New Zealand, from Chile to Mexico, have adopted the model. This is clearly a big change from where we are now, and I am not suggesting that we should suddenly go to an automatic lifetime provider for all, which would be impossible practically, but there are many different ways of setting up the lifetime provider model.

[Anthony Browne]

What I am proposing is a small legislative change that gives employees the right to opt out of their company pension scheme without losing pension contributions. A new employee would be given the right to direct their own and their employer's contributions to a provider of their choice, perhaps to an existing fund or to a new one. When they change job, they could make sure their new employer's contributions go into their own pension pot. The employer's contributions would be required to be of the same value as the contributions it makes to its existing company scheme, to make sure that employees who opt out are not penalised.

One concern that has been raised is that the proposed model would increase employers' administrative costs, particularly for small businesses, as they would have to pay contributions to multiple schemes, but I think that argument is overegged. Pretty much all companies now have automatic payroll systems or a payroll service provider that can pay salaries into different bank accounts and pension contributions into different pension funds.

There are concerns about the impact on existing company pensions, but that can be easily mitigated. It is an opt-out system, so the change can be gradual and the effect on existing schemes incremental. After a long time, when the scheme has bedded in, a future Government might decide to make it automatic, as has happened in Australia. The industry may want to set up a platform to process all the different payments.

My proposal is a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, the different proposals that the Government are currently considering. My proposal will not deal with the existing stock of millions of deferred pension pots, which the consolidator model would help to address, and it could exist alongside the "pot follows member" regime. Employees would be given a choice of solutions. If the overall solution is better in the long term for pension members, we should pursue it.

Some in the industry might need educating on the wisdom of this solution, but many in the industry are already supportive. As I came into this place, I received an email from Hargreaves Lansdown, whose permission I have to quote it. It said:

"This is an approach which Hargreaves Lansdown has supported for many years. We believe that it is a vital part of the puzzle to drive up engagement with pensions, especially with so many saving in DC pots."

Other countries have gone down this route and have had a positive experience. Australia and New Zealand have seen reduced transfer costs in the industry, as pension members do not have multiple pots that need to be consolidated. It has also helped to reduce member

charges, as they do not have multiple pots all accruing their own separate charges. Of course, there are economic, technical and cultural differences between the UK and these countries, but that does not take away from the general principle.

Ultimately, it is my belief that pension savers should be at the heart of our pension system and that the north star of our pension policy should be a pot for life. That means that people know exactly what they have in their pension pot, helping them to make informed decisions about their level of contribution and to plan for their retirement based on this knowledge. Such an approach would help to restore trust in our great pensions system. A solution to multiple pension pots should help engaged pension members while protecting the less well engaged. It should not be skewed by only addressing the providers' concerns with small pension pots. That is why I want to legislate to require employers to pay into a pension scheme of the employee's choosing. I commend this Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Anthony Browne, Damian Green, Richard Fuller, Gareth Bacon, Mr Jonathan Djanogly, Mrs Flick Drummond, Mrs Pauline Latham, Alexander Stafford, Andrew Selous, Selaine Saxby, Douglas Chapman and Wendy Chamberlain present the Bill.

Anthony Browne accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 17 March, and to be printed (Bill 264)

PUBLIC ORDER BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO.3)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Public Order Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 23 May 2022 (Public Order Bill: Programme), as varied by the Order of 18 October 2022 (Public Order Bill: Programme (No. 2)):

Consideration of Lords Amendments

(1) Proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion three hours after their commencement.

(2) The Lords Amendments shall be considered in the following order: 5, 6 to 9, 36, 1, 17, 20, 21, 23, 27, 28, 31 to 33, 2 to 4, 10 to 16, 18, 19, 22, 24 to 26, 29, 30, 34, 35 and 37.

Subsequent stages

(3) Any further Message from the Lords may be considered forthwith without any Question being put.

(4) The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—(Julie Marson.)

Question agreed to.

Public Order Bill

Consideration of Lords amendments

[Relevant documents: First Report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, Legislative Scrutiny: Public Order Bill, HC 351, and the Government response, HC 649.]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I inform the House that I have selected amendments (a) and (b) to Lords amendment 5.

Clause 9

OFFENCE OF INTERFERENCE WITH ACCESS TO OR PROVISION OF ABORTION SERVICES

3.23 pm

Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con): I beg to move amendment (a) to Lords amendment 5.

Mr Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Lords amendment 5, and amendment (b) thereto.

Lords amendment 6, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendment 7, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendment 8, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendment 9, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendment 36, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendment 1, Government motion to disagree, and Government amendment (a) in lieu.

Lords amendment 17, Government motion to disagree, and Government amendment (a) in lieu.

Lords amendments 20, 21, 23, 27, 28 and 31 to 33, Government motions to disagree, and Government amendments (a) and (b) in lieu.

Lords amendments 2 to 4, 10 to 16, 18, 19, 22, 24 to 26, 29, 30, 34, 35 and 37.

Andrew Lewer: I have tabled my amendment because the Bill, in its current form, has a problem. The part of the Bill it deals with is leading us into the territory of thought crimes and creates unprecedented interference with the rights to freedom of speech and thought in the UK.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): If my hon. Friend were to go on Twitter now, he would find a recording of an arresting officer telling a lady that praying silently is already a crime, and we have not even passed this Bill yet. Are we not really in Orwellian territory of thought crime, as he said?

Andrew Lewer: I could not agree more with my right hon. Friend, and that is the concern. The part of the Bill I am referring to is Lords amendment 5; put forward in the House of Lords by Baroness Sugg on the matter of “interference” within buffer zones.

I understand that many people will find it highly inappropriate for vocal or difficult protests to be held right outside abortion clinics, and I categorically condemn harassment against women at all points in their life, let

alone near an abortion facility. However, that is a world away from the police being able to detain people and question them over what they are doing if they are merely standing there or praying quietly—or worse, if they are praying silently and are then asked by the police, agents of the state, “What are you thinking about?”

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I commend the hon. Gentleman for tabling this amendment. Does he agree that the Government could do one thing today: they could indicate clearly that this measure does not apply to people engaged in prayer? Secondly, does he agree that if the Government allow this situation to continue, they are going to turn the police into a laughing stock? People will be mocking them, saying, “What about all the knife crime and all the other problems that you have? And you are arresting people for silently praying.” This provision really does make a fool of the police, does it not?

Andrew Lewer: It does cause reputational damage to the police; the videos that some colleagues have seen are hugely disturbing. It makes it difficult for Ministers to stand up and say, “The police are on your side, they will defend you”, when people see a woman who is on her own and standing perfectly still being harassed by the police. I agree entirely with the comments that the hon. Gentleman has made.

So, “What are you thinking?” is covered by the Bill in its current state and remains there despite the Sugg amendment. Action such as I was describing is entirely unacceptable in a free and open society, and I could have my pick of dystopian novels—one has already been referenced—from which it would not be out of place.

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con): No one, in any part of the House, wants women or anyone else to be harassed while going about their lawful business. However, does my hon. Friend acknowledge that legislation is already in place whereby local councils can apply buffer zones around abortion clinics and other such areas when it is necessary to do so? Three or four local authorities have already introduced buffer zones, so this extra amendment is not necessary, because local authorities already have the powers.

Andrew Lewer: Indeed. The Lords amendment extends something that is already disturbing, as we see in some of the video instances that have taken place. These zones would be the only place in the UK where consensual communication is banned by the state—simply saying that sentence makes this seem such an absurdity. To those who say this would never happen, I say that it has indeed already happened. In December, in Birmingham, Isabel Vaughan-Spruce was searched, arrested, interrogated and placed on criminal trial for silently praying within one of these zones, and she has now been arrested again.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): There is an important detail missing from what my hon. Friend just said, as I understand that when Isabel Vaughan-Spruce was arrested the clinic was not even open. It just seems that if we continue down this line, we are going to extrapolate on an extrapolation in order to make absolutely sure that anybody can be arrested for anything.

Andrew Lewer: That is exactly right, and I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution. Indeed, the question asked then was, “Are you praying?” When that was answered with, “I might be”, the next question was, “What are you praying about?” That was answered with, “I am praying in my head.” It is extraordinary that that leads to someone being arrested in this country in 2023.

Last month, a father and Army veteran was fined in Bournemouth after being grilled by the police about what he was silently praying in his head. This points the way to a world where freedom from offence, or even potential offence, supersedes freedom of speech and religious belief. We have created, therefore, a situation where we can impose criminal penalties for silent thought, and there will be countless ramifications. For example, it would make it increasingly difficult for my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), as the Prime Minister’s special envoy for freedom of religion or belief, to advocate for these freedoms abroad. We often have debates in this House where we are all telling the rest of the world what to do and people will turn around and say, “How can you lecture us about religious freedom when there are areas where you cannot even pray in your own country without being arrested and hauled off by the police?”

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): My hon. Friend is speaking first in the debate, so I would like to give him an opportunity to anticipate an argument, with which I have considerable sympathy, that we are going to hear urged against him. I refer to the fact that we have seen in other countries, particularly the United States, loud and noisy protests outside abortion clinics and they are what has undoubtedly led to this movement for zones. Will he confirm that if his amendment goes through, it will not, in any way, affect the ability of the law to prevent women from being genuinely harassed when they go to abortion clinics?

Andrew Lewer: That is an extremely important part of this amendment—it makes sure that those protections are very much still in place, as indeed they already are under the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022. Censorship is a notoriously slippery slope. It might not be our thoughts that are being criminalised today, but we should be careful not to open the door to that happening tomorrow to other opinions that people might hold about something else.

3.30 pm

The Sugg amendments do provide some welcome scope for an improvement to address some of the concerns that I have mentioned, but issues remain, which is why I have tabled my amendments to Lords amendment 5. Amendment (a) would provide much-needed clarity to the broad and vague terminology of “influencing” currently in the Sugg amendment. My amendments would introduce no substantive changes to the revised clause 10 and, whatever individuals’ opinions of it are, they would therefore respect the desire of both Houses to introduce buffer zones. But I also seek to ensure that any law doing that does not impose an unreasonable limit on freedom of speech and thought, as was seen in the recent prosecution against those engaged—I can still hardly believe I am saying this in the House of Commons—in silent prayer.

My amendment (a) would therefore specify and exempt consensual communication, silent prayer, and peaceful presence from criminalisation. My amendment (b) would pause the implementation of censorship zones until the Government carry out a review into what is really going on outside clinics in the UK, not those in the US or other countries. In 2018, this same Government found that such zones would be “disproportionate” and unnecessary, because the vast majority of activity was peaceful and helpful, instances of harassment were rare and existing legislation was perfectly capable of dealing with any instances of criminality. What has changed? Law must be evidence-based, but the evidential basis for the crackdown has been paltry. I hope my elected colleagues will join me in demanding that our laws are fair, just and considered. It is an abdication of good and standard process that this part of the Bill has made it this far in its current state.

Much of what it is claimed the buffer zones will deal with is already dealt with in law, and more effectively, under the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Which is precisely why successive Prime Ministers and Health Secretaries, including the current Chancellor of the Exchequer, took the view that there was no need for further action. Indeed, they did not see this as a matter for a free vote, which abortion, as a generality, rightly is. This is about freedom: it is not about the purpose of that freedom or the location of it. It is about the ability to think, speak and pray freely.

Andrew Lewer: It is, and that is an important point. This is not a debate about opinions on abortion. Opinions about abortion are varied and differ hugely throughout the House. The 2022 Act already gives the police the power to

“place any condition on a public assembly (that is necessary to prevent disorder, damage, disruption, impact or intimidation)”.

That is far more targeted and proportionate. If Members do not feel those powers are sufficient, that is a conversation about altering public space protection orders, not imposing nationwide buffer zones.

Those who do not accept amendment (a) must be able to justify to both themselves and the public why they do not believe that private prayer is a fundamental human right in the United Kingdom. The Bill must absolutely not outlaw our fundamental human rights and I remain far from convinced that, unamended, it will not.

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab): May I first seek your advice, Mr Deputy Speaker? May I speak to the other amendments on the order paper?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Please speak only to the amendments that are before us today.

Jon Trickett: Thank you for your guidance, Mr Deputy Speaker: I just wanted to be clear.

I have some sympathy with the points made by the hon. Member for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer), although clearly the ability of people to go about their lawful business at work, including clinicians, administrative assistants and women going to have procedures, must

be protected. I am not convinced that his amendment (a) would achieve an absence of harassment, so I will not support it and the House should not do so either.

I have some sympathy with the points the hon. Gentleman made, however, because the whole Bill is an assault on British liberty. That is the central point, and I will illustrate it in several ways later in my speech. This is an extraordinary Bill. It will hand unprecedented, draconian powers to the repressive arms of the British state, but we have been given only three hours to discuss it. The debate on protecting people going for abortions could take three hours in itself, but we are faced with a series of amendments that were debated in the Lords over days. We have been given three hours, and that is outrageous. Why have the Government provided so little time to discuss these matters, some of which go back a thousand years in English history?

Lords amendment 6 deals with stop and search without suspicion. The police will be granted the power to intercept people who are not even suspected of committing a crime. That is an extraordinary power after more than 1,000 years of the struggle by the British people for a state that protects our liberty. Several of those who spoke in the debate in the other place said that the only comparison they could think of was in the laws that were passed against terrorism. Protesting about injustice is not terrorism, and to conflate the two is a mistake. I have not heard the Government make the case for that, and I will be interested to hear what they have to say. The police have said that they do not want these powers, and previous members of the judiciary in the Lords said that they were concerned about how the Bill could be interpreted.

The Bill as it stands will lead to a further breakdown in confidence between the police and other parts of the state on the one hand, and communities on the other. One example is the Sarah Everard case, where police moved in to prevent what was effectively peaceful and justified protest. That led to a major breakdown in confidence in the Met, although that was already in process because it was a serving police officer who had committed the crime. The police used the covid rules that were then in place, the appropriateness of which had been debated in the House.

Sir Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): I am sympathetic to what the hon. Gentleman is saying, and I support him in his cause this afternoon, but the arrests in the Sarah Everard case were made because, shamefully, this House had banned the right to protest.

Jon Trickett: That is the point I was just making, and I thank the hon. Gentleman for repeating it.

The police used the covid rules, which had been passed by the House, possibly regrettably. But under this Bill, the police will need no excuse whatever, because the law will allow them to arrest people even if there is no suspicion of any kind. It is quite extraordinary to see a clause in a Bill brought before this British House of Commons proposing that people can be intercepted by the police on no suspicion whatsoever.

Ian Paisley: The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful point. Is it not the case that this Bill removes from the police the right to use something that we expect from them: discretion? It removes the ability to use their

discretion and be proportionate. This Bill applies a disproportionate action and forces the police to take that disproportionate action.

Jon Trickett: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point. He is right that the British state claimed historically to be the bastion of our liberty, but today it is proposed that it become an engine of our suppression. An authoritarian state is being created here, and it is not acceptable.

When I said earlier that these rights go back centuries, I was not exaggerating. The right to freedom of association—for people to meet with whoever they choose, on the streets or anywhere else—is part of the very structure of our society. The rights of free speech, freedom of association and freedom of assembly were built into our constitution for generations and centuries. They will all be fundamentally disrupted by this piece of legislation.

Habeas corpus, the right of individuals not to be intervened on by the state or its apparatuses without good reason, goes back centuries. Protection against arbitrary imprisonment by the state was incorporated in the Habeas Corpus Act 1679. The Bill of Rights 1689 went through this House of Commons, and now the House of Commons is being asked to surrender at least part of the principle of habeas corpus, and on no suspicion whatsoever. I add that point one more time, because it is extraordinary that that is what is being said.

It may be said, “Well, in the light of what’s happening in the country, with the protest movements and so on, we need new powers.” Just a minute, though—will the Minister in responding perhaps tell us why a breach of the King’s peace, or the Riot Act 1714, or other items of legislation which have gone through this House and have protected our liberties over the centuries, might not be appropriately used? A breach of the peace is an act of common law going back before the year 1000, to King Alfred—that is how deep the attachment to liberty is in our country, yet it is about to be broken.

The Justices of the Peace Act 1361, preventing riotous and barbaric behaviour that disturbs the peace of the King, also went through this Parliament. Why is it suddenly necessary now, after more than 1,000 years of our history, to empower the state to operate in these ways? We have many other Acts; the Riot Act was read on the steps of the town hall, I think, in my home city of Leeds, against the gas workers who were on strike in the 19th century. In Featherstone in my constituency, the Riot Act was read and people were killed. All they were doing was striking to protect their wages and incomes. How can it be that there is no legislation in place that might deal with the kind of actions we can envisage taking place? Why is it that suddenly, in this century, we are about to abandon 1,000 years of our history? I will come to an explanation in a moment.

I have spoken to Lords amendment 6, but I will briefly speak to Lords amendment 1 and the attempt to define what the Government mean by “serious disruption”. The amendment is now being replaced by the Home Secretary, who is proposing amendment (a) in lieu. The amendment in lieu is quite astonishing. It suggests that anybody may be arrested if they have taken action that might, in more than a minor degree, affect work or supply of goods and services. Subsection (2)(b) of the

[Jon Trickett]

Home Secretary's amendment in lieu refers to the following activities: the supply of money, food, water, energy or fuel, communication, places of worship, transport, education and health. It so happens that those are the areas where there is industrial action—where people are taking action to protect their living standards, a right they have had for more than a century.

Why is the list that has been provided to this House in this amendment proposing those particular areas of action? How can minor disruption to services now be regarded as a criminal offence? This will provoke a breakdown in trust between the police force, the state itself and people taking action. I represent a mining community. I went there just over 27 years ago, and during the strike—[*Interruption.*] Are you trying to say something, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I was just trying to communicate that at some point we need to be aware that there are quite a few speakers. That is all.

Jon Trickett: I appreciate your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker; I am about to finish on this point.

The definition that the Lords tried to introduce was not perfect but it was far better than the amendment before us. We have a failing political and economic system, and consent has broken down across wide parts of the country. There are two ways of moving forward: either we try to produce a just and more equal society or we move from consent to repression. That is where this Government are taking us, and it is a seriously bad step. This legislation, and certainly the amendments, ought not to go through.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It will be clear that quite a few hon. and right hon. Members wish to speak in the debate. I would suggest that colleagues keep to about eight minutes to start with. I will not need to put a time limit on if we can think of each other in a comradely fashion—that would be great. I call David Davis.

3.45 pm

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): May I start by commending the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Jon Trickett)? I agree very much with what he had to say, but I say to him that, although the laws and the constitution underpinning these matters are, as he said, up to 1,000 years old, much of the tradition of modern demonstrations goes back to the 1930s, when the behaviour of the police towards demonstrators led to the creation of the National Council for Civil Liberties, for example. I know that because my grandfather led more than one demonstration and was arrested—after being baton-charged by the police—for inciting violence. He was sent to prison for six months—although the judge gave him the option of being bound over for six months and not making irritating speeches, and he said he would rather go to prison, so there we are.

My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer) made one of the best speeches I have heard in this House for a very long time on something

as fundamental as the right to prayer without intercession by the state. That is an issue that is thousands of years old, and he was absolutely right.

This is problematic. What we are debating is the outcome of an over-heavy-handed Bill—that is where it starts. We were all outraged by the behaviour of some of the demonstrators—disrupting ambulances and Lord knows what else—and the Government reacted to that, but they overreacted, frankly. The Lords have corrected that, and the Government have conceded on a number of important points. They have removed the possibility that a serious disruption prevention order—one of the most restrictive measures we have short of imprisonment—can be imposed on people who have never been convicted.

I say to the Minister that five years after a conviction is a very long time. Most non-violent convictions are spent after one year, so five years is a devil of a long time to allow such restrictions to be put on somebody. The Lords have removed the electronic tagging requirement again. The idea that creating nuisance should lead to someone being tagged is, in my view, a barbaric proposal, and it is gone. An explicit provision that the police cannot use their powers against journalists was carried by about 90 votes in the Lords. That should not even have come up; it is so obvious that that is undermining for us.

The SDPOs are still very restrictive for what are relatively simple offences. They involve bans on using the internet in certain ways, bans on being in certain areas, bans on intended protests, and many other restrictions. They resemble control orders, which—remember—are counter-terrorism measures. That is a crude approach. As I said, five years is too long for the criminal offence to be unspent, so I hope that the Government will look at that again, or, if they do not, that the Lords send it back again.

The organisation Liberty, which, as I said, came into being because of these sorts of problems with demonstrations in the '30s, has raised concerns about the possibility of political interference, which is really serious. The Secretary of State may issue “guidance about identifying persons” to whom the police should apply an SDPO. In that, we in this House will have no say. That is, again, a critical concern.

The most important thing was raised by the hon. Member for Hemsworth: suspicionless stop and search. Stop and search is an abuse of our freedoms, full stop. Being stopped by a policeman and required to strip off, or to empty one's pockets and bags, is an abuse that we do not allow in this country. Let me be clear: the vast majority of police are responsible, decent and public-spirited people, but the past year has shown that there are also some other people in there. The Sarah Everard offence has been referred to; Couzens was charged with other offences just recently. That demonstrates the danger of handing over unfettered power to people who might abuse it. That is the simple point, and what the state is doing is handing over that power. What we are looking at here—suspicionless stop and search—has to be restricted or eliminated. If we do not do this, we will be in the same position as some states with which we have no sympathy.

Last, I want to reinforce my point with quotations from His Majesty's inspectorate of police. Inspectors went round 10 police forces asking for their opinions,

and right enough, there was a spectrum, but I want to read out a few sentences from their report. They said:

“At one end of the spectrum, an officer we interviewed described the current legislation”—

that is, the existing legislation, not this Bill—

“as providing ‘an arsenal’ of weapons for the police to use, including many appropriate for use in the context of disruptive protests. Consequently, that interviewee”—

a police officer—

“and many others saw no need for change. Arguing against the proposal for a new stop and search power (Home Office proposal 5) another officer stated that ‘a little inconvenience is more acceptable than a police state’.”

That is a policeman speaking. His Majesty’s inspectorate said:

“We agree with this sentiment.”

His Majesty’s inspectorate, with all its knowledge—much greater than that in the civil service and the Home Office—think that the proposal is unnecessary and that to keep it is to veer towards a police state. On that basis alone, I say to the Minister, please think again about getting rid of the amendment.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis). Our view remains that, despite the best efforts of the other place, the Bill continues to represent a draconian and utterly unjustified attack on protest rights. It is fair to acknowledge that the Government have given some ground, but it is far from enough, so we will vote against a number of the Government’s motions to disagree.

Let me deal first with no-suspicion stop and search, in clause 11. It is horribly ironic that as part of a Bill which the Home Office claims—unconvincingly—is designed to tackle “dangerous and highly disruptive” tactics, the Home Office itself is turning to one of the most dangerous and highly disruptive police tactics: suspicionless stop and search. It is a tactic that achieves next to nothing, yet causes considerable harm, including shocking racial disparities—a fact which I do not think the Government have properly acknowledged during the course of the Bill’s passage.

The profoundly negative impact of stop and search on individuals and on community faith in the police came across loud and clear to me as a member of the Home Affairs Committee when we heard evidence as part of our “The Macpherson Report: Twenty Years On” inquiry. Nobody with reasonable knowledge of the Macpherson report, numerous subsequent inspection reports, or the Home Affairs Committee report could responsibly think that expanding no-suspicion stop and search is a sensible way to go, or the answer to any of our problems. Our Committee report warned of the dangers of such search powers resulting in injustice and undermining the legitimacy that is fundamental to the model of policing by consent. In doing so, we echoed earlier inspectorate reports and the words of the former Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), who in 2014 spoke about the huge damage done to the relationship between the police and the public when innocent people are stopped and searched for no good reason.

Similarly, when looking at the Bill, the Joint Committee on Human Rights—we will hear from its Chair, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), shortly—objected to these powers. We fully support the Joint Committee’s conclusions on the inherent risk of arbitrary and discriminatory use, and the point that post-exercise accountability is simply not enough. The Committee rightly highlighted that such powers have been used only for really significant and serious offences, such as terrorism or serious violence. Now, the Government want to use them for non-violent activities that are only just now being made criminal offences. The question is: what comes next? It is a very, very slippery slope and a totally inappropriate use of such powers.

The trigger for the powers is also ridiculously low: it could be the possibility that someone somewhere is seriously annoying or inconveniencing somebody else—the public nuisance offence—or that somebody somewhere could lock on to a fence or a gate in a way that is capable of causing more than minor disruption to two people. Suddenly, the whole neighbourhood can be searched in the name of stopping that serious annoyance or the more than minor disruption for two people. The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden quoted the police officer who told His Majesty’s inspectorate that

“a little inconvenience is more acceptable than a police state”.

That is absolutely spot-on. In short, it is a totally ludicrous proposal of dubious consistency with human rights law. It is similarly ludicrous and disproportionate that the penalty will put at risk of imprisonment completely innocent people who simply challenge an officer over an asserted use of a blanket power. That is a dangerous road to go down.

Turning to serious disruption prevention orders, we acknowledge again that the Government have come some way in diluting these highly objectional orders made otherwise than on conviction, but we remain of the view that the whole idea of SDPOs is utterly Kafkaesque and threatens an unjustified infringement on the right to protest of huge numbers of people each and every year. We support the critique provided by Lord Anderson in the other place. It is not long since terrorism prevention and investigation measures were reluctantly introduced, which see significant infringements of a person’s liberty without the use of a criminal court to protect the public from a risk of terrorism. Recently, this House gave cautious support for state threat prevention and investigation measures, but the application of similar ideas, not for the purposes of countering terrorism or espionage, but in the field of protest, is utterly disproportionate and unnecessary. The nature of the SDPO is less defined and lacks similar oversight, limitations or protections compared even with TPIMs or STPIMs, and that is extraordinary. The possibility of a prison sentence for a breach is ridiculous, and the trigger for the imposition of an SDPO is many times lower. Again, the question is: where next? It is a slippery slope indeed. The police do not ask for these powers, and the whole notion should be removed from the Bill.

Finally, we support new clause 1, which seeks to clearly define the meaning of serious disruption and put an appropriate threshold on it. That definition is crucial for a number of other offences and powers. The Government amendment in lieu puts in place so low a

[Stuart C. McDonald]

threshold that we would prefer no definition at all. If this Government want serious harm simply to be “more than minor”, that triggers all sorts of crazy and unacceptable consequences. Crimes could be committed simply because two people or an organisation had to face moderate or even moderate to minor disruption. Frankly, it is such a wishy-washy low bar that the Bill would be better off with no definition at all. Our view remains that this whole Bill is rotten, overblown, unwelcome and a dangerous threat to human rights, perhaps a bit like the Government themselves. It is a dreadful attack on rights, and it is also dreadful that the constitution allows it to happen. Anything that waters it down is welcome, but in reality the whole Bill should go altogether.

Sir Charles Walker: I rise in support of Lords amendments 6 and 20 and to urge the Government not to strike them out. I received some excellent briefings, as many hon. and right hon. Members did, from Big Brother Watch and Liberty, supporting the arguments that will be made this afternoon as to why Lords amendments 6 and 20 should be retained, but actually I found an even better briefing in support of those amendments, and it was provided by the Whips Office.

In “Chamber Brief: Public Order Bill”, the Whips make the best argument possible for retaining these two amendments. If I may, I will just quickly read it out. The brief states:

“Lords amendment 6 removes clause 11: power to stop and search without suspicion from the Bill.”

That sounds an outstanding thing to do. It continues:

“This would mean senior police officers would not be able to give an authorisation allowing a constable in uniform to conduct a suspicion-less stop and search of a person or vehicle”.

That sounds excellent. I do not want suspicion-less stop and searches. It sounds extraordinary that anyone in this House would support suspicion-less stop and searches. In fact, I am surprised that the Whips in my party are requesting colleagues to strike out Lords amendment 6 in relation to suspicion-less stop and searches. When I am going about my business, I do not want to be stopped by a police officer and asked about my business. When I say to the police officer, “Why are you stopping me?”, it seems pretty odd that they can say, “I have not really got a reason to stop you, it is just that I can.”

The Whips’ brief, or the Government’s brief passed through the Whips Office, has a wonderful bit of doublespeak at the end of the paragraph. It states:

“Removal of this clause from the Bill reduces the tools available for the police to use when responding to serious disruption and the Government cannot support it”.

The police do not have these tools yet, so how can the amendment reduce the tools available? That does not make any sense at all.

In promoting their position that Lords amendment 20 should be struck out, the Government say:

“Lords amendment 20 removes clause 20: serious disruption prevention orders made otherwise than on conviction entirely from the Bill. This would mean that an order could not be made by a magistrates court on application by a relevant chief officer of police. It is important that the police have the power to seek an order on application, rather than solely at the point of conviction.”

I understand that, when someone is convicted, the police might have a point of view, but to begin placing restrictions on people before they have been convicted of any crime strikes me as somewhat unBritish.

4 pm

The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp): There is some factual confusion about this, and I am grateful for the opportunity to clear that up. In the other place, the Lords made an amendment to clause 19, which said that the orders could be made without a conviction. The Government accept that amendment—we do not seek to overturn it—and we accept that a conviction is required before an SDPO can be made. Clause 20 is rather misleadingly titled, because it implies that an SDPO can be made without a conviction. If Members read the clause, however, they will see, now that we have accepted the amendment to clause 19, that it applies to circumstances in which there has been a conviction and the police wish to apply to the court for an SDPO at a later date, which will still be after a conviction has been made, so we have conceded the point that my hon. Friend is making. It is rather confusing because the title of clause 20 is a bit confusing, but we have conceded that point.

Sir Charles Walker: I am relieved to hear that.

Mr David Davis: The Minister is quite right—that describes exactly what the Government are doing—but he has left out one thing: the conviction is up to five years before. Usually in British law, convictions are spent after a certain period. Non-violent convictions are all spent after one year, but the conviction for causing a nuisance will last five years.

Sir Charles Walker: We are so lucky to benefit from my right hon. Friend’s wisdom, which has been built up over a 30-year period, and I thank him for making that important point.

I know that you want Members to make brief contributions, Madam Deputy Speaker, so I will conclude. We are at this point, because we criminalised protest during the covid pandemic, and the Chamber did not push back when the Executive did that. We are paying the price. It is all very well being wise after the event. I have always believed that protest was a right, but I was mistaken because rights cannot be taken away from people. Actually, protest is a freedom, and we discovered that during the covid pandemic, when people up and down the country gathered in small town centres and village squares to protest at the restriction on their freedom, perhaps to earn a living as artists and performers. They were often rounded up by the police and arrested. At the time, many of us warned that once this poison was in the country’s bloodstream it would be difficult to get it out. I am deeply disappointed that the Chamber went missing in action for so long. We allowed the Executive, as I say, to get away with appalling abuses of our unwritten constitution, and we are now paying the price for that. I do not think that we should do that, and I will certainly vote against the Government’s attempts to strike out the Lords amendment.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): There is lots to consider today. I share the concerns that have been expressed about things like stop and search

and locking in. Those things go too far. I want to concentrate on Lords amendment 5, which would introduce an

“Offence of interference with access to or provision of abortion services”,

which is a perfectly sensible thing to do. The Lords, particularly the Conservative peer, Baroness Sugg, have done a great job in tackling what are called, rather clunkily in clause 9, buffer zones, and making them into safe access zones. I therefore urge colleagues to support Lords amendment 5 unamended tonight.

Were it not for the actions of anti-choicers, the amendment would not be necessary at all, but something must be done when, every week nationwide, 2,000 women seeking lawful medical treatment find themselves impeded on their way to the clinic door by unwanted individuals. Now, those individuals would not call themselves protesters; they may just be silently holding a sign, lining the pavement with images or holding rosary beads, but given the slogans on those signs, and the ghoulish images of foetuses, and given that the whole intent of all of that is to shame these women, guilt trip them and stop them exercising their bodily rights—

Eddie Hughes: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dr Huq: I don't want to eat up time. There are a lot of people and I'm in the middle of a sentence, so, no, I will not give way right now.

Eddie Hughes: Will the hon. Lady give way at the end of her sentence?

Dr Huq: I know that the hon. Gentleman is jumping up and down, thinking, “Red light here,” but if he will allow me to develop my point, I will be happy to debate with him.

Okay, these individuals do not call themselves protesters—they are not those angry young radicals—but the whole point of these actions is to deter, to dissuade and to knock off course those women who have made a very difficult decision, and probably the most agonising decision of their lives. We could therefore call it obstruction.

In 2018 in Ealing, my home patch, I went and saw the evidence logs of our Marie Stopes clinic. It was not just women users of the clinic but women practitioners—medical professionals—describing how they had to run a daily gauntlet just to get to work or to have a completely legal procedure.

Five years ago, our council became the first in the country to introduce a public spaces protection order buffer zone, and protest still occurs every day. I heard the catastrophising of the hon. Member for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer), but he should come to Ealing and see that it has just moved a set number of metres down the road so that it is not right in front of the clinic gate and women can get in and have their procedure without people in their face and without any kind of influences.

Within that, I include Sister Supporter, a pressure group known for its members' pink high-vis jackets. Towards the end of 2018, they were accompanying women into the clinic because people felt afraid to go on their own. It is an upsetting enough experience as it is without all these layers on top.

Ian Paisley: Will the hon. Member give way?

Dr Huq: Okay, I will give way now.

Ian Paisley: I thank the hon. Member for giving way. The issue of “for or against abortion” is really not what we are debating here today, but I want to know, loud and clear, whether the hon. Member believes that, if a person is engaged in silent prayer, that person should be arrested.

Dr Huq: Well, I would say to the hon. Gentleman that there is a time and a place for everything. Regarding prayer, does it have to take place literally outside the gates of the clinic at the moment that these women, in their hour of need, are seeking their treatment? Is it necessary for it to take place at that place at that moment? I would say that, no, it is not.

We had this argument over the vaccination centres, didn't we? The anti-vax people would try to deter people from getting in the door. Everyone should be able to seek lawful medical treatment—this procedure has been legal in this country since 1967—without interference. That is what I believe. It is public highway issue as well.

As I say, Sister Supporter, our local campaign group, wishes that it did not have to be there—and it does not, now. The problem is that only three other local authorities have followed that PSPO route, because they have enough on their plate without that onerous process and without the threat of a legal challenge. In Ealing, it has been upheld three times—in the High Court, the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court.

The other week, the Prime Minister was challenged at that Dispatch Box—I had a question that week as well—by someone raising a case from Birmingham. He said that, yes, we do accept the freedom of thought, conscience and belief, but that, at the same time, there are freedoms of women to seek legal treatment unimpeded and uninterfered with, and we have to balance the two.

Carla Lockhart (Upper Bann) (DUP): Will the hon. Member give way?

Dr Huq: I want to carry on for a minute, actually.

Some of the tactics that such people employ include live-streaming, filming and uploading to Facebook, despite there sometimes being a violent ex-partner in the background. I do not disagree with praying or informing, as I think people call it, but there is a time and a place for everything. That informing should take place at the GP surgery down the line.

The hon. Member for Northampton South said that the police are being made into a laughing stock, but our police in Ealing welcome the measure because it frees them from patrolling two different groups outside the clinic, so they can fight real crime. There is real crime out there.

Anyone should be able to use medical services without navigating an obstacle course of people trying to impose their view of what is right on the process to dissuade and deter. Even the reviled Iranian regime got rid of its morality police, so why do we allow them here?

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): The hon. Member is making a good and powerful point. Several people have written to me about the Bill with varying views. Does she agree that there is a huge contradiction

[Christine Jardine]

in people saying, “We have a right to protest in buffer zones,” yet denying women the freedom of choice for themselves? At that point, it is not protesting but bullying and harassment. That is the difference.

Dr Huq: I completely agree. These things are always subjective, so someone might say, “I’m just praying. I’ve just got some rosary beads,” but the woman seeking the treatment is traumatised for life. It is often a traumatic experience in the first place.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): The hon. Lady is making an excellent speech. Does she share my frustration at the number of men who have stood up in this Chamber and pontificated when they will never have to make that choice? They are telling women that they should put up with being harassed when they are just seeking healthcare. [Interruption.] I have heard a number of men in this Chamber shouting down women, but perhaps they should pipe down and listen to our perspectives, because none of them will ever have to go through it.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. It is important that we do not personalise the issue. That goes for everybody in the Chamber.

Dr Huq: I completely accept what the hon. Lady just said. As a woman, Madam Deputy Speaker, you know that, if any woman present in the Chamber were walking down a dark alley, they would shudder if someone was there. That feeling is magnified x amount of times for women having that difficult and distressing procedure when people determined to stop them having a termination are in their path. Those people can have their say, but let us move them away from the clinic door.

Buffer zones are not outlandish. They exist in France, Spain, Canada, Australia and some US states. In Ireland, they are legislating on them at the moment. We will be out of step with the rest of the UK, because a Bill is being brought in in Northern Ireland and a private Member’s Bill will become law this year in Scotland.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer), because His Majesty the King was visiting my constituency today, so I arrived back too late to hear him propose the amendment. It is worth pointing out, however, that both Houses have now voted heavily in favour of the principle of buffer zones. We have to understand the passions behind what is proposed, but it is not really a relevant amendment that advances the argument. In fact, it tries to set the argument back against what both Houses have already decided.

Dr Huq: The hon. Gentleman and knight of the realm makes a completely incontestable point. When we last voted on it in this place, we voted in favour by almost 3:1. In the other place, the vote was taken on voices, because the support was overwhelming. Hon. Members should not fall for a wrecking amendment; they should reject it.

This is about not the rights and wrongs of abortion—that question was settled in 1967—but the rights of women to go about their lawful daily business. It is not even a religious issue: the Bishop of Manchester in the other place made a barnstorming speech on the day.

As we said after the tragic killing of Sarah Everard, she was only walking home. Women should be allowed to use our pavements unimpeded. We saw the re-sentencing of her killer yesterday, so it all came back, and sadly, Sabina Nessa and Zara Aleena have been killed since. We cannot stand by, do nothing and say, “This is all okay.” It is obviously not, when 10,000 women a year are affected. Who could argue with safe access? I urge hon. Members to support Lords amendment 5 unamended.

Sir John Hayes: I was elected to this place in a free and fair election, and I come here and say not what I am asked or told to, but what I believe. Similarly, my constituents make representations to me in a free and open way, fearlessly. They sometimes agree with me and they sometimes disagree. Part of the glory of our democracy is that we can exchange views, we can learn from others, and we can disagree openly, fairly and, as I have said, without fear. That would once have been taken as read as a way of describing not just this place and our representative democracy, but the character of a free society in which we are all proud to live.

4.15 pm

At least, I could have said that until very recently, but now all is altered. In our universities, women are intimidated simply for saying that sex is a biological fact. Academics are intimidated—sometimes silenced—for championing our history and our heroes. Worst of all—this brings me to the amendment from my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer)—we now have people arrested for praying. They are interrogated by the police; asked what they are praying about and what they are thinking. As my hon. Friend said, this is dystopia. It is like a mix of Huxley, Philip Dick and Orwell.

It is unthinkable that we should be living in a society where what people think has become a matter of police interest. But more than that, it is not merely a matter of police inquiry, for the lady concerned was arrested, charged and went to court. Of course, in the end she was acquitted, but that is not the point. The very fact that she could be arrested for what she thought or prayed for is—in a much overused word—chilling.

Sir Julian Lewis: Surely the point that we have to be careful about is the use of words—which the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq), whom I regard as a personal friend, did use—such as “impede”. Thinking and praying is not impeding. Actually shouting, livestreaming and doing offensive things to people who are going to have a procedure is impeding. If I understand correctly the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer), he is talking only about things that do not impede. I think that is right, and that is the only basis on which I could vote for his amendment.

Sir John Hayes: My right hon. Friend will be pleased—but not surprised, given that he knows me so well—to hear that I entirely agree with him. I would not support loud, aggressive protests outside abortion clinics. They do take place in some other countries, but the evidence that they take place in this country is extremely thin. Indeed, a previous Health Secretary conducted a review to establish that fact. If that was in any way likely or

possible, or was made more possible by this amendment, I would not be speaking in support of it, so my right hon. Friend is entirely right. This is about peaceful, silent protests.

In moving this Bill at its inception, the Government rightly said they were doing so because they were against violent disruptive protests. They had in mind people gluing themselves to roads, and stopping ambulances that were rushing to save lives. I support this Bill. I support its objectives because that kind of disruptive and violent protest is incompatible with a free, open and peaceful society. But it is extraordinary that, simultaneously, having said that they were in favour of peaceful protests—the defence being, “We are in favour of an open society, different opinions, the right to put your case by protesting peacefully”—the Government are now failing to support an amendment, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South because the Government refused to table it, to protect people’s right to protest in the very peaceful and indeed silent way that a few weeks ago they were saying they were prepared to defend.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: It is not a matter of interpretation, because it seems to me that this amendment would create exactly the kind of conflict and disruption to public peace that it is intended to avoid? If somebody kneels ostentatiously to pray in front of someone on their way to an abortion clinic, what is that intended to do? This amendment says that

“such communication or prayer shall not, without more, be taken to be—

(a) influencing any person’s decision”,

but why else would somebody kneel down and pray in front of a woman on her way to an abortion clinic unless it was intended to influence that person’s decision? There is a balance to be struck between the rights of people who pray, like my right hon. Friend and me, and the rights of people trying to avail themselves of a perfectly legal service to which they have a right.

Sir John Hayes: I do not know how often my hon. Friend prays—maybe more often than I do, although my need to do so is probably greater—but he must understand that prayer does two things: it sends a message, one hopes, to the Almighty; and it provides solace for the person praying. So the person praying outside the clinic may well be sending a message, but that message is just as likely to be transcendental as to be intended for any individual in proximity.

The idea that we should interrupt the relationship between an individual and their God seems to me to be pretty monstrous, particularly as amendment (a) states specifically that any activity, communication or prayer shall not influence any person’s decision or, more especially, instruct or impede any person. This is not about interfering with another. Rather, it is about expressing a view to oneself, to the Lord and perhaps to others; but that could surely be said of any prayer at any time. Are we going to arrest people in other public places? Once this is allowed and the police are permitted to apprehend people for what they think and what they are praying about, why not arrest them in other public places? Why does this have to apply only to abortion clinics? Once we open this door, why would the police not arrest

people outside mosques or temples, or in any other public space where they are praying to illustrate an opinion—or indeed, as I have said, to express it not horizontally but vertically, to a greater power above us?

Christine Jardine: This is an extremely important point. I do not think anyone in this House wants to restrict anyone’s right to pray, but we are trying to differentiate here and consider the impact of that action on the women who are going in for a very traumatic experience. Many of them will be grieving and many will have been through a traumatic experience to get them to this point, only to then be presented with someone telling them that what they are doing is wrong, increasing that trauma. Regardless of the intention of the person praying, which I would defend forever, the impact on the women is the problem.

Sir John Hayes: But in a free society the impact we make on others by our sentiments, by what we do, say and, indeed, by what we pray about, is the inevitable consequence of the openness that I would have thought all of us in this place would celebrate. In this case, the amendment states specifically that we should not influence or obstruct, but the more general context in which we are having this debate is a world in which the ability to express a view that others might find offensive or unreasonable is being curbed every single day as our freedom is being eroded, and all the things we hold dear put at risk.

Several hon. Members rose—

Sir John Hayes: I will not give way again; I see that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, if not yet on your feet, are edging forward in your Chair, and so asking me to bring my remarks to a conclusion.

Freedom is not just about the capacity to hear from others with whom we agree; a free and open society is one in which we hear from those with whom we do not agree. That freedom is at risk. Amendment (a) is most reasonable, and I urge the House to accept it with these final words from the author and statesman John Buchan:

“You think that a wall as solid as the earth separates civilisation from barbarism. I tell you the division is a thread, a sheet of glass.”

Today I will vote against barbarism by voting for this amendment. I mission everyone in this Chamber to exercise their conscience and vote for it with me.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I will confine my comments to the amendments that touch on the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, which I chair. We did not look at the debate on abortion buffer zones because that was not part of the original Bill, so I will not comment on that. In general terms, some of the points made by the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) could be carried across. I could very well ask of him why, if that is what he so clearly believes, he would support a power to stop and search without reasonable suspicion? So it cuts both ways.

However, I will confine my comments to support for Lords amendments 1, 6 to 9, 20, 21, 23, 27, 28, 31, 32 and 33, which can basically be grouped into suspicion and stop and search, serious disruption prevention orders,

[Joanna Cherry]

and the meaning of the phrase “serious disruption”. I will speak to the Joint Committee’s report on our legislative scrutiny of the Bill, which was published on 8 June last year. It was a unanimous report of our cross-party Committee, which of course contains both MPs and peers.

The right to peaceful protest is a cornerstone of our democracy, which should be championed and protected rather than stifled. The Joint Committee concluded that while the stated intention behind the Bill was to strengthen police powers to tackle dangerous and highly disruptive protest tactics, its measures went well beyond that to the extent that we feel the Bill poses an unacceptable threat to the fundamental right to engage in peaceful protest. We have heard speeches about the historic basis of that right, and of course it is also protected in modern times under article 10 of the European convention on human rights, which deals with freedom of speech, and article 11, which deals with freedom of association.

In our report, we recommended that the power to stop and search without reasonable suspicion should be removed from the Bill. Other hon. Members have spoken about that in some detail. Basically, what we said was that the power to stop and search without reasonable suspicion inevitably gives rise to a risk of arbitrary or discriminatory use, and that it is disproportionate and inconsistent with the right to engage in peaceful protest. As we heard from other hon. Members, the police themselves said it is counterproductive and I do not understand that it is a power the police actually want as a whole. Lords amendments 6 to 9 take that out of the Bill, and I think that should be supported by this House.

Chris Philp: I am extremely grateful to the hon. and learned Lady for giving way. On a point of clarification, clause 11, prior to amendment by the Lords, states that although an individual does not have to be subject to suspicion before an officer can activate this section, the officer has to “reasonably believe” that a number of offences may be committed. So it is not a wholly unconstrained power to search. That reasonable suspicion in clause 11(1) does have to be engaged.

Joanna Cherry: I am not sure the Minister is right about that. I think what he is trying to say is that the police officer could have a highly subjective view prior to stopping, and a highly subjective view is not a reasonable suspicion. We took all these matters into account in our report.

Stuart C. McDonald: I think what the Minister is trying to point out is that before the 24-hour period where the suspicionless stop and search can come into force, there has to be a reasonable belief that somebody somewhere in the locality may commit one of these wishy-washy offences. If that happens, then everybody in that locality can be subject to suspicionless stop and search. I am afraid that is just not an adequate answer to the fact that everybody in that locality could be subject to suspicionless stop and search. It is nonsensical.

Joanna Cherry: The Minister must know that we are still bound by the European convention on human rights. Clearly, from what the Home Secretary said earlier this afternoon, some Government Members are

trying to find a pretext to take us out of the convention, but we are still bound by it just now. The Minister must know that in order to interfere with freedom of assembly or freedom of association, under article 11 the interference has to be lawful, necessary and proportionate. What my hon. Friend just described is not lawful, necessary and proportionate.

Chris Philp *rose*—

Joanna Cherry: The Minister will get to speak at the end. I do not want to take up too much time as I have already spoken for five minutes and I do not want to upset Madam Deputy Speaker. The Minister can take the tenor of the comments so far across the House, including from the Government Benches. People are not happy about the power to stop and search without reasonable suspicion. The cross-party Committee of MPs and peers shared that unhappiness.

4.30 pm

We also recommended the removal from the Bill of the power to impose serious disruption prevention disorders. We did so on the basis that they are an unnecessary response to disruptive protest given the host of other powers that the police already have, and because they could result in disproportionate interference and outright bans on the exercise of people’s rights under articles 10 and 11. The Lords amendments on this issue go a long way towards meeting our recommendation, principally by removing from the Bill SDPOs that are imposed otherwise than on conviction, and by removing the power to monitor recipients electronically. We support that. We see the Government’s proposed alternative amendments as pretty minor and do not think they will be sufficient to protect article 10 and 11 rights. We would like SDPOs to go completely from the Bill but we think that the Lords amendments make quite a significant difference, and therefore are worthy of common support.

Finally, on the meaning of “serious disruption” in the Bill, the Joint Committee on Human Rights noted a lack of any definition of that term, and how that created uncertainty that risks a breach of the rights of those affected by it. We recommended a definition of serious disruption be added to the Bill, which is not dissimilar to that in Lords amendment 1. It is important that any definition of serious disruption should genuinely confine the powers in the Bill to actions causing serious disruption. Anything else would risk disproportionate interference with the right to protest under articles 10 and 11 of the convention. The Government’s proposed amendment in lieu would insert a definition that is not suited to the term that it defines. It does not define serious disruption and it would reduce the threshold to such an extent that almost any disruption in day-to-day activity could justify police action against peaceful protesters. That would not comply with the convention on human rights. I think I will leave it at that.

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): I have spoken in favour of this legislation in each of its stages thus far. I would like to continue to express my support for the Bill and the principles behind it, and also place on the record my appreciation for the work that so many colleagues have done. As a relative newbie, it has been a learning experience to hear the expertise

that has been brought to bear to ensure that, as this legislation passes through Parliament, it has become more focused and more able to deliver the intended outcomes.

This morning I visited my constituent Mr Bhalla at his home because, for the second time, his car had been stolen from his driveway. He wanted to express his frustration at having been a victim of a serious and very costly crime for the second time. Often, when we debate in the House we focus on a great deal of the detail, but when constituents have been a victim of crime, we feel a great desire to ensure that Parliament takes advantage of every possible measure. My constituent certainly expressed his view robustly to me—he would like to see suspicionless stop and search for anybody on his road, wherever they might happen to live. He would like the strongest possible measures to be taken.

We need to achieve an appropriate balance between protecting the right to exercise free speech and to protest, on the one hand, and preventing unreasonable disruption to our constituents' lives on the other. I represent an outer London constituency, and one of my reasons for speaking in favour of the Bill at previous stages was the disruption, frustration and difficulties that have been caused for my constituents while they are trying to go about their normal daily lives.

Personally, I have a great deal of sympathy with some protesters, such as those who have been camping out and seeking to disrupt work on HS2, which is causing huge difficulties in my constituency and which many of my constituents continue to oppose. However, I recognise that for the thousands of constituents who travel by car or on public transport and have found that as a result of peaceful but extremely disruptive protests they cannot get to work, attend medical appointments, visit family members or get their children to school, it is clear that the balance needs to be shifted. Their interests, and those of other law-abiding people who are perfectly reasonably exercising their rights and their need to go about their daily business, must be appropriately protected.

It seems to me that greater focus on the definition of serious disruption will make the powers in the Bill more legally effective and enforceable. We have all had experiences of supporting things and then discovering that in the real world they do not work quite as well as we had hoped, so I very much welcome amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment 1, which will bring such a focus and will ensure that the powers in the Bill work effectively to remedy the impact of serious disruption that is not reasonable, while maintaining free speech.

I also welcome amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment 17 on the protection of journalists. We all value the media's ability to scrutinise the work of the Government and the various arms of the state, as we did during the covid era when it was difficult for this House to do so. It is enormously helpful that we now have greater clarity.

Let us consider what will happen once the Bill has made its way through this House. I was struck by what my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) said about the history of the right to peaceful protest. Most importantly, he pointed out that legislation is all interpreted by the courts.

As a magistrate in north-west London, I recall people being brought in who had been stopped and searched and were found to be in possession of bladed articles.

I remember one case of a man who explained to the court that he was a carpet fitter, that the bladed articles were the tools he needed to fit carpets, and that he travelled around on public transport to appointments to fit them at various locations. He provided appropriate evidence to demonstrate it, so the court acquitted him. In other cases involving similar offences, it was clear that the individuals concerned were seeking to do harm to others, perhaps in connection with drug dealing, so the court took a different view. It is always valuable to remember that interpretation and enforcement will be down to juries of our peers, to magistrates or to judges. We have learned to place a great deal of faith in our judicial system's ability to interpret "reasonableness" in a way that reflects the expectations and aspirations of all our constituents.

Finally, I join several colleagues in expressing my continuing support for Lords amendment 5 on buffer zones. I think it right that the House should agree to it. I have listened carefully to the views of many colleagues, and I understand the need to ensure that those of a religious faith have the freedom to express their views. None the less, access to medical and clinical services should be available to all our constituents without undue disruption. It seems to me that their lordships have done a good job of refining what we mean in the drafting of the Bill. This House would be wise to welcome the amendment; I shall certainly vote in support.

Ian Paisley: I commend the way in which the hon. Member for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer) spoke to the amendments; I think that he served the House extremely well.

Let me begin by saying that I am opposed to harassment. I think it intolerable for a woman to feel that she is being harassed, and indeed for a man to feel that he is being harassed. We were given a demonstration of harassment in the Chamber earlier today when a female Member came in, told male Members to "pipe down" because essentially this was none of their business, and then beetled out. That is harassment according to any definition of it, and it is wrong and should be called out as such. This is a good debate, and it is important for us to have it. Debate is what the Chamber is for, and we should not be afraid of combative ideas, but telling Members to pipe down just because they are male is not an argument that should be entertained in this place. So harassment should be called out, and we should not be afraid of doing that.

I object to, for instance, the harassment of women who go into abortion clinics if that is their free choice and they wish to do it. I am not advocating that in any way, but harassment cuts both ways. It is important that those who wish to pray, to express their identity or to make points that are fair in a non-combative way should be encouraged to do so. A Home Office review published in 2018 found that many protesters in the UK—it identified some of the places involved—were simply praying, sometimes displaying banners and sometimes distributing literature. Is the proportionate response to that introducing a law that essentially says, "You cannot pray silently in public"? That seems to be what the Government are saying today.

Ashley Dalton (West Lancashire) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Ian Paisley: I will make this point, and then I will give way.

We are all aware of the Bible story about Daniel daring to pray and being put in jail—

Chris Philp: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Ian Paisley: Of course I will give way to the Minister.

Chris Philp: The Government are not saying anything about this matter. It is a free vote, and there is no Government position on the “buffer zone” amendment.

Ian Paisley: I look forward to the Minister joining me in the Lobby this evening.

Whenever we walk into the Palace of Westminster, we walk beneath a massive portrait of Moses by Benjamin West. We walk through St Stephen’s Hall, and what is St Stephen’s Hall? It is a church. We walk over the catacombs under which is another church. We come to this place—to the “mother of Parliaments”—and debate a piece of legislation that essentially says, “If you dare to pray in a certain part of this Christian nation, in silence, you will be arrested.”

Sir Bernard Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Ashley Dalton: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Ian Paisley: I want to make this point. I will give way later.

I think that Members need to stop and seriously ask themselves whether that is the sort of law that they wish to pass. The Government have an opportunity here. Is the Minister willing to say—perhaps he will want to intervene at this point—that the Government would exclude silent prayer from the Bill as an indication that the liberty of freedom of thought, of the freedom to have an opinion in one’s head, will be allowed? That would be the moderate thing for them to do.

Freedom of thought is a right enshrined in article 9 of the European convention on human rights and in article 18 of the international covenant on civil and political rights, while freedom of opinion is enshrined in article 10 of the convention. These are international rights which we should all support and defend to the very end, because they are about our right to think, to express ourselves and to maintain an opinion that we hold dear. Even if it is an objectionable opinion—even if a person does not believe in the God to whom we are praying—we are entitled to have that opinion, and to prevent that in any way is to remove a legitimate right. However, we have heard a justification in the House, and I really had to pinch myself when I heard it. The justification was that we should limit our thought and limit our opinion.

Ashley Dalton: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Ian Paisley: I am going to make this point. I promise I will give way after that.

The hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) stated very clearly that praying was not proper in certain places. The hon. Member is entitled to that opinion, but where is not the proper place to pray? Is here not the proper place to pray—will that be the next argument? Where ultimately is not the proper place to pray?

4.45 pm

Ashley Dalton: I would like the hon. Member to help me understand why it is particularly important that prayer must be carried out openly, publicly and ostentatiously. Most often, if we pray, no one else will know that we are doing it. He briefly referred to the Bible and to Daniel in the lion’s den. I draw his attention to Matthew, chapter 6, verses 5 and 6:

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others...But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.”

Is it not possible to do that privately, without intimidating others by doing it ostentatiously and publicly?

Ian Paisley: The gospel of Matthew is a wonderful gospel—as a son of the manse, I know a little bit about this—but the reference I made was to Daniel, who was praying privately in his home. I did not talk about ostentatious public prayer. Maybe the Member should have used their ears and listened to the point that I made, which was about silent prayer and about freedom of thought in someone’s head, not freedom of outward expression. If the Member had listened, she would have got the answer to her point.

Despite the level of crime across this society—I think there were over 500 knife crimes last year—are we actually going to ask the police to get engaged and be detained in questioning people about what they are thinking in certain parts of the United Kingdom? That is a complete waste of police resources and police time, and it should not be done. When hon. Members stand up in this House and demand more police action in the future, it should be pointed out to them that constraining the police in this way and saying that they must chase after people who are silently thinking things, silently worshipping or silently praying is a total waste of police resources.

In Northern Ireland we have brought in a safe access zone law. I do not like that law—it was brought in by the Northern Ireland Assembly while I was a Member of this House—but it states that there must not be an unnecessary or disproportionate response from the police. Unfortunately, what we are doing in this House is bringing in disproportionate actions by the police when we should be moving away from them. Northern Ireland’s law gives the police at the right to use discretion and take steps to calm a protest, as opposed to stopping a protest. It also says that the Department of Health must maintain and regularly publish a list of all potential premises where the clinics could be taking place, so that people are aware of where they are so that they cannot, for example, be caught out wearing a T-shirt or a badge, or driving a car with a bumper sticker on it, in an area where it might give someone offence.

Eddie Hughes: The point that the hon. Gentleman has just made is incredibly important. In the circumstances that I was talking about previously, the lady was arrested in Birmingham and the police arrive to interrogate and subsequently arrest her. Given the other crimes that were going on in Birmingham at that time, it is important to see that the police had clearly determined that the most important thing they had to do at that particular time was not to deal with knife crime or with people stealing tools out of other people’s vans to stop them earning a living, but to arrest and interrogate a woman

who was silently praying outside a clinic that was closed. Surely that shows a sense of complete disproportionality on the part of the police.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. It is important that interventions are short, and I know that the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) will want to come to the conclusion of his remarks now, as he has been speaking for 10 minutes.

Ian Paisley: I will conclude now, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I agree with the point that the hon. Member has made. The arrest of Isabel Vaughan-Spruce was atrocious. It sends out a terrible message to women and to anyone who wishes to engage in silent prayer in this nation. I am glad that that attempt at a conviction was overturned by the court and thrown out. It is unfortunate that she has been arrested again today by another police officer saying, “What are you thinking? What are you praying?” That is wrong, and we need to stand up against that sort of harassment.

Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con): I rise to speak to amendment (a) to Lords amendment 5.

I recognise that there is a genuine problem that the Bill and the Lords amendments seek to address, of harassment, intimidation and offensive behaviour directed at women going into abortion clinics. I recognise that this requires policing and that it is appropriate for the authorities to stop harassment and intimidation. This House and the other place have decided that additional legislation, on top of what is already on the statute book, is required to enable that additional policing. All the arguments made by the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq), who has campaigned so hard on this issue for so long, have been accepted by the House, and I do not think there is any particular value in unpicking her arguments. That debate has been had.

The question now before us, and the purpose of amendment (a) to Lords amendment 5, is about what is to happen in these safe access zones, as they are now to be called. I recognise that is the intention behind the Lords amendment, and the intention behind the original clause, but my concern is that, in asserting a general principle of something we do not want, and couching that desire in very broad terms, we are taking a momentous step. We are crossing an enormous river. The Rubicon was actually a very small stream, but it was a momentous step. When we criminalise prayer, private thought or, indeed, consensual conversations between two adults, we are doing something of enormous significance in our country and our democracy.

Cherilyn Mackrory (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): I agree with everything my hon. Friend says, but my concern is about the motivation for a person to silently pray there. What motivation do they have other than to be seen by a woman who is at her lowest ebb? It is not the best day of her life. In fact, it will be one of the worst days of her life.

Danny Kruger: I recognise that, but the difficulty is that none of us can know their motivation. I can accept that my hon. Friend’s judgment is that the motivation is pretty malign. The prayer might be well intentioned, but the attempt to dissuade a lady from accessing an abortion clinic is genuine. There is no doubt that is what

is happening. My concern is about the principle of this law, how it will be applied and the precedent it sets in our democracy.

My concern is that the Bill authorises the police to ask exactly the question raised by my hon. Friend. It authorises them to go up to a private citizen standing on a street corner, not overtly harassing anyone, and to ask the question that the police asked the lady in Birmingham, “What are you praying about? What is in your head at this time?” They could see that she was not doing anything offensive, but they concluded that she was probably thinking something of which they disapproved, so they took steps to arrest her. I think we are taking a very concerning step as a country in authorising the police to act in that way.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: I utterly respect the sincerity with which amendment (a) to Lords amendment 5 was moved and why my hon. Friend is supporting it. I am pleased to hear that the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) is against harassment, but that is the point of amendment (a). It does not say that any person engaged in consensual communication or silent prayer shall avoid harassment; it says that it shall not be taken as harassment. However ostentatiously someone is praying, or however aggressively they are seeking to open consensual communication with an individual going to a clinic, it shall not be taken to be harassment. It is a blank cheque for a person to behave in a harassing way, because they can defend themselves by saying, “Oh, but it says here that what I was doing shall not be taken as harassment.”

Danny Kruger: The behaviour that will not be taken as harassment is private prayer. Other actions that may be taken—obstructing a person walking down the street was what my hon. Friend suggested earlier—will be in scope. What should not be in scope is a person thinking something in their head. That is the only defence on which we are trying to insist, and I invite Members to consider whether they want to pass a law that will ban people from thinking something. Other forms of harassment or obstruction will be in scope of the law. So I do not think the intention is to stop people praying—I do not think that is what the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton, the Government or indeed any of us want to do. We need to send a clear signal of the intention of Parliament through this amendment, and I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer) for tabling it. I ask Members to consider that if they vote against it, they are voting to ban private prayer. Of course it is a special case and we are talking about tiny zones, and of course we can all sympathise with the intention of the clause, but the point is the principle of this—

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): When we legislate, being specific matters. So let us be clear: the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Northampton South is not about private prayer, but about “silent prayer”. Silent prayer can be done in somebody’s face, can it not, whether or not what the person praying is thinking is private in their head? That shows the challenge here. This is not actually about prayer; it is about where it is taking place. So will the hon. Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger) clarify, for the avoidance of doubt, that he has no problem with recognising that somebody praying in another person’s face, silent or not, is unwelcome?

Danny Kruger: The difficulty is with the private prayer—the silent prayer; that is what we are trying to protect. If the person is standing offensively in somebody's face and trying to obstruct their access, of course they will come within scope. We are trying to protect people such as the lady who was standing quietly at the side, praying to herself, as far as we know. She might have been thinking about her shopping, but that was what the police were interested in; she was asked, "What are you doing standing over here quietly?"

I am afraid to say that there was always going to be difficulty with this new law, because the police are going to be required to make all sorts of strange interpretations and judgments about why somebody is doing something. Nevertheless, in passing a law to create these zones we must consider people who are doing this utterly inoffensive thing, standing quietly at the side praying.

Dr Huq: Let me just give the hon. Gentleman the example of Ealing, where we have had our zone since 2018—this is now its sixth year. Only three breaches have occurred and none has resulted in a conviction, because these people are usually law-abiding. Only one came close—I think it is still being legislated on and is probably sub judice—because it was done as a stunt. In reality, these things do not occur. People can pray elsewhere, and every royal medical college, including the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, as well as the British Medical Association and all medical opinion support this measure.

Danny Kruger: Okay, well, I will wind up now, because I think the point has been well rehearsed. My concern is with the principle we are setting here. Of course, everyone must have sympathy with these women, and we need to protect them from harassment, but where does this lead and what we are doing by saying that people should not be allowed to pray quietly on their own?

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): Policing by consent is central to how our criminal justice system works in the UK and the authority by which officers wield the power given to them. That is why this issue is challenging and why we are having this debate. It is seen as being about balancing the rights of protest in this situation with other rights to go about everyday legitimate business. It is important to take a balanced and sensitive approach.

Several legal minds here are much greater than mine. I am not a qualified lawyer, but I am standing here as the only former police officer participating in this debate. I know who the other two former police officers are and they are not here. I have approached this debate, these clauses and the Lords amendments by thinking about what would happen if I, as a police officer, went to attend a "spontaneous protest", meaning that as a constable, the first person there, it would be on me to make the decisions about what was legitimate or not and about how I carried out my duties. I also thought about what would happen if I was part of a team of police officers policing a bigger protest, and about the instructions that I would be given by the silver and bronze commanders in relation to that protest and how they would tell me how to interpret the law.

I found it interesting when the Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire, who is no longer in his place, intervened on the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South

West (Joanna Cherry) to say that he would explain that this is confusing. Police officers are dealing with an ambiguity in the moment all the time. If we create legislation in this place that is confusing and if we have not provided clarity, it is not surprising that police officers will be found not to be applying the law correctly.

Interestingly, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), who is also no longer in his place, talked about the interviews that His Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and fire and rescue undertook with police officers. I cannot totally repeat what the former silver public order commander to whom I am married called this Bill, but I can say that it was a pile of something. I will leave Members to speculate on what else he said. These are complex decisions to be made in real time, regardless of rank. Policing by consent is how we ensure that we carry out our duties safely.

5 pm

Others have spoken about Lords amendment 5. It is not applicable in Scotland, and I look forward to similar legislation by means of a private Member's Bill. It is important that it is now perceived to be ECHR compliant. My party will not be whipped on the amendment, so it will be down to personal preference, but if as a police officer I was dealing with, for example, a case of harassment in which the allegation was racial in nature, I would listen to the victim in relation to how I applied the legislation and whether I would press for a charge. The tendency is towards how the victim or the person subject to the behaviour feels. If it is silent prayer that takes place outside an abortion clinic and women going into the clinic interpret it as harassing, that suggests to me that an offence has been committed and action needs to be taken.

On Lords amendment 1, the serious disruption definition is clear and, I would argue, more easily determined by a police officer in the course of their duties. Arguably, the Government's version of "more than minor" is more subjective and therefore more difficult for an officer to gauge. We are back to the skills, knowledge and behaviour of police officers and their capacity to deliver. My concern, as I have made clear throughout the passage of the Bill, including in Committee, is that we have put so much pressure and expectation on what we require police officers to do and this Bill will add another whole when—that is a Scottish word that means a load—of elements that they will require training to deliver. I continue to have concerns about the capacity to deliver that training and the ability to extract police officers to undergo that training so that they can implement the Bill. That is very problematic, and that is before we even come on to the issues of the erosion of trust that we have seen in the police service more generally in the past year.

On Lords amendment 6 and suspicionless stop and search, I will quote the words of Lord Paddick in the other place. He has handled with this Bill on behalf of the Liberal Democrats since Second Reading, and my colleagues and I are hugely grateful to him. He is a former Met commander and he knows what he is talking about. He said:

"Stop and search is a highly intrusive and potentially damaging tool if misused by the police. The fact that you are seven times more likely to be stopped and searched by the police if you are black than if you are white where the police require reasonable suspicion, and 14 times more likely where the police do not

require reasonable suspicion, presents a prima facie case that the police are misusing these powers.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 7 February 2023; Vol. 827, c. 1098.]

I understand that the House will not divide on Lords amendment 17, but it follows the arrest of journalists in Hertfordshire at a Just Stop Oil protest. If there is no need for the amendment, I would like to hear the Government outline what they will do to prevent the arrest of legitimate journalists and observers at protests in future. If we all care about democracy and freedom to protest and ensuring that those rights are applied, we need to have journalists and observers involved.

Chris Philp: The Government accept that protection for journalists might helpfully be set out, and that is why Government amendment (a) to Lords amendment 17 will substantively do what the Lords request, albeit in slightly different language.

Wendy Chamberlain: I am pleased to hear that.

If Lords amendment 1 is disagreed to and Government amendment (a) to it is passed, I would disagree with the broadening of the definition of “serious disruption”. Whatever the Government may think of protesters, they are not terrorists, and applying similar legislation where no offence is committed is simply wrong.

Chris Philp: As I said in my earlier intervention, the Government have accepted that serious disruption prevention orders can only be handed out by a court, following a conviction. The title of clause 20 is somewhat confusing, but we have accepted the point that there must be a conviction first.

Wendy Chamberlain: I am grateful to the Minister for that clarification, but the point I made while he was not in his place still stands: this is confusing. We are presenting confusing legislation to police officers to apply and potentially to take away people’s liberty accordingly.

Policing needs to be done with consent. This is knee-jerk legislation, as I have said throughout, to replace powers that already exist and that the police say they can utilise now. It also prevents the important discussions that take place between protest groups and police officers; we are going to create a chilling effect not only on the right to protest, but on the relationships that help us to enable legitimate protest. I think that is why the Lords rejected these clauses outright in their previous guise in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022. The Lords have attempted to ameliorate the worst excesses of this Bill, and I will certainly vote in support of keeping the Lords amendments in place.

Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con): I rise to speak to Lords amendment 5 and the amendments to it put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer).

Buffer zones are basically public spaces protection orders, extending a distance of 150 m. PSPOs, as they are called, are generally used for antisocial behaviour. We have three in Doncaster, apparently, and I have personally applied for one in Conisbrough in my constituency. We have a set of seating in the middle of town where we have people under the influence of drugs and alcohol, and beggars, and they make a nuisance of themselves with antisocial behaviour. They are killing the town centre. I have been refused a PSPO there, but I will continue, because I think it is the right thing to do.

Lords amendment 5 will put a mandatory buffer zone, a PSPO, around every single clinic in the country. Regardless of what we think about that, I want to tell people in this House and in my constituency what that will look like. The drunks and the people under the influence of drugs in Conisbrough are going to continue to be able to make a nuisance of themselves, damage the local economy and scare old and young people who want to go to the shops; yet a lady or a gentleman who has a real strong faith and believes they can help the people coming in to a clinic is not going to be able to do that.

The hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) talked about people praying and standing in front of people, and my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Cherilyn Mackrory) asked why they have to do it there. Well, if that is the worst day of a woman’s life, and I accept that it probably is one of the worst days of a woman’s life, if she saw somebody there who was praying respectfully, who was there to help, and she knew they were there, she could ignore that lady or gentleman who was praying and just walk in—but, if it was the worst day of her life, she might want somebody just to turn to for that second. Also, if somebody is being coerced into going into one of those places to have a forced abortion, that lady or gentleman could be somebody who is there to help.

I agree with everybody else in this House that shouting, screaming and holding up placards is an awful thing to do and should not happen, but silent prayer and consensual conversations should not be banned. The papers will get hold of this in a year’s time: we are the party of law and order, but we will be arresting people for prayer and for conversations, while letting the people who are harassing the public in our towns and our shops continue to do so.

I ask all Conservative Members in this House to think about amendment (a) to Lords amendment 5, which my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South has put forward. It simply asks for people to be allowed to pray and to have those consensual conversations. Amendment (b) provides that, before we put this law in place, we carry out a review on it. That is what I am asking for.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I have immense respect for many people who have spoken in the debate. I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) is no longer in his place. He and I might be in different political parties, but on issues of civil liberties, we often find common cause. I am not sure that my 15-year-old self would have thought that possible, but it is certainly true—for example, we are working, as Back-Bench Members of Parliament, to raise concerns about the restrictions on parliamentary sovereignty in the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill.

I have been very struck by the debate, which I believe crosses party political lines. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin), who I knew as the hon. Member for Colchester back when I was that 15-year-old who could not conceive of points on which I might find common ground with Government Members. But there are such points, and this—speaking up for freedoms—is one.

[*Stella Creasy*]

I am very struck that the concept of freedom that has been articulated in the Chamber so far is a myopic one. That myopic freedom comes from a blind spot that I believe most of the Members in this Chamber must recognise when talking about access to abortion, which is exactly what we are talking about. By definition of who they are, they will never have been in the position of the women for whom those buffer zones make a difference, so their experience of the human rights at stake in the legislation, and of the issues that we face, is inevitably tempered by their own understanding, in which they focus on the idea that this is purely an issue of freedom of speech and fail to recognise that other, much-cherished right in this country: the right to privacy. My remarks will be very much about that and about how we cannot be a free society if women, just as much as men, are not able to exercise those rights equally.

I am very taken by the fact that it is International Women's Day tomorrow. I have to say that I have become increasingly cynical about that day. It deflates me. We spend a year talking about how we are going to celebrate women, but precious little time working on advancing their rights. Well, I see Lords amendment 5 and opposition to amendment (a) as being about advancing women's rights and doing what the suffragettes told us to do: "Deeds, not words". Why do I see that? I see that because I think we must start by clarifying some of the myths that have been presented to the Chamber.

I listened respectfully to the hon. Member for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer) because this is the time and place for him to exercise that most important democratic right of freedom of speech. I have listened to many speakers talk about how we are somehow criminalising prayer. Let us be very clear for the avoidance of doubt: no prayer is being criminalised. Nothing in the Bill will do that, except, perhaps, for a gardener who is carrying a spade because they are praying that their carrots or green-sprouting broccoli will grow but who is stopped by the police—as clause 2 will allow—who argue that the gardener's intent in carrying the spade is to dig a tunnel. The gardener's prayer for the vegetables is secondary when they explain to the police why they were carrying a spade.

Let us be very clear: nothing in Lords amendment 5 criminalises prayer. It says what most people would recognise: that there is a time and a place for everything and a balance in those rights—in the freedom of speech to tell a woman that you do not think she has a right to make a choice over her own body, and her right to privacy. When she has made her choice, she should not be impeded.

Let us be honest about this: the people praying outside abortion clinics are not finding the right time and place for it. That is not just what I think; it is what the vast majority of the British public think because they recognise that when a woman has made that choice, she should not face someone trying to change her mind right up to the wire. She should be respected for her choice.

Sir John Hayes *rose—*

Stella Creasy: I have no doubt that the right hon. Gentleman will intervene with some rhetorical flourish about the purpose of freedom in this place. What about the freedom of a woman to make her choice in peace?

That is what the Lords amendment does. I will happily give way because I am sure that he wants to come in on that point.

Sir John Hayes: The hon. Lady has provoked me to intervene and to be rhetorical as well, but I simply say this to her. She suggests that someone could be impeded by silence. Given that that is entirely irrational, will she answer this question: does she support the arrest and charging of a woman, as has happened? Does she endorse that, and does she want to see more of it?

5.15 pm

Stella Creasy: It is an irony to me that Members of the party that once claimed to be the party of law and order are trying to argue against the law and order that a PSPO establishes.

For the avoidance of doubt, let me be clear that I am not arguing for the criminalisation of silence. My argument is about the location. The right hon. Gentleman is being disingenuous if he does not recognise the effect of somebody who disagrees so passionately with a woman's right to privacy in making that choice standing there while she does it. He talked about some of the literary greats, so let us talk about Margaret Atwood and "Under His Eye." That is what these people praying represent by being there at that most tender moment for a woman making that choice. It is their physical presence, not their praying, that is the issue.

If we respect people having different opinions on abortion when it comes to free speech, we also have respect that when someone has made that choice, they should not be repeatedly challenged for it. The Members who want to challenge those women by praying outside and supporting others who do so have no idea why those women are attending the clinics; they have no idea of the histories and stories. They can only listen to the countless testimonies that the women attending the clinics do find this harassing. That is why so many have called for the PSPOs. They do find it intimidating. That is not the right time and place.

In tabling the amendment, the hon. Member for Northampton South is attempting to complicate something that is very simple. I pay tribute to Baroness Sugg for tidying up our original amendment and clarifying where the 150-metre zone will be. In a very small zone around an abortion clinic, that is not the right time and place. People can pray—of course they can. Although I might disagree with the hon. Gentleman on whether that is still intimidating, I will defend to the hilt people's right to pray. What I will not do is place that ahead of a woman's right to privacy and say that a woman who has made the decision to have an abortion must continue to face these people, because somehow it is about their freedom of speech unencumbered.

We need to be honest and recognise that there will never be a point at which the people praying agree with the choice that a woman has made, so there is never going to be a point at which their prayers are welcome. There is never going to be a point at which those prayers are not designed to intimidate or to destabilise a very difficult decision. Look at the widespread evidence that shows that the people conducting these prayer marathons outside our abortion clinics are not acting simply to help women, and that they are not well intentioned. I think we can all make our own decision on what is well intentioned. The hon. Member for Devizes (Danny Kruger)

says it is not offensive, but I disagree. I think that when a woman has made a choice, to have someone try continually to undermine that choice is offensive. We both have a right in this place to make our argument. Where we do not have a right to make that argument is right outside an abortion clinic with a woman who just needs her right to privacy to be upheld.

The hon. Member for Northampton South talked about consensual contact, but that is very unclear. What if a protester walks up to a woman and asks her the time, and she tells them? Does that mean she has engaged in conversation with them, which will allow them to start talking to her about their views on abortion? What if they ask for directions? Will that undermine the provision? The people protesting outside clinics, especially the “40 Days for Life” people, boast about how their presence reduces the number of women having abortions. They say it makes the no-show rate for abortion appointments as high as 75%. This is not benign behaviour. They also claim that those of us who support a woman’s right to choose are “demonic”, and increasingly they suggest we are “satanic” in our support for a woman’s right to privacy. Let us be clear: amendment (a) would not make an abortion clinic buffer zone clearer; it would sabotage a buffer zone by introducing uncertainty about behaviour and about the simple concept of there being a right time and place.

I am conscious of the time available, so I just want to put on the record my gratitude not only to Baroness Sugg, but to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) for all her work, the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex, and organisations like Sister Supporter. They have stood up for the silent majority—the people who think it is not right to hassle a woman when she is making these choices. That is ultimately what we are here to say. When the vast majority of the public support buffer zones, and when those of us who will be in this position cannot speak freely, as a Scottish colleague raised, then we have a challenge in this place. Freedom of speech is not freedom of speech if 50% are living in fear of what might happen next. Margaret Atwood taught us that. She said that men are worried that women will laugh at them, and women are worried that men might kill them. Do not kill a woman’s right to her freedom. Do not kill a woman’s right to privacy. Let us not sabotage at the last minute abortion buffer zones by supporting amendment (a). We should support Lords amendment 5 and let everybody else move on with their life.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): It is worth looking at what amendment (a) states. It states:

“No offence is committed under subsection (1) by a person engaged in consensual communication or in silent prayer”.

For the avoidance of doubt, amendment (a) goes on to say that nothing in it should allow people to be harassed or their decision to be changed, such as kneeling down and praying right in front of somebody’s face, or blocking the pavement, or indulging in any kind of harassing.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Edward Leigh: I am not going to give way to my hon. Friend, who has intervened many times already. I have been asked to speak very briefly.

It is worth looking at what this amendment is, and it is worth considering the question put by the police officer to the lady. The police officer asked her, “Are you praying?” In other words, there was nothing she was obviously doing that was harassment or in any way objectionable. The police officer had to actually go into her mind—she was just standing there; I do not think it is even clear that she was kneeling—and that is surely what is dangerous about the measure.

In speaking to this Chamber, I am going far beyond what that lady was doing. Of course I am not indulging in any objectionable behaviour by expressing my thoughts. I am not harassing anybody, but everybody in this Chamber in a sense is being forced to listen to me, and I have spent 39 years no doubt irritating people and even boring them. They cannot shut their ears, but this lady was not actually saying anything, and the policeman had to go up to her and ask what she was doing. If we are going to have a law—a criminal law—it has to be capable of being effective.

The reason George Orwell’s novel “1984” resonates so much with all of us is that the state was trying to regulate not just people’s actions but what goes on in their minds. That is why, ever since that novel was written, people have felt that probably the most advanced form of totalitarianism is one where the state is trying to regulate not simply people’s behaviour, but their minds. What the debate is about is that those who oppose my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer) are determined to stop anybody indulging in any kind of protest, if it could be deemed to be some sort of protest, even if it is entirely silent.

The whole point of the Public Order Bill, as I understand it—this is why I support it—is that it does not outlaw peaceful protest. What the Government are addressing is people making that protest who are deliberately trying to obstruct the rights of other citizens by blocking roads or whatever. That is the point of the Bill. It has now been hijacked by people who want to stop completely silent peaceful protest.

The case of Livia Tossici-Bolt has not yet been mentioned. In the past few days she was told by council officers in Bournemouth that she would be fined simply for holding up a sign saying, “Here to talk if you want” inside a buffer zone. She was not holding up a sign with any graphic images, and she was not trying to intimidate anybody; she was simply saying, “Please, if you want to talk, I am here if you want any advice. This is a very difficult day for you.” For that she was stopped by the police. In other words, that lady was told that she could not offer other women who might, in some circumstances, be coerced into attending an abortion clinic, or who felt that they lacked the resources to complete a pregnancy, the opportunity to talk if they wanted to do so.

We must not criminalise such peaceful activity. Where are we going? Where will this stop? I believe—this is how I will conclude; I think that this is the shortest speech—that this is an entirely worthwhile, harmless, moderate amendment, and I hope that Members will support it.

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): I remain of the view that the Bill is draconian and anti-democratic, and represents a frightening lurch towards authoritarianism. Whether or not Members agree with me, most of us will

[Rebecca Long Bailey]

accept that the concept of what constitutes serious disruption is central to the sweeping liberty-curtailling powers and offences that it contains.

The matter of protest banning orders rests on that definition, and the peaceful and often innocent conduct that the police would seemingly be able to criminalise as a result is breath-taking in its range. The Bill says that those orders can apply to people without a conviction—the Minister explained the Government amendment earlier—if someone has carried out activities or contributed to the carrying-out of activities by any other person related to a protest

“that resulted in, or were likely to result in, serious disruption”,

among a range of other scenarios, on two or more occasions. Justice has stated:

“Given the extent of the powers contained within the Bill, it is essential that any definition should be placed at such a threshold as to minimise the possibility for abuse.”

I agree. The term “serious disruption” should be defined. Despite requests even from senior police officers for clarity in the Bill’s early stages, the Government had to be dragged to this point today. Looking at the Government’s vast and vague amendment on this issue, the reasons for not defining the term in the first place are clear. It would appear that their intention was always to set the bar at a frighteningly low level—and the bar could not be lower.

Serious disruption is “more than a minor” hindrance. That is a paradox if ever there was one. Apart from being dangerously vague, “more than a minor” hindrance is not serious disruption by any stretch of the imagination. More than a minor hindrance, as suggested by the Government, is having to cross to the other side of the road because someone is protesting on the pavement. It is a Deliveroo takeaway arriving 15 minutes later than someone would like. Those things might be annoying, but they are not serious disruption and they certainly do not warrant arrest.

I want to set this in context, as the Lords have attempted to do. The comparison in English common law is the definition of civil nuisance, which involves “substantial interference”. That is a very high bar, which has been defined by decades of case law on the matter. It is a world away from the low threshold that the Government propose in this measure.

I should make it clear that on the issue of blocking emergency vehicles—the Minister might try to cite that as a reason for the Government’s vague and dangerous amendment—of course that should be an offence, but it already is. The Emergency Workers (Obstruction) Act 2006 contains two offences. First, the Act makes it an offence to obstruct or hinder certain emergency workers who are responding to emergency circumstances. Secondly, it makes it an offence to hinder or obstruct those who are assisting emergency workers responding to emergency circumstances. The Lords amendment provides a much more sensible definition of serious disruption. It states that serious disruption

“means causing significant harm to persons, organisations or the life of the community, in particular, where...it may result in significant delay to the delivery of a time-sensitive product...or...it may result in a prolonged disruption of access to any essential goods or any essential services”.

That complements “significant delay” in the delivery of goods and “prolonged disruption” of access to services, as set out in the Public Order Act 1986, as well as measures in the Emergency Workers (Obstruction) Act.

On stop and search, which colleagues have already mentioned, of course the police must have the ability, sometimes, to stop and search when people are reasonably suspected of various crimes. However, the danger of abuse lies in the threshold of “reasonable suspicion” being low or, worse, as in the case of this Bill, non-existent.

5.30 pm

The Bill originally expanded both suspicion-based and suspicionless stop-and-search powers, meaning that the police could confiscate almost any protest-related item without reasonable suspicion at all. That includes mobile phones, placards and fliers. In fact, it includes anything that could be vaguely connected to a protest.

We already know the dangerous implications of such sweeping powers. Black people are seven times more likely to be stopped and searched by the police than white people and 14 times more likely to be when the police do not require reasonable suspicion at all. Even the Police Federation has raised concerns, saying that the Bill could leave officers “vulnerable to complaint”. It has also said:

“Reasonable Grounds has a firm legal basis, is tried and tested, and therefore affords reassurance to our colleagues engaged in these stops.”

To that end, Lords amendment 6 removes the clauses of the Bill that provide the police with new powers to stop and search without suspicion. I hope that colleagues will support that very reasonable amendment.

Finally, turning to serious disruption prevention orders, the Bill allows the court to ban a person who has simply taken part in two or more protests that caused “more than a minor” hindrance in a five-year period, as I outlined earlier. It will be a crime to breach an order, with a punishment of imprisonment, a fine or both. As I have set out, “more than a minor” hindrance could mean anything. It could be extremely minor, and the provisions will inhibit and restrict the ability of potentially hundreds of thousands of people from protesting and standing up for their civil liberties. It is draconian. Lords amendment 20 removes that clause allowing serious disruption prevention orders to be issued not on conviction. I hope that colleagues across the House will support these very reasonable amendments.

Robin Millar (Aberconwy) (Con): Thank you for selecting the amendments to Lords amendment 5, Madam Deputy Speaker. I would first like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer) for bringing his amendments forward. He has put his finger on a couple of important principles about how we do law in this country and how we legislate in this House.

I should start by saying that this debate is absolutely not about abortion. My hon. Friend’s amendments also do not change the legislation regarding buffer zones. As has been said, that debate has happened in this House; they are in place. In fact, the powers providing for buffer zones around abortion clinics already exist. That point was made very well, I may say, by the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq). She is not in her place, but she highlighted how, where buffer zones have been challenged, their presence has been upheld and

people protesting within them have been moved on. They are both legal and, it would appear from her description, effective for their purpose.

We therefore have not only laws that provide for buffer zones around abortion clinics but some evidence of what those mean in practice. We have the evidence that there are laws that allow for people to be moved on. However, we also have something rather more disturbing: evidence of the way that law is being interpreted.

I would like to make two points about the law and how we approach it. As a Member coming to this House tasked with understanding the issues that we debate—a wide range of issues on all sorts of things—one of the first questions I ask myself, and often one of the first questions asked of me, is, “What evidence is there of the need for this?” I think that that question of necessity and proportionality is an important one, particularly in relation to amendment (b) to Lords amendment 5 tabled by my hon. Friend, which seeks a pause in the legislation until we have established such a need.

Certainly, before any kind of national provision is introduced, it is reasonable to ask, “What is the necessity, and is this proportional?” In 2018, it was established that that necessity was not there, so I have to ask myself how that has changed and why the measure is felt to be necessary now. Is there a material difference? I must confess that I am struggling to understand the objection to providing or securing that evidence to have the confidence that we are acting proportionally and out of necessity.

My second point on my hon. Friend’s amendments is about, effectively, the carve-out or provision for silent prayer. There is no support in this place, nor has there been throughout the passage of the Bill, for any intimidation or harassment of women seeking the services of an abortion clinic. That is an important point, because that is not what the amendments seek to achieve and we already have laws to deal with that.

We have evidence of an arrest that took place for the act of silent prayer. Amendment (a) seeks to make it clear that that is an inappropriate interpretation of our laws.

Stella Creasy: That seems to be the nub of the challenge. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, although he does not feel that silent prayer would intimidate him, plenty of users of the service feel that it is intimidating, so it is right that it is in scope?

Robin Millar: The hon. Member has clearly read my notes, because I am coming to that exact point. In response to her earlier comments, I also say that I do not seek to put myself in the place of a woman who is seeking the services of an abortion clinic. I respect the fact that that is an incredibly difficult moment—a sensitive and vital moment—and I cannot seek to understand that from my lived experience, as she said.

Equally, however, as the hon. Member said, it is the presence of the person in that place that is objectionable, because we cannot know what silent prayer is. Hon. Members may well be silently praying that I wrap up my remarks so that we can move to the votes; I have no way of knowing. Prayer is not necessarily marked by a folding of hands, a closing of eyes, a bowing of the head or a thumbing of a rosary, and it is not necessarily marked by kneeling.

Indeed, the evidence from the abortion clinic with a buffer zone around it where the arrest took place is that the person was standing. When challenged, she was arrested on the basis that she was praying silently. There were no placards or graphic images, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton, and there was no shouting—there was nothing. That is the point of concern, because what is the basis for the arrest if it is just the presence of someone who is perhaps in the habit of praying silently?

The importance of the issue comes down to three things: thoughts, words and deeds. If our freedom to think, our freedom to speak and our freedom to act exist on a continuum, where we put the marker of where a freedom ends is a statement about our society. Do we place that marker just beyond the freedom to speak, effectively saying that we must watch our speech and what we say? I think we have already established through the laws of the land that we do that, because we do not allow people to speak freely without consideration.

What we have seen, however, through the implementation of existing local laws that the Bill seeks to make national, is an interpretation that says that we do not have freedom of thought. That is the point of my contribution and of the amendments of my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South. Specifically, I support them because first, they are a helpful and sadly necessary clarification that we in this country enjoy freedom of thought and the freedom to practise silent prayer; and secondly, when we make laws, it is incumbent on us to pause to test the need for further legislation before introducing unnecessary legislation.

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

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): I rise to speak on Lords amendments 1, 5, 6 and 20, beginning with the definition of “serious disruption”.

Before I go into the detail, let me mention the publication in 2021 of Her Majesty’s inspectorate of constabulary’s now widely debated report looking at protests and how the police response was working. Matt Parr, Her Majesty’s inspector of constabulary, called for a “modest reset” of the balance between police powers and the right to protest in order to respond to the changing nature of the protests we were seeing, which were sometimes dangerous; people were taking more risks. The suggestions included far more measures that were non-legislative than legislative, such as better training for police, better understanding of the law and a more sophisticated response to protests. What has followed has been a series of escalations of more and more unnecessary legislation that the police have not asked for and that will not have an impact on the actual challenge.

We have gathered to debate public order legislation many times in this House, and while there have been numerous Ministers, I have been here every single time. For our part, we suggested a modest reset of the laws, as suggested by Her Majesty’s inspectorate, with amendments making injunctions easier for local organisations to apply for and with stronger punishment for obstructing the highway. Our sensible amendments were rejected by the Government in favour of this raft of legislation, which now finds itself in ping-pong, because the House of Lords is quite rightly saying that these proposals are not necessary.

[Sarah Jones]

What do the Government think their amendments to the Lords amendments will actually deliver? Their impact assessment is quite clear. Let us look, for example, at the new offence of locking on, which is going to change everything, we are told. Let me quote:

“the number of additional full custody years”—

the number of prison years that will result from this new offence—

“lies within the range of zero to one”.

That is the impact this Bill will have: zero to one years of custodial sentences.

What about the serious disruption prevention orders we are debating today? How many custodial cases will they amount to? The answer is three to five. Well, that is all worth it then! The rights to be taken away, as Conservative and Opposition Members have so eloquently described, will be for three to five cases with custodial convictions a year.

The impact assessment is extraordinary.

Matt Parr of Her Majesty’s inspectorate clearly said that there was

“a wide variation in the number of specialist officers available for protest policing throughout England and Wales”,

and that

“Non-specialist officers receive limited training in protest policing.”

He made several recommendations about increased and better training. Have the Government listened to these sensible concerns? Not a bit. Their impact assessment states that the police will need seven minutes to understand this entire new Bill and to implement it fairly—seven minutes. The truth is that they do not listen to the police and they do not listen to what is actually needed; they just want a headline.

To pause for a minute, today we have all been appalled by the offences David Carrick was guilty of in the run-up to the murder of Sarah Everard, and these appalling sexual crimes and this epidemic of violence against women and girls needs a proper response, yet the Government are prioritising this legislation over a victims Bill.

Laws already exist to tackle protest that the police use every day. Criminal damage is an offence, as are conspiracy to cause damage, trespass, aggravated trespass, public nuisance, breach of the peace and obstruction of a highway—I could go on. In April 2019, 1,148 Extinction Rebellion activists were arrested and more than 900 were charged. In October 2019, 1,800 protesters were arrested. Many have been fined, and many have gone to prison. The impact assessment for this Bill suggests a few hundred arrests; the police are already making thousands. The powers are there for the police to use.

Turning to the definition of “serious disruption”, we must be clear about the history. The Opposition asked for a definition of “serious disruption” long ago in debates on what is now the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022. The Government said no, but then agreed to a definition in the Lords. It was not a very good one, and we tried to amend it. The police have asked us for greater clarity on the definition of “serious disruption” because the Government have drafted such poor legislation that it is important for them to interpret how and when they should and should not intervene.

But the new definition appears to include as serious disruption situations such as if I have to step aside on a pavement to avoid a protestor. The police do not want to diminish people’s rights through this definition—they have said that time and again, and privately they think the Government are getting this wrong.

5.45 pm

In the other place it was agreed that “prolonged disruption” was needed for a serious disruptive activity to have taken place, but the new Government amendment in lieu of Lords amendment 1 suggests that I would be causing serious disruption if I hindered an individual or organisation

“to more than a minor degree”.

That goes too far.

Sir Charles Walker: Does the shadow Minister agree that this provision is extraordinary, because there is often disruption around the Houses of Parliament when there is a protest and people march around Parliament Square and up to Trafalgar Square? That is a disruption, and is more than a minor disruption, but it is the type of disruption that most people in a free and democratic society can live with.

Sarah Jones: The hon. Gentleman has made many good points already this afternoon, and I entirely agree; “more than a minor degree”

is way too low a bar to allow these interventions. Many Members and many watching the debate would have fallen foul of this law.

The amendment is drawn so widely that it is almost meaningless. As the hon. Gentleman said, when there are protests on Whitehall, near Parliament Square, there can be large crowds, and banners and speeches, so they are noisy. In 1 Parliament Street, where my office is, we have to shut the windows, which is irritating, but we are not hindered to the extent that we expect police interference. There are so many scenarios that could come under the scope of this definition that would render it ludicrous.

If I chain myself to a tree to protest at a new road and a couple of people are unable to cross a road to go to the supermarket, is that more than a minor disruption, or not? We have to remember that serious disruption, however it is defined—and I argue that here it is defined without any legal certainty—does not have to happen for offences under the Bill to be committed. This sloppiness and breadth of drafting is unacceptable, and the police do not want it. They just want clarity, and this will not bring clarity.

Turning to suspicionless stop and search, the Government have tabled a motion to disagree with Lords amendment 6. The motion would reinsert wide-ranging powers for the police to stop and search anyone in the vicinity of a protest, for example shoppers passing a protest against a library closure, tourists walking through Parliament Square, or civil servants walking to their office. If there is a large crowd in Parliament Square and a tourist gets caught up in it, they could be stopped; they could have no idea what is going on, and would be an offence to resist.

Stop and search is disproportionately used against black people in this country. Do Members on the Government Benches really want to pass legislation for powers that risk further damaging the relationship between

the police and our communities? Instead of actually targeting serious gun crime, serious knife crime or terrorism, the Government are choosing to focus on stopping and searching people who may or may not be taking part in a protest. That is not proportionate.

Former police officers have warned that these powers risk further diminishing trust in public institutions. That will put the police in a difficult position, and it risks undermining the notion of policing by consent. Members of the other place were right to remove the powers to stop and search without suspicion, and the Government are wrong to put them back in.

We agree with what the Government have done with regard to the journalists clause and amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment 17. The right to protest is a hard-won democratic freedom that many have fought for in our history, and many are fighting for it in other parts of the world. A free press is another hallmark of our democratic society. The amendment will not prevent the police from responding to someone who is causing trouble and happens to be a journalist, but, crucially, it will allow reporters to observe and report to the wider public about the happenings of a protest. Considering the scope, breadth and low bar of most of the powers in the Bill, reporting on their potential misuse or wrong application is even more important. That is a power that must be protected, so we welcome the Government's amendment in lieu of Lords amendment 17.

We are fundamentally against the principle of serious disruption prevention orders. We do not agree with them on conviction and we certainly do not agree with them not on conviction. The Government have tabled a motion to disagree with Lords amendment 20 and tabled their own amendment in lieu. That reinstates but limits the ability to apply an SDPO to someone without a protest-related conviction. We welcome the fact that the Government have accepted that their initial draft was overreaching and unnecessary. However, we do not support the five-year conviction compromise that they suggest. Problems remain, in that police could still apply for a SDPO to prevent a person from carrying out activities that are merely likely to result in serious disruption to two or more individuals or an organisation. The Met police commissioner said that

"policing is not asking for new powers to constrain protests", but SDPOs on conviction unfortunately remain in the Bill. An SDPO treats a peaceful protestor like the Government treat terrorists. Does the Minister really want to treat peaceful protestors, however annoying they may be, as serious criminals?

On buffer zones, the Opposition do not agree with amendment (a) to Lords amendment 5. It is important to remember that we have already voted on this issue in this place. We voted to introduce buffer zones and in the other place the Conservative peer Baroness Sugg did a very good job of tidying up the Bill. We have already voted in both Houses to introduce what we now call safe access zones. Lords amendment 5 is really important, creating a 150-metre safe access zone around abortion clinics to stop the intimidation and harassment of women and healthcare professionals. The proposed changes to the amendment would risk preventing people from getting the medical support they need.

Robin Millar: Does the hon. Lady accept that the evidence from the abortion buffer zones that exist at present is that people are being arrested for silent prayer?

That is a fact. If she does, does she then accept that amendment (a) to Lords amendment 5 is necessary to provide a provision for silent prayer?

Sarah Jones: I do not agree with that interpretation at all. We have public space protection orders around some abortion clinics now, and we are broadening that out. That has been voted for twice, in this House and in the other place. I believe very firmly that the changes proposed in amendment (a) would risk preventing people from getting the medical support they need. Let me explain why.

I am a person of faith. I have also walked into an abortion clinic. I pray, but I also know how intimidating it is to walk past people silently standing there with signs trying to communicate, trying to pray, trying to persuade women to change their mind. It is a balance that we strike in this place between a woman's right to privacy and healthcare and everybody's right to go about their business and do what they choose. This place has already struck that balance.

I will explain why I also believe the proposal would not work. It goes way beyond silent prayer. Amendment (a) states:

"No offence is committed under subsection (1) by a person engaged in consensual communication".

What is "consensual communication"? How on earth can we define it? Members have said women should not be harassed. Everybody agrees with that, but one person's consensual communication is another person's harassment. We have taken some legal advice on the amendment. The Government, when considering whether to support it, should look at the wider implications it might have.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: Just to make the obvious point, the whole purpose of the buffer zones legislation is to create an exclusion zone around abortion clinics so that people with views they want to express about the subject of abortion clinics will not be in contact with people going to use those services. Amendment (a) would drive a coach and horses through that whole process. The way it is worded would mean that people would be protected from accusations of harassment, because their actions

"shall not...be taken to be...harassment"

whatever they may actually be doing, so long as they can call it silent prayer. That drives a coach and horses through what the House of Lords compromised on and what the House of Commons originally agreed to vote for and approve.

Sarah Jones: The hon. Member is completely right. The amendment also risks driving a coach and horses through all the protests legislation. If I am standing outside Parliament protesting and being annoying and loud, the police may want to intervene, but I might say, "Actually, I'm silently praying. Are you going to tell me I'm not?" How far does the amendment ride roughshod over all our definitions of protest? That is a question that the hon. Members who support it have not considered.

Nick Fletcher: What the hon. Lady just said is completely and utterly wrong—the chuntering on the Government Benches proves that. We are banning people from praying—silently—in a Christian country. Can we let that sink in? This is ridiculous. I want all colleagues on

[Nick Fletcher]

the Government Benches to think about this: within a 150-metre zone of a clinic, people will not be allowed to silently pray. Regardless of the reasons behind that, we need to think carefully about what we are doing.

Sarah Jones: I remind the hon. Gentleman that we have voted in this House and the other place for the safe access zones. As someone who prays, I understand why we need to introduce that legislation. However, the amendment mentions not just silent prayer but “consensual communication”. How on earth do we define consensual communication? There is no definition.

Stella Creasy: We must be clear that nobody is banning praying. We are saying that there is a time and a place to do it appropriately, which balances with people’s human rights. There has been some concern that, somehow, the buffer zones will take up police resources. Does my hon. Friend agree that, actually, amending the buffer zone legislation—as the amendment intends—would mean that more police resource would be needed, because it would become so unclear what was and what was not harassment, even when women repeatedly say that praying in their face is not acceptable?

Sarah Jones: I completely agree. Having talked to the police for nearly three years in this role, I know that they want clarity. The amendment provides not clarity but unbelievable confusion, whereas a 150-metre zone provides clarity, and that is what the police want.

The Bill remains an affront to our rights. The Government’s own impact assessment shows that it will not have much effect. It is our job as parliamentarians to come up with laws that solve problems and really work. The Bill does not do that, so the Opposition will vote against the Government tonight. We agree with the Lords, and I urge every Member to look to their conscience and do the same.

Chris Philp: As always, it is a great pleasure to follow my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones). She has faced a number of Policing Ministers in her time, and I hope she faces many more during what I hope will be a very long tenure as shadow Minister.

We have heard some extremely thoughtful and well-considered contributions from both sides of the House on quite profound issues, touching as they do on conscience, free speech and a woman’s right to choose in relation to an abortion, as well as slightly more prosaic questions on policing protests. The objective of the Bill is to better balance the rights of individuals to protest—which this Government respect—with the rights of individuals to go about their daily lives without suffering from disruption. Those include the rights of parents to get their children to school, of people to get to hospital for vital treatment and of people to go to work without having their way impeded.

We have seen so many protests impeding the rights of the law-abiding majority, particularly in the latter half of 2022. There were 10-mile tailbacks on the M25. People glued themselves to roads in London and it took a long time to remove them. In December, we saw protesters walking slowly down streets, deliberately trying to cause as much disruption as possible—not so much

exercising the right to protest as seeking to make a point by deliberately inconveniencing their fellow citizens. That is not something that this Government support, which is one reason why we are now legislating. The Metropolitan police have confirmed that between October and December last year they spent 13,600 officer shifts policing such protests, at a cost of nearly £10 million. That is time and money that would be much better spent elsewhere.

6 pm

I turn to the definition of serious disruption in Lords amendment 1. Members across the House agree on the need to define it, and the Metropolitan police and the National Police Chiefs’ Council have argued for such a definition, but we do not think that Lords amendment 1 strikes quite the right balance. Instead, we have carefully studied an amendment tabled in the other place by Lord Hope of Craighead. It included a definition of serious disruption, but it was not voted on because another amendment was voted on first. We think that Lord Hope of Craighead, who is a Cross-Bench peer and a former Deputy President of the Supreme Court, got it right by proposing a threshold of “more than minor” inconvenience. The minor inconvenience that the shadow Minister described would not be caught under such a provision, because the “more than minor” threshold would not be exceeded.

As one would expect of a former Deputy President of the Supreme Court, Lord Hope of Craighead was not simply making the threshold up; he was referring to case law. I refer the House to the Court of Appeal judgment in the Colston statue case. At paragraphs 116 and 121 of his leading judgment, the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Burnett of Maldon, made it clear that where criminal damage is more than “minor or trivial”, it would be acceptable to consider the criminal law to override or trump the rights enshrined in articles 9, 10 and 11 of the ECHR.

Our definition of serious disruption has been proposed by a former Deputy President of the Supreme Court, a Cross-Bench peer, and it enshrines case law handed down by the Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales, no less. I therefore feel very comfortable in commending our amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment 1.

Sir Julian Lewis: Will the Minister confirm something for the sake of clarity? In the past, major peaceful demonstrations such as anti-nuclear demonstrations have blocked roads, but it was done with the permission of the police. That would continue, would it not?

Chris Philp: Yes, it would. My right hon. Friend pre-empts my next point, which I think an Opposition Member raised earlier. Where a protest has been authorised and licensed in advance by the police, of course these provisions will not be engaged. Protests such as the Iraq war protests aimed at the former Labour Government would, of course, be licensed. Protests against this Government would no doubt be licensed as well and could properly be held.

The hon. Member for Hemsworth (Jon Trickett), who I see is back in his place, made a point about whether the Bill could be used to disrupt strike action. I draw his attention and that of the House to the Bill’s original clauses 6 and 7, which as a result of the Lords amendments have been renumbered as clauses 7 and 8.

Subsection (2)(b) of each clause makes it clear that it will be a defence to offences under the Bill that the act in question was undertaken

“in...furtherance of a trade dispute”,

so trade union protests and anything to do with strikes are exempted from the provisions of the Bill.

I think that the definition we have set out is reasonable. The police have asked for it, the former Deputy President of the Supreme Court supports it, it backs up the case law and I strongly commend it to the House.

Lords amendments 2, 3 and 4 deal with tunnelling. They are clarificatory amendments, making it clear that the offence of causing serious disruption by being present in a tunnel, as defined by clause 4, is committed only if the tunnel has been created for the purposes of a protest. Lords amendments 10 and 16 relate to some clarifications involving the British Transport Police which we think are important. Lords amendments 6, 7, 8, 9 and 36 pertain to so-called suspicionless stop and search.

Sir John Hayes: Before my hon. Friend moves on to this subject, will he give way?

Chris Philp: In just a moment.

As the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) correctly said in an intervention, these so-called suspicionless stop and searches can only take place in the absence of personal suspicion, when an officer of the rank of inspector or above believes, or has reason to believe, that in the next 24 hours a number of offences may be committed in the locality. That reasonable belief is required before any suspicionless stop and search can take place, and even then it is time-bound to a period of 24 hours. We think that that is proportionate. We have heard some views from the police and, in particular, from the His Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary, which has said: “On balance, our view is that, with appropriate guidance and robust and effective safeguards, the proposed stop and search powers would have the potential to improve police efficiency and effectiveness in preventing disruption and making the public safe.” So this is something that HMIC has supported.

Stuart C. McDonald: I think we all accept that suspicionless stop and search can be triggered quite rightly, for example if there is a danger of terrorism, but the Bill now allows it to take place when, for instance, there could be a danger that someone somewhere might commit a public nuisance or lock themselves to a fence. That could lead to hundreds or even thousands of suspicionless searches, which is surely disproportionate.

Chris Philp: I do not accept that. When there is a reasonable suspicion that in the next 24 hours offences may be committed which may themselves have a profoundly disruptive effect on members of the public, it is reasonable to prevent that. Let me point the hon. Gentleman to the example of the protests on the M25 last November, when a 10-mile tailback was caused. I suggest that preventing that would be a reasonable thing to do.

Lords amendment 17 deals with the question of journalists. As I have said previously, although the law as it stands does protect journalists—in fact, an apology rapidly followed the arrest of the journalist in Hertfordshire

—the Government accept that clarification and reaffirmation of journalistic freedom is important, so we accept the spirit and the principle of the amendment. We have improved the wording slightly in our amendment in lieu, but we accept that journalists need special protection.

Lords amendments 18, 19 and 20 deal with serious disruption prevention orders. There has been some confusion over this, on both sides of the House, so I will reiterate the point for the purpose of complete clarity. The Government have accepted the point made in the Lords that a conviction is required before a serious disruption prevention order can be made. That is a significant concession. However, we do not accept Lords amendment 20, because clause 20—as formerly numbered—simply allows for an application to be made at a time after conviction, but a conviction must previously have taken place. We have therefore tabled an amendment in lieu.

I think it important to emphasise that there will be a free vote on buffer zones, at least on the Government side, because it concerns an issue of conscience, namely abortion. There is no Government position on this matter, and Members will vote according to their consciences. We have heard Members on both sides of the House speak about this issue passionately and with conviction.

Sir John Hayes: I hear what the Minister says about that, and he has heard the strong opinions expressed from this side of the Chamber in favour of the freedom to pray silently. Speaking personally and for the guidance of the House, will he tell us whether he will be supporting the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer), which allows free and silent prayer?

Chris Philp: My right hon. Friend is putting me on the spot a little bit. I would like to reiterate that the Government are neutral on this position. It is a free vote and there is no Government position, and in my capacity as a Government Minister I do not have a view. Obviously, as a Member of Parliament, I will be voting as an individual on this question. I do think, speaking personally, that women should be free to use these services without intimidation or harassment, which is why I voted for the amendment from the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) when it was first tabled, but I do not think the amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South undermines that, particularly given the words in proposed subsection (3B), which say that prayer

“shall not, without more, be taken to”

influence a person's decision. So, personally, I will vote for that, but I emphasise again that the Government do not have a position and this is a free vote. We have heard some extremely thoughtful, well-considered, well-argued and sincerely held views on both sides, and Members will no doubt make up their own minds. up.

Stella Creasy: I respect the fact that the Minister has his own personal opinion. For the avoidance of doubt, can he confirm to the Chamber that this legislation, as amended in the Lords, is compliant with the European convention on human rights and that it does not criminalise praying but sets out boundaries for where it should occur?

Chris Philp: I think we will ultimately have to defer to the Attorney General, but my understanding is that the legislation, as amended by the Lords and if amended by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South's amendment, would in both cases be compliant with the European convention on human rights. Indeed, it is our opinion that the entire Bill is consistent with the European convention on human rights.

I think I have probably spoken for long enough—*[Interruption.]* Did someone say, “Hear, hear”? This Bill strikes the right balance between protecting the right to protest and making sure that our constituents can go about their day-to-day business without unreasonable hindrance, that parents can get their children to school, that patients can get to hospitals and that people can get to their place of work. That is the right balance, and I commend the Government amendments to the House.

Question put, That amendment (a) to Lords amendment 5 be made.

The House divided: Ayes 116, Noes 299.

Division No. 185]

[6.12 pm

AYES

Afriyie, Adam	Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Anderson, Lee	Gray, James
Anderson, Stuart	Grayling, rh Chris (<i>Proxy vote</i>
Ansell, Caroline	<i>cast by Mr Marcus Jones)</i>
Bacon, Gareth	Green, Chris
Bacon, Mr Richard	Green, rh Damian
Baldwin, Harriett	Griffith, Andrew
Benton, Scott	Grundy, James
Berry, rh Sir Jake	Gullis, Jonathan
Blackman, Bob	Halfon, rh Robert
Bone, Mr Peter	Hart, Sally-Ann
Bradley, Ben	Hayes, rh Sir John
Braverman, rh Suella	Hinds, rh Damian
Brereton, Jack	Hollobone, Mr Philip
Bristow, Paul	Howell, Paul
Burghart, Alex	Hughes, Eddie
Campbell, Mr Gregory	Hunt, Jane
Cash, Sir William	Hunt, Tom
Cates, Miriam	Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
Chishti, Rehman	Jenkinson, Mark
Chope, Sir Christopher	Jenkyns, Andrea
Clarke, rh Mr Simon	Johnson, Dr Caroline
Clarke-Smith, Brendan	Jones, rh Mr David
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Kawczynski, Daniel
Courts, Robert	Latham, Mrs Pauline
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey	Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Crosbie, Virginia	Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Davies, Gareth	Levy, Ian
Davies, Philip	Lewer, Andrew
Davis, rh Mr David	Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Dines, Miss Sarah	Lockhart, Carla
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.	Loder, Chris
Donelan, rh Michelle	Lopez, Julia
Double, Steve	Lord, Mr Jonathan
Drax, Richard	Mackinlay, Craig
Drummond, Mrs Flick	Maclean, Rachel
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain	Maynard, Paul
Eustice, rh George	McCartney, Karl
Farron, Tim	McVey, rh Esther
Fletcher, Nick	Menzies, Mark
Foord, Richard	Millar, Robin
Foster, Kevin	Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Fox, rh Dr Liam	O'Brien, Neil
Francois, rh Mr Mark	Paisley, Ian
Fuller, Richard	Pawsey, Mark
Girvan, Paul	Philp, rh Chris

Prentis, rh Victoria
Pritchard, rh Mark
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rowley, Lee
Sambrook, Gary
Shannon, Jim
Smith, Greg
Stafford, Alexander
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Iain

Streeter, Sir Gary
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Tomlinson, Michael
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Theresa
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Young, Jacob

Tellers for the Ayes:

Craig Whittaker and
Danny Kruger

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (<i>Proxy</i>	Cooper, rh Yvette
<i>vote cast by Chris Elmore)</i>	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Abrahams, Debbie	Crouch, Tracey
Ali, Rushanara	Cruddas, Jon
Ali, Tahir	Cryer, John
Amesbury, Mike	Cummins, Judith
Anderson, Fleur	Cunningham, Alex
Andrew, rh Stuart	Daby, Janet
Antoniazzi, Tonia	Dalton, Ashley
Argar, rh Edward	Daly, James
Ashworth, rh Jonathan	David, Wayne
Atherton, Sarah	Davies, rh David T. C.
Atkins, Victoria	Davies, Geraint
Bailey, Shaun	Davies, Dr James
Baillie, Siobhan	Davies, Mims
Baker, Duncan	Davies-Jones, Alex
Bardell, Hannah	De Cordova, Marsha
Barker, Paula	Debbonaire, Thangam
Baron, Mr John	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Baynes, Simon	Dixon, Samantha
Beckett, rh Margaret	Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Begum, Apsana	Dodds, Anneliese
Bell, Aaron	Doughty, Stephen
Benn, rh Hilary	Dowd, Peter
Beresford, Sir Paul	Duffield, Rosie
Betts, Mr Clive	Dunne, rh Philip
Bhatti, Saqib	Eagle, Dame Angela
Blake, Olivia	Eagle, rh Maria
Blomfield, Paul	Eastwood, Colum
Blunt, Crispin	Edwards, Jonathan
Bowie, Andrew	Edwards, Ruth
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Efford, Clive
Brennan, Kevin	Ellis, rh Michael
Brine, Steve	Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Britcliffe, Sara	Elmore, Chris
Brown, Ms Lyn	Eshalomi, Florence
Buck, Ms Karen	Esterson, Bill
Burgon, Richard	Evans, Chris
Butler, Dawn	Everitt, Ben
Byrne, Ian	Fabricant, Michael
Cadbury, Ruth	Farry, Stephen
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Fell, Simon
Carden, Dan	Fletcher, Katherine
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Fletcher, Mark
Carter, Andy	Fovargue, Yvonne
Cartlidge, James	Foxcroft, Vicky
Champion, Sarah	Foy, Mary Kelly
Charalambous, Bambos	Frazer, rh Lucy
Clark, Feryal	Furniss, Gill
Clarke, Theo (<i>Proxy vote cast</i>	Fysh, Mr Marcus
<i>by Mr Marcus Jones)</i>	Gardiner, Barry
Clarkson, Chris	Gibson, Peter
Collins, Damian	Gideon, Jo
Cooper, Daisy	Gill, Preet Kaur

Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hall, Luke
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, Helen
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hoare, Simon
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollern, Kate
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Howell, John
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Jupp, Simon
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kniveton, Kate
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lightwood, Simon
 Lloyd, Tony (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Loughton, Tim
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema

Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 McCabe, Steve
 McCartney, Jason
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 Mearns, Ian
 Merriman, Huw
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Moran, Layla
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nici, Lia
 Norris, Alex
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Opperman, Guy
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Percy, Andrew
 Phillips, Jess
 Pollard, Luke
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Powell, Lucy
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, rh Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Rob
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saxby, Selaine
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick

Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stevens, Jo
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sultana, Zarah
 Sunderland, James
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Trickett, Jon
 Trott, Laura
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz

Vaz, rh Valerie
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Whately, Helen
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Whittome, Nadia
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Hywel
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Winter, Beth
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Stella Creasy and
 Wendy Chamberlain

Question accordingly negated.

6.29 pm

More than three hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on consideration of Lords amendments, the proceedings were interrupted (Programme Order, this day).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83F).

Lords amendment 5 agreed to.

Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 6.

The House divided: Ayes 281, Noes 236.

Division No. 186]

[6.30 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Anderson, Lee
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Sir Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blunt, Crispin

Bone, Mr Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brereton, Jack
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Butler, Rob
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carter, Andy
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 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, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, rh Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 French, Mr Louie
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibbon, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkins, Andrea
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
 Kniveton, Kate
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lockhart, Carla
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherylyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan

Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 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, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Greg
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark

Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syme, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trott, Laura
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, rh Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Fay Jones and
 Stuart Anderson

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna

Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Dalton, Ashley
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dixon, Samantha
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foord, Richard
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glendon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 McMahon, Jim
 Mearns, Ian
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie

Pennycook, Matthew
 Phillips, Jess
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, rh Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham

Sultana, Sarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Taiwo Owatemi and
Navendu Mishra

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 6 disagreed to.

Lords amendments 7 to 9 and 36 disagreed to.

Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 1.

The House divided: Ayes 286, Noes 235.

Division No. 187]

[6.43 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Anderson, Lee
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Sir Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brereton, Jack
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Butler, Rob
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carter, Andy
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 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, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, rh Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, rh James
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
 Kniveton, Kate
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lockhart, Carla
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie

Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 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, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Greg
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew

Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, rh Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Stuart Anderson and
 Fay Jones

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy

Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Dalton, Ashley
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dixon, Samantha
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foord, Richard
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 McMahon, Jim
 Mearns, Ian
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Phillips, Jess
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin

Rayner, rh Angela
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, rh Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeter, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark

Tarry, Sam
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Wakeford, Christian
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Navendu Mishra and
 Taiwo Owatemi

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 1 disagreed to.

Amendment (a) proposed in lieu of Lords amendment 1.
 —(Chis Philp.)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Committee divided: Ayes 285, Noes 231.

Division No. 188]

[6.55 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Anderson, Lee
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Sir Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brereton, Jack
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Butler, Rob
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carter, Andy
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 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, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth

Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, rh Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 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
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
 Kniveton, Kate
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lockhart, Carla
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia

O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 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, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Greg
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trott, Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, rh Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim
Tellers for the Ayes:
Fay Jones and
Stuart Anderson

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Dalton, Ashley

David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dixon, Samantha
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foord, Richard
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 McMahon, Jim
 Mearns, Ian
 Monaghan, Carol
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Phillips, Jess
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, rh Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy

Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen

Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Wakeford, Christian
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Taiwo Owatemi and
 Navendu Mishra

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment (a) made in lieu of Lords amendment 1.

Lords amendment 17 disagreed to.

Government amendment (a) made in lieu of Lords amendment 17.

Clause 20

SERIOUS DISRUPTION PREVENTION ORDER MADE
 OTHERWISE THAN ON CONVICTION

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 20.—(Chris Philp.)

The House divided: Ayes 280, Noes 232.

Division No. 189]

[7.8 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Anderson, Lee
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, rh Sir Jake
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brereton, Jack
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Butler, Rob
 Carter, Andy
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 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, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, rh Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Green, Chris
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, rh James
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Howell, John

Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
 Kniveton, Kate
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Largan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lockhart, Carla
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 Menzies, Mark
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia

O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 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, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Simmonds, David
 Skidmore, rh Chris
 Smith, Greg
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain

Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syme, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trott, Laura
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, rh Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Fay Jones and
 Stuart Anderson

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Buck, Ms Karen

Burgen, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Dalton, Ashley

David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dixon, Samantha
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foord, Richard
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 McMahon, Jim
 Mearns, Ian
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, Ian
 Murray, James
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Sarah

Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Phillips, Jess
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, rh Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Stringer, Graham

Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Taiwo Owatemi and
Navendu Mishra

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 20 disagreed to.

Lords amendments 21, 23, 27, 28, 31 to 33 disagreed to.

Government amendments (a) and (b) made in lieu of Lords amendments 20 to 23, 27, 28, and 31 to 33.—(Chris Philp.)

Remaining Lords amendments agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83H(2)), That a Committee be appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing with their amendments 6 to 9 and 36;

That Chris Philp, Scott Mann, James Sunderland, Aaron Bell, Sarah Jones, Gerald Jones and Stuart C McDonald be members of the Committee;

That Chris Philp be the Chair of the Committee;

That three be the quorum of the Committee.

That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—(*Robert Largan.*)

Committee to withdraw immediately; reasons to be reported and communicated to the Lords.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 41A(3)),

That, at this day's sitting, Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply to the Motions in the name of Secretary Grant Shapps relating to Energy.—(*Robert Largan.*)

Energy

7.22 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Amanda Solloway): I beg to move,

That the Alternative Fuel Payment Pass-through Requirement (England and Wales and Scotland) Regulations 2023, dated 19 February 2023, a copy of which was laid before this House on 21 February, be approved.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): With this we shall take the following motion:

That the Non-Domestic Alternative Fuel Payment Pass-through Requirement and Amendment Regulations 2023, dated 22 February 2023, a copy of which was laid before this House on 23 February, be approved.

Amanda Solloway: The instruments were laid between 11 January and 23 February 2023, and their purpose is to ensure that benefits from the alternative fuel payment, both domestic and non-domestic, are passed through to consumers. Throughout this winter, the Government have delivered critical support to households, businesses and other non-domestic consumers in response to the unprecedented rise in energy prices. The Government brought forward emergency legislation on energy support, paving the way for this support package to be delivered rapidly across the entire United Kingdom.

The alternative fuel payments scheme provides support to households, organisations and businesses that do not use mains gas and use alternative fuels such as heating oil. Eligible domestic consumers using alternative fuels will receive a one-off fixed payment of £200. Non-domestic consumers will receive £150.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Can the Minister tell us how many households are still waiting to access the £200 payment?

Amanda Solloway: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question. With his permission, I will get back to him with the answer.

The pass-through requirement regulations are an important part of the support package and of ensuring that support reaches those who need it. The alternative fuel payment and non-domestic alternative fuel payment pass-through schemes set out in the regulations take the same approach as other energy schemes, particularly the energy bills support scheme and the energy bill relief scheme. They make it mandatory for intermediaries to pass the financial benefit of the schemes through to end users, which is necessary because that benefit is being delivered through electricity suppliers. In some cases, a supplier will have a contract with an intermediary such as a landlord or a heat network rather than with the end user, so we need to ensure that the support that it provides to the intermediary is passed on to the end user in a fair way.

Let me clarify what I mean by “end user”. In the case of both the alternative fuel payment and the non-domestic alternative fuel payment, an end user is an individual who consumes energy and pays for its usage through an intermediary such as a landlord. We are talking about tenants of different types—they could be domestic tenants, businesses or any kind of organisation.

Like other energy schemes, the schemes set out in the regulations require that support be passed on in a “just and reasonable” way. The regulations have been drafted in that way to account for the many kinds of relationship between an intermediary and an end user. If we used a narrow definition of “just and reasonable”, we could run the risk of inadvertently excluding some intermediaries from the pass-through requirements.

The regulations also accommodate scenarios in which there are multiple end users to whom intermediaries pass on support. They make it clear when and how intermediaries should communicate with end users regarding the benefit that is being passed on.

Our approach to enforcement is consistent with the approach taken in other energy schemes, particularly the energy bills support scheme in Great Britain. If an intermediary does not pass on the benefit to a user who is entitled to it, that user will be able to pursue recovery of the benefit debt through civil proceedings. Should a court rule in the end user’s favour, the end user will be entitled to the payment plus interest at 2% above the Bank of England base rate.

The Government have published guidance on gov.uk to ensure that the requirements are clear to all parties. If necessary, there are also template letters that tenants can use to contact their landlords if they are concerned about their energy bills. The Government are working with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that the pass-through regulations work for everybody in scope, including vulnerable people and vulnerable groups.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): It is apparent from my constituency casework that there are people who have already received the payment through their energy company, but who probably should not have. I ask the Minister to confirm on the Floor of the House what she has told me in correspondence:

“Government will not require customers to repay an Alternative Fuel Payment which they have received, even if they use electricity to heat their homes.”

Amanda Solloway: As the right hon. Gentleman will know, I am very new in post, so I will check that point before I respond, if I may.

The regulations are vital to ensuring that support reaches the people it is designed to help. They are essential to the effectiveness of the alternative fuel payment in GB and the non-domestic alternative fuel payment across the United Kingdom. They will ensure that intermediaries pass on the support to those who really need it: the households and non-domestic energy customers most vulnerable to high energy costs. With all those important reasons in mind, I commend the regulations to the House.

7.29 pm

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): As the Minister has said, these statutory instruments deal with alternative fuel payments within the general scope of the domestic energy price guarantee scheme and the non-domestic energy bills support schemes. They deal specifically with circumstances in which the customer does not hold a fuel account directly with the supplier but, either domestically or commercially, is able to secure assistance with energy costs by ensuring that the saving is passed through from the supplier to them. This applies to, for example, park home occupiers or, in business cases, end users such as those who run cafés and guest houses and are lessees of a landlord who pays the bills,

and receives the rebate, in the first instance. There will be pass-through payments of £200 for domestic end users and £150 for non-domestic end users. It should be noted that in Northern Ireland alternative fuel payments have been combined with a main payment of £600.

These latest SIs represent what I hope is the end of a long line of provisions for various sub-categories of people for whom we seem to have been legislating for a very long time. However, we ought to note, at least in passing, that this has meant that schemes that were announced in the autumn and were supposed to run for six months are now in the last month of their operation, and some people who should have received support are still waiting for it six months after the scheme started. Lest there be any doubt about that, I can tell the House that in February the Government issued a press release headed “Households, businesses and organisations off the gas grid to receive energy bill support over the coming weeks”, which stated that:

“£200 payments for off grid households start today, while businesses off the grid are expected to receive £150 payments by 10 March”,

which is in three days’ time. I therefore think that the inquiry from the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) about who had not yet received their payments is rather germane, given what the Government themselves said about the long delays in releasing the payments.

I appreciate that the support schemes have proved difficult to administer, and that there have been repeated instances of new sub-categories of people for whom separate secondary legislation has been necessary to secure the integrity of the schemes, but does the Minister really sit comfortably with the knowledge that a not inconsiderable number of customers, both domestic and non-domestic, did not receive help that was often desperately needed for virtually the whole passage of the scheme itself, and in some instances, as I have said, may not receive support until the middle of the month?

We will not be opposing the SIs. Indeed, we want to see them dispatched so that help, albeit late, can assuredly reach people, particularly those who are relying on pass-through arrangements for relief when they do not receive the up-front sums directly. We are discussing these SIs because—as far as I can see—of defects in the original pass-through SIs, which we have already debated, as reported to the Government by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments.

The Committee cited one particular defect in the Energy Bills Support Scheme and Alternative Fuel Payment Pass-through Requirement (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2023, which failed to make it clear that support is to be delivered as a single rather than a monthly payment. That has been corrected in the Non-Domestic Alternative Fuel Payment Pass-through Requirement and Amendment Regulations 2023. However, the Committee reported on a second defect in the legislation which I think is potentially serious: namely, the fact that there are requirements in both pass-through SIs for the intermediary in the scheme to notify the end user within 30 days of the provision of the scheme benefit of how and when the pass-through will take place and what amount will be passed through, and convey the important information that the end user can recover amounts to which they are entitled but do not receive as a civil debt.

All the information about how the end user can expect a pass-through benefit should be contained in the information from the intermediary. The Committee noted that no sanction is attached to the provision to cover cases in which the intermediary fails to inform the end user in that way. It seems that the vital part of telling someone that they will receive the benefit or can sue the intermediary if they do not receive it is essentially a voluntary act for the intermediary to perform.

Yes, they should send the information, and yes, the legislation says that they should, but if they do not, nothing will happen to them, and unless the end user is aware of their entitlements, they might remain in complete ignorance of an expected payment. Thus, nothing will happen as far as a payment is concerned. This is in spite of requirements being placed in the main legislation, the Energy Prices Act 2022. Section 10(b) of that Act states that regulations may make provision

“for the payment of a specified amount, on an application made in accordance with the regulations by a person who is an end user of an intermediary, where the intermediary fails to comply with a requirement by virtue of subsection (9) to provide information to the person”.

It is therefore clear in the main legislation what the secondary legislation is intended to achieve.

The Government’s response to the information they received from the Committee on this defect was to decide not to amend their approach and effectively to ignore this provision in the Act. They say so in the explanatory notes to this SI, and it is worth putting the Government’s line of argument for ignoring the main legislation on record. The explanatory notes state:

“Section 19(10)(b) of the Energy Prices Act 2022 provides that pass-through regulations may require an intermediary who is in breach of requirements to provide information to pay a specified amount on application by the end user to a specified person. The Department decided that the incentive for end users to make such an application for payment would have been insufficient given the time and administrative burden involved in doing so. However it is still considered that there is merit in including notification requirements in the instrument. This is on the basis that many intermediaries would be likely to comply with the requirements notwithstanding the lack of an enforcement mechanism.”

Frankly, that is a rather laughable defence for not doing in the secondary legislation what the original Act said should be done.

Is the Minister comfortable with this state of affairs where the secondary legislation has written out a provision contained in the primary legislation and potentially makes the receipt of relief from bills much more capricious in the process? Does she consider that there is arguably a case for action against the Government by those deprived of the information to which they are entitled on the grounds of negligence in doing their own pass-through, which is to pass the requirements of primary legislation into secondary legislation in such a way that it reflects the primary provisions? Clearly these are not in themselves grounds for chucking these SIs out on a vote, but perhaps the Minister should consider, since she is clearly no stranger to SIs, correcting the defects of previous SIs, and consider whether there might be a case for a further correction of these SIs to place the primary and secondary legislation on a watertight footing.

7.37 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is quite incredible that we are debating these SIs in the main Chamber today. They should never have been on the Floor of the House. This is proof that, apart from othering asylum seekers, this zombie Government are just padding out what would otherwise be normal Government time. It is also ridiculous that, six months down the line from announcing the energy support scheme, so many people are unfortunately still waiting for the moneys they are due. Can the Minister confirm whether these regulations and the applications being opened up for the alternative payment will now resolve the park home issue as has been long promised? For clarity, will these regulations resolve that issue?

It would be good to know how many people are still waiting on their moneys. Also, why do so many people have to jump through hoops and apply for alternative fuel support? Why do people in areas such as the highlands and islands, where there are many more people off the gas grid than there are in Northern Ireland, have to apply when every household in Northern Ireland gets the £200 payment anyway? It is clear that people in the highlands and islands of Scotland have fallen through the cracks, and the Government should look at this again, especially if they are going to repeat the scheme in future.

The first SI is about the pass-through of payments from the likes of commercial landlords. Does the Minister know how many payments are estimated to have been made to landlords that still have not been passed on? As the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) said, the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments confirmed that the Government expect information to be provided to them from these commercial landlords, except that there is no enforcement mechanism. This is a defective SI, yet despite that, the Government have chosen to bring it back to the Floor of the House in the main Chamber and do nothing about support or about changing the defects reported by the Joint Committee. Have the Government considered any such mechanism to allow the enforcement of information reporting? If not, and if there is no way to enforce it, how can they assess whether this support, this taxpayers' money, is going to those who need it, rather than being held up by intermediaries? This money should be passed on to the people to whom it is rightfully due.

The truth is that there is no incentive for commercial landlords to report, even those who are doing the right thing in passing on the money, because it is just time-wasting for them. Why should they see any merit in reporting what they have done? That means that, overall, the Government will not be able to assess the scheme's success in getting the money to those to whom it is due.

The key question is, why is the onus being put on individuals to pursue any moneys they are owed as a civil debt? In reality, how many people know they can go to court to claim the £200 they perhaps did not receive? Again, that is beyond most people's knowledge and ken.

Looking forward, as we come to the end of the initial energy price guarantee scheme, and given that the Government have borrowed a lot less money than they thought they would, they really must look at reducing bills. Even holding bills at £2,500, on average, is not

enough because it would keep 6.5 million households in fuel poverty. We are calling for a £500 reduction. It is also critical that they review the support for small businesses, which will receive an estimated £200 on average. That is a drop in the ocean compared with their high energy bills. The Government must look at that as we come to the new financial year.

7.41 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I was not planning to speak in this short debate, so I will be brief.

We have waited a long time for this statutory instrument. During that time, many very vulnerable people have been suffering. I acknowledge that, from the Government's broad perspective, it is a challenge to get this legislation right, but my concern, which I hope my hon. Friend the Minister can allay, is that the punishment for landlords—I am thinking in particular of some rogue park home site owners—who do not pass on the money is, I sense, puny rather than punitive. They will just laugh at the punishment. I hope I am wrong, but I ask the Minister to take on board my concern.

7.42 pm

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I declare an interest, as my home is off grid. We are heated by an oil-based central heating system, and I have received the £200 alternative fuel payment from my energy company, Octopus Energy.

The Liberal Democrats support this scheme but, like others, we have very serious concerns about the way in which it has been constructed and implemented. I have liaised with the Minister through correspondence and at Business questions last week on the fact that a number of people whose homes are heated entirely by electricity should not, on my reading of the regulations, have been given the alternative fuel payment, but on the basis of the modelling used by the Department, they have been given it. Others in an identical situation will now have to make an application through the portal that went live yesterday. If the Government are to implement their own regulations, those applications will be refused. That will leave us in the manifestly unfair situation whereby, for two households in exactly the same situation, one will be in receipt of the £200 payment and the other will not. The Minister has already told me in correspondence that there are no plans to claw back payments that have been made. That being the case, what will be the remedy for those whose application through the portal is refused?

I look at the information that has been put into the public domain on the way in which tokens for people on prepayment meters can be paid out, and I look at the information that has been given to me by my own energy company, and they both say that the tokens can be redeemed through PayPoint. That is true, but they can also be obtained through the Post Office. Only a handful of the outer islands in my constituency have access to PayPoint, but people can go to their local post office. The information going to the end energy user should surely reflect that.

One business in Orkney brought to my attention today the fact that it will not, apparently, receive the payment because it changed its energy supplier at the start of the year. It will not get the payment from its new energy supplier or from its former one, which, again, appears to be a fundamental unfairness.

The issue relating to district heating schemes does not affect many communities, but it very much affects Lerwick, where Shetland Heat, Energy & Power provides a district heating scheme to many local households. It appears to us that they have been excluded from the scheme. Will the Minister explain to us, either now or in correspondence, why that should be the case?

The applications that are now having to be made by those who have not received their payment automatically are to be done through the portal. So will the Minister tell us how long it will take for those people to be given a decision? In the event that they are unhappy with the decision made, what will be their appeal process? It is matter of record that there is a significant overlap between homes that are off grid and those that have poor or no internet access. A number of vulnerable elderly people just do not use internet services at all, but there appears only to be an online application process. Will the Minister explain to the House why no offline process—no paper-based process—is in place for that small number of people who remain highly vulnerable?

Finally, I turn to the issue of those who rely on solid fuel—peat, coal or logs—for their heating. It is now apparent that they will have to provide receipts. Those can go back to September, but someone who has been buying coal at their shop, perhaps in a small bag, every week since goodness knows when will not have kept their receipts. How are those people, who have incurred the expense, going to get access to this important payment? It is arbitrary to say that solid fuel bought only after September will be eligible for reimbursement. I know a lot of people who will buy solid fuel in the summer months because it is at its cheapest then. What will be done to ensure that those people, who are now being told that they should have been keeping the receipts from their weekly shopping since September, are not going to be excluded?

Will the Minister tell us how many payments have already been made? How many people will now have to make an application through the portal? How many does the Department estimate will remain off grid but will not receive a payment under this scheme?

7.48 pm

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael), because he raised a number of important points and concerns echoed by many of my constituents. Ceredigion is a mainland constituency that has one of the highest proportions of domestic households not connected to the mains gas grid—74% of properties are off grid there. Clearly, the scheme is very welcome and will offer a great deal of support for many of my constituents. However, the right hon. Gentleman drew upon a few concerns that I share and would like to bring to the Minister's attention this evening, as I believe they warrant urgent attention.

As the right hon. Gentleman said, those who have not received the payments automatically are required to make an online application. I have already been contacted, since yesterday, by many constituents who have explained that although they are eligible and satisfy most of the criteria, their applications have been refused and they cannot proceed any further because they have not got evidence that they bought fuel after September 2022.

Many of these people will have bought oil in August or July. I know and I am anticipating arguments that fuel was slightly cheaper in those months than it would have been during the winter months, and I do not deny that, but they were not to know at the time that they would be punished for buying in advance. They were not to know that if they bought in August, as they often do, they would be at a disadvantage under this scheme.

I cannot comprehend of a fair line of argument that the Government could produce to satisfy me that some of my constituents, who have been buying in the month of August for decades in some cases, should be punished when their neighbours, who perhaps were not able to buy in August—there were many difficulties at the time—will receive a £200 payment. I would be grateful if the Minister could satisfy the House that there will be some discretion for people who bought in August. Although the prices in August were cheaper than in the winter, they were still significantly higher than prices in 2021 or 2020. The prices in August 2022 were more than double those of August 2020. It is important that individuals are not punished by an arbitrary cut-off date for the online scheme.

If we need more arguments against the arbitrary cut-off date, it is obvious that those who have received the payment automatically may not have bought fuel after September 2022, but they will benefit from the £200 because they have a direct relationship with an electricity supplier. That is an unintended unfair consequence of the scheme. I support the scheme, but that is a hitch that needs to be addressed.

My other concern is that the postcode details of a number of off-grid homes in Ceredigion were not supplied to energy suppliers—for various reasons, mainly because they are new builds or new estates—so they did not receive the payments automatically. I am grateful to the Minister and the Department for clarifying that those households are eligible for the payments but that they will need to apply through the online portal. The potential problem is that because they have a direct relationship with an electricity supplier, they will have taken it for granted that they would receive the payments automatically. I am concerned that some people may not know that they need to make an application through the online portal. Could the Government initiate any steps, such as publicity campaigns, to make sure that everyone who needs to make an application knows that before the scheme concludes?

I echo the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) when he said that we need to look ahead to next winter. The Government would do well to do the work now to support off-grid homes in winter 2023-24.

7.52 pm

Amanda Solloway: With the leave of the House, I will respond to the debate.

I thank my hon. Friends and other Members for their valuable contributions tonight. I will send on some information about some of the figures that I am unable to give at the moment. The regulations are necessary to ensure that we implement the alternative fuel payment scheme, in Great Britain, and the non-domestic alternative fuel payment scheme by allowing support to reach those who need it, and I think we all agree with that. The schemes are already in place and are delivering support to organisations across the United Kingdom.

[Amanda Solloway]

As we are all aware, the domestic alternative fuel payment scheme is delivering £200 to households that use alternative fuels such as heating oil, liquified petroleum gas, coal or biomass, helping some 2 million off-grid households to meet their energy costs this winter. The scheme particularly supports households in rural areas that are not connected to the gas grid. Support was doubled to £200 in the autumn statement to reflect the price rises facing people using alternative fuels in their houses. The vast majority of eligible households should have received the payment automatically via their electricity supplier in February.

The non-domestic alternative fuel payment is delivering £150 to non-domestic customers who use alternative fuels for heating, helping premises in Great Britain and Northern Ireland meet their energy costs this winter.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I want to pick up the point about park homes and site owners and ask the Minister to address that specific point in her closing remarks. There are concerns that site owners are not always passing on the benefit of this payment to the residents of park homes. I would like some reassurance that there are proper measures in place and penalties that will make a difference in ensuring that site owners pass the benefit of these payments on to residents.

Amanda Solloway: I will address that in a moment. As I was saying, the scheme supports a wide range of domestic and non-domestic customers, including businesses, schools, hospitals and churches that are not connected to the gas grid. It will also deliver a top-up payment to the highest users of kerosene heating oil. Most eligible non-domestic customers should receive their £150 payment automatically in March, and we continue to update and publicise our guidance on the gov.uk website to ensure that energy users and intermediaries understand their rights and obligations.

I turn now to a couple of other questions that have been raised—as I have said, if I do not address any of the questions that have been asked, I will write to hon. Members. One thing I can confirm is that the Government will not require customers to repay an alternative fuel payment that they have received, even if they use electricity to heat their house.

Thinking about how to ensure that energy users know how to make necessary claims, end users can recover claims to pass-through amounts as civil debts in the county courts, in the same way that other outstanding amounts owed to an individual can be claimed. However, for future pass-through requirements, we will be keeping ahead of that position and making sure that we review it on a constant basis. We have reflected on advice we have received regarding previous pass-through regulations and meaningfully engaged with stakeholders across the United Kingdom to promote and disseminate requirements for all the schemes. That includes working side by side with delivery partners such as utility regulators and energy suppliers, and key stakeholders including consumer ombudsman services.

We considered introducing sanctions on intermediaries if they failed to notify the end user of their rights. However, we decided that the incentive for end users to

make an application for sanctions to be applied would be insufficient, given the time and the administrative burden involved in doing so. None the less, notification requirements were included in the statutory instruments, on the basis that many intermediaries are likely to comply with the requirements set out and that the published guidance clarifies the contents of this obligation. Furthermore, it was considered important to ensure consistency in approach across the pass-through regulations of all energy support schemes.

We will continue to seek views and feedback from those impacted by all these regulations, as well as from key delivery partners. I commend the regulations to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Alternative Fuel Payment Pass-through Requirement (England and Wales and Scotland) Regulations 2023, dated 19 February 2023, a copy of which was laid before this House on 21 February, be approved.

ENERGY

Resolved,

That the Non-Domestic Alternative Fuel Payment Pass-through Requirement and Amendment Regulations 2023, dated 22 February 2023, a copy of which was laid before this House on 23 February, be approved.—(Amanda Solloway.)

Business without Debate

INDEPENDENT EXPERT PANEL

Resolved,

That this House—

(1) takes note of the report of the Independent Expert Panel, *The Conduct of Mr Neil Coyle MP*, HC 1194, and the recommendation for sanction of a suspension of a total of five sitting days;

(2) accordingly suspends Neil Coyle from the service of the House for five sitting days, in accordance with paragraphs 1.11, 2.40 and 4.38 of that Report, namely Monday 13, Tuesday 14, Wednesday 15, Thursday 16 and Monday 20 March; and

(3) notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 45A, directs that Neil Coyle's salary shall be withdrawn for five days, from Monday 13 March till Friday 17 March.—(Penny Mordaunt.)

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

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

MEDICAL DEVICES

That the draft Medical Devices and Blood Safety and Quality (Fees Amendment) Regulations 2023, which were laid before this House on 2 February, be approved.—(Robert Langan.)

Question agreed to.

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

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

That the draft National Minimum Wage (Amendment) Regulations 2023, which were laid before this House on 30 January, be approved.—(Robert Langan.)

Question agreed to.

ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Helen Hayes be discharged from the Environmental Audit Committee and Cat Smith be added.—(Sir Bill Wiggan, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.)

Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Robert Langan.)

8 pm

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): It is a pleasure to bring some positive news and, I hope, some reasonable asks to the Minister regarding Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust. May I first declare an interest as a practising psychiatrist? I do not work for the trust, but I think it important to bring the House's attention to that point.

Over the past few years, we have had many debates in this place and many meetings with Ministers about Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust. The good news is that in the last few days, the trust has been taken off special measures and is no longer rated "inadequate". The tremendous effort of the board and the staff has paid off, and, as a result, we have seen in the latest Care Quality Commission report a considerable improvement in the quality of patient care.

The background is, as we know, that Norfolk and Suffolk Foundation Trust, which serves roughly 1.6 million people across Norfolk and Suffolk, and has about 87,000 patient contacts a year, has been in difficulties for a number of years. Over the past eight years, the trust has been rated "inadequate" four times, which I think probably places it not just as an outlier but as historically the worst-performing trust in the country for both physical and mental health.

A tremendous amount of work has needed to be put in to turn things around. I am optimistic that the new leadership team at the trust, the board and the staff have done the necessary work and that they will now continue that work to ensure that the people of Norfolk and Suffolk with mental ill health receive the improved care that they need.

In its most recent inspection, the CQC conducted an unannounced comprehensive inspection of two core services: child and adolescent mental health wards and community-based mental health wards. That inspection took place towards the end of last year. The CQC highlighted in its report, which was published on 24 February, a number of areas of improvement. It awarded NSFT an improved overall rating. It still requires improvement as a trust, but that is much better than being inadequate. The trust is now rated "requires improvement" rather than "inadequate" across all CQC domains, with the exception of the caring domain, in which the trust continues to be rated "good". On individual services, 60% of those inspected are now rated "good", and the trust no longer has a legal warning notice relating to concerns about the quality and safety of its patient care.

The CQC reported:

"The trust has moved at pace to make the necessary changes and significant improvements could be seen at all levels".

It also described largely positive feedback from patients and service users, who said that they

"felt safe and well cared for...staff were supportive of their needs and friendly and approachable...staff were kind, they felt listened to...staff helped them when they needed it"

and that

"they were fully involved in their care".

That is positive feedback from patients.

Key areas of good care highlighted by the CQC included the NSFT's child and adolescent mental health ward, Dragonfly, which achieved a significantly improved overall rating of "good"; acute wards and community-based mental health services, which support working-age adults and achieved positive improvements in overall ratings; and the community-based mental health services for adults of working age, whose Bury St Edmunds pilot programme for dialectical behavioural therapy—a type of therapy generally provided to people with personality disorders—was recognised for outstanding practice.

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. He mentioned improvements on the acute wards, and I wanted to highlight that a recurring theme of my 13 years as an MP has been the lack of acute beds in the region, and how for so many people with real challenges beds have to be sourced out of region, which causes them a lot of stress and their families a great deal of anguish as well. I am aware that the trust has plans to address the deficit, but does he agree that this issue must be addressed as a high priority?

Dr Poulter: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He has been a strong advocate for patients in his constituency receiving the care they need locally, which is something we all want for mental health patients. The trust has identified that out-of-area placements have been a problem, which is now being addressed at board level and throughout all services. Part of that work will be about improving and developing the mental health estate, improving the in-patient facilities available locally in Norfolk and Suffolk, and part of it will be about transforming the model of care, moving away from inappropriate in-patient admissions where people can be better cared for in the community. I will return to that subject, but my hon. Friend is right to say that the trust must continue to focus on reducing out-of-area placement, which is not good for patients or for their families, who want to support them while they are being cared for in hospital.

A key point that the CQC highlighted was strengthened leadership across the organisation, in individual services and particularly at board level. That was reflected in the trust now having a rate of mandatory training compliance among staff of at least 90%, and the trust rolling out accredited training in the prevention and management of violence and aggression, following a case in which restraint had been carried out incorrectly.

There has been significant change at board level, which I believe has been vital in driving the improvements in the quality of patient care. There has been a number of new appointments: trust chair Zoe Billingham, non-executive directors Dr Roger Hall and Sally Hardy, chief executive Stuart Richardson, deputy chief executive and chief people officer Cath Byford, chief medical officer Dr Alex Lewis, who is particularly impressive, and chief operating officer Thandie Matambanadzo have all brought significant experience and qualifications to the trust. It is by bringing in that external expertise that the trust has been able to understand what good looks like, and to begin to transform services and patient care.

The trust's clinical and other governance processes have been strengthened. The number of board sub-committees has been reduced to streamline systems of assurance. External stakeholders have become more active participants through committee memberships. An evidence assurance

[Dr Poulter]

group has been introduced to ensure that progress-monitoring data is accurate. The strengthening of a ward visit quality assurance team has also been important to driving up standards; this team carried out 100 comprehensive visits between March and October 2022. The introduction of a new digitised and simple method of completing clinical audits is another key element of driving up standards at the trust.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): My hon. Friend has great expertise in this area, so when he speaks his words carry weight. I welcome some of these improvements, but does he agree that, such is the extent of the failure over such a long period, a huge job for the new leadership is to regain the trust of families throughout Norfolk and Suffolk who have lost trust in the organisation, who think it is broken, and who believe a new organisation is the only way forward?

Dr Poulter: I agree with my hon. Friend and neighbour about the importance of rebuilding trust. The CQC highlighted a lot of the work done over the last year as good because the NSFT has rebuilt trust with both staff and the patients who use the service. The patient feedback, which was highlighted by the CQC, has been overwhelmingly positive in that time. That area has been addressed. It is an ongoing piece of work for the trust to focus on. It is also important, before we think about reorganisation—I understand why my hon. Friend has highlighted that—to understand what the consequences of that might be, and I will come to that in my later remarks. My view would be that we now need to get behind and support the new leadership team and recognise that for the first time in eight years we have a trust that is moving in the right direction and now needs to show consistent progress. Reorganisation would be a distraction from continuing that progress and could be detrimental to patient care. Whereas I might have agreed with my hon. Friend a year ago that reorganisation could be a viable option, at this stage, given the progress made and for a number of other reasons that I will come on to, I believe that the solution does not lie in breaking up the trust, but in supporting the board and staff to do the job that they have started and to get the trust not just to “requires improvement”, but to “good” and then to “outstanding”, which is what they would like to do.

The trust has recognised that it has needed to bring forward work to align its strategy with the plans in the broader health and social care system. One of the problems in the past was that the trust was often operating in isolation and not joining up the focus of its care with the work done by other healthcare partners. If we are talking about preventive care and upstream early intervention, a lot of the work going on between NSFT and primary care partners has meant that there is more focus on early intervention and preventing people becoming unwell, and hopefully therefore reducing inappropriate hospital admissions, and that is an important ongoing piece of work.

However, improvements still need to be made. A key area that has been highlighted for improvement by the Care Quality Commission and internally by those who work at the trust is that trust data is not as unified as it could be. While the trust has a large amount and range of data, it is not brought together effectively to focus on

patient care and reduce risk in the way it needs to be. The effect is that struggling services are not always identified quickly enough to be provided with the necessary support, and I know that that will be a key focus over the next year to 18 months. Essential environmental improvements, for example on in-patient wards, do not always happen fast enough within the trust to address patient safety concerns. There is variation in the abilities and confidence of ward and team managers and middle management in clinical care groups, and managers do not always escalate concerns quickly enough to gain the necessary support. The strategic leadership team at the trust has recognised that and is now focusing in particular on ensuring that quality improvement is embedded in everything that everyone at the trust does so that it becomes everyday business, rather than an aspect of clinical audit, as may have been the case in the past.

Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for bringing this debate to the House. I think we should give credit where credit is due, and it is positive that we now have some green shoots at the Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust moving forward, but my concern is that those should be sustainable green shoots and that this is not a yo-yo where the trust goes back into special measures. It should be on a sustainable footing going forward. I know that the chair has reassured many of us that she feels it is a good platform from which to move forward.

One of the points to address is culture and the improvements that need to be made. Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the key statistics is that 41% of staff leave within the first two years? The trust has to improve on that. People who need a lot of mental health support must form relationships with those who are treating them. The number leaving within those first two years is something that the trust has to improve.

Dr Poulter: I agree with my hon. Friend. A key issue faced by a lot of mental health trusts, but which is particularly acute at Norfolk and Suffolk, has been a high rate of staff turnover, and that is not good for continuity of patient care. It is not good when we are talking about embedding a culture of safety and quality improvement. It does not help. It is undoubtedly the case that one of the key challenges going forward that has been identified by the trust and the CQC as well as by NHS Improvement, which has been providing external support, is the need to improve staff recruitment and retention. Some of that is a national challenge, but effective initiatives have been introduced at a local level. The new chief medical officer, for example, has introduced staff recruitment and retention initiatives, some of which are financial and some of which relate to improved job planning, which can help to make the trust a more attractive place for staff, not just to work, but to remain for the longer term. We need to see that kind of work being built on and continue in the months and years ahead. The same is true across nursing and all other staff groups.

Other areas to highlight where things are going well include investment. The trust has invested £3.2 million in digital improvements, £1.6 million in improvements in clinical areas, £1.3 million refurbishing bungalows for people with learning disabilities, £1 million to address safety issues, and £600,000 to improve the pharmacy at Hellesdon Hospital in Norwich. There are new services,

including 95 new primary mental health nurses working across the trust directly with primary care, offering more than 80,000 appointments in GP surgeries across Norfolk and Suffolk. There is a 22-strong rehabilitation team and a new armed forces veterans wellbeing service in partnership with Walking with the Wounded and Outside the Wire to help to improve mental health support available to veterans across Norfolk and Suffolk—we have many veterans living in our constituencies.

The trust still has a lot to do, but it has achieved a lot in the past year under new leadership. I should like to put on record my thanks to the board and all the staff for the work they have done in turning things around so effectively and quickly. Key challenges, as we have outlined, remain the recruitment and retention of staff. The trust has launched programmes to address that, but there is still more to do. The CQC report recognised that the NSFT is changing at pace, but it needs to do more than show improvement over a year—it needs to embed the changes, sustain them and secure not just “requires improvement” but “good”. The NSFT needs to continue its work with system partners across Norfolk and Suffolk to improve commissioning and the delivery of mental health services across the patient journey.

The trust requires ongoing support, and I have some brief asks of the Minister. First, the trust requires from the Government another £3 million of funding to complete the £54 million needed for a new campus at Hellesdon Hospital, which would secure the development of three new wards. That is a key aspect of addressing the problem that my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) outlined, so that there is less reliance on out-of-area beds. We need more wards to treat more local patients in Norfolk and Suffolk, and less reliance on out-of-area placements. I hope that that £3 million of funding can be secured, and I would be grateful if the Minister outlined how we can go about that.

Secondly, the trust has made inroads into issues associated with its estate, but it needs significant and urgent capital investment in addition to that £3 million to help to develop those new wards and modernise Hellesdon Hospital. More generally, can the Minister outline what capital programmes are available to support the trust in those ambitions?

Thirdly, funding for mental health services has been constrained despite increased needs and patient demand, and, when we are talking about parity of esteem when funding increases for the NHS, my general plea—I would say this as a practising psychiatrist—is for greater funding for general adult and other mainstream psychiatric services.

The next area of asks for the trust is from NHS England. The trust has benefited from strong and experienced outside support from NHS Improvement and from experienced leaders such as Nick Hulme from East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust, who was seconded to support the trust. Now that the trust is out of special measures, I hope there is still an opportunity for some of that external support to be maintained, even in a more informal capacity. I look to the Minister to perhaps outline how that may continue or whether she may be able to give some direction to help with that ongoing support, which the trust has found very helpful during these difficult times.

On local decision makers and stakeholders, the trust supports a new model of care for Norfolk and Suffolk, and ensuring that local ICBs work effectively with it to

deliver more preventive upstream care and more care in the community. Reducing inappropriate and unnecessary in-patient admissions is a key priority in the trust's ambition to transform services and improve patient care, and any support the Minister can offer to encourage or enable the local ICBs to be more effective at doing that would be gratefully received by the trust.

On the issue of breaking up the trust, I would urge the Minister to give a commitment at the Dispatch Box today that, given the progress that has been made by a very effective new board—a group of individuals with a good skillset—and given the commitment that has been shown to staff and to turning around the trust and moving it away from special measures and away from “inadequate” towards “requires improvement”, the threat of the trust being broken up can be taken off the table at this stage so that the trust can focus on caring for its patients. Breaking up the trust now would be very disruptive to patient care. It also would be financially inefficient and would lead to a worsening of the retention and recruitment challenges, which have been outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Duncan Baker), with staff feeling that their jobs are insecure.

To sum up, we are asking for support with capital projects, particularly around Hellesdon Hospital. We are asking for ongoing support, be it informally from NHSI or key national stakeholders. And we are asking for some encouragement to be provided to the local health and care system to support the trust's service transformation model. Finally, I hope the Minister can give a commitment this evening that there is no threat of the trust being broken up, so that it can get on and continue to deliver the improvements that have been put in place.

I will cease my remarks, Mr Deputy Speaker. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response, but I will put on record once again my thanks to the board and the staff for turning around what was the worst-performing trust in the country and, I hope, putting us in a place where we can be proud of our local NHS mental health trust and where patients will receive a much better quality of care not just today but in the future.

8.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) for bringing forward this important debate about the Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust, and for highlighting the progress that has indeed been made. The difficulties at the trust have been well documented, and there have been performance and quality issues for many years. Those have been highlighted on behalf of their constituents by many Members of the House, including my hon. Friends the Members for North Norfolk (Duncan Baker), for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), for Waveney (Peter Aldous) and for Ipswich (Tom Hunt), many of whom are here this evening. However, all the MPs in Norfolk and Suffolk have worked constructively to make progress and to support the trust, patients and staff.

To understand the root causes and to ensure that effective plans are in place to improve patient outcomes, I and many of my ministerial predecessors have met right hon. and hon. Members from Norfolk and Suffolk

[Maria Caulfield]

collectively on several occasions, alongside NHS England, the CQC and representatives from the trust and the newly formed ICBs, to review progress and to ensure that there was an effective plan to achieve the quality of care that patients and families clearly deserve.

I am pleased that the latest CQC report recognises some key progress in areas that need improvement. The leadership team and staff across the trust should be congratulated on their hard work on that, and on the fact that the trust's overall rating has moved from "inadequate" to "requires improvement". Many elements of the report were found to be "good", however, which indicates that things are moving in the right direction. The CQC also reports that

"the trust had moved at pace to make the necessary changes and...significant improvements could be seen at all levels",

which is encouraging.

I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich and other hon. Members from Norfolk and Suffolk were invited to attend a briefing on 23 February, prior to the publication of the inspection. I hope that those who could attend found that session constructive; it sounds as though there is collective agreement that progress has been made. I had a similar session with the CQC the day before and I found the progress encouraging. I was reassured that many of the issues raised previously are being addressed, but there are clearly still significant challenges at the trust that must be addressed, which my hon. Friend outlined well this evening.

I welcome the progress that the trust and its leadership team have made and the fact that they have set out a realistic improvement delivery plan and a commitment to take it forward. I am pleased to hear from the CQC that the trust and all its partners are clear that they cannot take their foot off the pedal. Now is the time to double down on their efforts and not just assume that the progress of the last few months will continue.

I am pleased to confirm that NHS England will continue to provide the existing level of support to the trust. A full-time improvement director is in place, with representation at the trust's governance meetings, so they have full visibility of the latest data and improvements needed. They will continue to work closely with the trust and key stakeholders to ensure that they continue to build on the recent progress. As part of the next steps, a rapid quality review meeting between the trust and its partners will take place on 27 March.

I will continue to watch closely and to ensure that any concerns that arise are dealt with quickly and at pace. Alongside NHS England, I am keen to ensure that the joint meetings that we were having continue to take place. I intend to hold a follow-up meeting with the relevant Members of Parliament and our system partners in early May, once the rapid quality review meeting has taken place on 27 March and the options review work has concluded. I hope that gives my hon. Friend some reassurance about how seriously we are taking the issue.

On mental health more generally, on 23 January I announced that we were commissioning a rapid review into mental health in-patient settings, with a focus on how we use data and evidence to look at the quality of in-patient services in mental health across England more broadly, including complaints and whistleblowing alerts, to identify risks to safety. The review is being chaired by Geraldine Strathdee and will run for eight weeks. We will shortly get her report and I am keen to implement her findings. That relates to the point that my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk made about the culture in mental health and how we change that to improve outcomes for patients. NHS England recently announced a new in-patient quality transformation programme to support cultural change in mental health and to develop a new, bold, reimagined model of care for all NHS-funded mental health services, particularly in an in-patient setting.

In the minute or so I have left, I will touch on a couple of key asks. Capital funding is available for mental health services. A few weeks ago, we announced funding for crisis centres, community support teams and mental health ambulances, so that they can respond more quickly to those going into crisis, in order to try to avoid admissions. More generally, record levels of funding are going into mental health—£2.3 billion extra each year. I encourage the local trust to speak to its integrated care board, which has access to that funding, if it is interested in capital programmes. That is a whistlestop tour of the support that we can give.

Dr Poulter: Will the Minister give way?

Maria Caulfield: I have only a few seconds left.

In conclusion, I hope that reassures all hon. Member across Norfolk and Suffolk that we take the issue seriously. I am delighted that progress is being made across the trust.

Question put and agreed to.

8.29 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 7 March 2023

[GERAINT DAVIES *in the Chair*]

Decarbonising Rural Transport

9.30 am

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): I beg to move,
That this House has considered decarbonising rural transport.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies, and I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting the debate, which is so important to those of us who live in rural constituencies like mine.

Transport is the United Kingdom's highest-emitting sector and is responsible for a quarter of our emissions. If we want to achieve net zero by 2050, we need to reduce emissions from our cars, vans and lorries, but we also need to recognise that rural transport is different from urban, and that reliance on cars is so much higher in rural areas. Therefore, we need to include rurality as a factor in more decisions on how we move to decarbonise our transportation.

Public transport is limited in rural Britain, and given the sparsity of population, expanding it along the lines of transport in our towns and cities is not, in general, financially viable, or even welcome—for example, sending enormous buses through tiny country lanes—but we must find ways to extend routes, provide smaller vehicles or car shares, and reintroduce train lines, especially where there has been large growth in housing, such as between Bideford and Barnstaple in my constituency of North Devon.

Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con): East Sussex County Council has an excellent bus service improvement plan, one of whose objectives is progressively to support operators to increase the number of zero-emission buses used on the network and to upgrade diesel buses to Euro 6 standard as part of the drive to achieve net carbon neutrality by 2050.

Does my hon. Friend agree that, in order to fulfil that objective, further Government funding opportunities will be required to introduce battery electric buses or hydrogen fuel cell buses, and for retrofitting to Euro 6 specification, and that decarbonisation of rural transport should not be restricted to local buses but should include trains? Does she further agree that the extension of HS1 from Ashford to Rye, Hastings and Bexhill, which will decarbonise and make the journey faster, is essential?

Selaine Saxby: My hon. Friend is entirely right that all of us in rural constituencies have plans that we need our councils to deliver to facilitate the decarbonisation of our rural transport network. The challenge we face is that, unfortunately, there is not always the funding to support those fantastic rural transport schemes, although I hope the Minister will reassure us on that point. I will come to some of my own suggestions for the bus network in Devon.

Active travel is an opportunity for some, but the distances involved in rural commuting by bike mean that it is not always an option for everyone. In my constituency of North Devon, 2.4% of work journeys

are made by bike, which is a surprisingly high percentage for such a rural area, but realistically, active travel is unlikely to replace huge numbers of car journeys unless it is integrated into a wider transport solution.

I will return to the opportunities to tackle the issues of public transport and active travel, but we need to be realistic: rural Britain will continue to rely on its cars for the foreseeable future.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. Limited public transport options in rural communities mean that, as the hon. Lady says, many residents depend on their car for everything—getting to work, going to the doctor, seeing family and friends. Does she agree that any strategy to decarbonise rural transport needs to improve connectivity so that social isolation is not inadvertently increased?

Selaine Saxby: I agree entirely that there are so many more challenges around rural connectivity. If we are to continue to rely on our cars, we need to decarbonise them, but the roll-out of electric charging points in rural Britain lags behind that in towns, and when the distances we travel per day are so much greater, investing in an electric vehicle is a far harder decision to take.

Only 1.5% of North Devon residents have gone fully electric, compared with 2.1% nationally. I have a hybrid, as the majority of electric vehicles would not get me to Westminster each week, and I am not sure I would ever get to Exmoor in my constituency and back home as there are no charging points where I live. The nearest one is 5 miles away. To plug in at home, I would need to lay my own cable down 20 feet of path every evening, and I am not sure my schedule accommodates that.

While the Transport Minister is here, I want to highlight the appalling state of the roads in Devon. I am fully aware that we have the longest road network in the United Kingdom by 2,000 miles and that the council is working flat out to try to repair the proliferation of potholes that we have seen this winter. Not only has the weather contributed but we need to recognise that in rural Britain we have enormous farm vehicles on tiny lanes and we therefore create even more potholes, yet our council is not assigned long-term funding solutions to tackle them.

The short-term approach to funding, with inadequate rural weighting, makes the cost of repairing each pothole far higher. At this time, Devon is moving teams off scheduled roadworks as we cannot take on full-time highways teams due to the uncertainty around long-term funding. I hope that the Minister will be able to take that away and see what more can be done to address the entirely unacceptable state of our roads. If there were an Ofsted inspection of roads, I suspect we would go into special measures, yet the current funding mechanism contributes to that. The damage that potholes do to vehicles is also hugely expensive to motorists and the council, which is no doubt reimbursing a growing number of inconvenienced motorists with damaged tyres. And it deters people from switching to active travel solutions because of the potential risk of falling due to a pothole.

I spend a lot of time in this place talking about connectivity, often the communication kind, but our transport connections are vital. The lack of decarbonised public transport is impacting on decarbonising our travel.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing a really important debate. When it comes to decarbonising public transport, bus use is massively important in rural communities like hers and mine. I am sure she will agree with me that the Government's £2 cap on bus fares is a positive thing and it is positive that it has been extended to June, but even more positive would be to extend it beyond that. But it is of no use whatever if someone lives in a community where there is no bus service. When I think about places in my own community such as the Cartmel peninsula and areas in Cumbria such as the Eden valley, there is a lack of options when it comes to bus services—far too few or none at all—so it would make sense to give local authorities like the new Westmorland and Furness Council the power to start and run their own bus services to fill in the gaps and people could spend their £2 on bus services that actually exist.

Selaine Saxby: I agree with the hon. Member. There is so much more that could be done. With so many of these rural transport issues, we need local solutions and for local communities to be able to share their best practice, because there are some great local bus solutions up and down the country. I have a remote district council that is detached from the county council, which is where highways sits. How do we join up those pieces? More could be done to come up with innovative solutions, which already exist in places, but are not universally available. Indeed, bus travel in my constituency is not universally available, let alone decarbonised, and that makes things as basic as getting to school both expensive and problematic.

Our bus company, which I recently met, notes that people are tending to make fewer trips than they did before the pandemic and also tending to make shorter and more local journeys as opposed to long-distance trips on a daily basis. Public transport providers have had to adapt to that, but our communities still rightfully expect the same connections to exist as they did before the pandemic, or even new connections to be developed as society has changed.

Broadly in my constituency the patronage has recovered to about 80% to 90% of pre-pandemic levels, but with concessionary journeys recovering only to around 70%. That recovery creates a challenge in rural settings where margins were stretched or non-existent before the pandemic. Funding needs to respect rurality and the higher costs of operating the routes. That could be done through paying bus service operator grants on a mile or kilometre basis as opposed to per litre of fuel to cover costs. I am assured that the industry wishes to engage with the Department on those points so that a longer-term settlement can be reached to support rural services on a longer-term basis as opposed to the current cycle of short-term funding that we are in, even though that funding is greatly appreciated.

The current Get Around for £2 is fabulous. In my constituency people can do a fantastic trip from Barnstaple to Lynton for just £2—a full 26 miles—or get to Exeter on the bus for £2. In normal times, to get from Ilfracombe, which has recently lost its last bank, to Barnstaple for the nearest branch, is two to three times more than the current £2 rate. We need to find a way to facilitate access to services for remote rural communities. In other

communities, such as Woolacombe, employers provide buses for their teams to get to work, because there are no public transport options.

In the peak of the tourist season, overlaid with parking challenges and air pollution, huge queues of visitors and locals try to get to our beautiful beaches. Although the availability of public transport is my primary concern, decarbonisation of it is an entirely different matter, as rural bus journeys are significantly longer than urban ones. Capital investment in suitable vehicles is by definition going to be higher in rural Britain.

I recently spoke here about introducing a rail link from Barnstaple to Bideford. We also unsuccessfully submitted an inquiry into putting in a light rail link from Braunton to Barnstaple. Time and again, those projects do not progress; one cannot help but think that our rurality and population sparsity are factors. I hope that the Department for Transport will continue its positive work in active travel, with the latest round of funding of £200 million including rurality as a factor for the first time.

The previous cycling Minister visited north Devon's iconic Tarka trail. Completing a stretch of that trail would see the north and south coasts of Devon fully connected. The project was ranked second out of six submitted by Devon County Council. The council team met the Minister to explain their frustration at having the five Exeter-based projects succeed, yet the second highest priority project rejected. I am delighted that rurality is now being considered following the Minister's visit, and that the Tarka trail project is now being resubmitted. I hope that Active Travel England and the Department will look favourably upon it, and take further steps to enable more active travel solutions come to fruition in rural Britain.

Large counties such as Devon, with big urban centres and an enormous rural hinterland, need different approaches for those two elements. As a community, we would benefit hugely from electric bikes, which can undertake longer, hillier journeys and enable people who may not be able to cycle so far on a traditional bike to do so. Again, electric bike hire facilities are available at transport hubs in Exeter but not Barnstaple.

To begin to decarbonise our transport network, we need to look to transport hubs, where active travel can potentially be the first or last mile. To do that, our buses and trains should be better at taking bikes, hubs should have better bike storage and there should be electric vehicle chargers, if travellers are connecting to buses or trains, alongside public toilets.

Tim Farron: I am taking advantage of the hon. Lady's generosity, for which I am grateful. I am in full agreement with what she says about transport hubs, where there can be electric bikes, non-electric bikes, and bus and rail interchanges. In our community, we have several railway lines: Settle to Carlisle, the Furness line, the Lakes line and the main line. My great concern is that we stand to lose railway station ticket offices at Grange, Appleby and Windermere. Would those not be great places to have hubs? Is that not a good argument to ensure we maintain fully-staffed railway stations in rural communities?

Selaine Saxby: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. It is important to look at rurality in how we deal with all infrastructure developments. I know

that my own ticket office in Barnstaple has concerns. I have only one trainline, so his constituency is particularly well connected. We need to recognise that, where there is a sparse population, ticket offices are working less than in a busy town centre. We need to be more innovative in our approach, to ensure that residents who do not use trains so often can comfortably use the train station and transport hubs.

I was coming on to say that facilities such as public toilets are a vital part of transport hubs. Barnstaple's bus station toilets have not reopened since March 2020. If we are serious about encouraging public transport usage and decarbonising our transport, we need to recognise that longer journeys, with longer waits between buses and trains, require these additional facilities to be present, particularly for our older residents. The lack of hubs that are safe, warm and have the right facilities makes using public transport far harder in locations such as North Devon at this time.

Far too many routes in rural Britain are single-carriageway, 60-mile-an-hour roads. If we are to tackle that head-on, to facilitate safer cycling and walking on those roads, we need additional paths to be constructed to facilitate things such as safe school journeys on foot or bike. Although today's debate focuses on decarbonisation, we could also consider the health benefits of an active travel mode to work or school, which often seem to be somewhat neglected.

I recognise that, as was mentioned earlier, there are examples across the UK of great rural transport schemes. However, as with so many matters around rurality, as discussed in the debate that I led on levelling up rural Britain, it is harder for these examples of best practice to be shared between councils and communities. I hope that as we move towards decarbonising our transportation, more support is given to overstretched councils to share best practice and roll out solutions to rural as well as urban Britain and find funding solutions that give councils the ability to deliver a decarbonisation plan that reflects rurality, alongside an acceptance that the costs per capita will differ. In areas reliant on their tourists, the population swells enormously in the summer, which, again, is rarely reflected in funding settlements or even the calculation of carbon pollution.

Rural Britain deserves to see its transport decarbonised. Our productivity is reduced because of the poor transport links. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister has plans in his Department to ensure that rurality is rapidly included in future funding announcements and that there are long-term settlements lying ahead—it was so warmly welcomed to have rurality mentioned in the current round of active travel funding—because we all want to level up and decarbonise transport in rural Britain.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): Order. I remind any hon. Members wanting to speak that they should bob if they have not done so. Thank you so much. I will ask Jim Shannon to speak next.

9.47 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I think the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Helen Morgan) is first, Mr Davies.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): You were first on the list, Jim.

Jim Shannon: Well, may I say how pleased I am?

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): This is the first time you have been called first, I know.

Jim Shannon: To be first on the list—my goodness. I am almost in a state of shock. Mr Davies, you are very kind. Thank you for giving me the chance to contribute. Others will contribute as well.

I thank the hon. Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) for leading today's debate and setting the scene so well. She is right. The examples from her constituency are replicated across all the other constituencies represented here. Those hon. Members who have intervened so far have given an indication of the same issues.

As someone who represents a rural constituency, I have stated before that it is imperative that there is sustainable and economical transport for our constituents who live out in the countryside. I am very fortunate in that I have lived in the countryside all my life. I am very pleased to do so. I love the green fields; I do not like the concrete—that is no secret. That is why London does not really appeal to me as a place where I would want to live—there is not enough greenery around me to enjoy. But that is a choice that I have and that I have been able to make over the years.

We have seen the expansion of “green” transport to protect and preserve our atmosphere and environment, and we must continue to do this as time goes on. The hon. Lady outlined that. The issue must be addressed not only in England but UK-wide to ensure that we are consistent and equal in our efforts to decarbonise rural transport. I realise that the Minister is responsible only for England, but my comments will be on Northern Ireland, as they always are, and what we have done there.

Electric car charging points are few and far between. In rural areas, we have few or no charging points; they are always concentrated, as it is probably right that they should be, in towns—in my constituency, it is the towns of Newtownards and Comber. There are not enough charging points; I realise that. Central Government here have taken a decision to support the Northern Ireland Assembly and, with that process in mind, have allocated money to ensure that charging points are available across my constituency as well. There is an issue not with the number of charging points but with the time it takes to charge a car. The hon. Member for North Devon talked about needing 20 feet of cable to charge her car. Wherever there is a charging point, it is also important to have enough charging connections. I am not in any way influenced to buy an electric car, but my sons have done so; they are moving with the times, while their father may not be anxious to do that. My point is that we need charging points and enough connections. If it takes six hours to charge a car, as some people have indicated to me, then that tells me that we need more connections.

Margaret Ferrier: Transitioning the country from petrol to electric vehicles requires extensive work that needs to be done by 2030. The Government have already acknowledged that poor grid connectivity in rural areas

[Margaret Ferrier]

could be a real problem when it comes to the charging infrastructure. Does the hon. Member agree that the current reliance on the private sector to decide on charge point locations and the lack of central policy around that could create a barrier to reaching the target?

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Lady for her wise and salient words. In Newtownards for example, people can charge their electric cars at the shopping centre, but if they want to go elsewhere in the town, they cannot charge their cars. Councils have a key role in prioritising charging points and, as the hon. Lady said, we must not depend on private companies, who may put charging points only in places that are advantageous to them. I am not saying such companies do not have a role, but the issue needs to be looked at more widely and in greater depth.

I am pleased to record a recent development by Wrightbus, whose headquarters are in Ballymena, in Northern Ireland, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley); indeed, my hon. Friend talked about this last week at Transport questions in the main Chamber. Wrightbus has secured a major order to supply 117 zero-emission buses across England, thanks to an investment of £25.3 million by the Government. That is an example of the many things that the Government are doing.

Operated by First Bus, the buses will be rolled out across Yorkshire, Norfolk, Portsmouth and Hampshire, and will enable passengers to enjoy greener, cleaner journeys. Therefore there is a strategy and we, in Northern Ireland, are very much part of that. The new buses will be manufactured by Wrightbus in Ballymena, supporting hundreds of new high-skilled jobs to help level up and grow the economy. Some of those workers live in my constituency of Strangford and travel to the Wrightbus headquarters for their work, so there is a spin-off in jobs, opportunity and economic advantage.

The new additional funding brings the vision of a net zero transport network one step closer to reality. The double-decker battery electric buses are 44% more efficient grid to wheel, saving energy costs and carbon. That is another example of how we are moving forward. The fact that the buses are manufactured in Ballymena means that the whole United Kingdom has the chance to benefit from that advantage, and hopefully other companies will be able to do the same.

The funding is an additional investment from the zero-emission buses regional area scheme, which was launched in 2021 to allow local transport authorities to bid for funding for zero-emission buses and supporting infrastructure. The Government have a policy that is working. Obviously it is a first stage, but I believe the policy will be able to go a lot further.

While it is a welcome and much-needed step, it goes back to my point that this needs to be a UK-wide measure. As the buses are manufactured in Northern Ireland, it would be fantastic for the Northern Ireland economy if some of the buses could be administered across the Province. We manufacture and sell the buses across the United Kingdom, but unfortunately we do not have much take-up back home, but I know Translink, our bus company, has purchased some.

The Secretary of State for Transport met Wrightbus representatives to discuss the success and stated that it would help level up transport across the country, yet the funding has been awarded only to places in England. While I respect the fact that infrastructure and transport are devolved matters, there needs to be greater communication between Westminster and the devolved Governments in relation to nationwide levelling up. I support the Government's levelling-up policy. I think they have taken giant leaps to make levelling up happen, and this is such an example.

We need ideas for decarbonising public transport in more rural areas, where the population is more dispersed. As others have said, we do not have the continuity or regularity of buses that we should have in rural communities in order to incentivise people to leave their cars and use buses. We in the countryside—especially where I live in the Ards peninsula; indeed, in the whole of the Ards peninsula—depend on our cars, whether they are diesel, petrol or, in my son's case, electric.

It will always be challenging and expensive to provide the decarbonisation of public transport, but many residents have brought to my attention that some rural buses routes are extremely limited anyway, and I want to put that on the record. There is hope that installing hydrogen buses in rural areas will further discourage people from using cars, which is certainly the intention. People with cars can jump in them and go—they do not have to wait for a bus to come along—but others are probably in a position where they can do that. The use of hydrogen buses and other approaches tend to focus on densely populated urban areas, as there may be a critical mass of people to support public transport services, so it is great to see some Government commitment and willingness to ensure that efforts are made to decarbonise our rural communities too.

I hope that the Minister can join me in congratulating Wrightbus, take the comments of Members from across the House into consideration, and ensure that there is equal opportunity for rural decarbonisation across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

9.56 am

Helen Morgan (North Shropshire) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I thank the hon. Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) for securing the debate. I think we all agree that this is a really important topic, and it is good to have the opportunity to air the issues.

I am sure we are all aware that domestic transport is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the country. The Department for Transport's 2022 statistical estimates report that cars emit more greenhouse gases per passenger mile than trains and coaches, for the obvious reason that trains and coaches convey more people, so maximising the number of people in a vehicle for each journey is a really important part of meeting our emissions targets. The example that the Department gives is a long-distance one: on a journey between London and Glasgow, the average petrol car emits over four times more CO₂ than the equivalent journey by coach for each person, or 3.3 times more CO₂ per passenger than an electric car, once it has been taken into account that we do not generate all our electricity in a totally green way.

In rural areas, it is proving really difficult to get such efficiencies and cut the greenhouse gases that we emit because of the high level of dependency on private cars, which are mostly non-electric. Our bus services are already very poor and have been driven to the verge of extinction by the covid pandemic, and it is well documented that usage has not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels. In Shropshire, services have continued to be cut since 2020 because they are no longer considered commercially viable. Obviously, we are not just talking about the tiny hamlets where everyone accepts it would be uneconomical and unsuitable for a large bus to trundle through; market towns of under 20,000 or 30,000 people are suffering as well.

North Shropshire has five market towns with fewer than 20,000 people, which contain about half the population of the area. There are also a significant number of larger villages that sit on main roads, and they are all pretty poorly served. There is only one bus service running in the whole county on a Sunday, and the weekday and Saturday services have been reduced, with early and end-of-day services being cut back. Even some Saturday services are at risk: the service from Shrewsbury to Market Drayton in my constituency, and on to Hanley in Stoke-on-Trent, is at risk of being axed on a Saturday. It has been given an interim stay of execution by Shropshire Council, but given that the council has missed on the bus back better funding and money from its bus improvement plan as part of the levelling-up bid, it is now looking to make cuts of at least £150 million over the next three years, and I fear for route's future. As the hon. Member for North Devon said, we need to take into account that Government grants for public transport in rural areas are more expensive than grants for urban areas. We need to accept that and consider whether the need requires them.

Selaine Saxby: Does the hon. Lady agree that, far too often, our rural bus routes are the first thing that is threatened when our large rural councils face funding pressures?

Helen Morgan: Yes, I agree. We have absolutely seen that in North Shropshire and across the rest of the county. It is causing us a number of different issues, in addition to those of climate emissions. Already in my constituency, it is no longer possible to access one of our two key hospitals in Telford from Oswestry without changing services at least twice. There is no direct public transport service at all between Market Drayton, a town of around 12,000 people, and the sizeable town of Telford, where there are all sorts of extra services that people might want to access.

The impact of those poor and continually reducing services is twofold. First, a private car is a necessary part of life in the countryside or in one of the smaller towns, and many households have to find the money for at least two if the adults in those households work in separate directions. Once they have forked out for a private car and accepted the expense of running it, they are less likely to use the available public transport, so we are in a downward spiral of cuts to public transport as it becomes more and more uneconomic.

Jim Shannon: It is not just those who have one or two cars in their households; it is their families and where they work. By and large, if someone wants a job in my

constituency, they have to travel to Newtownards or Belfast. Then, there are the extra complications of employment and getting access at the right time for shift work, and buses are probably not on at that time. So there are other complications for people who live in the countryside.

Helen Morgan: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman and am just about to come on to that.

Jim Shannon: I just set it up for the hon. Lady.

Helen Morgan: Yes. Secondly, if someone cannot access a car because they are young, are prevented from driving by their health or simply cannot afford to run one, they become stranded on the island of where they live. They cannot sign up to a college course, they cannot commit to a job outside the area and, in many cases, they cannot access what is becoming increasingly centralised healthcare provision without calling on endless favours from friends and family or using private cars instead.

The lack of a usable service not only means we emit far more greenhouse gases than we used to or, more accurately, than we need to, but there is a social and economic cost. For instance, the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital in Gobowen, near Oswestry in North Shropshire, is a top-class orthopaedic hospital with a dedicated veterans' centre that takes patients from all over the country. We are extremely proud of it. Recently, however, the hospital is struggling to recruit and retain its staff and one of the factors in that is the lack of a bus service back into Oswestry for those working early or late shifts because those end-of-day services have been axed from the route. More widely, the issue is driving young people from our towns, increasing the proportion of elderly residents, and harming the economic vibrance of the high streets.

How can we reverse that in an area where the council is spending 85% of its budget on social care and where bus services have been so badly depleted that the remaining routes are uneconomic? At this point, I should also mention the importance of active travel. For an increasingly elderly population, in an area where rural roads are single carriageway with quite fast speeds, it is probably not sensible to suggest that those people should be cycling every day between the market towns, which are some distance away from each other.

Margaret Ferrier: The focus on active travel is sensible, because it has both an environmental and health benefit. However, there are many reasons that is not a suitable focus for rural communities when it comes to decarbonisation. Does the hon. Member share my concern that while the Government's active travel strategy seems to acknowledge that, they have yet to set out any further specific guidance?

Helen Morgan: I think that is a fair point. Active travel has a role to play in towns, but it is concerning that we are not investing in public transport to move people around in rural areas. We need some clarity on that.

Going back to cycling and walking, many shorter journeys within towns can be made easier on a bike or on foot if there is a sensible network of crossings and dropped kerbs. In towns such as North Shropshire's, which are largely medieval market towns, it would clearly

[Helen Morgan]

be difficult to add a big network of cycle lanes into the narrow roads. During covid, councils were very quick to reimagine the way vehicles flowed around the town, making a pedestrian-friendly space workable at a fast pace. It would be good to see those councils being encouraged to continue to find practical ways of allowing people to move more easily around the centre of our towns. Removing the need for even a proportion of short car journeys, even if only on days when the weather is good, would surely have an impact on car emissions and—as the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) just pointed out—improves the health and wellbeing of anyone who decides to walk and cycle a little more.

Returning to the thorny issue of public transport, I am afraid that national intervention is probably needed. I welcome the restoring your railways scheme; North Shropshire has a great bid in for the Oswestry to Gobowen line, with an important stop at the hospital, and I take this opportunity to plug that bid. However, railway stations are not accessible for everyone. There is not really access for all where there is no step-free access to the railway station, which is another big problem in rural constituencies. At Whitchurch in my constituency, people cannot access the southbound platform, so despite the fact that there is actually a pretty good public transport service into Shrewsbury and beyond, on the main line to Crewe and Manchester, if someone has trouble with steps or has a lot of heavy baggage or a pushchair, they will turn again to their private car.

We are on the list for the Access for All plan. We have made our bid, which I hope will be successful, but it takes years and years to come through. If we are trying to get to net zero by 2050, the Access for All process really does need to be speeded up and, let's face it, most places do not have a railway station or a railway line. Many of those stations have been axed from rural market towns and would be totally uneconomic to reinstate, particularly as those towns largely have housing estates over the former track, so we need to have a nationally led bus strategy that addresses people getting out of their cars and on to buses.

What would that look like? I am open-minded about demand-led travel and the technology that enables it, and it may well be part of the solution to improve connectivity and public transport in the more rural parts of Britain, and to integrate that with other parts of the network. We see elements of that with some of the voluntary schemes that are in place—the dial-a-ride, North Salop Wheelers-type schemes that help to get elderly and more vulnerable people out of their houses and into the towns on market days. However, those schemes are volunteer-run by nature, which is not necessarily sustainable. Demand-led travel might be part of the solution, but in areas where the population is sparse and the benefits of lift sharing and journey planning might be more limited, we still need a proper investigation into the relative benefits of demand-led travel and a good look at reliable, clock-face services for smaller market towns and the feed-in services from their surrounding villages.

We do, of course, need to talk about the types of buses—the fact that they do not all need to be huge, and that in future, they probably need to be electric or

hydrogen-fuelled—but I will not elaborate on that point, because it has already been made. We should also accept that in small villages, there will always be a need for the private car, and we need to continue to incentivise the roll-out of electric cars. Public charging points are, therefore, really important. We are only just beginning to see the roll-out of public charging points in North Shropshire, but the capacity of the electricity infrastructure to cope with the additional demand on the rural grid is absolutely critical. I urge the Minister to consider not only the number of points, but the ability of the underlying energy infrastructure to support what is going to be an increasing electricity load, particularly in rural areas.

Overall, I support empowering local councils to develop their own public transport plans within the framework of a national strategy to find the solution that serves their area best. Empowering means funding and supporting those councils with the expertise they need to deliver a better future for rural transport, and funding them to tackle the additional rural distances is a critical factor. The rural economy, just like the climate, is approaching a tipping point, so we need a radical approach to public transport that can help tip both things in the right direction.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): I call the SNP spokesperson.

10.9 am

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Davies; it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again. I congratulate the hon. Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) on securing the debate, and I thank the Backbench Business Committee for facilitating it.

The hon. Member opened the debate very well, setting out a number of issues that are the same across pretty much all rural areas in the UK. As she said, many of the solutions for our towns and cities simply would not suit a rural setting or be as efficient. She mentioned a lack of electric vehicle chargers and the reinstatement of rail lines. She also welcomed the Government's £200 million active travel budget and plans, although that pales into insignificance compared with the Scottish Government's investment in active travel, as I will set out.

The hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) mentioned zero-emission buses and the requirement for further Government support. I could not agree more, and I will touch on that later. The hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) made an excellent point about social isolation, and how we need to be careful that rural decarbonisation solutions do not entrench those issues or make them worse. She also made a salient point about capacity issues in our rural electricity grid.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)—I call him the hon. Member for Strangford and Westminster Hall West—gave an excellent speech, as usual. My biggest surprise was that he said he liked something green; that may also be a surprise to some people watching, certainly in Scotland. He mentioned the time it takes to charge a car. In a recent debate in this place, we spoke about the charging issues in Northern Ireland. As an EV owner myself, I would have been unlikely to make the switch if I lived in Northern Ireland, such is the paucity of public chargers over there. He also mentioned the importance of the UK Government's ZEBRA—zero-emission bus

regional areas—scheme, and obviously he has Wrightbus in Northern Ireland. The implementation of that scheme is frankly shocking, but I will touch on that later.

The hon. Member for North Shropshire (Helen Morgan) made an excellent point about the issues with recruitment and retention for all sorts of businesses and services in rural areas because of the lack of connectivity and public transport. That does not help with the brain drain of young people leaving rural areas to go to cities and large towns. She also spoke about the lack of rural rail services in North Shropshire and elsewhere, which leads me to my own remarks.

Scotland has led the way on transport innovation over the years, and our track record on rail decarbonisation is yet another example of that. The world's first electric railway locomotive was powered by batteries and invented in Scotland. It was designed by Robert Davidson of Aberdeen and first tested on the Glasgow to Edinburgh line. If we fast-forward over a century, one of the first battery trains to be used in regular passenger service was deployed on the Aberdeen to Ballater line. It is powered by clean, renewable electricity provided by the hydro board.

Today, the Bo'ness and Kinneil railway is seeing testing of a class 314 train formerly used as a workhorse on the Strathclyde lines. It has been converted to hydrogen-fuelled operation, and it is being put through its paces by the University of St Andrews, Transport Scotland, Scottish Enterprise and Ballard Motive Solutions. That kind of innovation is one part of the deployment of investment and policy decisions that make Scotland a leader in the decarbonisation of rural transport.

The reopening of Reston station in the Scottish Borders is another such example, with £20 million of investment from the Scottish Government accompanied by £3 million from Scottish Borders Council. That investment will improve bus links to and from the station, making it a hub for an area of the east borders that has been poorly served by public transport. Reston itself is a village with only a few hundred souls, but the integrated transport package introduced by local and national Government has turned it into a major transport centre, giving access to major cities on both sides of the border to a population that was previously either poorly served or not served at all by links beyond the local area.

The Scottish Borders were hit harder than most areas by the post-war retrenchment in rail. Peebles, Eyemouth, Kelso, Duns, Hawick, Selkirk and Melrose—I am starting to sound like a Bill McLaren rugby commentary—were all linked by rail to the wider country and the world. However, post-war mistakes in rail management across the UK, and the Beeching axe, left the borders with no rail links at all for 40 years, until the Scottish Government reopened the Borders railway in 2015. That new route is among the first in line for the next tranche of electrification on Scotland's railways. After 40 years of isolation from the rest of this island's rail network, the borders are seeing a bonanza in rail, integrated public transport and decarbonisation, which is surely unmatched by any comparable rural area on these islands.

The Scottish Borders are just one example of how decarbonisation is not constrained to our urban areas. We have seen the Invernet service, which provides commuter rail in the Inverness area, as well as the opening of the Inverness Airport railway station. Reopening the station

at Beaulay, which has a population of just over 1,000, generated more than 50,000 passenger journeys a year pre covid.

In the north-east, we have seen a step change in rail provision with the full introduction of the Aberdeen Crossrail, which connects Inverurie to Montrose via Aberdeen with regular fast services. Those communities will benefit still further from the rolling programme of electrification in Scotland, with main routes to the central belt, as well as the Inverness to Aberdeen route, becoming wired. The programme will also electrify the Glasgow to Dumfries route—indeed, part of it is being electrified as we speak—giving a huge boost to rural communities along its length. It will also give us scope to look again at the rural stations closed by the Beeching axe and at how we can apply the lessons learned from the Reston reopening to another area in the south of Scotland.

By 2045, every rail line in Scotland bar the West Highland and Far North lines, and the Girvan to Stranraer line, will be fully electrified. That is quite an achievement in a country where modernisation was ignored by this place for decades, until devolution and the Scottish Parliament came along. Clearly, 100% electrification would be preferable, but the economic reality is that electrification cannot always be justified in rural areas. However, that must not mean that more sparsely populated locales miss out on decarbonisation, and lines without full electrification will see the roll-out of innovative and game-changing trains such as battery electric and, potentially, hydrogen trains.

It is not just our rail network that is being transformed through funding from the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland. Fully 20% of the funding and buses on the road as a result of the first round of ScotZEB—the Scottish zero-emission bus challenge fund—went to operators in rural areas, from Campbeltown to Lockerbie and Aberdeenshire to Dumfries and Galloway.

In addition, Loganair has set a target to have a fully zero-emission fleet of aircraft serving Scotland's islands and rural communities by 2040. Orkney is the hotbed for trials of electric and hydrogen-fuelled planes, with the islands expected to see the first scheduled zero-emission services as it becomes feasible to start rolling out the technology for passenger service. Those air links are a lifeline for the communities they serve, and making them net zero will play a crucial role in Scotland's journey to being a net zero country by 2045. All this is evidence that decarbonisation is not just about urban and suburban travel; with the right strategy and package of investments, we can push modal shift in rural areas too.

Rural Scotland is also powering ahead in decarbonising private transport. Among the local authorities with the highest per capita penetration of public charge points are Orkney, Na h-Eileanan an Iar, Argyll and Bute, Highland, Shetland, and Dumfries and Galloway. Most of the time in those areas, there is no alternative to private motors, so we want to support infrastructure to ensure that EVs are a practical solution. All those areas have seen a massive increase in public chargers over the past few years; since 2019, their numbers have more than doubled in Orkney and increased by 177% in Argyll and Bute. They are also up 194% in Highland, marrying up with the A9 electric highway, which links the highlands and the central belt. If we are serious about rolling out chargers to the level needed to hit our targets to phase out petrol and diesel cars, the number

[Gavin Newlands]

in rural Scotland needs to continue to increase at its current rate. The Scottish Government have shown the way, and it is for others—particularly the DFT—to learn from their lead.

I cannot let pass an opportunity to highlight Scotland's transformational active travel budget, which will reach £320 million—10% of Scotland's entire travel budget—by the end of this Parliament. Bear in mind that that is in a country one tenth the size of that served by the DFT, whose £200 million budget was heralded—no offence to the hon. Member for North Devon. That £320 million investment will upgrade our network for walking and wheeling across the country and, in particular, give extra opportunities for integration with the rest of the public transport network. It is game-changing. I urge the DFT to match that commitment, rather than throwing yet more money into the bottomless pit that is Greater London transport spending.

Scotland is showing that rural decarbonisation can be achieved if the will is there. Making integrated transport a key policy objective, as well as relatively modest investment, can produce huge dividends for communities that were previously isolated from the public transport network. We know that in rural communities there will always be a need for cars in a way that simply is not the case in more urban areas, but providing alternatives to private transport when it is practical to do so and ensuring that the investment is targeted in the right places can help to drive modal shift and drive down emissions, and provide a more sustainable transport system across the board into the bargain.

As I have done many times before, I commend to the Minister the work that the Scottish Government are doing and invite him to study closely what is happening in Scotland, so that the UK Government can follow Scotland's lead and apply the lessons to rural communities here in England. The UK Government's reluctance to invest appropriately in this area—as with so many other areas—limits Scotland's ability to go even further even faster, and it is time for the DFT and the UK Government to get their collective finger out on these issues.

10.20 am

Simon Lightwood (Wakefield) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies, and to speak for the Opposition in a Westminster Hall debate for the very first time.

I congratulate the hon. Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) on securing this debate and I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting it. The hon. Member's opening remarks underscored the importance of decarbonising our transport, especially in our rural communities, and the contributions from Members throughout have demonstrated why we need to take urgent action in this area. Indeed, decarbonising our transport sector is one of the most pressing challenges to overcome if we are to meet our net zero goals.

I am proud to represent the Wakefield constituency, which has both the city of Wakefield and a large rural community, with villages such as Netherton, Middlestown, Durkar, Hall Green and Woolley. I know first hand the challenges those areas have in accessing transport, and I understand that many of the solutions that work in cities may well not work as well in rural communities.

I will address a number of the various transport sectors that Members have referred to, but I will start with active travel, which is a sure-fire way of improving air quality, reducing congestion, improving physical health and, of course, lowering carbon emissions. Research shows that the benefit to cost ratio of investments in walking and cycling are estimated at 5.62:1.

However, one of the biggest barriers to active travel, especially in our rural communities, is safety. A recent survey found, unsurprisingly, that most people prefer to cycle where it is safe, and the same can be said for walking. Improving real and perceived safety is an effective way of encouraging more people to walk and cycle, and the Government and local councils must do what they can to improve routes and roads to facilitate that.

The Government really need to step up. In 2017, the Department for Transport provided guidance for local authorities to develop local cycling and walking infrastructure plans, but there was no funding available for that. I am pleased that many rural authorities have developed such a plan. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss) recently asked a parliamentary question to find out how many councils had developed one, and the answer was just 78, which is only around a quarter of all local authorities. That is simply not good enough and the Government must do more to ensure that rural areas have these plans in place.

Another example is the Government's consultation on personal safety measures on streets in England, which specifically covered rural streets, to seek views on how street design, maintenance and operation could be improved to make people feel safer. The consultation closed in August 2021, yet 19 months on the Government have not responded. I hope that the Minister will be able to shed some light on that.

As the hon. Member for North Devon said, many people in rural communities are very dependent on cars, and we must continue to encourage the transition to electric vehicles. We have some good momentum as we transfer away from petrol and diesel cars to electric vehicles. That is one of the primary ways to decarbonise our transport. The RAC estimates that there are now 712,000 zero-emission electric cars on our roads, along with more than 400,000 plug-in hybrids.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) is right that charging points are few and far between in rural areas. However, people might not think that, given what the Government talk about. The latest figures show that we have just 37,055 public chargers in the UK at the moment. Rural communities are lagging far behind.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): The hon. Gentleman is making a very valid point. As we make the transition towards electric vehicles and electric heating, there is a big issue about grid capacity and resilience in rural areas; I just do not believe that it will cope at the moment. The Government have enabled challenger companies to the traditional distribution network operators—they are called independent distribution network operators—to bring in their own infrastructure. The issue in rural areas is that metal pylons for electricity transmission are extremely controversial. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this is going to happen very quickly and that, as we push the transition,

decisions will have to be made about where to locate the infrastructure? We have to work with local communities, and in rural areas we need to work on the basis that the infrastructure needs to go underground.

Simon Lightwood: The hon. Member makes a valid point, and if the Government are serious about installing 300,000 charging points, they need to redouble their efforts. At this rate, we would not get to even 100,000 by the date they have set. Monthly installations would need to rise by 288% to meet that ambition.

Gavin Newlands: Just before the intervention from the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards), the hon. Gentleman mentioned that rural areas are missing out in terms of the charging network. I made the point in my speech that in Scotland that is not the case. The areas with the highest penetration of public charge points per capita are Orkney, the Western Isles, Argyll and Bute, Highland, Shetland, and Dumfries and Galloway. That is because the driver was Scottish Government public investment. Down here, the UK Government have relied on private investment. Does the hon. Gentleman think that is why rural areas in England do not have the connectivity that Scotland has?

Simon Lightwood: The hon. Member makes an interesting point, and I share his concerns about the Government's focus in achieving their targets. Obviously, this is a pressing matter for our rural communities, which are being underserved, and if drivers cannot access charging points, they will be far less likely to make the transition to electric.

In London, there are 131 charging points per 100,000 of the population, but in the south-west region the figure is a third of that—44 per 100,000. The hon. Member for Strangford will be interested to hear that the figure is only 19 per 100,000 in Northern Ireland. Indeed, more charging points were installed here in Westminster in the previous quarter than in any English region outside London. The Government must urgently come up with a plan for how they will drastically speed up the roll-out, especially in rural communities, otherwise the campaign to get people to transition their vehicles will be undermined completely.

As the shadow Minister covering buses, it would be remiss of me not to mention the vital role that the sector is playing in decarbonising our transport. That is especially the case in rural areas, where buses can be a lifeline for many, especially the elderly—connecting people with friends and family, and getting people to work, hospital or school.

As the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Helen Morgan) said, getting to hospital appointments is really important, but the rural bus network is desperately struggling, and cuts in Government funding have hampered rural routes, leaving behind a patchy network that cannot get people from A to B. I have seen that in my constituency, where several services have been cut altogether and others run at a reduced frequency. One service, which is the only bus covering a village of about 500 people, runs only until 5 pm. Another village service runs only three buses a day.

People cannot get to work, cannot get to the shops and cannot attend hospital appointments with services like that, and they are left having to depend on taxis or

the car when the bus does not turn up. That is creating what the charity CPRE calls transport deserts, whereby public transport is severely limited, which stops people being able to do basics such as shopping or meeting friends. In 2020, CPRE found that 56% of small rural towns had become transport deserts or were at risk of becoming a transport desert. I imagine that figure will have risen since then.

In recent years, local authorities have had to step in to support many rural bus services that have become commercially unviable, but reductions in their funding have meant that many routes have been lost. That is why Labour's plans for franchising could help many rural communities and give them greater certainty over the routes they have. I continue to urge the Government to look at the proposal in more detail.

Furthermore, buses need to be transitioned from diesel. The Government announced that they would deliver 4,000 zero-emission buses in this Parliament, but, as I pointed out during Transport questions in the Chamber last week, only 341 have been ordered and just six are on our roads. At that rate, it will take 23 years to meet the Government's target. Many bus operators serving rural routes will be relying on Government grants to decarbonise their fleets, so the lack of progress with the scheme is hampering the business planning process and efforts to push forward with bus company investments.

I am pleased that we have had the opportunity to debate this important issue. It is clear that our rural communities want to play a part in the clean transport revolution, but they need more support to do so. Whether we are talking about buses, cycling, walking or cars, there are opportunities for decarbonisation, but rural areas are lagging behind. The Government must match their rhetoric with a proper plan to deliver what they have promised, so that we can see those zero-emission buses on our roads, have enough electric charging points to encourage people to transition, and encourage people to cycle and walk more. The Government must get their act together, and quickly; otherwise, it will be our rural villages and towns that suffer the most.

10.30 am

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Jesse Norman): What a delight it is to see you in the Chair, Mr Davies. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) on securing this debate on decarbonising rural transport. I am very aware of this issue as a constituency MP; in Hereford and South Herefordshire, we have many of the issues that have been described. I do not mean to disappoint my hon. Friend at the outset, but I am not going to make Treasury policy here and, least of all, as a former Financial Secretary to the Treasury, a few weeks before a Budget. Nevertheless, a wide range of issues have been raised and it is important to engage with them all.

As my hon. Friend rightly noted, buses are at the centre of the public transport network, but even more so in rural areas than in many urban areas. I and colleagues recognise their important role in providing sustainable transport options and independence to people who live in the countryside. They also have an essential role to play in achieving net zero by 2050 and in creating the cleaner and healthier places to live that we all aspire to have.

[Jesse Norman]

On decarbonisation, I am sure that my hon. Friend will join me in celebrating Devon's recent success in joining the Government-funded ADEPT Live Labs 2 programme for decarbonising local roads in the UK. I am delighted that Devon will carry out a carbon-negative project on the A382, including the Jetty Marsh link road. That is part of a suite of corridor and place-based interventions, trialling, testing and showcasing applications in connection with the Wessex partnership, an exciting project that will be provided with more than £12 million for the three-year programme.

As colleagues will know, the national bus strategy was published in March 2021, with the long-term aim of making buses more frequent and reliable, easier to understand and use, and better co-ordinated and cheaper. The strategy asked all local transport authorities to develop a bus service improvement plan, setting out how they would improve services. It also stated that local transport plans must be clear on

"how interventions across local transport modes will drive decarbonisation in their area."

I am delighted that Devon received £14.1 million in BSIP funding, £1.87 million of which is being targeted at bus priority measures that will benefit routes into Barnstaple and to North Devon District Hospital. I was also delighted to hear about GWR's work in my hon. Friend's constituency, where a bus-branch line has been introduced between Barnstaple and Lynton and Lynmouth, co-ordinating bus and rail timetables to offer a more integrated travel experience for passengers. I hope that there will be more to come in the following year.

The bus strategy makes it clear that the needs of rural transport users should be given equal consideration to those of users in urban areas. However, I recognise that it can be challenging to provide conventional bus services for rural areas, which have widely dispersed populations and consequent travel patterns that are hard to cover effectively. That is why demand-responsive services, which have been discussed today, can be used in some places to meet their needs, and work is under way to assess whether that can be more effective than traditional public transport solutions.

Colleagues will be aware of the £20 million rural mobility fund, which supports 17 innovative demand-led minibus trials in rural areas. They use app-based technologies so that passengers can book a journey through their smartphone, and intelligent software then works out the right route to pick up and drop off passengers, given the demand. The Department has made sure that the services use accessible minibuses and can still be booked through a website or with a phone call so that no one is excluded from using them.

As the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Helen Morgan) pointed out, demand-responsive services are not the perfect solution to every challenge. Other schemes need to be trialled, and have been, but have proven not to be sustainable. A balance needs to be struck between providing a useful service that is responsive and frequent and running too much mileage cost-ineffectively, with too few passengers. That is why it is so important that each scheme should participate in a detailed monitoring and evaluation process, so that the Department can learn about the most effective approaches.

Some of the pilots use zero-emission vehicles. The scheme in Essex has been electrified since day one, providing a zero-emission demand-responsive service to rural areas around Braintree, and Surrey County Council has started to roll out its electric minibus route on its Mole Valley connect service.

On buses more broadly, colleagues will know that, in 2020, we committed to introducing 4,000 zero-emission buses and, ultimately, to achieving an all zero-emission bus fleet. It is nice to hear the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) rightly supporting the superb achievements of Wrightbus in Northern Ireland with regard to not just electrification, but its work on the Hydroliner, using hydrogen technology.

The approach to zero-emission buses will support our climate ambitions, improve transport for local communities and support green jobs across the country. Since 2020, the Government have funded an estimated 3,452 zero-emission buses across the UK, some 1,400 of which have been supported by funding from the zero-emission bus regional areas, which has rightly been highlighted. Great progress has been made, with more than 500 buses ordered so far under the ZEBRA scheme, including 117 electric buses that have been ordered for four different local authorities, as announced in the House last week.

Buses are not the only zero-emission vehicles on our roads. It is right to think about the question of zero-emission vehicles more widely, as well as the charging infrastructure network, mentioned by several colleagues, that needs to be as accessible, affordable and secure in rural areas as elsewhere. Last March, the Government published their electric vehicle infrastructure strategy, which set out plans to accelerate the roll-out of the network. We expect at least 300,000 public charge points to be installed across the UK by 2030. There are already over 37,000 open-access public chargers on UK roads, with more than 600 new chargers added to our road network each month on average, and public charging devices have more than tripled in the past four years. That is in addition to the hundreds of thousands of charge points in homes and workplaces. We believe that we are on track to meet local expectations.

Gavin Newlands: I like the Minister's comments on the ZEBRA scheme, even though it has been an utter shambles from start to finish. Scotland has more zero-emission buses on the road in a country that is a tenth of the size.

On chargers, the Government launched Project Rapid, and the Labour Front Benchers, the hon. Member for Wakefield (Simon Lightwood), mentioned the number of chargers in the UK. Scotland already has 73% more rapid chargers per head than the rest of the UK. In the last quarter of last year, the number increased by nearly 15%, more than double the rate at which England increased its rapid chargers—the east and west midlands rate was 4.3%, Yorkshire was 5% and the south-east was 3.3%. Project Rapid needs to change its name, does it not?

Jesse Norman: There is no doubt that the question of how we get lots of rapid chargers into motorway service areas and other parts of the trunk network is complex, because it requires long-term solutions based on translating large amounts of electricity through distribution network

operators and the national grid into those areas. I was slightly surprised to hear the hon. Gentleman bragging about the Scottish Government's achievements. He may want to look at the *Daily Business* published in August last year, which said that Scotland was "bottom" of the EV charging league for growth and described that as

"an embarrassing blow to the country that hosted the COP26".

The hon. Gentleman should look not just at the number that have been installed, which perhaps is not surprising given the level of income per head that Scotland receives under the Barnett formula. If my county of Herefordshire was miraculously and sadly disentangled from its current place and floated north to abut on to Scotland, the rate of funding per head would go up by over £2,000, so perhaps it is not so surprising that the funding settlement is different and that has different effects. The Scottish record is not one to be proud of as regards the growth of charge points, and he may want to look again at the numbers he described.

We have also been looking at public and industry funding to support local authorities with the roll-out of charge points. Just last month, we announced a further £56 million of public industry funding. In Devon, there are currently 442 public charge points, of which over 100 are rapid and above, which is pretty much in line with the UK average per person and possibly even slightly higher in relation to rapid charging. That is a good start, but there is plenty still to do.

Helen Morgan: I reiterate the point made by the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) about grid capacity. Rural areas are being asked to look at replacing a lot of oil-fired boilers with electric alternatives, and obviously, we need to address electric charging points, but grid capacity is a fundamental restraining problem in rural areas. What are the Minister's thoughts on how improvements to that infrastructure can be speeded up?

Jesse Norman: It is important to put this into perspective. One advantage of rural areas is that, in many cases, more so than in urban areas, people have driveways or accessible areas where they can put in charging points. Of course, domestic charging points are growing rapidly—vastly faster, as one might expect through private investment, than in the last year or two. It is a rapidly escalating curve, and rural areas have a great advantage over urban areas when it comes to charging electric vehicles. Rural areas will also benefit as improvements in technology increase vehicle range and reduce costs and range anxiety. It is a picture that we have reason to be optimistic about without in any sense being complacent about the need to continue to make rapid progress.

Jonathan Edwards: I want to reiterate my initial intervention on the Labour Front Bench, the hon. Member for Wakefield (Simon Lightwood), and the point made by the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Helen Morgan) on behalf of the Liberal Democrats. The concern is that the grid as it is will not accommodate everybody charging their cars at home; it will not cope. It would require significant extra infrastructure to transmit the electricity into rural areas. If we did that, we would put pylons everywhere and that becomes controversial. One solution in the United States is to use transport corridors—roads and rail—and go underground along

those routes, which can be far more cost-effective. Of course, going underground is far more expensive than overground pylons.

There needs to be strategic thinking. These issues are devolved in Wales. Planning matters are devolved, as they are in Scotland and Northern Ireland, but there needs to be co-ordination and some thinking about how we can create the resilience and capacity for rural areas without desecrating them.

Jesse Norman: I completely agree with the hon. Member that any solution needs to respect the beauty and integrity of the area concerned. That is absolutely right, and I thank him for his suggestion, which I believe has received some consideration, but I will check with my officials.

There is a wider point. Of course, the demands on the grid are changing over time, but we have been given no reason to think that they are unsustainable. The attraction of much modern technology is that it allows much more load balancing in the timing of when cars are charged. We expect that to be a valuable source of strength and stability in the grid as we go forward.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Devon is a passionate advocate for active travel. She knows that the Department published the second cycling and walking investment strategy in the summer of last year, which includes new and updated objectives, such as increased levels of walking, including walking to school and doubling the levels of cycling. We expect to invest over £850 million in active travel between 2020 and 2023, which is a record amount of funding. As she knows, last month we announced an active travel fund of £200 million to improve walking and cycling routes and to boost local usage and economic development.

The benefits are not just economic, as has been rightly highlighted. There are also the benefits of air quality and improved health, and they play a vital role in decarbonisation. Funding is important, and we have talked about that, but it is only one part of the solution in rural areas. We also need to support increased capability in delivery, and that is why the Government are providing Devon County Council with capability funding to support the development of its county-wide rural trail—its cycling and walking infrastructure plan.

I was delighted to open the offices of Active Travel England in York a few weeks ago with Chris Boardman, our national active travel commissioner, and Danny Williams, the chief executive. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon will know from her APPG, those are people of the highest quality and the ATE is a very important development—indeed, a milestone—in how we think about the adequate and highly effective provision of active travel infrastructure and standards.

There is a mixed picture in terms of need, but not a mixed picture in terms of the commitment, energy and drive that we are trying to bring to the entire portfolio across the range of the different interventions and modes in the cause of decarbonising our country and our economy.

10.44 am

Selaine Saxby: It has been a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Davies. I thank the Minister for his response and for his Department's recognition of rurality, because it is the first time that a Department has focused on that in its funding decision. I very much

[Selaine Saxby]

hope that with him at the helm, it can do more in some other areas that we have touched on this morning, because I know that the constituents I represent care deeply about their environment and are really passionate about being able to decarbonise their transport networks. For that to happen, it is important to find rural solutions that work and deliver better value for money. Although I fully respect that the Minister could not possibly comment on things going on in the Treasury ahead of the Budget, I hope that he might have a quiet word to say that a longer-term funding solution would deliver far better value for money in areas such as rural transportation.

I want to reiterate points from colleagues, which perhaps the Minister could pass on. I did not focus too much on the grid, because it is not in his portfolio, but I fully agree with hon. Members' comments that the grid is a real concern if we are to deliver an electric transport solution. The hon. Member for North Shropshire (Helen Morgan) talked about hubs and the number of bus changes that people have to make on longer journeys in rural Britain. Although I warmly welcome the Minister's observation on services to the hospital in Barnstaple, most of those services involve a change at Barnstaple bus station, where the toilets are still closed. As we look to rural solutions, we need to find better ways to ensure that such hubs work. I know that, like me, he is passionate about active travel, but we all accept that we will not do all our journeys in rural Britain on a bicycle. However, we could do the opening or closing mile of those journeys on one if our hubs worked better.

I thank hon. Members for their time and participation, and I particularly thank the Minister for his response.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered decarbonising rural transport.

10.47 am

Sitting suspended.

Post-16 Education: Bolsover

11 am

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): There will not be an opportunity for the Member in charge to wind up, as is the convention with 30-minute debates.

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

That this House has considered post-16 education in Bolsover constituency.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I am sure by now that the Government are well aware of my campaign to bring post-16 education back to the Bolsover constituency. I am delighted that the Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education, my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) is responding. I know that this is not necessarily his area in the Department. I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Suzanne Webb), who has heard me make this argument on many occasions. I have been fortunate to have meetings with the Secretary of State to raise this important issue, and I welcome the opportunity again to set out the reasons why this is such a vital endeavour.

This issue is close to my heart. I have spoken previously about the importance of a good education and the effect it has had on my life. It is during those years that our lives are shaped. I was fortunate to become the person that I am at sixth form: I made friends for life; I discovered my love of economics and politics; I was able to come out and be happy as an individual; and when I lost my mum, I was looked after by my teachers at sixth form, who became like family. I want that experience to be shared by those in Bolsover, so that they can live their lives to the full. Just as I owe that to the fantastic mentoring I received at school, we all owe it to the next generation of students, so that they may have the best opportunities in life.

I grew up in Doncaster—an area with very similar demographics and skill prospects as Bolsover. I know at first hand the difference a quality education can have on young people, and the opportunities it opens. I know the effect that bringing post-16 education back to Bolsover will have on the hardworking students there. The Redhill Academy Trust, which runs The Bolsover School in my constituency, has submitted an application for a sixth form to be based in Bolsover town. I wholeheartedly support that application, and was more than happy to contribute to the bid and provide support wherever possible.

For a long time, my constituency failed to receive the investment it deserves. Children are feeling the impact of that on their educational opportunities. Countless parents have told me that they want their child to have a better education than they were able to receive. Currently, just 21% of people in Bolsover have a degree level or higher qualification, compared with 42.8% nationally; and 9% of people in my constituency hold no formal qualification at all. Bolsover is ranked as the most deprived area in Derbyshire, according to the combined indices of deprivation. It has the highest rate of child poverty in Derbyshire, and the lowest gross disposable household income in the county.

Levelling up is vital to my constituents, which means investment in housing, infrastructure and high-skilled jobs, and ensuring that we have a skilled population,

underpinned by an ambition to capitalise on the opportunities available to them. I welcome the Government's ongoing plans to do that, but if we want to ensure that Bolsover has the long-term prospects necessary to create a real shift towards a brighter future, the key will be improving educational opportunities for the current and next generations of students. Three main factors are driving the need for a new post-16 education provider in Bolsover: the lack of existing provisions within a reasonable distance; the over-subscription of existing schools; and the lack of choice for students wanting to pursue an academic form of education.

My constituency currently has no further education providers. Students at The Bolsover School have three options for post-16 education that are within one hour via public transport; two are rated as "requires improvement" and the third is over-subscribed. The need for a quality post-16 alternative that is accessible to the residents of my constituency's towns and villages is one of the most common concerns raised by local parents. I am well aware of the issue and am fortunate to have spent time as a governor at The Bolsover School. In May last year, I mentioned in the main Chamber an email that I received from a concerned constituent, which I think is worth repeating:

"There is no 6th form available at The Bolsover School and so pupils wishing to do A levels have an expensive bus ride in order to get anywhere. For instance it costs around £650 a year if your child is successful to get a place at St Mary's High School in Chesterfield and the choice of courses at Chesterfield college are quite limited."

That is just one example from hundreds of parents who have spoken to me in person or contacted my office to outline their concerns about the lack of post-16 provision in the constituency.

Netherthorpe School, the closest sixth-form provider for students living in Bolsover, is currently over-subscribed by 251 pupils. So what do the committed and passionate pupils of Bolsover do? Well, a third travel from Bolsover for up to an hour and 33 minutes—not including the time it takes to get to and from the bus stop, and waiting for the next bus—to go to Tupton Hall School, a sixth form that is also part of the Redhill Academy Trust. The children of Bolsover should not need to travel this immense distance just to seek the education they so desperately want and deserve. Those pupils lose a minimum of three hours and six minutes every single day. That time would be far better spent on additional education or partaking in after school curricula; after school activities are an incredibly important part of the education experience, and every child should have the opportunity to get involved in them.

Ten of the 13 major settlements in the north of my constituency—including Glapwell, Langwith, Palterton, Scarcliffe and Shirebrook—would be better served by the creation of a new sixth form in Bolsover. I have received a lot of correspondence from parents who are concerned about the price of sending their children to school. Taking away that cost is an important and tangible benefit of opening a sixth form in Bolsover that Ministers take into consideration when discussing current free school bids, and it is particularly important when it comes to the proposed location of the Bolsover sixth form. The catchment area would cater for a greater than average number of children from disadvantaged

backgrounds, with an estimated 32% entitled to free school meals compared to 22% nationally. Some 16% of pupils will have special educational needs compared to 12.6% nationally, and 36% access the pupil premium. This is a real opportunity to support those who are most in need of support.

The Redhill Academy Trust also has a fantastic record of ensuring that its students are well prepared for higher education; 71% of post-16 graduates from the Redhill Academy Trust progressed to university, compared to the national and local authority average of 52%. This proposal will increase the number of disadvantaged students going to university.

There is no solution other than to tackle the issues of capacity and travel times. The free school bid explains that although most pupils attending the sixth form would come directly from The Bolsover School, the catchment area would also include the majority of north Derbyshire and parts of Nottinghamshire, which, as the Government will know, are both educational investment areas. Crucially, it will also include the Heritage School in Clowne, Shirebrook Academy and the surrounding villages, all of which are in desperate need of greater education provision and would directly benefit from a sixth form in Bolsover.

The current issue of capacity will not ease in the coming years. Bolsover District Council has identified Bolsover North, Clowne and Whitwell as the three strategic sites for its preferred spatial strategy—all in prime distance for a new sixth form. To accommodate growth in the region, these areas have already begun to see greater investment in housing and, sometimes, infrastructure. Over the coming years, we should expect to see 1,800 additional dwellings in Clowne Garden Village and 1,000 in Bolsover North, as well as another 700 in sites across Bolsover town and 600 at Brookvale in Shirebrook. There will be another 500 dwellings at the former Whitwell colliery site and 300 houses on the former Creswell colliery site. Those must all be taken into consideration.

I hope that I have set out the quite clear and desperate need for additional post-16 provision in Bolsover. I will touch briefly on why a sixth form is the right type of educational setting to resolve the issue. Children in Bolsover are suffering from a severe lack of choice when it comes to the type of education they want to pursue. While I understand—indeed, greatly support—the push for more technical education across the UK, I urge the Government to carefully consider that in these circumstances, what the children of Bolsover require right now is the greater provision of academic education.

When deciding to apply for a free school in Bolsover, the Redhill Academy Trust chose to make it a sixth form with very good reason: there is excess demand for a local sixth form. In 2020-21, only 23% of students at The Bolsover School went on to study at a sixth form or sixth-form college, compared to the English average of 52%. These figures are reflected in the other secondary schools in my constituency, but we should be careful not to infer from that figure that less than a quarter of students from the school want to attend an academic education. We have already seen that students are willing to travel great distances to very competitive and over-subscribed schools to get the education they want and deserve, and those who cannot afford to do so are limited in their options and prospects. This education

[Mark Fletcher]

relies on children getting one of the very competitive school places and parents being able to afford the associated costs. As noted in the free school bid, travel times and costs are the main barriers to post-16 education in Bolsover. Those barriers can and should be removed.

Also highlighted in the free school bid is an outlook for the future of jobs in Bolsover. A high number of jobs locally are at risk because of automation, and there remains a high proportion of low-skilled and low-earning jobs, with high rates of long-term unemployment. That seriously needs to be addressed.

The east midlands is home to fantastic firms, such as Rolls-Royce and its small nuclear reactor production plant in Derby, and the UK Atomic Energy Authority with its fusion energy site in West Burton. Both are working hard to make the east midlands a global centre for green technology. We have an opportunity to ensure that the future workforce can capitalise on that and benefit from future investment in the sectors. The way to do that is to promote the provision of important subjects, such as computer science, physics, chemistry, maths and further maths—all key education areas for the proposed sixth form in Bolsover, and all currently under-subscribed locally.

To briefly quote the bid, the Bolsover sixth form would

“improve outcomes for young people in the region and help strengthen Derbyshire’s and Nottinghamshire’s economies, as both areas are known for their manufacturing and engineering sectors, as well as recently their investment into low carbon technologies.”

That does not mean that a sixth form in Bolsover would not also supply technical education. In fact, the Redhill Academy Trust is working closely with the University of Derby to ensure that the skills provided will be aligned with the university’s drive to improve both technical and academic education in the region.

Supporting the Redhill Academy Trust’s application for a sixth form in Bolsover, the absolutely brilliant Professor Kathryn Mitchell, vice-chancellor of the University of Derby, has stated:

“The University of Derby is delighted to support the application for the Sixth Form at The Bolsover School. The ambition of the school to serve its community with high quality academic and technical qualifications is both exciting for their young people and essential for the vibrancy of the regional economy.

The University of Derby is delighted to be a central partner in enhancing the school to explore and deliver T levels and pathways to apprenticeships—something which we have a strong track record in, with the recent opening of the Nuclear Skills Academy in partnership with Rolls-Royce and our commitment to Nursing apprenticeships.

If we are to address the chronic skills shortages that currently exist within the United Kingdom, developing, in partnership, a pipeline of talented young people who are equipped with the skills for tomorrow is essential for both national and regional prosperity.”

The Government will no doubt be aware of my passion for this cause, but I am not the only person who is passionate about it. Alex Dale, the cabinet member for education at Derbyshire County Council, summarised the The Bolsover School’s bid fantastically when he spoke in support of it. He set out the political will to get this across the line:

“It is absolutely clear that there is very strong public and political support for securing a 6th form provision in Bolsover. Not only will a new provision remove barriers for those who already have a desire to study A-levels, but it will also no doubt inspire more young people to take up A-levels and go on to university than might otherwise have been the case.

In 2021, the Conservatives were re-elected to run Derbyshire County Council with the largest majority we have ever secured, winning over 2/3s of the seats on the Council—including 4, for the first time ever, within the Bolsover constituency.

Our manifesto included a commitment that we would offer ‘support for the campaign for a Sixth Form in the Bolsover District to raise aspirations and ensure continuing education is an option for all’. It is absolutely clear therefore that there is a strong political mandate for making this happen.”

There is clear support from students, parents, teachers and school governance for the provision of a sixth form. The people want it. There is support for it. Frankly, the Government have the easy job of simply saying yes to the application. To make that easier, I will touch on why this bid should be so attractive to the Government.

If the Government remain committed to levelling up long-forgotten areas such as Bolsover, accepting this bid will prove it. If the Government wish to remain on track to meet their net zero commitments and their ambition to turn the UK into a world leader in green technology, approving this bid will ensure that there are the necessary skills to make that happen. If the Government want to close the skills gap between the most advantaged and least fortunate in this country, there is no better way to do that than by investing in our children’s education, approving this bid, and bringing a sixth form to Bolsover. I could go on, but I think I have made my point.

Redhill Academy Trust summarised the need for a new sixth form in Bolsover in its application:

“We believe that there is a great need for the new Sixth Form in Bolsover, due to poor public transport routes, the lack of good academic places at other local providers and the need to improve KS5”—

key stage 5—

“outcomes for young people in the town.”

I fail to see how anybody can object to addressing those key issues, but we must now wait for the Government to confirm whether they will take this opportunity and give the children of Bolsover the education that they deserve. Until then, I will of course continue to badger every Minister unfortunate enough to pass me in the corridors of this great place.

11.19 am

The Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education (Robert Halfon): It is an honour to serve under you, Mr Davies. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mark Fletcher), not just on securing this debate, but on being such an incredible champion of education and skills in his constituency. He is known widely in the House of Commons for championing causes, and the people of Bolsover are without doubt lucky to have him as their representative. He spoke movingly about how education was a ladder of opportunity for him, and I absolutely understand that he wants a ladder of opportunity for every child in his constituency.

It is only right that we focus on ensuring that every young person has access to high-quality post-16 education and training options so that they can reach their full

potential and gain the skills that employers need. I know that my hon. Friend has met the Minister—Baroness Barran—and the Secretary of State for Education, and I believe he has had other ministerial meetings along the way, so today's debate is very timely. I will talk generally about education and skills in his constituency before coming to the specific issue that he mentioned.

The Government have an ambitious plan to transform post-16 education and training, so that people can develop the skills needed to get good jobs and ensure national productivity. My hon. Friend spoke passionately about vocational and technical education; he knows that there are a wide range of opportunities through T-levels, apprenticeships and higher technical qualifications, as well as traditional A-level routes. T-levels are particularly rigorous post-16 technical qualifications that will pave the way for young people to access skilled employment, higher apprenticeships or further study, and I hope that many learners in Bolsover take up those opportunities.

There are 16 T-level subjects being taught around the country, and a growing number of new T-level students will start their courses in September. I am pleased to say that from September 2023, four colleges within travelling distance of Bolsover will provide T-levels. Chesterfield College, which is around 7 miles away, will offer T-levels in construction, education, digital and health. Additionally, new employer-led institutes of technology will offer higher-level technical education to help close the skill gaps in key areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The University of Derby is the lead partner in an institute of technology proposal, and the future IOT and its partners will be able to consider expanding into the Bolsover area or other cold spots if that is deemed appropriate.

I want to take this opportunity to reflect on the delivery of high-quality provision at further education colleges local to the Bolsover constituency. Each of the three colleges is assessed as good by Ofsted, and they have developed strong partnerships with both local and national employers. Chesterfield College and West Nottinghamshire College offer a broad curriculum from entry level to higher education, including apprenticeships and A-levels.

My hon. Friend mentioned the education investment areas, including Derbyshire. These are the local authorities in England in which attainment is weakest, as well as local authorities that contain an opportunity area or have been identified as having high potential for rapid improvement. As an EIA, Derbyshire will benefit from access to the £86 million in trust capacity funding that is being targeted at education investment areas over the next three years, and to the levelling-up premium, which offers tax-free payments of up to £3,000 per year to maths, physics, chemistry and computing teachers. There is also £150 million for extending the Connect the Classroom programme, which upgrades schools that fall below our wi-fi and connectivity standards.

My hon. Friend acknowledged that young people have the choice to follow an academic programme of study at a nearby school sixth form; the majority of those pupils choose to study at one of three local schools, all of which were judged by Ofsted to have

good sixth-form provision. I absolutely acknowledge his support for the new 16-to-19 free school in his constituency of Bolsover. The current mainstream application round will approve up to 15 new schools, and will focus on the areas with the greatest need. Although I am unable to discuss the specifics of the application—as he rightly mentioned, these decisions are being made by Minister Barran—I can assure him that all the applications received are being considered very carefully.

I wholeheartedly commend my hon. Friend for his continued support for a 16-to-19 free school in his constituency, and for ensuring that young people in Bolsover have access to high-quality academic provision. I was pleased to hear of his support, and of his engagement with the proposers, the Redhill Academy Trust, which, as he mentioned, is a multi-academy trust in Bolsover. He also mentioned the support from his council, a local cabinet member and the university. That message will be heard loud and clear.

It is right that young people in Bolsover should have the opportunity to achieve their full potential. The Government's priority is to ensure a range of high-quality post-16 education options. Opening new free schools is one of the Government's policies. We must achieve that aim for all young people, whatever their background and wherever they live. The application is progressing through the published process, as my hon. Friend knows. I can assure him that it is being carefully considered against the published criteria for setting up new schools. We expect the Secretary of State to announce the successful applications later this year.

I will ensure that Minister Barran sees the brilliant case that my hon. Friend has made and sees the *Hansard* report of this debate. I have no doubt that he will have further meetings with Education Ministers to discuss these issues. I commend his continued commitment to improving outcomes in his constituency, and his desire to see 16-to-19 provision in Bolsover. As Skills Minister, I am passionate about technical and vocational education, but as he rightly said, people want academic education as well. That is very important, and we want parity of esteem. He spoke very powerfully about that.

My hon. Friend has raised important concerns. He spoke about transport problems and made the point about bus journeys. Although it may be said that the journey is half an hour or whatever, it can actually be much longer, because pupils have to get to the bus stop. They then rely on the buses. In my area, Harlow, bus routes for students have sadly been cut, so I have a clear understanding of these issues.

To conclude, the Department for Education remains committed to ensuring that everyone has access to high-quality post-16 opportunities, so that they can fulfil their potential, no matter where they live. I again congratulate my hon. Friend on the powerful case he has made.

Question put and agreed to.

11.28 am

Sitting suspended.

Civil Service Pay

[MARK PRITCHARD *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the civil service pay remit and the future of pay negotiations.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Pritchard, in this extremely important debate. This is my second Westminster Hall debate on public sector pay and the threat of industrial action as a result of the Government's decisions in recent months. As we approach Budget day, I want to use the debate to drill down into one area of public sector pay: the civil service.

The civil service employs around half a million people across the UK, ranging from Whitehall mandarins to work coaches in the Department for Work and Pensions and prison officers in the Ministry of Justice. Those people carry out absolutely vital services, and I believe that the long-term trajectory of pay settlements in the civil service exposes the Government's intentions and the Conservative approach more generally. The civil service pay remit is a political imposition by the Government on the incomes of hundreds of thousands of employees, and the effect of the past 13 years of civil service pay remit decisions has been to create a crisis in civil service pay. What we are witnessing is clearly an intentional and systematic downgrading of the remuneration of work in the civil service. Without doubt, it is part of a Conservative agenda to shrink the state, shrink the share of the economy allocated to public spending, and shrink the share of the economy that rewards labour costs.

The UK civil service has had the lowest pay increases in the public sector since the election of the coalition Government. Analysis of the reduction in civil service pay suggests that salaries have fallen by between 12% and a staggering 23% in real terms at each grade of the civil service since 2010. The Public and Commercial Services Union has said that this year's pay remit means that members are missing out on at least £2,800 this year, and research by the Prospect trade union has revealed that since 2010-11 a civil servant on a median wage has lost around £10,500, which is staggering.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Ind): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing the debate. Some 49.7%, or nearly half, of civil servants earn less than £30,000. Many are struggling with the impact of rising inflation and living costs, and rising travel costs to reach work. Does she share my concern that the continued undervaluing of the civil service will lead to officials leaving and a worrying potential exodus of experience and expertise?

Beth Winter: I thank the hon. Member for her contribution, and I will come on to recruitment and retention later.

There have been pay freezes and pay caps over the last 13 years. The situation has worsened in the past 12 months because of high rates of inflation and the lower allowance in the civil service compared with other public sector settlements. Civil servants had a paltry 2% pay rise imposed on them in the past year, which is more than 10% below the retail price index at its peak and almost 10% below the consumer prices index.

Civil servants, teachers and nurses have all suffered under the Conservatives' low-pay agenda, and have all received a completely unacceptable and avoidable real-terms pay cut. The extent of the Conservative Government's low-pay agenda is laid bare by the high number of civil service staff in receipt of the minimum wage. It is an absolute travesty that over a quarter of DWP staff are paid so little that the national living wage floor increase this April will push their salaries up. It is worth noting that when many Departments contract work, they insist that people get paid at least the real living wage as determined by the Living Wage Foundation, yet the civil service itself point blank refuses to guarantee to pay civil servants at least the real living wage.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for giving way and emphasising that point. Does she share my concern, and that of many others, that the statistics she has just quoted are the reason for an increasing number of civil servants using food banks in order to survive week by week?

Beth Winter: I thank the hon. Member for his contribution and I fully agree. I will come later to the stark figures on the use of food banks by civil service staff.

As I said, the past 13 years of pay freezes and pay caps have slashed the value of civil service pay. There is also the current civil service pay remit process, which is completely unacceptable. The FDA union describes the current system as "entirely flawed and incoherent" and as one that completely fails to allow for a strategic approach to pay, reward or meaningful negotiations.

Repeated pay cuts cannot simply be imposed without industrial disputes. Pay needs a negotiation between employers and employees. The current civil service pay remit process does not even offer the façade of employee involvement through the trade unions that even the increasingly discredited public sector pay review bodies are meant to offer. The end of national pay bargaining in the civil service by the Thatcher and Major Governments and the introduction of departmental and agency-delegated responsibility for setting pay continued the Tory ideological attack on the powers of the trade unions.

In the "Continuity and Change" White Paper, John Major's Tory Government set out how, previously,

"centralised pay systems covered groups of staff whatever department they worked in, with settlements negotiated nationally between the Treasury and the unions."

Even the claim that pay is delegated is a fallacy. Pay continues to be determined centrally. Ministers can, and do, still determine pay in these different bargaining units. That is evidenced by George Osborne's imposition of a two-year pay freeze in the civil service, which he did without permission from the delegated bargaining areas. He was allowed to do that. That has been the approach for the past 30 years. It now applies to more than 200 bargaining units across the civil service, from the DWP to the National Museum of Wales. It is not logical, practical or cost-effective, and is certainly not fair. The fragmentation of the pay system has been described by the former Minister for the Cabinet Office, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), in his evidence to the Select Committee on Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs as the "balkanisation" of pay. I would like to hear whether the Minister agrees with that comment.

What is the cost to the Government, both in finance and efficiency, given the duplication of human resource process, of changes to payroll procedures across so many units? It is just not cost-effective. Although civil service Departments essentially follow the same grading structure, the salaries paid at different levels by different Departments mean increasing disparities, resulting in significant inequalities. There has been an entrenchment of inequalities that existed in the 1990s, and an opening up of new gaps that did not even exist then. The PCS union has argued that as a result there has been an entrenchment of historic gender and ethnicity pay caps, and the development of pay differentials across Departments for the same grades. That includes women being paid less than men, and the pay process has not allowed them to break out of that. Last year, *Civil Service World* reported how the civil service's median gender pay gap had widened for the first time in six years, with a gender gap in average hourly earnings of 11.3%. In most cases, where large median pay gaps exist, it is because there is a higher proportion of men in senior and more highly paid roles, or of women in more junior roles. The PCS has argued that, as civil servants are increasingly being co-located into regional hubs organised by His Majesty's Revenue and Customs and by the Government Property Agency, the difference in pay between staff at the same grades is becoming increasingly apparent—so much so that the PCS has said that it is preparing to begin large-scale equal pay challenges, bringing cases on behalf of women in one bargaining unit against men in another.

Ethnicity pay gaps are also a significant cause for concern. Black members of staff are disproportionately employed in lower paid areas of the civil service. Only this morning, we heard shocking evidence of racism in the Cabinet Office from trade unions giving evidence to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee. Regional inequalities have also been identified. For example, a median civil servant at administration assistant or officer level at the Ministry of Defence earns just over £20,000, whereas their equivalent in the Welsh Government earns around £24,500, nearly as much as the median executive officer, a grade higher, at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

The evidence clearly shows that the pay structures across the civil service are unequal, dysfunctional, broken and in urgent need of reform. The situation hinders the delivery of an efficient service, so the transfer of staff between Departments is complicated in the absence of a uniform and fair pay system, while the unfair pay differentials create obstacles to achieving effective joint working within or between Departments. As others have mentioned, poor pay and terms and conditions within the civil service are also resulting in recruitment and retention problems, which, in turn, are also very costly for the Government.

Analysis by the Institute for Government reveals that turnover in the civil service is the highest it has been for a decade, and that the recruitment and retention of highly skilled staff is a particular cause for concern. It stated:

"The National Audit Office, the Public Accounts Committee, Ministers and civil servants have described how a lack of specialist skills in areas from digital to finance has contributed to delays, cost overruns or policy and operational failures."

Research commissioned by Prospect and the FDA this year concluded that in order to ensure that the civil service can recruit and retain the high numbers of staff required,

it is essential that the Government urgently address the poor levels of civil service pay. That is all having a significant detrimental impact on staff.

In PACAC this morning, we discussed the civil service people's survey and we heard shocking evidence of harassment, bullying, discrimination and racism in the civil service. I will just quote some startling figures from a recent PCS survey of its members: 85% said that the cost of living crisis has impacted their mental and physical health; over half fear losing their home; 40% say that they have used credit to pay for essential shopping; and almost a fifth say that they have missed work because of their inability to afford transport or fuel. As the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) has said, 40,000 are using food banks, and 47,000 people are claiming universal credit because pay is so low. That is totally unacceptable and that is why civil service staff have been driven—forced—to take industrial action.

Nobody makes the decision to take industrial action lightly; it is very much a last resort. It is not a choice but a necessity that has been forced on civil service staff. Since December, PCS has been engaged in a series of targeted industrial action across many Departments, including the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, the DWP and Border Force. That is why we will see over 130,000 civil servants take strike action on Budget day next week in an attempt to make this Government listen and improve their offer. PCS is not alone. The poor pay outcomes have also led the Prospect union to ballot its members and they have also overwhelmingly voted for industrial action. Even the fast-streamers organised by the FDA have voted for industrial action.

I am very conscious that some Government Members have sought many a time to assert that rising wages cause inflation by creating a wage spiral. I am confident that the Minister is aware that that does not stand up to scrutiny. Research by James Meadway for the General Federation of Trade Unions, cited in a recent pamphlet, said:

"Whatever it is that is driving inflation in the UK, it is not high wages. Wages have been low for a long time and are now falling very fast."

Independent analysis commissioned from Incomes Data Research by Prospect and the FDA argues that,

"public sector pay rises might only lead to an increase in inflation if they at least matched or were higher than current rates of inflation, and then only if private sector employers followed suit, and then only if these employers then decided to deliberately pass on this aspect of increasing costs directly to consumers in the form of price rises."

If the Government truly believe that they do not have the resources to fund the pay rise, they need to make it clear they will end some of the tax inequalities that continue to let the wealthiest off the hook and will introduce a new measure of wealth taxation.

Previously, I have highlighted what such measures might include, including the equalisation of the rate of capital gains tax with income tax, which, in a single measure, would raise up to £14 billion. The money is there; it is a political choice not to use it. The Government can afford to pay civil servants, all public sector workers and everybody who has been forced to strike a decent wage.

I will move to a conclusion. There are a number of issues that need addressing and I would welcome the Minister's response to them. We need an audit of pay

[*Beth Winter*]

differentials impacting gender and ethnicity across Departments, an audit of pay differentials at the same employment grades across Departments, a grouping of agencies around their main Government Departments to harmonise pay arrangements and an acceptance of the need for pay remits that move the civil service towards national pay rates, which will establish moving floors at different grades and the safeguarding of differentials between grades. That should be a step on the way to the re-establishment of a national pay bargaining process that ends the refusal to negotiate with trade unions.

Indeed, Labour's deputy leader, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), and her predecessor on the employment rights brief, my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald), have set out that fair pay agreements will be negotiated through sectoral collective bargaining, reversing the decades-long decline in collective bargaining coverage. I am not asserting that that is a manifesto commitment to national pay bargaining for the civil service, but it is clear evidence of the direction in which the party intends to move. I refer people to the Labour party's excellent "A New Deal for Working People" employment rights Green Paper for more information.

Such an approach is essential in order to tackle the problems of insecurity, inequality, discrimination, enforcement, low pay and the raft of other issues that I outlined in my speech. Urgent action is also required, with the Government's commitment to hold constructive talks with PCS to resolve the current dispute. In next week's Budget announcement, we need a revision of the 2022-23 civil service pay remit that reflects an understanding that a 10% rise and a living wage of at least £15 an hour are wholly affordable—wholly in this Government's grasp—and do not require a reduction in service provision. We need a reformed pay bargaining process for the civil service and across the public sector, and an end to the Tory low-pay agenda of holding down public sector pay. *Diolch yn fawr, Mr Pritchard.*

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): I remind Members to bob if they wish to speak, just to help the Chair—I think you all are, thank you. I call Chris Stephens.

2.50 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Pritchard. I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, particularly my position as chair of the PCS parliamentary group. I thought I would do that, Mr Pritchard, because we usually hear shouts from the Conservative Benches about the Register of Members' Financial Interests, but I notice that those Members are on strike today. No one from the Conservative Back Benches is here to take part.

Who are the heroes of the pandemic? I would suggest that among those heroes are those who worked in the civil service, such as those who were in the Department for Work and Pensions when there was an explosion of universal credit claims that had to be processed and of people to be paid on time. It was those people who made sure that universal credit payments were paid on time, helping those in need. The heroes of the pandemic

include those who worked in HMRC, who had to make sure that businesses, including small businesses, received furlough payments to help ensure that the economic wheels were turning. They include those in the civil service who put together the rules and regulations to update the public on what to do and how to comply with covid regulations, to ensure that the public were safe and protected.

As such, what is astonishing about this debate—as the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter), who secured the debate, has outlined—is that the civil service seems to be treated worst of all across the public sector. Frankly, that is a disgrace. I want to concentrate on the economic case for giving civil servants and other public sector workers a real-terms pay rise. I note that in his demands for the Budget, my good friend the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Stephen Flynn), the leader of the SNP group, has said that we must have pay rises that match inflation. It is not public sector pay that increases inflation: it is prices. Food inflation is currently around 13%, yet we are offering some public sector workers 2% or 3%: that is not going to help them feed their families, and it is not going to help them going forward. We need to look very seriously at this situation.

The Conservative Government keep telling us that they are the party of efficiency and small government, yet they allow a situation in which there are over 200 separate pay negotiations across the civil service for those who work for the Westminster Government. The fact that so many different pay negotiations are being carried out across the civil service is something that you really could not make up. If the Conservative Government allow that situation to develop going forward, they are opening themselves up to equal pay claims, and I hope the Minister will tell us how they are going to cut the number of pay negotiations. There should be one set of pay negotiations covering those who work for the Westminster Government.

I know that many colleagues want in, Mr Pritchard, so the final point I will make is this: if people are talking, they are not walking. Far too often, we hear Government Members blaming society's problems on not just refugees, as we heard in the main Chamber earlier, but trade unions. "It is the trade unions' fault that we have so many societal problems at the moment"—what a risible argument! If the Government keep pursuing that level of tactic and introducing such rubbish legislation, such as the so-called minimum service levels legislation, it is only going to intensify the situation and make it worse. I want to hear from the Government how they are actually going to sit around the table and enter into meaningful negotiations like other Administrations do, including the Scottish Government.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): I will have to enforce an informal time limit of five minutes.

2.55 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter) and the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) have comprehensively covered most of the issues. There is little to say, apart from maybe the Minister saying, "I give up and we'll go and sort this out." I also declare an interest as a member of the PCS parliamentary

group. There is no financial relationship as such; it is not even affiliated with the Labour party, although I keep trying.

I want to get across to the Minister what the Government need to face up to. In recent years, the Government have come for civil servants' pensions. They lost in court over that, but they have not even addressed the legal judgment. In addition, they cut their redundancy payments, and now they are insulting them with a 2% pay offer. As the hon. Member for Glasgow South West said, these are the people who worked throughout the pandemic, and were applauded by Government Ministers for what they did. I remember the then Chancellor applauding HMRC and Department for Work and Pensions staff for the role that they played, many of them working from home. And then they get the insult of a 2% pay increase. It is no wonder that, for the first time in civil service history, there will be 100,000 civil servants on strike in a week's time.

The Government rely on the myth that it is nothing to do with them, and all to do with the Departments that are negotiating. That myth has been exposed time and time again. The pay remit is set by central Government. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley said, the Government hide behind ludicrous pay structures. Having 200 individual units is not just inefficient but completely counterproductive. The result is that the civil service is demoralised, and it is failing to retain and recruit in many sectors. At the same time, I never expected public servants to be paid such low real pay. We have seen the issues with food banks, and some workers not even being able to afford the transport costs to get to work. Collectively, as a Parliament, we are the employers. Parliament holds Government to account; we all have to shoulder a responsibility. The Government have to recognise just how serious the situation is. They cannot underestimate the depth of anger that is out there among civil servants, their families and their communities.

The Government have hidden behind the high cost of settling at inflation-proofing; they themselves have used the mythical figure of £28 billion. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has already said that there is 4% to 5% within the Government's existing budget structures for 2022-23, so the cost to get to inflation-proofing may be more like £15 billion to £17 billion. I will not go into detail, but others have pointed out how much the Government will get back in tax, national insurance contributions and so on. As a result of that, we are talking about single figures in terms of the cost to ensure that civil servants are inflation-proofed. The Bank of England destroyed the argument that this causes inflation in some way. Some 80% of the inflationary factors are external, and not to do with pay. The Government cannot argue that wages are causing inflation when they have been held down for 13 years. As others have said, they are now between 12% and 23% lower.

Finally, we need an inflation-proofing offer immediately so we can avoid the industrial action that is taking place. We want a reform of collective pay bargaining structures so we can get away from the current ludicrous system and back to collective bargaining itself. I think that in the future, all pay settlements across the whole economy should minimally be based on inflation-proofing, so that people are not impoverished as a result of pay settlements imposed upon them by the Government.

2.59 pm

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): I disclose an interest: my father was a civil servant. He was in charge of economic development at the Welsh Office and was instrumental in getting the DVLA to come to Swansea, which I represent.

The Government have treated the DVLA appallingly, particularly during the pandemic, when something like 500 people caught covid at the Swansea centre. Even though the unions and the management agreed a policy to mitigate risk that allowed more people to stay at home, the then Transport Secretary, the right hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps), intervened and pulled it off the table, forcing a strike. That was a taste of things to come: the Government have provoked unnecessary strikes across the board and failed to negotiate in order to create a political atmosphere in which they can say to the electorate, "It's the strikers versus the people. Who are you going to vote for?" It is completely cynical and counterproductive.

In Swansea and many parts of the country that have very poor communities—Swansea was a recipient of EU structural funding—people have not had proper pay increases. We know about inflation. According to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, food inflation is at something like 17%. People have been given an offer of 2%, so it is no surprise that they have been provoked. Those public servants are one of Britain's greatest achievements. They provide neutral support and advice to Ministers, and public services to the people.

Of course, the inflation was to a certain extent provoked by the Ukraine war, but it is interesting that energy inflation in Britain is much higher than it is in the rest of Europe, which is much more exposed to Russian gas. We have seen the fuel companies' massive profiteering; those windfall profits should be properly taxed.

In addition, food price inflation has been pushed by retailers' and food producers' profiteering. During the pandemic, because farmers could not sell their products to the hospitality sector, which was closed, the retail sector took advantage by pumping up prices while costs were going down, doubling their profits. Again, in theory, they should face a windfall tax. Profiteering, the Ukraine war and Brexit, which of course added 6% to inflation, have pumped up costs for people who have faced 13 years of pay freezes. It is no surprise, therefore, that something like 40,000 of them are relying on food banks.

We want a proper negotiation. People know that there is not an unlimited amount of money, but treating them like dirt and pushing them on to their knees is a recipe for making them rise up and strike. That is completely unnecessary; we want to move forward.

People in the civil service accept that they earn a little less because they are public servants and their heart is in the right place, but they are being driven to take action. We have a tight labour market because there is not freedom of movement. We have had reckless covid management, so tens of thousands of people have long covid and are not as productive. The Government resist allowing civil servants to work from home, as we saw in the DVLA. We should support people in work, invest in them, allow them to work from home and provide wi-fi clouds to make them more productive.

[Geraint Davies]

I look forward to a growing economy in which we invest in a growing future, rather than a hobbled economy in which we kick people who are already down. We need a strategic approach to this problem, and I very much look forward to a Labour Government, as we have in Wales, who talk to the unions and people in work in partnership, so we can grow together in the knowledge that we all face constraints. We need to do that in an adult way, rather than with a bullying approach that provokes strikes and poverty.

3.3 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter)—I hope that is the right way of pronouncing her constituency; I am definitely improving—on securing the debate. My constituency borders Belfast, so I have a large number of constituents employed in the civil service. This debate therefore is especially relevant to me.

I have been in this world a wee while. When I was in school, which was not yesterday, most of my friends leaving school sought jobs in the civil service. It offered job progression for many, and people had those jobs for life.

Today, life has changed. People change their jobs much more than they ever did. The problem that I see—others have said this, and I want to confirm it—is that people with civil service jobs come to me in the office in need of genuine help because they have financial difficulties or are using food banks. They sometimes come to me and say, “Jim, I’m under a bit of pressure with my mortgage. Can you approach the mortgage people and see if we can get a bit of space?” They want to make their payments—it is not that they do not want to—but they are having difficulty trying to manage them.

After a lengthy time of small increments and pay freezes, junior and senior civil servants were offered a pay increase of 2% in March 2022, with Departments having the flexibility to pay up to 3% in certain circumstances. By comparison, pay awards of 4% to 5% have been agreed in the public sector following industrial action, while the private sector has agreed awards of over 6%. I am not saying that the private sector should not do that, but if it can do it, civil servants should be given the same.

Overall, the median salary in the civil service has risen by 3% since 2010—less than the median real-terms changes at each individual grade. This is being driven by the increased seniority of the civil service. I read an interesting article, which said:

“While it is likely that at least some of this is a genuine change in composition, it is also likely that some civil servants are being promoted to boost their salaries, to stop them from leaving the civil service and to manage morale, rather than because their skill-set and responsibilities demand it. These promotions are likely to be focused in the middle grades, where there are more roles people can be promoted into than at senior levels. And it is harder to promote a junior official in an administrative, operational role because of the different responsibilities at the EO level.”

It is important to make that public and put it on the record, because that is what is happening to civil servants. They are not getting the pay rises that they justifiably should; instead, they are being moved about and given higher grades. That might help in the short term, but it does not really help them at all.

It is clear that in-house tinkering to try to meet the needs of the workforce has reached its limit, and Ministers must recognise this and begin to find a way forward to meet the need. Being a civil servant used to be known as a job for life—it was when I was a young boy—but staff increasingly feel overworked, underpaid and underappreciated. What a disappointment that is. Some civil servants are left feeling that, because they are not in as bad a financial position as those in retail, they should not complain. There is almost a guilt complex among some of them as well, but the fact is that to have happy, efficient staff, our civil service must lead the way.

To have staff who are not invested in doing the bare minimum but who are thankful for a decent job, we need to restore pride in their work and increase job satisfaction, which comes with the recognition that a decent pay rise takes on board, and I support staff in their aim on this. I am aware that working in the civil service has its advantages, such as decent annual leave, sick pay and maternity pay. These perks have carried people through for many years, but staff are now concerned about how they will stay warm on their days off at home. Given that they cannot afford to go on holidays either, it is clear that the perks are not enough to make people stick at it.

The fact is that those in decent jobs are precluded from the help that comes with universal credit or other benefit streams. Their children do not get free school meals and they are at risk of losing child benefit, despite the fact that they are under more financial pressure than when the child benefit threshold was set in 2013. The price of public transport and parking is up, and all bills have risen, yet their wages have not even tried to compete. There is only so much that a “job for life” means if that life is not of a decent quality. I say with great respect and honesty to the Minister that I join my colleagues on this side of the Chamber in asking for change and for reasonable adjustments to help civil servants to have a normal life like everybody else.

3.8 pm

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter) on securing the debate.

I pay tribute to the unions that are working tirelessly on behalf of their members in their fight to secure fair deals on pay. Many Wirral West residents work in the civil service and a number of them—members of the PCS—have written to me in recent weeks. They have expressed their frustration and dismay that the civil service pay remit for 2022-23 limited pay increases to just 2% to 3%. They have also rightly pointed out that, at the time, this

“represented a significant, real-terms pay cut given that inflation was already running at around 9%”.

We must also remember that the pay remit for 2022-23 has been set against a backdrop of a decade of real-terms pay cuts. According to PCS, as a result of pay being frozen and capped, the living standards of many of its members have fallen by about 20% in real terms in the last decade. The average PCS member is worse off by £2,300 a year since 2011. When the remit was announced in March last year, PCS was right to describe it as “an insult to PCS members who helped to keep the country running during the pandemic”.

As I wrote in an email to the Chancellor just last week, the rhetoric of Ministers has not always recognised the dedication of civil servants, many of whom are still dealing with the impact of the covid-19 crisis, including those dealing with backlogs in the Home Office and criminal courts.

The PCS survey results are shocking, with 18% of members admitting to missing work because they cannot afford transport or fuel to get there; 37% of respondents saying that they are looking for a job outside the civil service and considering a career change for the good of their health; and 85% of members saying that the cost of living crisis has affected their physical or mental health. Shockingly, figures also suggest that 40% of PCS members are using food banks, and 47% are claiming universal credit because their pay is so low. It is therefore incredibly disappointing that the Government have ruled out a resettlement of the pay offer for the current financial year.

PCS is calling for a 10% pay uplift, an end to the pensions overpayment of 2%—which it says costs civil servants an average of £500 a year—and guarantees on the protection of the existing compensation scheme terms and job security. Constituents who have written to me have been clear that they

“would much prefer a negotiated settlement with the employer than to have to take...industrial action, particularly at a time when the cost of living is as high as it is.”

As we have seen elsewhere in the public sector, the Government's refusal to pay workers the fair wage they deserve has left them feeling that they have no choice other than to go on strike to get their message across.

When it comes to pay remit guidance for 2023-24, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has said that it will be put together

“in the context of higher inflation”,

and that he would

“expect some of that to be recognised in the sort of pay settlement”

that the Government are able to give civil servants. Nevertheless, he has tempered expectations, suggesting that civil servants will be left disappointed once again by the Government.

That is not good enough. The Government must ensure that civil servants receive the fair pay rise that they deserve. The Government's attack on the rights of working people is wholly unacceptable, with the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill leaving some civil servants, as well as workers in key sectors, potentially at risk of losing their jobs as a result of industrial action agreed in a democratic ballot. That is very draconian indeed. It is a pernicious piece of legislation and it must be withdrawn immediately.

Will the Minister also address the issue of job cuts in the civil service? Last May, the Government announced that there would be 91,000 job cuts in the civil service within three years. The Prime Minister initially scrapped those plans when he came to office, but there were reports recently that there are still likely to be significant job cuts in the civil service, although no numbers have been confirmed yet. The Government should not need reminding that job cuts in the civil service would be detrimental to the quality and availability of the public services on which we all rely. As Amy Leversidge, the

assistant general secretary of the FDA union said during a recent meeting of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, the Government

“cannot expect everything that was delivered with over 400,000 civil servants to be done with 91,000 less.”

Will the Minister commit to protecting jobs in the civil service? Will he revisit the 2022-23 civil service pay settlement in the light of the cost of living crisis and rising inflation? Finally, will he give a reassurance that hard-working civil servants will receive the pay and conditions they deserve in the next financial year?

3.13 pm

Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab): It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter) for securing this important debate and for so evocatively laying bare in her opening remarks the scale of the crisis facing the civil service.

In recent days, Conservative Members have dedicated much of their energy contriving to impugn the conduct of the former second permanent secretary to the Cabinet Office. However, I have noticed with interest the lengths to which many of them have gone to make clear, regardless of their views of Sue Gray, the high esteem in which they hold the civil service. As the Paymaster General himself echoed in his remarks to the House yesterday, this nation's civil servants are diligent and hard-working, and display the utmost integrity in the exercise of their duty. The question facing Conservative Members, and which I hope the Minister will address in a moment's time, is: why should civil servants be denied the fair and long-overdue pay rise that will allow them to keep their heads above water during the most precipitous collapse in living standards in a generation?

The Government are impotent without the civil service, and nowhere was that more clearly demonstrated than during the height of the pandemic. That global health crisis necessitated the most radical expansion of state involvement in the lives of ordinary people since at least the second world war. Furloughed workers needed to get paid, businesses needed financial support, and the health service required additional resources on an unprecedented scale.

Notwithstanding the Government's many failings during those dark days, not a single one of our successes in the fight against covid—including the vaccine roll-out—would ever have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the civil service. And yet, in November last year, those same workers were told by the Government that they deserved a measly pay rise of just 2% during a period of record inflation, when food prices have risen by more than 16% and October's mini-Budget catastrophe sent mortgage rates and rents soaring. That is an insult. All of that comes after over a decade in which a public sector squeeze has seen pay fall at every grade of the civil service by between 12% and 23% in real terms.

Let us be very clear about what that squeeze has meant for those working in the civil service. Of all PCS members surveyed, 85% said that the cost of living crisis has impacted their physical and mental health, over half are worried about losing their homes, and nearly one in 10 have been forced to resort to food bank use. One constituent recently wrote to me to say that they felt at their wits' end. Another asked for assistance in dealing with the payday lenders they had been forced

[Mick Whitley]

to turn to in order to make ends meet, while another said that the challenge of keeping up with mortgage payments had left them feeling like a prisoner in their own home. We should not be surprised that a third of all respondents to the PCS survey said they were looking to leave the civil service entirely, and that a career change would do good for their mental health.

Next week, as the Chancellor delivers his Budget, more than 100,000 PCS members will be on picket lines across the country to tell this Government that enough is enough. I will be proud to stand with them as they do so. It is time for this Government to realise that this country cannot survive without its public servants, and those public servants cannot survive on warm words alone. In the national interest, I urge the Minister to get around the table and negotiate the fair pay rise that our civil servants so rightly deserve.

3.17 pm

Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Mr Pritchard. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter), who is a good friend, for securing this important debate, and for her excellent speech. I hope I have pronounced her constituency right, or she will kill me.

Although I have no formal interests to declare, I am a proud member of the PCS parliamentary group. I stand in full solidarity with the civil service in Liverpool, West Derby, and across the country, who are taking industrial action as a last resort over their pay, pensions and job security. It was an absolute privilege to stand with civil servants on an historic day at the PCS picket line in Whitehall last month, with quite a number of colleagues from this side of the House. It is a position they should never have been put in.

Workers in the civil service have not had a real-terms pay rise for over 11 years. Salaries have fallen by between 12% and 23% in real terms at each grade since 2010. There would be an uproar among MPs if that happened to them. There has been a sustained pay cut—a disgraceful pay injustice that has resulted in the loss of at least £2,800 a year in pay to individual civil servants. The pay structures across the civil service are fragmented into over 200 bargaining units, a system that the FDA trade union has rightly described as “dysfunctional and broken”.

That broken system has resulted not only in low pay but in wide variations of pay across the service, equal pay issues and a gender pay gap, as well as a recruitment and retention crisis. On top of that, civil servants have been overpaying pension contributions by £500 a year since 2019. The situation is grim.

This Government's decade of brutal and unrelenting austerity has cut our public services to the bone and forced people who deliver those services into abject poverty. One in six people in my constituency are missing meals or going without food, and that includes many civil servants. In a PCS survey of its members, 35% of respondents said that they had skipped meals because they had no food, 18% that they have had to miss work because they cannot afford transport or fuel to get there, 85% that the cost of living crisis has affected their physical and mental health, and 52% that they are

worried about losing their homes as bills and inflation rocket. Forty thousand civil servants are estimated to be regular users of food banks—I have seen that myself in the pantries that we run in Liverpool—and 47,000 are claiming universal credit because the pay is so low.

Let us just reflect on those statistics. The very people we trust to ensure that the social security system works for those in need are now being driven into hunger because of the poverty pay they receive. That encapsulates 13 years of Tory rule, which has driven many members of our public sector staff into poverty. Political choices are being made that have caused so much harm and misery to our communities. I have heard Members say, “Enough is enough,” quite a lot, certainly earlier on in the Chamber for the immigration statement. Let us use those words today to frame this economic injustice for all our loyal public servants; and let us hope the Minister uses them when we talk about that economic injustice.

The Government's derisory 2% pay offer for 2022-23 is an absolute insult to those civil servants and their families. Inflation is over five times as high, and food inflation is around nine times as high. Trade unions representing staff, including fast streamers, are now taking industrial action as a last resort. One-hundred thousand civil servants will take strike action on Budget day next Wednesday: a day that the Government could use—if they had the political will and leadership, Minister—to announce an inflation-proof pay rise for public sector workers to avoid the strikes.

On Friday, I received a disappointing response from the Minister for the Cabinet Office to my letter raising the issues that I have raised in this debate. In that correspondence, he said that he would

“like to take this opportunity to reiterate...our gratitude for the exceptional commitment Civil Servants and public servants have shown in supporting essential public service delivery during this challenging time.”

Yet, further on in the letter he says that he recognises that the current civil service pay uplift

“will be below current levels of inflation.”

Warm words mean absolutely nothing to civil service staff in West Derby and across the country, who are not being paid enough to live off. I am also extremely disappointed that the Minister for the Cabinet Office appeared to suggest in that letter that pay restraint is somehow linked to getting inflation under control. The FDA's independent analysis debunks the Government's claim that public sector pay awards cause inflation. Inflation cannot be caused directly by public sector wage rises, and there is no evidence that this can occur indirectly.

I and my constituents are dismayed by the Minister for the Cabinet Office's correspondence, and I am appalled by the Government's overall approach to public sector pay disputes. Rather than taking the mature and robust step of offering an acceptable settlement on pay, terms and conditions, the Government have instead taken the reactionary step of ramping up anti-strike rhetoric and placing regressive legislation against industrial action on the statute book. That is not leadership when it is needed. We must be better than this. Those loyal public sector workers deserve the Minister's action and support. We urge the Minister today to listen to the demands of civil service staff and their trade unions, and to provide them with pay justice and improved conditions. They and our nation deserve nothing less.

3.23 pm

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I appreciate you chairing this afternoon's debate, Mr Pritchard. We have been particularly raucous and difficult to control, so congratulations on taking on that most difficult role this afternoon.

I also thank the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter) for taking forward this incredibly important debate. I was going to start by discussing the question she asked yesterday in Department for Work and Pensions questions—to which the Secretary of State responded by tacitly acknowledging that more than a quarter of DWP staff are paid so little that the minimum wage increase in April will lift their salaries. How have we reached a situation where they are so poorly valued and so poorly paid that they are not even paid the real living wage? They are simply paid the Government's pretend living wage.

Given that such a high percentage of them claim universal credit, as the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Ian Byrne) has just stated, how is that cost-effective for the Government, never mind anything else? If people are paid so little that they need other Government funding to allow them even the most basic standards of life, something is going wrong. As so many Members have said, these are people who worked day in, day out during the course of the pandemic. They worked so hard to ensure that others were able to access the vital public services that we all need and that became incredibly important—far more important than before the pandemic—for so many. People were putting themselves at risk by travelling and working during lockdowns and the pandemic. It is a travesty that those people have been undervalued to such an extent.

Comments have also been made about gender-based discrimination and job cuts, and the fact that the Government expect people to do more work for less pay. Nobody wants to do more work for less pay. We should value the folk who deliver the most vital public services. During sittings of the Procurement Bill Committee, which some Members here attended, we tried to ensure that the Government would write a real living wage into procurement contracts. It is important that the real living wage is paid. When we write procurement contracts it is important that that is a requirement on external contractors or companies, but it should also be required of all public services.

We are doing everything we can in Scotland. Ensuring that people such as those working in adult social care are paid the real living wage is resulting in a significant increase in the number of people being paid an amount on which it is possible for them to live. That also reduces reliance on the benefits system and ensures that people have dignity and can avoid having to go to food banks to provide basic services for their families.

The Minister might talk about the amount of money that the Government have given to people for electricity and gas bills, but it is not enough. People are still struggling. The money given to support people with energy costs does not fully cover the increased costs, and that is not to mention the 17.1% inflationary increase in the cost of food. The highest increase is for the most basic food, yet we cannot avoid buying pasta, potatoes and rice.

The Government need to step up. They need to properly negotiate with trade unions. Nobody wants to take industrial action. It is not the case that trade unionists hate work. They have been forced into this situation because of the UK Government's unwillingness to negotiate. In Scotland we have negotiated pay deals far more successfully. We have experienced strikes in Scotland, but we have constantly been round the table talking. We have been able to make much higher pay offers despite the fact that we have a legal requirement to have a balanced budget. We do not have the same flexibility as the UK Westminster Government on budgets. They can pay people by making in-year changes to budgets. We cannot do that in Scotland, yet we have prioritised pay because we recognise how important our public sector workers are. We recognise how vital the services that they provide are, so we are doing everything that we can to make the best possible pay offers.

Job cuts have been mentioned, but we are trying to ensure that people are not asked to do more work for less pay. We are putting in other provisions as well to ensure that we have enough staff. Obviously, we are hampered in that by Brexit.

In spite of a decade of real-terms pay cuts and the lack of flexibility in the Scottish budget, we will keep on fighting for a better and fairer Scotland. On Thursday, the Minister of State, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, the right hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) accused me of using the need for a balanced budget in Scotland as a convenient scenario. It is not convenient! It is incredibly inconvenient that Scotland has to have a balanced budget and that we cannot therefore make the offers we would like to make and provide people with cost of living uplifts. We have been arguing for decades for independence for Scotland so that we do not have to work within this framework and so that we have the ability to make our own choices about spending and about the money that we have as a Government to spend. The UK Government's continued cuts to the budget mean that our budget is less and we do not have the power or the flexibility to sort out that situation.

This debate has been incredibly interesting because Conservative Back Benchers have not come to the debate to provide their input. Do they not think that DWP staff are important? Do they not think that Home Office staff and DVLA staff are important? Do they not think that they should be coming out to bat for their constituents and providing that level of support? We are not asking for anything excessive. We are asking simply for the Government to look at inflation-level increases. That is not a completely crazy idea. It would allow people to have the dignity to support themselves and, as I have said a couple of times, not to find themselves entangled in the benefits system, where they are having to claim universal credit. People do not want to be in that system, but when the Government are not paying them enough and when Government Members are standing up in Parliament, as they did yesterday, and doing everything they can to smear the name of the civil service, we will have a situation where those dedicated public servants will be saying, "Enough is enough. We are not continuing to work for this Conservative Government, who continually undervalue us and refuse to negotiate reasonable pay uplifts."

3.31 pm

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under you, Mr Pritchard. I, too, pay a big tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter) for securing this really important debate. Her passionate opening remarks highlighted why we are having the debate. I want to go back to some of the points that she highlighted.

In the recent survey conducted by the PCS union, 85% of its members said that the cost of living crisis had had a big impact on their mental and physical health. If people are not in a fit position to go to work, how are they supposed to carry out even the basic functions that they are employed to do? When we talk about people using food banks, some Members of this House basically say that that is incorrect, but the figures do not lie: 40,000 of that union's members say that they are using food banks. That should shame us. Those are staff members, people in work and with a salary, having to rely on food banks. That should not be happening in 2023. Of those PCS members, 18% said that they had missed work because of their inability to afford transport or fuel—the energy companies and fuel companies are making record profits but not passing the benefit down to people who are filling up at the petrol stations—and 40% said that they had had to use credit for essential shopping. We saw what happened a few years ago with the rise of loan companies and loan sharks. If we are not careful, the number of people who have to rely on credit for the basic necessities—for basic bills—will creep up. That is what is happening to people who are in work. In-work poverty should not be happening.

Many hon. Members have highlighted issues across their constituencies, and I think about my own constituency, just over the bridge, where a significant number of civil servants live. Many Members have highlighted how hard our civil servants worked during the pandemic. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) highlighted the fact that, if we are honest, a job in the civil service is no longer a job for life. I will be honest: when I graduated, I applied for the fast stream, but I failed at the first hurdle and I thought that that was the end of my career. A number of people who have worked in the civil service feel that they have no career progression. Their pay is stagnating, and they are leaving. He is right; it is no longer a job for life.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) highlighted the fact that the 2% increase is an insult—nothing more—because inflation is skyrocketing and the cost of everything is going up for our civil servants. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Ian Byrne) highlighted the really big issue that civil servants are having to rely on food banks. I totally agree with him that the situation is grim. To repeat his words, we are forcing people into abject poverty because they are having to choose. That should not be happening. I also agree with the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) that as a result of what the Government are proposing and the fact that they are not negotiating, fewer people will be doing more work for less pay. That should not be happening, either.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) raised the issues with the DVLA, which we all remember, and the shameful way in which the former Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. Member

for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps), handled that situation, with hard-working staff not being treated right. These issues are happening while the Government refuse to negotiate with our civil servants. If we look back to the pandemic, civil servants kept the country going and on its feet, whether by putting emergency measures in place, adjusting to new realities or taking on the mammoth task of dealing with so many different schemes, including furlough. Let us be honest: even now, those civil servants are still working to clear up backlog Britain. We have all seen that backlog in our casework, whether it is with the Home Office, the DVLA or passports. The civil servants are still working to clear it up, and trying to fix the problems of the past 12 years that have been caused by the Government's mismanagement.

Our public services are at breaking point. That is not the fault of the hard-working public sector staff; it is the fault of the Government, who have failed and let down our valued institutions—the Government who do not value our staff, and who have failed to recruit and retain staff across the public sector. We are now in a situation where civil servants feel that they have no choice but to go on strike. Like many people, they are seeing their bills and the cost of food rise. The hon. Member for Aberdeen North mentioned pasta, potatoes and rice; whenever I get updates from the food banks in my constituency, those are the key items that they want people to drop off. Those basic items are now so expensive, and the truth is that civil servants' pay is not keeping up with those increases. The Government are more determined to scapegoat workers and avoid fixing a mess that they created than they are to get around the table and negotiate, including in the civil service.

We cannot expect the civil service to be attractive to external employees when civil servants are expected to withstand threats to their jobs. My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) highlighted the fact that just over a year ago, the Government threatened to cut 91,000 jobs across the civil service. That caused endless sleepless nights for those who were worried about the future of their jobs. Thankfully, those plans have been shelved, but given the merry-go-round of Ministers that we have had, how can anyone joining the civil service now be sure that that proposal will not come up again? That uncertainty and real-terms pay cuts are hindering the civil service's ability to retain and recruit staff. Too often, that results in the false economy of having to rely on external contractors and consultants within the civil service. Year after year, public money is being spent on external consultants, rather than attracting the knowledge that we need in-house and training people to have that knowledge. We have simply outsourced the pay rise that our civil servants need to keep up with the cost of living to the profits of consulting firms. That is a horrific waste of money, resulting directly from 12 years of Government neglect and ideology-driven pay decisions.

When we consider civil service pay, we must look at its impact on equality. There are around half a million civil servants, who are responsible for delivering vast amounts of our public services. It is critical that our civil service is representative of our society as a whole, but we cannot expect it to be representative when pay across the civil service is unequal. My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley mentioned the shocking issues that PACAC explored around racism in the civil service—I hope the Minister and his colleagues will be looking at that—and the shocking fact that the gender

pay gap in the civil service increased drastically in 2022, with the median pay gap increasing by almost 70% in just one year. We cannot tackle inequality in society if inequality is entrenched in our civil service.

One point I would like the Minister to come back on is whether he agrees with the Women and Equalities Committee, which reported last year on the ethnicity pay gap—another key issue within the civil service. Does he agree that the first step in addressing the pay disparity is to ensure that ethnicity pay gap reporting is mandatory? I urge him to outline the measures he is taking to address the pay gap in the civil service.

The Government have a responsibility to ensure our public services are run well and our public sector workers are treated fairly. The next Labour Government's mission will be to grow our economy, ensure that we have high-quality public services and ensure that our workers have better pay and conditions. Labour's new deal for working people looks to deliver on this mission for the civil service and across society. The cost of living crisis is driving our civil servants to breaking point. It must be a priority for the Government to get to grips with this crisis and ensure that working people do not continue to suffer. Working people need a fair deal. The Government must get around the table to ensure that our public services are not ravaged by the outcomes of 12 years of Conservative failure and mismanagement.

3.40 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Alex Burghart): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter) on securing the debate, as I welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues. I am sure the Chancellor will have heard her remarks. The Government are obviously in the process of preparing for the Budget in the very near future.

At the outset, I want to join all Members in recognising the extraordinary hard work and dedication of the civil service. I cannot accept the remarks made—admittedly, as an aside—by the hon. Members for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) and for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi) about how the Government are in some way scapegoating civil servants. That is absolutely not the case. It was not the case in the urgent question in the House yesterday. Obviously, a lot of people in the Cabinet Office are sad about what has happened over the past few days, but that in no way detracts from our huge respect for our exceptional civil servants, on whom we rely every single day. It is important for me to put that on the record.

As right hon. and hon. Members will undoubtedly be aware, civil service pay is determined by separate processes for delegated grades—typically grade 6 and below—and the senior civil service. For delegated grades, the Cabinet Office publishes the pay remit guidance annually. The guidance is a cost control document setting out the parameters of average awards in a pay remit year for Departments. For the senior civil service, the Senior Salaries Review Body makes independent recommendations to the Government based on evidence provided by the Government and data from recognised trade unions and the labour market.

In the 2021 spending review, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the end of the temporary pay pause in the public sector, including the civil service,

starting from the year 2022-23, throughout the duration of the spending review period to 2024-25. The strong recovery in the economy and labour market at that time allowed us to return to a normal pay setting process. Again, right hon. and hon. Members will be aware that new challenges then emerged. We are operating now in a very different economic environment. Higher than expected global energy and goods prices have already led to unavoidable increases in the cost of living in the UK, and the repercussions of Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine have added considerably to those pressures.

Last year, the civil service pay remit guidance allowed Departments to make awards of up to 3%, which we absolutely recognise is below inflation. The Government of course recognise the significant strain that cost of living pressures are putting on everyone, including civil servants, and this Government have been helping with energy support and other cost of living payments for the most vulnerable.

Chris Stephens: The Minister mentioned the pay remit guidance. For clarity, can he confirm that the pay remit guidance is one document—that there is only one piece of pay remit guidance? If so, why are there 200 sets of negotiations across Westminster Government Departments?

Alex Burghart: The hon. Gentleman will be glad to hear that I will come to that point very soon.

As everyone will, I hope, appreciate, the Government put fiscal responsibility at the very centre of our policy, and we are taking appropriate steps to manage inflation. Obviously, at the moment, it is not public sector wages that are driving inflation. Many factors are driving inflation. Inflation is besetting our closest friends and competitors around the world; it is an international problem. However, if we were to take the advice of the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Ian Byrne) and others, we would find ourselves in trouble.

The Governor of the Bank of England and its chief economist have both said that inflation-matching pay rises in the public sector can spill over into higher pay across the economy, and that would make the fight against inflation even more challenging. That is why halving inflation is the top of the Prime Minister's five immediate priorities, alongside growing the economy, reducing national debt, getting the NHS backlog down and stopping small boats crossing the channel. Our focus is on pay for 2023-24.

John McDonnell: It is difficult to see how a reasonable settlement below the rate of inflation—for example, the fire brigade settlement of 7%, with backdating and 5% for next year—could in any way offend against the Bank of England Governor's comments. Have the Government even considered an offer of that sort to the civil service?

Alex Burghart: The right hon. Gentleman is a former shadow Chancellor. He will appreciate that the higher the pay settlement, the slower the rate of decline in inflation is likely to be. *[Laughter.]* He laughs; I hope he has realised how the numbers work.

John McDonnell: This is unique in economic history in this country. We are arguing that a pay award below the rate of inflation is still inflationary. I have never heard that one before, and I think we should record it for posterity.

Alex Burghart: I know the right hon. Gentleman is new to this House, and I am delighted to be able to tell him that the minutes of this debate will indeed be recorded for posterity. He will understand that the sooner the speed of inflation comes down to a manageable level, the sooner we can return to growth in the economy. The sooner the whole economy benefits, the sooner public services will benefit. He proposed an inflation-matching pay rise, but that would certainly not help bring down inflation, and he knows that. It is very easy to propose things from the Labour Back Benches that sound good, but that are impractical and damaging. The Government have to take fiscally responsible decisions.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmer (Oliver Dowden), said in a recent PACAC evidence session that considerations for the pay settlement this year will, of course, be done in the context of higher inflation, but that

“we have to be cognisant of wider pressures on the public finances, which ultimately can be paid for only by higher taxes, by increased borrowing or by savings elsewhere in the Government...Ministers have to take difficult decisions.”

Geraint Davies: The Minister is making the case for a balanced approach. The Chancellor’s objective is to halve inflation this year, from 10% to 5%, so prices will have risen 15% over two years. Given that, what would be a reasonable and balanced pay award to civil servants over those two years, in the Minister’s view?

Alex Burghart: Those conversations are ongoing, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware. It is not within my remit to speculate on that.

Geraint Davies: But not 2%.

Alex Burghart: I will come back to the hon. Gentleman’s point.

Salaries for junior grades in the civil service remain comparable with private or public sector equivalents. Many civil servants also benefit from defined benefit schemes, where employers contribute around 27% of earnings. In contrast, most private sector employees receive defined contribution pensions, which are dependent on investment performance, and where employer contributions are typically around half those in the public sector.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, pay arrangements for civil servants below the senior civil service are delegated to Departments as separate employers. That has been the case since 1996, and was not a position overturned by the previous Labour Government. The annual pay remit guidance sets out the financial parameters within which civil service Departments can determine pay awards for their staff. Negotiations take place between organisations and trade unions. The Cabinet Office does not negotiate or consult on pay or changes to terms and conditions outside the civil service management code. Ultimately, it is for Departments to decide on their pay awards and how they are structured, in the light of their own budgets and priorities, and to negotiate with their trade unions.

There are many merits to the delegated model, as the last Labour Government recognised. Civil service Departments deal with many different, complex issues. That means it is really important that Departments continue to have the flexibility to tailor their own pay

and grading arrangements to enable them to recruit, retain and reward the hard-working civil servants who deliver for them.

Pay remit guidance also allows Departments to seek further flexibility for a pay award above the headline range for pay awards. That has enabled some Departments to make higher awards to their staff in return for productivity and efficiency gains, or to reform terms and conditions of employment, in order to deliver transformational reform. That has been demonstrated in pay deals at His Majesty’s Revenue and Customs and the Ministry of Justice in recent years.

We continue to explore opportunities for greater coherence for reward in future years in support of civil service challenges and priorities, which is where the work of cross-Government professions and functions have a particularly valuable role to play. The Minister for the Cabinet Office met with some of the main civil service unions on 12 January to listen to their representations on pay, as part of an exchange of information to inform pay for 2023-24. That is supported by continuing dialogue at official level.

The Government remain committed to holding discussions about pay for 2023-24. We want to work constructively with the civil service trade unions as the Government consider the pay remit guidance, the delegated grades and the evidence to the Senior Salaries Review Body on senior civil service pay. I am confident that when we announce the 2023-24 civil service pay remit guidance, we will continue to strike the balance between appropriate reward and the need to live within our means as a nation.

Chris Stephens: The Minister has confirmed that there is one pay remit guidance. Do the Government have any plans to cut the numbers of negotiations? There are currently more than 200 across Westminster Government Departments.

Alex Burghart: The hon. Gentleman will have heard me say that we consider there to be many advantages to this model.

The purpose of Westminster Hall debates is for the Minister to come and listen to what colleagues in the House have to say. It was interesting, listening to the hon. Member for Vauxhall, to hear that a lot of the positions from the Labour Back Benches do not necessarily accord with the position of the Labour Front Bench. I wonder whether one of the things that is happening in this Westminster Hall debate is an internal debate within the Labour party being aired in public. There was no position from the Labour Front-Bench spokesperson on collective bargaining, on the pay offer, or on PCS strike actions.

Florence Eshalomi: On this side of the House, we will make sure that we negotiate—sit around the table and address the concerns. It is not for me to say, “This is what we will offer.” It is about sitting down with the unions, outlining the concerns and then coming to a decision.

Alex Burghart: I respect the hon. Lady’s position. However, that is not the position that many of her colleagues have taken here today. It is important that the Labour party comes to an agreed position before the next election. If it does not, we will be sure to remind the public that the Labour party does not have a position on this, whereas the Government do.

3.53 pm

Beth Winter: I am wondering if the Members on this side of this room are living in a parallel universe to the Minister, given that he did not address any of the points we raised in any substantive way. I will follow up my questions and comments and those of others in writing to the Minister; I hope I can get a more comprehensive response.

We have heard today about what the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) called the heroes of the pandemic: our public servants. And yet, they have had the lowest pay increase in the public sector since the advent of the coalition Government back in 2010. The civil service staff are demoralised, angry, frustrated and desperate. They are suffering extreme hardship, using food banks and unable to afford to go to work.

You have not addressed any of the real hardships that they are facing, which have been caused directly by your policies and your low pay agenda. A civil service member of staff contacted me yesterday and described themselves as, “The poor relations who feel totally overlooked by society.” You have it in your gift to redress this—to address the problems that these workers face. On behalf of the PCS parliamentary group, we formally invite you to join PCS members on the picket line next week to listen to the real-life experiences of PCS members. If you are not going it for the staff who are suffering, do it for yourself. It is not efficient—

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Order. I remind the hon. Lady to address her remarks through the Chair, rather than using “you”. The Minister is responding on behalf of the Government.

Alex Burghart: I hope you’ll be there, Mr Pritchard; you’ve been invited.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): I am neutral. I remind the hon. Member to address her remarks through the Chair. The Minister is here representing the Government rather than as an individual.

Beth Winter: I just wish that people could tell how passionate I and others feel about this.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Indeed, there are a lot of passionate feelings on both sides of this debate.

John McDonnell: There was a flippant remark from the Minister with regard to meeting PCS members. I just remind him that PCS members in my constituency—two Border Control staff—died during the pandemic because of covid. They sacrificed their lives keeping this country safe.

Alex Burghart: On a point of order, Mr Pritchard. The right hon. Gentleman knows full well that there was no flippant remark about PCS whatsoever. *[Interruption.]* There was no flippant remark whatsoever. The record

will state that all I said was that you had been invited to join the picket line, Mr Pritchard. That is not a flippant remark about PCS.

John McDonnell: This is a serious debate about people living in poverty.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Order.

Alex Burghart: It was not a flippant remark about PCS. The right hon. Gentleman knows that it was not.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Order. The Minister is entitled to put his point of order—although it is not a point of order. However, it has been put on the record by our excellent *Hansard* colleagues here. We go back to Beth Winter for the last three minutes of the debate.

Beth Winter: May I ask, through the Chair, whether the Minister will agree to attend the picket line to listen to the real-life experiences of so many thousands of civil service staff? As I began to say, if the Government are not going to address these issues for the people who are suffering, surely they will do so, because it is in their own interests. The overwhelming evidence shows that the current system is not efficient. It is not cost-effective and it will not address the cost of living crisis—

John McDonnell: Could my hon. Friend give way to the Minister so that he can respond and confirm whether he is coming to meet the PCS members next week?

Beth Winter: I certainly would like to give way.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): The Minister can choose to respond or not, because he has concluded his remarks. If he wants to intervene, he can, but it is entirely down to him. The hon. Member who moved the motion can continue for the last minute and then allow me to put the Question, or can talk out her own time, which will mean the Question is not put. She can make that decision. *[Interruption.]* Order. The right hon. Gentleman should know, as he has been here for a very, very long time. I have been very patient with him.

John McDonnell: Too long.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Whether or not the right hon. Gentleman thinks he has been here too long is entirely a matter for him. He will come to order, thank you.

Beth Winter: It is my strongly held opinion that it is in everybody’s interest that people across the public sector are given an inflation-proof pay rise. I urge the Government to follow the lead of the Welsh and Scottish Governments and enter into proper negotiations with the civil service to address the horrendous situation that people are experiencing.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the civil service pay remit and the future of pay negotiations.

Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure

[Relevant Documents: First Report of the Transport Committee, Session 2021-22, Zero emission vehicles, HC 27 and the Government response, HC 759.]

4 pm

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): I will call Stephen Hammond to move the motion, and then I will call the Minister to respond. As the hon. Gentleman knows, in 30-minute debates he does not get a one-minute wind-up at the end.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. We had an important hour and a half debate on electric vehicle charging in this place less than two weeks ago, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine). It was a wide-ranging debate and we touched on a number of issues, but today I want to define it slightly more tightly and look at a couple of issues in a bit more detail. I recognise that there is a risk of repetition, but this is an extraordinarily important matter for this country to get right.

Although the country and the Government are making huge progress—the Government are leading the world, to a great extent, with the UK's net zero target of 2050 and the phasing out of the internal combustion engine by the beginning of the 2030s—it is hugely important that they set aspirations and lead other nations.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing forward this debate. There just are not enough electric charging points across the whole of the United Kingdom. As a result, constituents are unwilling or unable to buy electric cars, which take eight hours to charge fully. The latest figures indicate that there are now more than 90 vehicles per rapid charging point. Does he agree that it is crucial that conversations are had with Departments in the devolved Governments and other countries to enable them to align with the rest of the UK in electric vehicle charging points?

Stephen Hammond: I will later refer to the barriers to greater electric vehicle uptake, which include accessibility and the number of on and off-street charging points. There are great regional disparities across the United Kingdom in the number of charging points per 1,000 people. There are great differences between London, Scotland and the rest of the world. I am sure colleagues from more rural areas will talk about access to charging points and about local councils' ability to allow people to use on-street and off-street parking, which sometimes prohibits the movement from the internal combustion engine to electric vehicles.

Transport represents 27% of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions, and road transport is somewhat over 85% of that. We should not underestimate the progress that has been made. There are now 39,000 charging points across the UK and about 1,135,000 plug-in vehicles. But, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said, the price of those vehicles and the lack of access to charging points prevent uptake. There is also a lack of a second-hand market—perhaps unsurprisingly, given the

relatively recent development of the electric vehicle—which would mean more widespread availability and help the movement to electric vehicles.

Production levels of electric vehicles, which were greater two years ago than they are now, means that although there are 1,135,000 vehicles at the moment, the progress of uptake is slower than we would have expected, given the culture behind electric and hybrid.

Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): My hon. Friend rightly made the point about access. Havant Borough Council has installed several fast electric vehicle charging points in partnership with a private sector contractor. Does he agree that local authorities, particularly those in coastal and rural areas, have a key role to play in expanding EV charging infrastructure and that others should follow the example of my local council, and will he say more about that in his later remarks?

Stephen Hammond: My hon. Friend is right to point out that a number of councils are exemplars for charging, but a number of other councils are lagging behind the good example of Havant. I will come to that issue, because one of my key asks is for the Minister to consider what pressure the Department is prepared to put on local councils. I mentioned that we have seen some movement on electric cars, but there are barriers. Perhaps the biggest is accessing charging points and the infrastructure that is available. We have a target of 300,000 charging points by 2030, but we currently have fewer than 39,000. We therefore need a compound increase of 33% over the next seven or eight years to make that a reality. Unless we do more, that target looks challenging.

There are also issues with accessing on-street charging points, of which there is a limited number. We need to change the culture, and part of that is that, although there are huge numbers of funds and suppliers, far too many people think only the public sector should provide charging points. That is wrong. Also, if someone who lives on a road with a limited number of charging points gets home at six or seven in the evening and someone is charging their car, and if it is not a rapid charging point, it will take anywhere between four and eight hours to charge that car. I challenge my colleagues here to say who is going to get up at two o'clock in the morning and move their car so that the charging point becomes available, and who else is going to get up and move their car to that charging point.

We need to make more on-street charging points available. We also need to make some of those on-street charging points accessible to households that are unlikely to be near places where the public installation of on-street charging can happen. I will make the case in a few moments that local byelaws should be changed so that that can become a reality for many people, particularly those in rural areas.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): My hon. Friend makes a good point, which I am sure the Minister will respond to in detail in a moment. On rural charging for electric vehicles, it strikes me that in very rural areas, such as many parts of Suffolk in my constituency, the only solution is to make the availability of home charging for each and every household economically viable. Even in a village, it can still be one or 1.5 miles from one end to the other in terms of

connectivity. Will he speak more about home charging and what he thinks the Government should do to promote it, particularly in rural areas?

Stephen Hammond: My hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that I will make some remarks on that issue and particularly on what can be done. He is right: according to the RAC, the cost of home charging for a rapid vehicle is about 13p per kWh, yet those who use public chargers have seen a 91% increase to something like just over £3 per kWh. That is quite a big discrepancy. Although we have seen progress on on-street charging, the reality of home charging is important.

I want to make some key asks of the Government, some of which will involve direct Government intervention and some of which will involve Government pressure on local authorities to set targets. My first direct ask of the Government is a lobbying point for the Budget. As my right hon. Friend the Minister will know, there is currently a huge discrepancy between the VAT charged when people charge electric vehicles away from home and that charged when people charge them at home. The VAT on public charging is currently 20%, so the inequality between home charging and away-from-home charging is a major impediment. Will the Government look, not only in the forthcoming Budget but in future Budgets, at equalising the VAT rates for on-street away-from-home charging and home charging?

There also needs to be a change in the planning presumptions. We all agree that we need more on-street and on-site parking in terms of retail leisure parks and new in-town developments. The presumption should now be that any and all development comes with the right infrastructure that will allow a far greater number of not only charging points but rapid charging points for electric vehicles. That requires the Government to put some pressure on local authorities, or my right hon. Friend the Minister to work with his colleagues in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to change the planning presumption.

Currently, local authorities are responsible for deciding the locations in their area and securing funding for the delivery of on-street parking. The clear problem at the moment is that only 28% of local authorities have complied with the requirement to have an electric vehicle charging strategy. As I have said, even fewer are working with the large number of infrastructure funds and the providers of funds that would happily work in public-private partnership to work out the number of charging points that can be easily delivered in one year. Some local authorities have made huge progress on that—for example, under its previous Conservative leadership, Wandsworth worked with a major supplier to deliver a huge increase in on-street parking.

Local authorities need to have a strategy and to commit to work with the people who can supply the funding, so one of my asks of the Government is that, with the Department for Transport and DLUHC working together, they put some pressure on authorities to have such a plan in place. We should be pretty clear about what those plans cover: they should cover, as I said, the change in planning presumption and commit to an increase in on-street capacity.

The plans should contain another commitment. Let me address directly the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich

(Dr Poulter). All too often, local byelaws prevent home charging. We allow a huge number of utility companies to put wires and pipes across streets, and they do so safely; one of the great local campaigns I have run in my area is to change a local byelaw to allow people to run cables safely across pavements. It could easily be done, via either cable gullies or other protective measures, to allow people to home-charge who do not have access either to off-street parking—because they do not have their own driveway—or to on-street public facilities. A simple change in the byelaw could easily be applied. There are of course safety challenges and public liability challenges, but the reality is that we let utility companies do it every day of the week, all over the country, and a simple change in byelaws would allow a huge number of extra people to access charging infrastructure.

I am trying to set out how, if we want to make the movement to electric vehicles a reality, there are some things in respect of which we as a country need to change the presumption and the DFT and colleagues in DLUHC need to change the culture. I have set out a number of asks for the Government. Changing the byelaws and planning permission is a relatively simple thing they could work on.

Finally, the Government need to think carefully about the 300,000 target. I accept that it is ambitious and difficult to achieve; however, in the second half of this decade, as the culture among vehicle owners moves more rapidly as price barriers are removed and production levels go up, it may well be that the target of 300,000 public charge points is simply inadequate. I ask the Government to commit to looking at that internally in the Department, and to make a written public statement on the need to be more flexible with the target and possibly to increase it.

I said that I would try to concentrate my remarks because we had a wide-ranging debate less than two weeks ago on the expansion of infrastructure, including in respect of home infrastructure, off-street parking, on-street parking in residential areas and on-site parking in non-residential areas. Removing the barriers to the expansion of those facilities would dramatically increase the opportunity for more people to switch to electric vehicles. I look forward to hearing from the Minister.

4.16 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Jesse Norman): It is a delight to see you in the Chair, Mr Pritchard, not least because you are a man educated in Hereford. It is a pleasure to respond to the interesting comments made by my dear hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond). I congratulate him on the indefatigable way in which he has pressed this issue in this Chamber and in the House of Commons over the years on behalf of his constituents in Wimbledon. He is absolutely right that the issue is important and has wider repercussions. I thank other colleagues who have made interventions in the debate.

It is interesting that this debate follows not just the debate that my hon. Friend mentioned, which took place a few weeks ago, but this morning's 90-minute debate on rural decarbonisation, secured by my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby). That is testament to the level of concern and interest among our colleagues in the House.

[Jesse Norman]

As my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon knows, the Government are committed to achieving their climate change obligations. Decarbonising transport is a key part of that. I hope we will make some important announcements fairly shortly about the zero emission vehicle mandate, which will be a massive driver of investment in new charge points and new electric vehicles. We are doing that not only to help to decarbonise the atmosphere but to improve air quality and the quality of life in our towns and cities, while supporting a sustainable path of economic growth. We are committed to phasing out the sale of all new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2030, and to ensuring that all new cars and vans are zero emission by 2035. We have already put in something like £2 billion to support the transition process.

As part of that process, almost a year ago the Government published their landmark electric vehicle infrastructure strategy, which comprehensively set out their vision and commitments in this policy area. In particular, the strategy put in place an expectation of around 300,000 public charge points—not just charge points, as my hon. Friend said, but public charge points. That is important because sitting alongside that are hundreds of thousands of charge points being put into private premises through the normal process of investment that goes alongside the purchase of electric vehicles. That may happen under a previously funded scheme or come as part of the package of buying the vehicle or via a number of other methods. Even that 300,000 is just a part of the overall picture. My hon. Friend is right to flag the ambition inherent in the target. As technology changes, as the market becomes more competitive and as the zero emission vehicle mandate kicks in, we expect that target to come into view.

Alan Mak: The Minister will know that throughout history the use of technology has accelerated when there is greater interoperability, common standards and open protocols. Does he feel that is an important aspect of our race to increase the deployment of electric vehicle charging infrastructure in this country?

Jesse Norman: Yes. I do not think there is any doubt about that, and my hon. Friend is right that that has been the pattern in the past. Of course, one cannot just regard technology as a panacea. Technology will improve, and it will stimulate adoption and increase growth at certain rates, but one has to be careful as to what the rate is. There is a moment in all market development at which markets go from being a collection of competing standards and potential franchises to becoming a standardised, all-embracing place in which different rivals can compete. That is what we are seeing with charging. We are seeing individual networks yielding over time to networks that can be accessed using credit cards, for example, in a network-neutral way. The Department is supporting that.

It is worth pointing out that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon highlighted, local authorities are going to be and will remain a central part of the nearer-to-home provision for charging, and possibly the nearer-to-business provision. What there will be less of in some areas is rapid charging on the public strategic road network, because that has different demands and is being handled in a slightly different way.

On 21 February, the Government announced an additional £56 million in public industry funding to support the local electric vehicle infrastructure programme, which includes a capability pilot designed to improve local authorities' capacity to commission and implement the infrastructure, recognising the concern that there was not necessarily a completely consistent picture of expertise or capability on the local authority network. In turn, that capability will enable what my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon rightly pressed the Government on. He asked whether we will continue to incentivise, encourage and press local authorities to do more; of course, we can do that as their capabilities improve.

Stephen Hammond: My right hon. Friend the Minister is clearly right about what the Government should be pressing local authorities to do. Given that they are giving additional funding for the capacity for local authorities to outline their strategy, might it not be good and sensible for the Government to ensure that there is a timeline for when local authorities should have strategies in place?

Jesse Norman: We can look to the incentives provided by public funding and public pressure, and pressure from car owners, to drive that process. I would not rule out a more engaged attitude towards local authorities. Indeed, I have met plenty of local authorities in the relatively short time I have been in this job, precisely because I regard charge point infrastructure provision as a very serious issue. It is one that involves not only the charge point operators and the electricity providers but the local authorities themselves, as the providers of infrastructure. I take on board my hon. Friend's point. The funding I have described sits alongside funding already being provided through the on-street residential charge point scheme.

I have talked a little about rapid charging; I do not need to spend too much more time on that. It does not directly affect the situation. Members will be aware that the current situation is that a driver is never more than 25 miles away from a rapid charge point. We need to increase and accelerate the level of charge points we have put in and we have a commitment to do so, to around 6,000 ultra-rapid devices by 2035.

Stephen Hammond: My right hon. Friend is incredibly generous to give way again. I made a glaring omission in my remarks. Although he rightly says that rapid charging points are perhaps the next follow-on, the reality is that rapid charging points are hugely important for commercial vehicle transition to electric vehicles, including in respect of taxi cabs and others. I had some remarks to make about that but somehow missed them out. We speak a lot about domestic vehicles, but we need to recognise the transition in commercial activity as well.

Jesse Norman: My hon. Friend is right to make that adjustment. I assumed that, given the confines of a Westminster Hall debate, he was compressing an otherwise comprehensive speech into a narrower compass, and rightly so.

Given the time available, let me pick up on a couple of things before I have to sit down. To strengthen consumer confidence, the Government will lay legislation in the coming months to reduce charging anxiety still further. To address the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Alan Mak), that legislation

will mandate open data; 99% reliability across each rapid charging network; a 24/7 helpline for when something might go wrong; contactless and payment roaming; and a pricing network to improve and increase transparency. That will improve competition rivalry and therefore investment. We have also made significant further investment.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) asked about changing planning permissions for developments. He is not in his place, but I should say that last year the Government implemented legislation to require new builds and buildings undergoing renovations to install charging points for domestic and non-domestic vehicles during construction. Part of the solution is not just further public investment alongside the rapidly escalating private investment; it is also about better regulation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon asked about the Budget and VAT on charging. As a former Financial Secretary to the Treasury I remind him that, as he will know, I will be skinned if I attempt to commit the Government on this issue, least of all in respect of tax policy a few days before a fiscal event. But I am sure it is on the public record and it will be well noted in No. 1 Horse Guards.

My hon. Friend talked about pressure on local authorities with regard to long-term plans. It is right that good local authorities think about longer-term plans. Not all the infrastructure originally installed was long term in its inspiration; it was an early technology that has since been superseded. I think local authorities are getting better. We have plans to assist local government in thinking about gullies, which are a useful long-term way to providing for on-street charging that will make a big difference.

My hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) asked about home charging in rural areas. He is right that such areas suffer particular drawbacks, but they have the advantage that there tends to be more available parking space there for people who buy electric vehicles. We would expect to see that as we see more longevity improvements in technology, but that then requires people to be able to charge. That capability is increasingly provided as part of the commercial package of buying a vehicle. As we see technology and competition take over, we can expect the price of vehicles to fall over time. I believe that the problem my hon. Friend raised will start to address itself over and above the considerable investments that we are already making.

Question put and agreed to.

Ukrainian Holodomor and the War in Ukraine

4.29 pm

Mrs Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Ukrainian Holodomor and the war in Ukraine.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I know that this is an issue that you will be interested in, as you chaired the all-party parliamentary group on Ukraine for a while.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Just for the record, I no longer chair the APPG on Ukraine. I am completely neutral.

Mrs Latham: This debate takes place at a terrible and opportune moment. Ninety years ago, in the spring of 1933, millions of Ukrainians were starved to death as part of a campaign of terror and forced hunger that was implemented by the Soviet leadership in Moscow. Last month I joined Derby's Ukrainian community to commemorate those who lost their lives, and two weeks ago we marked the first anniversary of Russia's latest invasion of Ukrainian territory—this time with military force, but once again with the aim of exterminating the nation of Ukraine. Today I will set out the case for the UK Government and Parliament to recognise the Holodomor as a genocide, and I will highlight some of the similarities with what is happening today, and the dangers of failing to recognise war crimes, crimes against humanity and even genocide.

I was part of the APPG on Ukraine delegation that recently visited Kyiv, and I see in the Chamber some of my colleagues who joined me. While we were there, the links between Soviet politics in the 1930s and the Russian aggression today were startlingly evident. We saw proof of the Russian attacks on Ukrainian nationhood and identity that are taking place today, and also visited the memorial to the millions of Ukrainians who were callously killed by Stalin in 1932 and 1933.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): I visited the Holodomor memorial with the hon. Lady, who is leading the debate brilliantly, and I have no doubt that the Holodomor was a genocide. A number of genocides are unrecognised by the UK Government. The Holodomor is a prime example, but there is also Armenia, West Papua and the Rohingya. Should there not be a better and quicker process for the British Government to recognise genocides, particularly historical genocides?

Mrs Latham: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, because I will come on to what our Government have said in the past. It is important, because the people who were subjected to the genocide, and many of the people who were there and survived, are no longer alive, so it is incredibly difficult to go to court and prove anything from that time.

In June 2013, just after the 80th anniversary of the Holodomor, I first led a debate in this House calling for the UK Government to recognise the Holodomor as a genocide. I tried again in November 2017, but we have just marked the 90th anniversary this year and there is still no official recognition by the Government. I hope that today will prove third time lucky, and that there

[Mrs Latham]

will be no need for a similar debate on the same subject in 10 years' time, when it will be 100 years since the Holodomor took place.

"Holodomor" is a Ukrainian word that means "to inflict death by hunger". However, the term now refers to the entire Stalinist campaign to eliminate the Ukrainian nation, which culminated in the forced famine of 1932 and 1933, killing millions of Ukrainians. The exact number is not known, because the Soviet Union refused to allow reporting of the famine, but it is estimated that 7 million, and maybe as many as 10 million, died in Ukraine, with many more deaths in neighbouring Soviet states. The Holodomor was a policy designed to eliminate the Ukrainian rural farmer population, who were the embodiment and spirit of Ukrainian culture and nationhood.

To understand the Holodomor, it is important to keep in mind the context of that period. In 1922, when the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was proclaimed, Soviet Ukraine was part of it, after being invaded by the Bolsheviks following the Russian revolution. Although Soviet Ukraine theoretically retained some domestic control, in reality all decisions were made by the Soviet leadership in Moscow. The Communist party of Ukraine's membership was less than 20% Ukrainian, so the Bolsheviks had very little support. Initially, from 1923, the Communist party took steps to appease the local population, including encouraging the Ukrainian language and culture and encouraging Ukrainians to join the party. However, by the end of the 1920s, Stalin had taken over as party leader and imposed a new revolution from above, which included banning the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, arresting the clergy, and arresting, deporting and executing Ukrainian nationalists and the cultural elite. Intellectuals, writers and artists committed suicide rather than be deported to Russia.

At the same time, the Stalinist Government was embarking on rapid industrialisation, and the cost fell most heavily on the Ukrainian rural classes. Wholesale agricultural collectivisation took place from 1929. Wealthy peasants, known as kulaks, had their property taken away and faced further sanction. By the mid-1930s, 100,000 such families had been deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan. In response to resistance in 1932 and 1933, Stalin's Government imposed impossibly high grain requisition quotas, which had to be satisfied before any grain could be kept by the local population. In 1932, not a single Ukrainian village met the quota threshold assigned to it. Anyone who kept grain destined for Russia was executed by firing squad. Special police roamed the countryside searching homes and summarily executing those who were found to have stored food. Moscow refused to provide any relief. In fact, at that exact time, Moscow was exporting more than a million tonnes of grain to the west. Callously and cruelly, Stalin shut Ukraine's eastern border, preventing Ukrainians from fleeing to Russia.

These conditions led to the most horrific situation for the people of Ukraine. Men, women and children starved to death in their villages. This was not a famine; there was enough grain, even with a below average harvest in Ukraine, to comfortably feed the entire population. The grain was exported to Russia, and Ukrainians were prevented from escaping. Again, this was not a naturally occurring famine. This was murder by starvation.

At the height of the famine, 25,000 people died every day of starvation, including children too small to feed themselves, who were reliant on their parents. Some people tried to commit suicide to escape the horror of starving to death. Those who refused to steal or leave died of hunger. Those who tried to steal were shot. Those who tried to leave were returned to their villages to face the same impossible choice. Villages turned to cannibalism to survive. The dead were unburied and the sick untended. These are difficult details to hear, but it is crucial that we appreciate the scale of the Holodomor. There is a large Ukrainian community in Derbyshire. In my meetings with them over the last decade, they have asked me to persist with my efforts to seek recognition of the Holodomor as a genocide.

Raphael Lemkin was an academic and lawyer who coined the term genocide. Lemkin was born in Poland and studied at the University of Lviv in modern-day Ukraine. He defined genocide—a new word coined to denote an old practice. Genocide literally means the killing of a race. Lemkin was influential in the drafting of the genocide convention, an international treaty that criminalises genocide and has been unanimously adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. Article II of the convention defines genocide as

"acts committed with intent to destroy in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group".

That specifically includes killing members of the group and imposing living conditions intended to destroy the group. The Holodomor was a genocide.

On the last two occasions that I have brought this debate forward, the relevant Minister has informed the House that His Majesty's Government will recognise an event as a genocide only once it has been recognised as such by a court. I am no lawyer, but I think it is very clear from the definition that I have set out and the history that I provided that Stalin did set out to destroy, in whole or in part, a national group—the Ukrainians. He did so by killing some, and imposing living conditions—starvation—intended to destroy the group. The fact that millions died from starvation due to Stalin's policy when Ukraine was not in the grasp of a famine is indicative of that.

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): I am grateful to the hon. Member for calling for this debate. I visited the Holodomor memorial with other MPs last year. As the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) is outlining, the denial and downplaying of the Holodomor is very damaging, and is having real-world impacts right now in modern-day Ukraine. Twenty-three countries have decided to go ahead and declare the Holodomor a genocide. They include Australia, Canada, Germany, Ireland and even the European Parliament. Does the hon. Member agree that this is an important time to stop denying this, and to declare the Holodomor a genocide?

Mrs Latham: Yes. I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. That is absolutely why this debate is so important—because we cannot deny the genocide any longer. It has to be recognised by this Government, because we will be—we are—an outlier.

Stalin set out to destroy the Ukrainians. The Ukrainians were not in the grasp of famine. He deported the cultural elite and suppressed Ukrainian culture, and there was the breaking of the rural communities. Stalin's

closure of the borders and refusal to send aid, despite selling millions of tonnes of grain to the west, are yet further proof. His desire to end Ukrainian identity is absolutely clear, and Soviet actions in the aftermath of the Holodomor—decimated villages were resettled with ethnically Russian communities—are conclusive.

Raphael Lemkin put the matter very clearly in a speech at the 20th commemoration of the Holodomor in New York City in 1953. He described the Holodomor as

“perhaps the classic example of Soviet genocide, its longest and broadest experiment in Russification—the destruction of the Ukrainian nation.”

He recognised that there were no attempts at “complete annihilation”, as had taken place in the holocaust. However, his most powerful quote is as follows:

“And yet, if the Soviet program succeeds completely, if the intelligentsia, the priests and the peasants can be eliminated, Ukraine will be as dead as if every Ukrainian were killed, for it will have lost that part of it which has kept and developed its culture, its beliefs, its common ideas, which have guided it and given it a soul, which, in short, made it a nation rather than a mass of people.”

The Lemkin quote sets out very clearly why the Holodomor amounts to a genocide. It also leads me on perfectly to another reason why today’s debate is so important. Those words, delivered by him 70 years ago, resonate with us today. Ukraine is once again threatened by Russian expansionism. Thankfully, Stalin failed, and the culture, beliefs and common ideas, the very soul of Ukraine, survived. On countless occasions in the last year, we have paid tribute in this House to the spirit and soul of the Ukrainian people in their battle against Putin.

The UK Government should always recognise crimes against humanity, including genocide, wherever they happen. In my last debate on this subject, it was suggested to me that official international recognition is less important than the memory of these events in defeating genocide. I do not agree. In my experience of serving on the Select Committee on International Development, I have visited both Rwanda and Bosnia, and have seen the peace processes that followed the Rwanda genocide and the Srebrenica massacre. Those have both been recognised as genocides by the UK Government, and that matters to the people. In any case, the Holodomor is now 90 years ago. Although my local Ukrainian community is brilliant at arranging annual commemorations and campaigning on this issue, the Holodomor is now almost out of human living memory. International recognition is absolutely crucial for local communities, and it is no surprise that the Ukrainian Government have welcomed a host of countries’ recognising the Holodomor as a genocide.

Recognition matters to the other side, too. In October 2022, when Russian forces took Mariupol, they tore down the Holodomor memorial, saying that it represented disinformation at the state level. It is clearly important to both the victims and the perpetrators when such an event is formally recognised.

That brings me on to my second point about recognition. I said that the Government should always recognise genocide when it occurs, and that is true, but in this case there is an even more obvious reason to do so. Ukraine is threatened again, and its strongest allies around the world are standing up and supporting it. That is why the delegation went a couple of weeks ago to stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian nation and say, “We support you.”

As the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) said, Canada, Ireland, Australia and many other countries have long recognised the Holodomor as a genocide. In May 2022, the US Congress passed a resolution recognising the Holodomor as a genocide and condemning Soviet policies that prevented the delivery of humanitarian aid and people from escaping. There are clear overtones of what is happening in current times. Germany, Romania and Moldova recognised the Holodomor as recently as November 2022, so we are fast becoming an international outlier by refusing to acknowledge the suffering of the Ukrainian people at the hands of the Soviets in the 1930s, while at the same time supporting them in their fight today.

In the war on Ukraine, as I heard during my visit, Russians have been accused of crimes against humanity. We saw evidence of that. We saw the piled-up, burned-out, shot-at cars of people who were trying to escape the Russians. Civilians were slaughtered as part of what Russia is doing to Ukraine. We must give confidence to the Ukrainian Government and the international legal order that the UK Government and Parliament will not stand for abuses of human rights and war crimes. We can do that by recognising where genocide took place. Indeed, that may be important in the future. I raised this matter with the Foreign Secretary in the House in February, and he noted that Putin has himself said

“that his intention is to eradicate the whole concept of Ukraine.”—[*Official Report*, 20 February 2023; Vol. 728, c. 60.]

If that is not genocide, I do not know what is.

A final reason why it is important officially to recognise the Holodomor as a genocide is because of our Ukrainian communities in the UK. Since February 2022, thanks to the generosity of the British people, those communities have increased exponentially in size. I know from my experience in Derbyshire that it would mean a huge amount to Ukrainians in the UK if we were able to recognise the Holodomor as a genocide. I met a family on Friday who said, “Please, get the Government to recognise it. It would mean so much to the people of Ukraine.”

I therefore have two asks of the Minister. First and most importantly, will he please reconsider the official Government position that a genocide will be recognised only after a court has adjudicated on it, given the evidence that I set out, and the unique circumstances? In the light of the war in Ukraine, we need to show our support for our allies; we need to show Putin that attempts to eradicate the Ukrainian people will not be tolerated. If the US, Germany, Canada, Australia and Ukraine can recognise the genocide, we can and should, too, particularly if it can have an impact on the war.

Secondly, if His Majesty’s Government are unable to break their policy and recognise the Holodomor—I hope I am wrong about that—would the Minister be willing to arrange a debate on the issue, and a meaningful vote on it on the Floor of the House, so that the UK Parliament can at least can show its support for Ukraine, and designate the Holodomor a genocide?

John Howell (Henley) (Con): My hon. Friend is absolutely right to ask for a parliamentary debate, which would show that there is a lot of sympathy for officially designating the Holodomor a genocide. She may be aware that the European Parliament voted to do so by 507 votes; only 12 voted against. That sent a powerful signal to Ukraine that the European Parliament was behind it.

Mrs Latham: It is a powerful signal to send and we should not be found lacking; we should send that powerful signal. Even Derby City Council has recognised that the Holodomor is a genocide. We have a plaque in Derby city centre that was supported by the whole council, and all the Ukrainians living in the area came to celebrate when we unveiled it. If all these other people can do it, I do not understand why the Government cannot.

The Holodomor was an atrocious, calculated murder of millions of Ukrainians designed to destroy the Ukrainian nation. Today, Putin is using a military invasion, which has exactly the same objective. In Kyiv, we went to the Holodomor Museum, and interestingly, all the exhibits have been taken away to protect them, but there are photographs of them because people are so concerned about Putin coming forward and creating yet another genocide. Now is the time to acknowledge the Holodomor as a genocide: to provide a warning to Putin that crimes against humanity will not be tolerated in Ukraine and that the UK stands squarely behind Ukraine in its defence of its sovereignty and its people's rights.

4.51 pm

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) on securing this debate; she was my colleague on the delegation that went out to Kyiv two weeks ago. It is also a pleasure to see the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel), with whom I shared the van journey from London to Lviv as part of that convoy.

It is right that we reflect on the Holodomor and its role in history. It was a dark time in Ukraine's history, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire rightly pointed out. Millions of people starved to death, not because there was a natural disaster or some blight that swept through the land, but because of a calculated policy decision. It was part of a general attempt to destroy the Ukrainian people and their identity and to make them subservient to the state based in Moscow, at the time led by Joseph Stalin. It is that core that resonates so firmly in today's situation.

History is a battleground in Ukraine. It is clear from President Putin's statements that he wants people to believe that Ukraine is just a political construct of the 1990s and that there is no history and identity, and not something that separates people from being part of Russia. It is part of his clear view that the Soviet Union should be back together, with him, of course, as its dictator. This is not a man who wants to create any form of democracy or respect for rights in the nations and lands that he wishes and seeks to control.

That is why this debate is so timely. It is not just a historical exercise. As my hon. Friend rightly pointed out, the events are still within living memory. It is about fighting back today—when it is highly relevant—against the narrative that the lands of Ukraine are an extension of Russia, which they most certainly are not. Ukrainians are a historic people with their own language, culture and identity, which they literally fight every day to defend.

It was good to be out in Ukraine and to see the commitment there to standing firm, as well as the gratitude for the support. The reality is that Ukraine would not survive and be fighting today were it not for us and other nations and democracies giving them, and

continuing to give them, the tools to do that job. We must not allow the fact that a year has passed to be a reason to slacken off our support. It is vital that that continues, especially as we see the Russian attacks continue, in particular around Bakhmut.

There are echoes of history and what Stalin did in some of the footage that has come out this week. We should be under no illusion: the Russian Federation is no respecter of international law on either aggression or human rights—or, for that matter, the most basic rules of warfare when it comes to those taken as prisoners of war. It is clear that it has very little respect for any international norms. Again, that is why it is so vital that, as a nation that believes in and respects the international rules-based order, we are there supporting Ukraine and making that contribution.

It is apt that we are having this debate, and that we talk about recognising the Holodomor for what it was. It was a calculated attempt to wipe out a nation and turn its lands to a different perspective. It was what we would call, in more modern terminology, ethnic cleansing in the effort by Joseph Stalin to dominate and assimilate a whole area within the empire that he had formed at that time. Given the backdrop of the war in Ukraine, it is timely now to respect this piece of history and to make it clear what it was. We also make clear our absolute condemnation of what happened then and our resolve to ensure that the Ukrainian nation today survives and flourishes.

4.56 pm

Anthony Browne (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) on securing this important debate and my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) on his powerful speech. I, too, was on the delegation to Kyiv last week and went to the Holodomor memorial with hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel), who intervened earlier.

There is no doubt, and complete consensus among historians, that the Holodomor famine happened. As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire pointed out, the scale of it is under dispute, but it was clearly a famine, clearly man-made and clearly a deliberate act by Stalin. It was not just starvation, but an attempt, as my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay said, to wipe out the Ukrainian nation. It was an attempt to Russify the whole area. Russia deliberately targeted Ukrainian culture—trying to wipe it out—and the Ukrainian elites. By all historical definitions of genocide, it was clearly a genocide. It was an attempt to ethnically cleanse Ukraine.

That is so important because if we do not confront and accept the tragedies of history, we are doomed to repeat them. Throughout its history, Ukraine has been in a fight for its survival against Russia. There is a pattern of behaviour where Russia has tried to simply wipe out Ukraine as a nation. It tried to do it 90 years ago with the Holodomor massacre, and it is clearly trying to do the same now. Unless we understand and appreciate the historical context, we do not realise the significance of what is happening now.

When we were in Kyiv, we discussed the Russia abductions of Ukrainian children with various human rights groups. The Russians are stealing and abducting Ukrainian children, taking them into Russia and Russifying

them—forcing them to sing Russian songs, speak Russian and everything else. There could be no clearer example of attempted ethnic cleansing. It is on a small scale at the moment, but it is absolutely horrifying. Unless we realise that this is about Ukraine's cultural survival and its survival as a nation, what Russia is doing with Ukrainian children simply does not make sense.

I fully support giving greater recognition to the Holodomor as a genocide. As we have heard, many other countries, including many of our closest allies, have done so. It has been recognised as a genocide by the United States Senate, Germany and many EU countries, including Ireland, Poland and Romania, the EU Parliament, Australia, Canada and Brazil. The Ukrainian people clearly want us to do this—there is no doubt. We discussed it with various Ukrainian leaders, and it would mean a huge amount to them politically. They are very grateful that we give Ukraine all this military support, and they would not have the success that they are having on the battlefield without it, but it would mean so much to them—more in terms of moral support—if we recognised the Holodomor as a massacre. The fight that they are having is really a continuation of a fight that has been going on for a century.

I urge the Government to think about what they can do to consider the Holodomor as a genocide. I appreciate that the Government have constraints: we cannot recognise everything as a genocide that people want recognised as a genocide, and the formal position is that it must be recognised in court. Perhaps there are other ways. As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire said, we could have a meaningful vote in Parliament about it, and I would certainly support that.

I will end with this observation. I found visiting the Holodomor memorial incredibly moving, and I am talking not just about the horrific photos about the famine and the stories of the extraordinary suffering, but about the fact that we did so in a situation where all the exhibits had to be replaced by photographs, because the Ukrainians were really worried that the Russians would succeed in doing this again. That is obviously completely unacceptable, and it shows us the reality that this is not some distant historical event from 90 years ago; the Ukrainians are fighting a similar sort of battle now. I urge the Government to do what they can to give as much support as possible to Ukraine by recognising the Holodomor as a genocide.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): We move on to the Front Benchers.

5.1 pm

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): It is always a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Pritchard. Like others, I begin by sincerely commending the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) not just for her efforts to secure this debate, but for her long-standing interest in and advocacy for the Ukrainian nation and the Ukrainian people, for which she was recognised by President Zelensky. I believe that she and I were honoured on the same day back in 2019, as she is a fellow recipient of Ukraine's order of merit, and like me, I am sure she holds that dear.

Millions of people were killed in one of Europe's most heinous crimes, which happened in Ukraine in the 1930s. To my amazement, very few people know all that

much about it. Until maybe six or seven years ago, I would have included myself among such people. However, because of such things as the work of the Holodomor Museum in Kyiv and the work of Ukrainian diasporas all around the world, including in this country, more and more people are understanding the true horrors of what took place.

Like other Members who have spoken, I have visited the museum in Kyiv a number of times. On my last visit there in September last year, I was with a friend of mine, who I am sure is known to many in this Chamber—Alyona Shkrum, a member of the Verkhovna Rada. She pointed out to me in the books and registers the members of her family—she can trace them back a long time—who are listed, and that really brings it home. When people go to that small museum, they see a small, solemn and sacred space, which—unfortunately but understandably, as other Members have pointed out—has had to be emptied somewhat just in case the Russians succeeded in taking Kyiv. Thankfully, that never happened.

I will outline two pieces of work that have brought the issue of the Holodomor to the masses. One is a 2019 film, “Mr Jones”, which I am sure the Labour Front Benchers, the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), will come back to, as a proud Welshman. As well as watching that film, which is an excellent modern depiction of what truly went on, we should not forget the heroic work of Gareth Jones in exposing, or trying to expose, what was really happening at the time, much to the annoyance of many, including the Government here.

I will also mention the excellent, highly detailed and grim book written by the inimitable Anne Applebaum, “Red Famine”. Anyone who reads the detail of that book will learn more about the cruelty of what really went on during the Holodomor. As has been mentioned, there were forced deportations, killings by firing squads and death forced upon people through starvation. Trying to stay alive was indeed a death sentence for millions.

As others have said, we have seen echoes of that in the modern conflict, not least by the Russians trying to use grain as a weapon of war—not just against people in Ukraine, but against people in some of the poorest parts of the world. Just as the Holodomor was indeed a genocide that should be recognised by the Government, we are seeing those patterns come back again today, because the attempt to suppress and even deny Ukrainian statehood, culture and institutions, as well as the country's language, history, art and people, is central to the prosecution of Russia's war in Ukraine.

Like others, although I want to see the genocide recognised by the Government, I fully appreciate the constraints within which the Minister has to operate, but I am left wondering what else we can do as a Parliament, and what else we can do in our communities, to draw attention to one of Europe's darkest crimes. I am bound to mention that I was pleased a few years ago, under the former Ukrainian ambassador to the UK, to see the unveiling of a new Holodomor memorial in Edinburgh.

I will end with a few words from Ukraine's national poet and patriot, Taras Shevchenko. Although he died many years before the Holodomor came into existence, his work and poetry provides Ukrainians—indeed,

[Stewart Malcolm McDonald]

all Europeans—with an understanding of the freedom that Ukrainians are currently dying for. In his poem “The Days Go By”, he said:

“It’s terrible to lie in chains,
To rot in dungeon deep,
But it’s still worse, when you are free
To sleep, and sleep, and sleep.”

I am proud of the support that this country’s Government have given to Ukraine. I am pleased that there is such phenomenal cross-party support for Ukraine—it is perhaps the only issue that enjoys such strong cross-party support—and we are not asleep. Ukraine is still fighting for its freedom, and essential to that modern freedom is recognising what happened to it under the Stalin regime, so I would like to see the Government recognise the Holodomor as a genocide. Short of that, this Parliament should act to do so, and we should ensure that the horrors of those years are known by more people not just in this country, but elsewhere across Europe, so that it truly never happens again.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): I call the shadow Minister.

5.7 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): It is a particular pleasure to serve under your chairpersonship, Mr Pritchard, and I thank the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) for bringing this issue to the House. I thank all colleagues who have participated for their insightful, powerful and considered remarks on this truly appalling moment in Ukraine’s history, and for linking it to the terrible events that we see today. I hope that the Minister can respond to the sincere questions that have been raised by all Members present.

I am not allowed to refer to the Gallery, but we have been joined in Parliament today by Lesia Ziburanna, who is a Member of the Rada. She has been speaking to many of us—

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Order. Under a recent ruling, you can refer to somebody in the Gallery, and I am sure the hon. Member would not wish to miss that opportunity.

Stephen Doughty: I will not miss that opportunity. I am delighted that Ms Ziburanna joins us in the Gallery for this debate. She is a Member of Parliament for Kyiv and has been here speaking to Members across the House. I am sure that today’s proceedings and the meetings that we have had with colleagues have shown her that the UK’s resolve and commitment to Ukraine has never been stronger; indeed, it exists on a cross-party basis across the House.

As we passed a tragic milestone last month, we must all continue to reflect on the immense suffering that Ukraine has endured, as well as the remarkable courage and resilience of its people and the progress that they have made in driving Russia back. It is clearer than ever that Putin must be defeated in Ukraine, and we must continue to stand full square behind Ukraine, to strengthen Ukraine’s hand on the battlefield, to support relief and reconstruction, to deliver justice, to maintain western unity, to isolate Putin and to undermine Russia’s barbaric war effort.

We were all incredibly moved by President Zelensky’s speech to us in Westminster Hall just a few weeks ago. As I say regularly in these debates, the Government will continue to have Labour’s full support in confronting the threat that Russia poses to the whole of Europe and the whole world, and in holding it to account for the terrible things it has done in Ukraine.

This debate has brought home the fact that today’s illegal, unconscionable war comes after a history of Ukraine being subjected to immense brutality, especially in the terrible events of the Holodomor, one of the most atrocious instances of man-made famine in European history, which culminated in the deaths of millions of people. I have also visited the museum and memorial in Kyiv just a few months ago—many Members have referred to it. It is incredibly moving. Everybody should see it to recognise the reality of what happened to the Ukrainian people.

Stalin’s role in catalysing enforced, man-made, widespread starvation in 1932 and 1933 understandably, and rightly, lives on in the Ukrainian national psyche. The barbarism we saw 90 years ago carries as much salience today as it ever has, particularly given what we have seen since.

The personal stories are the most harrowing. A congressional commission that took evidence in the late 1980s heard from an individual who grew up in the village of Stavyshe, who spoke of watching people dig into empty gardens with bare hands, in a desperate bid to find anything to eat; of witnessing people bloated from extreme malnutrition collapse on the road one by one; and, of course, of the mass graves. It is a tragedy that we again see mass graves in Ukraine. We have witnessed and heard the terrible stories of atrocities being committed.

As with the war today, there was a clear perpetrator behind the famine. Stalin’s motivation to transform and mould the Ukrainian nation in his own image, at any cost, is mirrored in Putin’s warped, imperialist world view today, the consequences of which continue to devastate the lives of Ukrainians. Putin’s misguided and perverse attempts to wipe Ukrainian identity are the most recent manifestation of Russia’s penchant for interference, subjugation, war and atrocities.

This debate carries particular weight for me as a Welsh MP. The hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) mentioned Gareth Jones. Much of what we know about the Holodomor is because of the bravery of that one Welshman. He was born a few miles away from my constituency, in Barry in the Vale of Glamorgan, in 1905. After witnessing the horrible consequences of Stalin’s tyranny first hand, he detailed those consequences. He wrote:

“I walked along through villages and 12 collective farms. Everywhere was the cry, “There is no bread. We are dying.”...In the train a Communist denied to me that there was a famine. I flung a crust of bread which I had been eating from my own supply into a spittoon. A peasant fellow-passenger fished it out and ravenously ate it. I threw an orange peel into the same spittoon and the peasant again grabbed and devoured it. The Communist subsided.”

Jones defied Soviet attempts to censor him and reported the truth of the Holodomor to millions. Yet the Kremlin of course continued to deny the existence of the famine. The mendacious campaign that tried to silence Gareth could not.

The parallels with today are striking. Journalists, correspondents and reporters from many countries, not least Ukraine itself, are putting themselves in danger to expose the true extent of Russia's barbarism. They are absolutely integral to thwarting Putin's concerted information war and to bringing justice in terms of investigating war crimes and atrocities.

I have a few questions for the Minister. Today in Parliament, we have been talking about the crime of aggression and war crimes. I understand that the Government have now opted to join a working group on holding Putin to account for the crime of aggression. Could the Minister say a little more on the progress of that group?

We have seen concerted attempts by Russia to lie about food supplies to the rest of the world. In a dreadful parallel to the way it used food as a weapon of war in the Holodomor, it is now doing so with the rest of the world. Despite the grain deal, it continues to frustrate. What can the Minister say about what we are doing to tell the world the truth about Russia's continued interference with world food supplies from Ukraine, including on the mining of Ukrainian agricultural land?

Finally, what can the Minister say about the crucial attempts that are going to be needed to rebuild Ukraine, its agricultural capacity, its ability to thrive, and its economy in the future? What are we doing to seize assets, not just freeze them? What steps are the Government further taking, given the cross-party consensus on the issue and the need to generate more resources for reconstruction?

Historically and today, the price that Ukrainians have had to pay for their freedom is immense. The events of 90 years ago are an anguishing reminder of the consequences when tyranny runs without constraint and imperialism without restriction. We must stand united in this House against it.

5.14 pm

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

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I am very grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) and to all colleagues for their contributions; my hon. Friend's contribution was moving and thoughtful. I also appreciated the contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster); he spoke of the echoes of history, which was particularly relevant. My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne) also spoke of his experiences on the delegation. I am very grateful to them for bringing their collective experience to the attention of colleagues today.

I was also grateful to the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) for his contribution. He referred to the work of Gareth Jones—I am sure many people will be pleased to know that they can watch that film, which will no doubt be of interest—and the terrific scholarship of Anne Applebaum. I was touched that he quoted the national poet, which I thought was particularly apposite. As ever, I was very grateful to the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) for his continued support for our collective resolve to support our Ukrainian friends in their efforts to liberate their territory and maintain their sovereignty. I join him in warmly welcoming our colleague from Ukraine—it is very good to see her in the Gallery, and I hope she has found this debate of interest.

Turning to the specific questions asked by the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth, which I welcome, I can confirm that we are indeed in the G7's core group of nations looking at what additional mechanism might be required to work alongside the International Criminal Court when it comes to countering crimes in Ukraine. That work is in progress, but we will keep the House updated and informed; it is something we are leaning into, because we need to acknowledge that not everything will be able to be covered off by the ICC. When it comes to the appalling disinformation spread by Putin's regime, particularly with regard to the global south, we are doing a lot of work to counter that disinformation and promote the Black sea grain initiative, ensuring that there is an ongoing flow and that people know that the vast majority of it is ending up in the global south—it is not just for western European nations.

Quite rightly, the hon. Gentleman talked about our collective efforts to help Ukraine rebuild itself. As he will know, we are very pleased to be hosting the next reconstruction conference in London in June, at the invitation of our Ukrainian friends and alongside them. That is the successor to the Lugano conference held by the Swiss last year, and it will be a very important moment to map out how private capital, particularly, will be able to find itself in Ukraine, helping the reconstruction effort. The hon. Gentleman asked a pertinent question about seizing frozen assets. That is something that we continue to look at; clearly, there are very significant frozen assets in the UK—some £19 billion, £2 billion of which are Russian state assets. We continue to look at that issue, because we know it is of urgent pertinence and relevance to the justified efforts of the Ukrainians to rebuild their society.

Turning to the subject of the Holodomor, we have heard today in moving terms how 90 years ago, millions of men, women and children lost their lives in that forced, deliberate famine, victims of Stalin's brutal regime. Of course, it is an echo from history today, because Ukrainians are again suffering from terror fomented in Moscow at the hands of Putin's brutal regime, so I pay tribute to those who keep alive the memory of the Holodomor and its victims—we must never forget them. Of course, the Prime Minister visited Kyiv in November and lit a candle at the memorial for those victims. I was pleased that colleagues recounted their own experience of doing a similar thing, because today we stand firm in our support of the Ukrainians amid growing evidence of appalling atrocities committed during this outrageous and illegal war. As I have indicated, we are actively supporting Ukraine to investigate and prosecute those responsible, as well as the investigation by the ICC. We will continue to exert institutional effort and resource, empowering Ukrainians to ensure that there is a very clear line and operational strand of accountability.

Turning directly to the questions asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire, of course, I entirely understand why colleagues have today called for the Government to recognise the Holodomor as a genocide. In response to her first question, I say gently that it is a long-standing policy of the Government that any judgment on whether genocide has occurred is a matter for a competent court, rather than Governments or non-judicial bodies. Our long-standing approach provides a clear, impartial and independent measure for the determination of whether genocide has occurred.

[Leo Docherty]

Of course, I know that is not what she wants to hear, but let me be clear that in no way does that detract from our recognition of the Holodomor as an appalling tragedy, its importance in the history of Ukraine and Europe, and the contemporary pertinence. My hon. Friend asked whether there might be a debate on the Floor of the House and, of course, it draws parallels with the 1930s. Russian forces have attacked Ukrainian hospitals, schools and energy supplies, leaving cities in ruins. In areas of Ukraine liberated from Russian forces, the Russians leave behind mass graves, as well as evidence of rape and torture on an unimaginable scale.

We should remember that, since 2014, thousands have been killed by Putin's forces. Since the full-scale invasion, over 50% of Ukraine's pre-war population—21 million—have needed humanitarian assistance either inside or outside Ukraine. We should remember the scale of the impact and, of course, it draws parallels with the 1930s. Russian forces have attacked Ukrainian hospitals, schools and energy supplies, leaving cities in ruins. In areas of Ukraine liberated from Russian forces, the Russians leave behind mass graves, as well as evidence of rape and torture on an unimaginable scale.

Ultimately, one man is responsible for the devastation left in the wake of Russia's forces. Putin's invasion was unprovoked and illegal. He has started a war he cannot win. It is our judgment that his army is on the defensive. Ukraine's heroic armed forces have recaptured thousands of square miles. We are proud to continue to work with our allies to ensure that Ukraine gets the support it needs to win this war, secure a lasting peace and bring to justice those responsible for war crimes and atrocities in accordance with international law.

Stephen Doughty: The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Anthony Browne) raised an important point about the terrible reports we have all heard of the forced deportation of children and the separation of families in an attempt to Russify them to deny them their Ukrainian heritage. Again, there are all sorts of awful parallels with the impact on children during the Holodomor. Will the Minister say a little about our current assessment and what we are doing to bring those responsible to account?

Leo Docherty: I will, gladly. We are working with the Ukrainians to invest energy and resource to build capacity for them to record these crimes, so that there is a trail of accountability; so Karim Khan and the International Criminal Court can hold these people to account. That is not least for its deterrent effect, so I welcome the hon. Member's question.

I will not recount at length the suite of military, humanitarian and economic support we are giving, but it totals nearly £4 billion. We continue to be the largest supplier of military aid to Ukraine after the United States. Importantly, we will keep this going. We expect to spend £2.4 billion on military support for Ukraine this financial year and have committed to £2.3 billion or more of support next financial year. That is important to note because this will be a matter of resolve, and we must send a clear signal that our resolve is not failing. In terms of economic and humanitarian support, we are proud that we are providing more than £1.6 billion in non-military assistance. Clearly, Putin is now completely

diplomatically isolated. Sanctions are beginning to bite. We have co-ordinated sanctions with our international allies to impose a huge cost, freezing a combined £275 billion of Russian assets. So our response is having effect.

When it comes to war crimes, there are some important next steps. We are supporting the Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine to help it investigate, as I have referred to, and set itself up to prosecute alleged war crimes. Colleagues should know that the Justice Secretary will host a major international meeting later this month to support war crime investigations by the ICC. So that important strand of work will progress. I have already mentioned our support and hosting of the recovery conference, which is hugely important.

To conclude, we have heard a moving evocation of the fact that the Holodomor and its modern parallel are two of the darkest chapters in Ukraine's history. Our stance is that any determination on genocide must be made by the courts. That does not distract from our recognition of the Holodomor as the most appalling tragedy—one that resonates today in the face of renewed Russian aggression. The UK is supporting our heroic Ukrainian friends to fight back, and it is our honour to do so. That includes supporting Ukraine's judicial system and the ICC to investigate and prosecute alleged war crimes.

When President Zelensky addressed both Houses, a short distance from where we are today, he said "Freedom will win." We know that that desire, and the desire for justice to prevail, unites the entire House.

5.25 pm

Mrs Latham: I thank all hon. Members who have taken part in this debate, especially those who came a couple of weeks ago to see Ukraine. I am incredibly disappointed, yet again, by the Minister. He said that this is what we always do; we do not recognise genocide retrospectively. We could do; we could change our view. The Foreign Office could change its view as to how it recognises a genocide. It is not just an unfortunate event; it is millions of people who were slaughtered by famine. They were not slaughtered with a gun or a knife; they were slaughtered by starvation to death. Surely, in this day and age, this Government should be able to change what we have always done before, and recognise the Holodomor as a genocide.

The Holodomor was the most horrific thing. It is so important to Ukrainians in this country and around the world for us to recognise it. I am absolutely devastated that the Minister has said no more than we have heard before. I feel completely let down, as I am sure other Ukrainian descendants feel, when this Government still say, "Oh, it was unfortunate. Yes, it is really sad, but it's not a genocide, because we don't recognise those sorts of things." It is ridiculous. I plead with the Minister to go back to the Foreign Office and say that it is about time we changed our attitude and recognised the Holodomor in Ukraine as a genocide.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the Ukrainian Holodomor and the war in Ukraine.

5.27 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Tuesday 7 March 2023

BUSINESS AND TRADE

India Trade Negotiations

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Kemi Badenoch): The seventh round of UK-India free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations began on 6 February and concluded on 10 February. As with previous rounds, this was conducted in a hybrid fashion—Indian officials travelled to London for negotiations and others attended virtually.

Technical discussions were held across 11 policy areas over 43 separate sessions. They included detailed draft treaty text discussions in these chapters.

Both sides are working toward a balanced deal that will build on our enhanced trade partnership. The UK-India trade relationship was worth £34 billion in the year to quarter 3 of 2022. A balanced deal that respects the domestic sensitivities of both sides will strengthen the economic links between the UK and India, boosting the UK economy and bringing benefits to UK businesses, families and consumers. In this negotiation, as with all our FTA negotiations, the NHS and the services it provides are not on the table.

The eighth round of negotiations is due to take place later this spring.

The Government will continue to keep Parliament updated as these negotiations progress.

[HCWS604]

CABINET OFFICE

Security and Intelligence Agencies: Contingencies Fund Advance

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Alex Burghart): The security and intelligence agencies have presented a supplementary estimate for approval to Parliament in the central Government supply estimates booklet—HC 1133, published on 21 February. Full details can be found on www.gov.uk. As it will be some time before the associated legislation receives Royal Assent, the agencies are seeking an advance from the Contingencies Fund in order to meet contractual commitments.

Parliamentary approval for additional resource of £140,017,000 has been sought in a supplementary estimate for the security and intelligence agencies. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £140,017,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

As the security and intelligence agencies are non-ministerial departments, I am making this statement on behalf of their accounting officer to ensure that Parliament is informed of this advance from the Contingencies Fund.

[HCWS607]

TREASURY

HM Revenue and Customs Update

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Victoria Atkins): From April 2013, the Government permitted individuals to retrospectively build their April 2006 to April 2016 National Insurance (NICs) record through voluntary contributions as part of transitional arrangements introduced alongside the new state pension. The deadline for voluntary contributions was set for 5 April 2023.

His Majesty's Revenue and Customs and the Department for Work and Pensions have experienced a recent surge in customer contact. To ensure that customers do not miss out, the Government intend to extend the 5 April deadline to pay voluntary NICs to 31 July this year. This applies to years that would otherwise have been out of time to pay after 5 April, up to and including the 2016-17 tax year. All voluntary NICs payments will be accepted at the existing 2022-23 rates until 31 July.

[HCWS608]

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Consultation on the English Portion of Dormant Assets Funding: Government Response

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Stuart Andrew): Today, the Government have announced that community wealth funds will join youth, financial inclusion, and social investment wholesalers as the named purposes of the English portion of dormant assets funding. This follows a public consultation last year, where we heard views from over 3,300 people, organisations, and financial services industry participants. The responses were clear that we must build on the successes of the scheme so far and ensure it continues to deliver the greatest impact possible.

To date, the money has been put to work tackling barriers to employment for disadvantaged young people; supporting households to get out of problem debt; and investing in charities and social enterprises across the country. Soon, a community wealth fund will join these three causes and empower local people to make decisions on how best to improve their neighbourhoods.

We have chosen these causes because the consultation made clear the strength of support for each of them and because we believe they strike the right balance between amplifying the progress that has been made to date while driving forward new innovations. This will allow us to build upon the solid foundations to develop an expanded scheme that is not only right for now, but also for the years ahead.

The dormant assets scheme continues to be underpinned by the voluntary participation of financial services firms. Its expansion through primary legislation last year marked the beginning of a long-term programme of work to unlock an estimated £880 million more across the UK over time. With £738 million of this to be apportioned for England, now is the right time to ensure the current impact of the scheme is amplified and to focus on the careful design of a community wealth fund set to last decades.

A community wealth fund is a pot of money distributed to communities in deprived areas and released over a long time period. In line with the community wealth fund's focus on giving more decision-making power to people, we will soon launch a technical consultation on the design of this important new initiative to ensure the public's views are embedded into the way it will operate in practice. Once Parliament has passed secondary legislation to include this new cause, eligible communities will be empowered to make decisions on how best to use the money to improve their areas.

The Government have also announced today that some of the most vulnerable people in society will be given additional support to deal with the cost of living, as £76 million from the current scheme is unlocked. Beneficiaries include no-interest loans for 69,000 individuals struggling with finances via a £45 million grant distributed by Fair4All Finance, and £31 million of investment for hundreds of charities and social enterprises, distributed by social investors Access and Big Society Capital. This will be used to retrofit premises with cleaner, greener and more efficient energy systems, such as new boilers or heat pumps, solar panels, and new lighting.

The dormant assets scheme is a perfect example of what happens when the public, private, and civil society sectors come together, in partnership, to drive change and support those most in need. The Government look forward to continuing this important work to make a real difference to people's lives across the country.

[HCWS611]

EDUCATION

Lifelong Loan Entitlement Consultation: Government Response

The Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education (Robert Halfon): Today I am announcing the publication of the lifelong loan entitlement (LLE) Government consultation response.

In 2020, the Government announced that they would introduce a lifelong loan entitlement to give people the opportunity to study, train, retrain and upskill throughout their lives to respond to changing skills needs and employment patterns—which is key to breaking the cycle of lower skills and lack of opportunity which affects too many of our communities.

In February 2022, the Government launched the LLE consultation seeking views on the key design principles of the LLE and how this will mean the current system in England will need to change.

The LLE consultation and supporting engagement activity ended in May 2022 and the Department for Education has spent time analysing the considerable insight and rich data gathered during the consultation, which included extensive stakeholder engagement.

This consultation response puts in no doubt this Government's intention to deliver a radical shift in our tertiary education system and sets out the policy design across a number of key areas. We will unify the student finance system for further and higher education across levels 4, 5 and 6, bringing them closer together, ensuring all higher education courses whether academic or technical will be funded in the same way and allowing for stronger partnership between further and higher education.

Under the LLE, eligible learners will be able to access an entitlement to the equivalent of four years' post-18 education funding—£37,000 in today's fees.

There will be a single student loan finance system for courses between levels 4 and 6. Learners will be able to use their LLE to access a wide range of courses including all courses previously funded under HE student finance, higher technical qualifications, and courses at levels 4 and 5 previously funded through advanced learner loans where there is clear learner demand and employer endorsement.

We also recognise that labour markets can change rapidly and we therefore want to ensure that learners can retrain, upskill or reskill at an equivalent qualification level. That is why we will be removing the restrictions on equivalent or lower qualification to provide increased flexibility to learners.

Furthermore, the Government want to make sure all learners receive the right amount of student support to complete their studies. That is why, from September 2025, maintenance will be available for all designated courses and modules with in-person attendance.

This represents a significant change from the current system: for the first time, we will expand access to the maintenance loan and targeted support grants for all designated courses and modules the LLE funds, including for part-time study. The availability of this support on a part-time basis will open up opportunities for learners for whom full-time study is not possible because of other commitments. The new budget for targeted grants will be agreed and set out at the next spending review, alongside further detail on the entitlements.

The Government will for the first time allow learners to access student finance for more flexible modules of higher and further education courses. This will enable lifelong learning by allowing individuals to build up to full qualifications over a longer time period, creating new retraining and upskilling opportunities, while retaining existing funding for those studying full courses. Like getting on and off a train, they will be able to alight and board their post-school education when it suits them, rather than being confined to a single ticket.

Making sure everyone can continue to access high-quality education and training in a way that works for them at any stage of their life or their career is of utmost importance for this Government. To ensure we get this right we will be taking a phased approach to introducing funding for modules, focusing initially on job-focused higher technical qualifications and some technical qualifications at levels 4 and 5, and extending to wider level 4, 5 and 6 courses at a later date. This offer will allow more people to climb the ladder of opportunity—for instance, by taking advantage of the in-demand skills provided by HTQs, in an even more flexible modular format.

And to further ensure quality, there will be clear criteria for modules to be eligible for funding, as set out in our response to the consultation. As previously announced and as set out in the Lifelong Learning (Higher Education Fee Limits) Bill, the LLE will introduce a system whereby fee limits are set using credits. This will provide consistency across the sector in the way fee caps are applied.

The Government have committed to making the student finance system fairer for learners and taxpayers. As announced in February 2022, for all new courses starting

from 1 August 2023 onwards, student loans will be issued on new plan 5 terms and conditions, which will see learners benefit from a reduction in the interest rate to RPI only. Plan 5 terms also mean learners only repay when earning over £25,000 and have a loan term of 40 years, after which any outstanding debt, including interest accrued, will be written off at no detriment to the borrower. We will continue to keep the terms of the student finance system under review to ensure that it remains fair to students and fair to taxpayers.

To ensure learners can easily navigate the courses that will be eligible for funding under the LLE, anyone who applies for funding will get an LLE personal account. This will be an online digital platform where learners will be able to view their entitlement, access information about courses to help them make informed choices about their learning pathways, and apply for loans and grants for fees, maintenance, and additional support.

Finally, I can confirm that the Government remain committed to delivering an alternative student finance (ASF) product compatible with Islamic finance principles. Our aim is that students will be able to access ASF as soon as possible after 2025.

The changes which I have set out today will have long-lasting, systematic impacts on the landscape of post-18 education affecting future generations of learners for years to come. Learners and employers alike will reap the rewards of a more flexible system that reflects and can adapt to changes in personal circumstances and the economy.

I believe that this package of measures is essential to deliver the transformation of student finance that this we need. Together they will create a fundamental shift in the way higher education is accessed, making it easier for people to train or retrain in a way that works for them and get the job they want.

More work is needed to make the LLE a reality, and this will need effort from both Government, providers and industry, but our Government response to this consultation is a major milestone toward this vision for a more dynamic and growing economy.

I want to thank all those who took their time to respond to this consultation and engage with the Department on an ongoing basis; their contributions will have a lasting impact in delivering the LLE. I look forward to continuing the hard work required to allow the launch of the new system in 2025, and to support learners to continue to acquire the skills they need to succeed in life.

Further details and the full Government consultation response can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/lifelong-loan-entitlement>.

[HCWS605]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Covid-19 Vaccine Update

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield): His Majesty's Government are committed to protecting people most vulnerable to covid-19 through vaccination as guided by the independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

On the 25 January 2023, the JCVI published interim advice on the covid-19 vaccination programme for 2023. The JCVI has now provided final advice for a covid-19 vaccination booster programme in spring 2023. HMG has accepted this advice and I am informed that all four parts of the UK intend to follow the JCVI's advice.

Covid-19 spring booster programme

The JCVI advises that a covid-19 vaccine spring booster dose should be offered to:

- adults aged 75 years and over;
- residents in a care home for older adults; and
- individuals aged five years and over who are immunosuppressed, as defined in tables 3 or 4 in chapter 14a of the UK Health Security Agency's (UKHSA) Green Book.

NHS England has asked covid-19 vaccination providers in England to begin the main spring 2023 booster campaign vaccinations from 17 April, with the national booking system opening beforehand. Vaccination of residents in older adult care homes will start ahead of this from 3 April. Eligible individuals will be offered the vaccine around six months after their previous dose.

The JCVI has advised the following vaccines may be used in the 2023 spring programme:

- Pfizer-BioNTech bivalent;
- Moderna bivalent;
- Sanofi/GSK monovalent—beta variant;
- Novavax monovalent—wild-type variant—only for use when alternative products are not considered clinically suitable.

The vaccine offered will depend on a person's age and local supply considerations. Children under 12 years of age will be offered a children's formulation of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

In addition, the JCVI's interim advice remains that individuals at higher risk of severe covid-19 are expected to be offered a booster vaccine dose in autumn 2023 in preparation for winter 2023 to 2024.

Moving primary course covid-19 vaccine to a targeted offer

Currently the covid-19 vaccine primary course offer—first two doses—is available in the UK to everyone aged five and over. The JCVI's interim advice in January set out that this offer, should move over the course of 2023 towards a more targeted offer during vaccination campaigns to protect those persons at higher risk of severe covid-19. This would include:

- residents in a care home for older adults and staff working in care homes for older adults;
- frontline health and social care workers;
- all adults aged 50 years and over;
- persons aged five to 49 years in a clinical risk group, as set out in chapter 14a of the UKHSA's Green Book;
- persons aged 12 to 49 years who are household contacts of people with immunosuppression;
- persons aged 16 to 49 years who are carers, as set out in out in chapter 14a of the UKHSA's Green Book.

I am now updating the House that the ongoing primary course vaccination offer will be moving to a more targeted offer available during campaign periods only for those at higher risk of severe covid-19 from July. Otherwise healthy five to 49-year-olds who have not come forward for their primary course covid-19 vaccination will no longer be able to access this offer following the close of the 2023 spring booster programme, planned to end 30 June 2023. I would encourage those who have not taken up the offer to come forward in good time to access it before the offer ends.

Notification of liabilities

I am now updating the House on the liabilities HMG have taken on in relation to further vaccine deployment via this statement and accompanying Departmental Minutes laid in Parliament containing a description of the liability undertaken. The agreement to provide indemnity with deployment of further doses increases the contingent liability of the covid-19 vaccination programme.

On 20 December 2022, the Sanofi/GSK covid-19 vaccine, VidPrevtyl Beta, was authorised by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). The JCVI has provided deployment advice on VidPrevtyl Beta as part of its advice on the spring programme.

The agreement to provide an indemnity as part of the contract between HMG and Sanofi/GSK creates a new contingent liability on the covid-19 vaccination programme. Deployment of effective vaccines to targeted groups has been and remains a key part of the Government's strategy to manage covid-19.

I will update the House in a similar manner as and when other covid-19 vaccines or additional doses of vaccines already in use in the UK are deployed.

[HCWS612]

Independent Review into Maternity and Neonatal Services in East Kent: Government's Initial Response

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield): I wish to inform the House of the Government's initial response to the report of the independent review into the maternity and neonatal services at East Kent University NHS Foundation Trust that was published on the 19 October 2022. NHS England commissioned Dr Bill Kirkup CBE to undertake this review following concerns about the quality and outcomes of care.

I would like to place on the record my gratitude to the families who came forward to contribute to this review, and to express my deepest sympathies for the loss and harm that Dr Kirkup discovered in the maternity and neonatal services at East Kent. I am also grateful for Dr Kirkup and his review team for his report. Taking each of the recommendations in turn:

The Government already has work underway to establish a taskforce with appropriate membership to drive the introduction of valid maternity and neonatal outcome measures capable of differentiating signals among noise to display significant trends and outliers, for mandatory national use.

Those responsible for undergraduate, postgraduate and continuing clinical education will be commissioned to report on how compassionate care can best be embedded into practice and sustained through lifelong learning.

Relevant bodies, including royal colleges, professional regulators and employers, will be commissioned to report on how the oversight and direction of clinicians can be improved, with nationally agreed standards of professional behaviour and appropriate sanctions for non-compliance.

Relevant bodies, including the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Royal College of Midwives and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, will be charged with reporting on how teamworking in maternity and neonatal care can be improved, with particular reference to establishing common purpose, objectives and training from the outset.

Relevant bodies, including Health Education England, royal colleges and employers, will be commissioned to report on the employment and training of junior doctors to improve support, teamworking and development.

The Government will consider in parallel with other relevant inquiries the duties placed on public bodies to share information with families.

Trusts will be required to review their approach to reputation management and to ensuring there is proper representation of maternity care on their boards.

The Government will continue to work with NHSE on its approach to poorly performing trusts and their leadership.

The trust has already made a statement accepting the reality of these findings; acknowledging in full the unnecessary harm that has been caused; and embarking on a restorative process addressing the problems identified, in partnership with families, publicly and with external input.

We continue to work with NHS England and the Care Quality Commission regarding patient safety concerns at the Trust. Further information on how the recommendations are being implemented will be outlined in spring 2023. The Department of Health and Social Care will also closely monitor progress on these recommendations alongside the recommendations of other maternity and neonatal service inquiries to improve standards of care for mothers and babies.

[HCWS606]

HOME DEPARTMENT Home Office Funding 2022-23

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman): The Home Office net cash requirement for the year exceeds that provided by the main estimate 2022-23 and is within that provided by the supplementary estimate to support related resource expenditure. The supplementary estimate has not yet received Royal Assent.

The Contingencies Fund advance is required to meet commitments until the supplementary estimate receives Royal Assent, at which point the Home Office will be able to draw down the cash from the Consolidated Fund in the usual way, to repay the Contingencies Fund advance.

Parliamentary approval for additional resources of £1,000,000,000 will be sought in a supplementary estimate for the Home Office. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £1,000,000,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

[HCWS610]

Report of the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation on the operation in 2021 of the Terroris

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman): Jonathan Hall KC, the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, has prepared a report on the operation of the Terrorism Acts in 2021.

In accordance with section 36(5) of the Terrorism Act 2006, I am today laying this report before the House, and copies will be available in the Vote Office. It will also be published on gov.uk.

I am grateful to Mr Hall for his report. I will carefully consider its contents and the recommendations he makes and will respond formally in due course.

[HCWS609]

Petitions

Tuesday 7 March 2023

OBSERVATIONS

HOME DEPARTMENT

Dangerous driving

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that the issue of dangerous driving within the constituency of Bradford South must urgently be addressed; notes that speeding, thoughtless parking, anti-social vehicle use, and the reckless use of off-road vehicles are common issues; notes that these are a threat to life and the quality of life of residents; and further that there must be a reallocation of funds to invest more in the policing of roads.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to police roads frequently and urgently introduce measures to reduce dangerous driving, speeding, thoughtless parking, anti-social vehicle use, and the reckless use of off-road vehicles in the constituency of Bradford South.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Judith Cummins, *Official Report*, 8 February 2023; Vol. 727, c. 990.]

[P002802]

Observations from The Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp):

The Government recognise that any form of antisocial, dangerous or inconsiderate behaviour involving vehicles is a serious issue. All available research shows a link between excessive speed and the risk of collisions. We expect all drivers to observe the speed limit.

However, law enforcement, including the enforcement of law on the roads, is an operational matter for the police. It is for the police to enforce road traffic legislation and investigate road traffic incidents using their professional judgment. Chief officers will decide how to deploy available resources in conjunction with local policing plans, taking into account the specific local problems and demands with which they are faced. They are best placed to understand how to meet the needs of local communities like the constituency of Bradford South.

Police and Crime Commissioners will identify local needs and in consultation with the Chief Constable draw up a five-year police and crime plan which sets out the local policing priorities.

The police have the power under section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2002 to seize vehicles being used in an antisocial manner. In addition, the Government have provided the police, local authorities and other local agencies with a range of tools and powers that they can use to respond quickly and effectively to all forms of antisocial behaviour, including that involving vehicles, through the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. These powers are deliberately local in nature, and it is for local agencies to determine whether their use is appropriate in the specific circumstances of each case.

The Government are proposing a total police funding settlement of up to £17.2 billion in 2023-24, an increase of up to £287 million when compared with 2022-23. West Yorkshire Police will receive up to £560.8 million in 2023-24, an increase of up to £18.9 million on 2022-23.

In addition, the Government are delivering on the people's priorities by recruiting an additional 20,000 police officers across England and Wales, by March 2023. As of 31 December 2022, West Yorkshire Police has recruited 837 additional uplift officers against a total three-year allocation of 852 officers.

Roads policing is an important cross-cutting capability to respond to a number of different threats, and is responsible for the enforcement of traffic laws, detection and the response to illegal or dangerous activity on the roads. This is why we have included roads policing as a cross-cutting capability in the revised strategic policing requirement, which was published on 20 February 2023.

The Government will continue to support the police to ensure they have the tools needed to enforce road traffic legislation and ASB powers.

TRANSPORT

Bus services in Rotherham

The petition of residents of the constituency of Rotherham,

Declares that residents are concerned at the poor standard of local bus services; express their opposition to a series of cuts that have seen timetables slashed and left services wholly unfit for purpose; and note that local transport authorities have been unable to attract operators to maintain existing services even where these services have been put out to tender.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to commit long term, sustainable funding to bus services in South Yorkshire both to maintain services in the short term and to grow the bus network in the long term.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Sarah Champion, *Official Report*, 5 December 2022; Vol. 724, c. 174.]

[P002787]

Observations from The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Richard Holden):

The Government recognise that the bus sector continues to face a number of challenges, including lower levels of patronage following the pandemic, and that this is impacting the viability of some services. The Department for Transport announced on 17 February that we will provide up to £80 million to extend the Bus Recovery Grant for a further three months from April to June 2023 to continue protecting vital bus services and take Government support for the bus sector to over £2 billion since March 2020. We are currently working on our plans for when BRG ends on 30 June 2023 and will continue to work with the bus sector, including bus operators and local transport authorities, on the challenges they face.

The Government are also taking proactive steps to help increase patronage on bus services by providing an initial investment of £60 million to help bus operators cap single fares at £2 on services in England outside London from 1 January. Over 140 operators covering

more than 4,700 routes are participating in the scheme which will help increase patronage on buses and help millions save on their regular travel costs. The scheme was originally due to run until 31 March. However, on 17 February we announced our intention to provide up to £75 million to extend the cap for a further three months until 30 June.

The Government are also providing £570 million over five years to South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority through the City Region Sustainable Transport

Settlements programme from 2022-23 to 2026-27 to improve its local transport network. This will include direct funding for bus infrastructure. This long-term funding is being delivered through a consolidated transport settlement agreed with central Government and based on the delivery programme put forward by SYMCA. SYMCA has also been provided with revenue funding to support the development of its capital investment programme and build longer-term local transport planning and delivery capacity.

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**not later than
Tuesday 14 March 2023**

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Online Abuse (Reporting) [Col. 196]
Bill presented, and read the First time

Pension Contributions [Col. 197]
Motion for leave to bring in Bill—(Anthony Browne)—agreed to

Public Order Bill [Col. 201]
Programme motion (No. 3)—(Julie Marson)—agreed to
Lords amendments considered

Energy [Col. 267]
Motion—(Amanda Solloway)—agreed to

Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust [Col. 277]
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Decarbonising Rural Transport [Col. 15WH]
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