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HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)

Monday 22 May 2023

HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 19 DECEMBER 2019]

FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HIS MAJESTY KING CHARLES III

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 733

TWENTIETH VOLUME OF SESSION 2022-2023

House of Commons

Monday 22 May 2023

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Antisocial Behaviour

1. **Paul Howell** (Sedgefield) (Con): What steps she is taking to reduce antisocial behaviour. [905034]

2. **Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to help tackle antisocial behaviour. [905035]

17. **Peter Dowd** (Bootle) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to help tackle antisocial behaviour. [905051]

19. **Jonathan Gullis** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): What steps she is taking to reduce antisocial behaviour. [905053]

23. **Dr Luke Evans** (Bosworth) (Con): What steps she is taking to reduce antisocial behaviour. [905057]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman): Antisocial behaviour brings misery and menace. On 27 March, the Government launched the antisocial behaviour action plan, giving the relevant agencies all the tools they need and communities confidence that it will not be tolerated. The plan focuses on making communities safer, building local pride, prevention and early intervention. These proposals will ensure perpetrators are punished and help to restore pride in our communities.

Paul Howell: I compliment the Secretary of State on driving the increase in police numbers on the streets. While Durham has 239 more police officers since 2019, will she confirm that recruitment will continue, as we have not yet returned to the 2010 level? Will she advise me and my Sedgefield constituents how to ensure that the emphasis is on frontline deployment to antisocial behaviour hotspots?

Suella Braverman: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his doughty campaigning in his constituency. Durham has received £3.4 million through four rounds of the safer streets fund, including just under £1.5 million in the current round. This is funding projects such as youth diversionary activity, ASB education programmes and target hardening measures. This Government are putting more police on the streets and engaging with communities to enable them to prevent crime.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: Driving without care or consideration is described as one of the worst forms of antisocial behaviour, as the consequences can be fatal. If caught speeding, does the Home Secretary agree that no one should be above the law?

Suella Braverman: As I said earlier, last summer I was speeding. I regret that. I paid the fine and I took the penalty. At no point did I attempt to evade sanction. What I am focused on is working for more police officers, so I am proud that this Conservative Government have secured a record number in the history of policing. This side of the House is focused on the people's priorities.

Peter Dowd: According to a joint letter I received from the Home Secretary and the Levelling Up Secretary on 27 March 2023:

“Tackling antisocial behaviour is an absolute priority for this Government.”

In the real world, how can 450 fewer police officers in Merseyside since 2010, and 69p per person invested in the immediate justice pilot, be classed as anything approaching tackling antisocial behaviour?

Suella Braverman: I am pleased that, thanks to this Government’s commitment, Merseyside has received millions of pounds of increased funding compared with previous years, but, most importantly, there have been seven rounds of safer streets fund projects in Merseyside, with 2.9 million in total provided over four rounds. I am glad that Merseyside has been chosen as one of our pilot areas for our immediate justice scheme, which is one way we will kick antisocial behaviour.

Jonathan Gullis: I thank my right hon. Friend for her earlier answer. In Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke, we are delighted to have seen more than 330 brand-new police officers recruited, new CCTV in Kidsgrove parish and more than £2 million in safer streets funding for Stoke-on-Trent. Sadly, however, in places such as Cobridge, crime increased by 75% between January and December 2022, which is why I launched the safer streets petition, which has more than 430 signatures. Will my right hon. Friend work to get the police and crime commissioner and the city council to bid with me for the next safer streets pot, to keep the streets safe in Tunstall, Cobridge and Smallthorne?

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend does a great job of standing up for his constituents on antisocial behaviour. In March, we launched the action plan to crack down on precisely the behaviour he has been talking about. The plan is backed by more than £160 million of new funding. That includes funding for an increased police and other uniformed presence in ASB hotspots. I am glad that his force has also been chosen as one of the pilots.

Dr Evans: I am pleased to see the plan being brought forward, because only last week I was speaking to parish councillors from Bagworth who have had real problems with vandalism and graffiti in some of their playgrounds—so much so that they are thinking of closing them. I have heard of this happening in places such as Earl Shilton and Barwell, too. Will the Home Secretary say how the plan will support communities such as mine?

Suella Braverman: I was pleased to visit Leicestershire police force some months ago. I am committed to supporting communities and the police. I am pleased that Leicestershire police has received £2.8 million through four rounds of the safer streets fund, including £800,000 in the current round, to fund projects such as youth diversion activities, antisocial behaviour education programmes, and target hardening. We have funded several initiatives, and that is how we work together with other agencies to ensure that our streets are safer, communities can restore pride, and ultimately that criminals are put behind bars.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): In Kendal we are proud of the recently set up Youth Matters project, which is about engaging young people with worthwhile activities to do with their time. Does the Home Secretary agree that as well as tackling antisocial behaviour by firm and adequately resourced policing, it is important that she works with her colleagues in the Department for Education to boost youth work, in particular detached youth work, to help give young people worthwhile things to do with their time? What is she doing to improve funding for that part of our armoury against antisocial behaviour?

Suella Braverman: Tackling antisocial behaviour is one of my priorities. That is why I launched the plan with the Prime Minister. It requires a multifaceted solution, and a lot of work must be focused on youth diversion. I was pleased to visit a boxing project a few weeks ago, in which money from the Home Office was diverted to encourage young people off the streets to take up a sport, work with mentors, and learn a new skill. It is a great way of reducing crime.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): The Home Secretary rightly said that antisocial behaviour brings misery and menace. As part of local antisocial behaviour plans, neighbourhood and traffic police across the country will rightly be cracking down on speeding and dangerous driving. Does the Home Secretary think that people who speed should be given the option to get private speeding awareness courses, rather than doing them with everyone else, and in her own case, what exactly did she ask her civil servants to help her with?

Suella Braverman: Hopefully we are not going to be too repetitive today, Mr Speaker. As I said earlier, last summer I was speeding. I regret that. I paid the fine and I accepted the points, and at no point did I seek to evade the sanction. But let us be honest about what this is all about. The shadow Minister would rather distract from the abject failure by the Labour party to offer any serious proposals on crime or policing. Labour Members want to talk about this because it distracts from the fact that they voted against tougher sentences for paedophiles and murderers. They want us to ignore the fact that Labour MPs would rather campaign to stop the deportation of foreign criminals than back our Rwanda scheme. They would rather the country does not notice their total abandonment of the British people. This Government are focusing on delivering a record—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The Home Secretary said that she did not want to be repetitive. That goes all around the Chamber.

Immigration Policies: Scotland

3. **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): What assessment she has made of the effect of her Department’s immigration policies on labour shortages in Scotland. [905036]

The Minister for Immigration (Robert Jenrick): The points-based system serves the whole United Kingdom, and as noted in the Migration Advisory Committee annual report, immigration policy cannot be a complete

solution to population movements within the United Kingdom, or to labour shortages. The Scottish Government have policy levers to address those issues more effectively.

Patricia Gibson: The Scottish Government have repeatedly raised the issue, I have secured a debate on it, and my SNP colleagues have raised it over and over again: labour shortages are posing huge challenges for Scotland right now. The Scottish Government proposed a rural immigration pilot—a proposal welcomed by one of the Home Secretary's predecessors, the right hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid). Why will the UK Government not engage with the Scottish Government on that important issue, given that the Scottish Government have no powers in that area?

Robert Jenrick: We believe strongly that the UK is better served by a single, national immigration service, and there is no material difference between unemployment or economic inactivity rates in Scotland versus the rest of the United Kingdom. The first port of call for vacancies should always be the domestic workforce. That is why my right hon. Friend the Work and Pensions Secretary has brought forward a wide package of measures across the whole country, to help more people into the workforce. It is not right that we always reach for the lever of immigration to solve those challenges.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, when thinking about the level of net migration, we should consider not just GDP and economic impact but the social and cultural impact of such rapid change, including the pressure on public services and housing?

Robert Jenrick: It is right that we consider economic growth and the needs of our economy, but my hon. Friend is absolutely right that these decisions also require careful consideration of the impact of large amounts of legal migration on housing, access to public services and, as he said, community cohesion and integration. That is absolutely the approach of the Government and the Home Secretary, and I am considering the challenge.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): Ending the small boat crossings is one way of reducing immigration, and Labour has a five point plan to do just that, but asylum seekers are only a fraction of the net migration total. The reason net migration is so high in Scotland and across the UK, and the reason businesses are over-reliant on migrant labour, is that, for 13 years, the Conservative party has failed to train up our home-grown talent. It has slashed the skills budget, and failed to get people off record-high NHS waiting lists and back to work. Labour has set out plans to do each of those things, because we want and expect immigration to come down, and yet the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary are clearly at loggerheads on the issue—it appears that the right hand does not know what the far-right hand is doing. Is the Home Secretary still committed to the 2019 Conservative manifesto pledge of bringing net migration below 226,000? If so, does she think that the Prime Minister agrees with her?

Robert Jenrick: Let us be absolutely clear: this party wants to bring net migration down. I have no idea what Labour wants to do. In the last few days we have heard a succession of shadow Ministers confused on this issue.

The Conservative Government believe in controlled migration. We only have to look back to the legacy of the last Labour Government to see that, under Labour, there is always an open-door approach to migration. We will control migration; the Labour party leaves an open-door migration policy.

Illegal Immigration Bill: Devolved Administrations

4. **Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP):** Whether she has had recent discussions with the devolved Administrations on the Illegal Immigration Bill.

[905037]

The Minister for Immigration (Robert Jenrick): I am in regular correspondence with the devolved Administrations about the Illegal Migration Bill. I recently met the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, Angus Robertson, and last week I wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice to propose a meeting, which I hope will happen later this week.

Owen Thompson: Not only is the Bill being driven through Parliament at breakneck speed, but the Scottish Government have been given no opportunity yet to consider the proposals properly before their introduction. Does the Minister therefore agree that any regulations through the Bill that would amend, repeal or revoke any Scottish legislation or any devolved matter cannot possibly come into force without the consent of Scottish Ministers?

Robert Jenrick: I think that I just made clear that I have reached out to colleagues in the Scottish Government. But immigration is a reserved matter, and it is a matter for this Parliament to dictate our future borders policy. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will support the Bill. From the figures that I have seen, his constituency of Midlothian currently has no asylum seekers in dispersal accommodation and no asylum seekers in contingency accommodation such as hotels. Zero asylum seekers in his constituency. He is, I am afraid, yet another example of humanitarian nimbyism by the SNP.

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): In addition to the devolved Administrations, will the Minister kindly share details of the discussions that he has had with local authorities—local government and local councils in particular—on the Bill's provisions? How do those relate to the Government's plans to accommodate people in Wethersfield, including those who would be covered by the Bill?

Robert Jenrick: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. When she was Home Secretary, she set out the policy to create large sites on which to house asylum seekers in a more focused and less expensive manner, and she took forward a proposal for a site in the north of England. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and I have continued that tradition and set forth plans for three sites: one at Bexhill, one at Wethersfield and one at Scampton.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance, TARA, supported 156 women in its service in 2021 and 2020. Of those, 138 were

seeking asylum or were undocumented when they were referred to TARA. Bronagh Andrew of TARA told the Scottish Parliament's Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee that,

"had the Illegal Migration Bill been in place, those women would not have been able to access our support."

In the face of clear evidence of the harm that the Tories' Illegal Migration Bill will cause, what possible justification can the Minister give for removing support from trafficked women in Scotland and strengthening the hand of those who would exploit them?

Robert Jenrick: The Bill is based on the simple principle that we want to break the people smugglers' and human traffickers' business model. By supporting the Bill—I know the hon. Lady opposes it—we will do that. We will stop people making these dangerous, unnecessary crossings and there will be fewer cases such as those that she raises. But I go back to the point that I made to her colleague, the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson). If the SNP feels so strongly about this issue, why does it do so little to support asylum seekers in Scotland? Currently, there are 11 contingency hotels in the whole of Scotland, housing 600 migrants. That is 1% of all the asylum seekers in the country. She never matches her words with deeds.

Fraud

5. **Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to tackle fraud. [905038]

8. **Mr Gagan Mohindra** (South West Hertfordshire) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to tackle fraud. [905041]

13. **Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to tackle fraud. [905047]

The Minister for Security (Tom Tugendhat): We recently launched our strategy to tackle fraud, alongside measures in the Online Safety Bill that will require companies to prevent fraud and measures in the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill to hold companies to account for fraud committed by their employees. We are also working with tech companies to agree other measures and improving the support we give to victims.

Nigel Mills: We know that 80% of fraud starts online, and 18% comes from the tech companies that the Minister talked about, yet they do not contribute anything to reimbursing the victims of fraud, despite effectively profiting from causing it. Is it not time that we considered asking them to contribute towards reimbursing some of the losses that they are introducing into the system?

Tom Tugendhat: My hon. Friend is raising questions that we have looked at closely in the fraud strategy, and he is absolutely right to highlight the disparity between those who are causing and those who are paying. This is a conversation that we have been having, and I look forward to identifying some areas soon for further discussion. Action Fraud has not always helped as well as it might, which is why we are looking at making the system more efficient.

Mr Mohindra: At my surgery in Sarratt last month I met Catherine, whose father was defrauded out of thousands after taking a call from a man who he thought worked for Virgin Media. Catherine only found out after her father unfortunately passed away and she found all the emails he had sent attempting to get his money back—a battle that Catherine has now taken on. Can the Minister tell the House what he is doing to stop vulnerable people being targeted by fraudsters?

Tom Tugendhat: May I offer absolute sympathy to Catherine? Sadly, although my hon. Friend is citing the case of an older man who was the target of crime, this is a crime that affects many people of all ages across our society. It is not specifically connected to the most vulnerable; rather, it predominantly affects people who are online more often, which, as one can imagine, includes many people across society. We are rolling out the nationwide economic crime victim care unit across England and Wales, for victims whose cases are not investigated by the police. This group will help victims to recover from fraud and cyber-crime, and will significantly reduce the likelihood of repeat victimisation.

Martin Vickers: I welcome Minister's proposal that Action Fraud should have greater capacity. I have experienced a number of constituency cases where elderly people were robbed of their life savings and there was a feeling that insufficient priority was being given to this issue. Will the Minister give an assurance that there will be a renewed focus on dealing with these scams, which destroy people's lives?

Tom Tugendhat: I can absolutely give that commitment. These scams, which to some people appear victimless, are sadly anything but. The connection to serious mental health issues that follow is sadly all too clear, and many of us in our constituency work have come across individuals for whom these events have resulted in extreme suffering and sometimes even worse.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): It is staggering that fraud now accounts for almost half of crime, yet barely any of those crimes are investigated, and less than 0.1% of them make it to court. Hardly anything seems to be being done to upgrade police technology and practice to help deal with that. Seriously, what are the Government doing that will make any sort of difference?

Tom Tugendhat: The hon. Lady will have heard only a few weeks ago that we launched our new fraud strategy, which includes 400 officers in the national fraud squad and increased resources of some £400 million to help police forces across the country. A lot of that work has already started, and a lot of it still has to be done. We are making sure that that focus is there because, as she correctly says, 40% of crime is fraud. The UK, sadly, has received too many attempts to defraud our people, for several reasons. One reason is the way our banking system works and the speed of banking in the UK, and another is the English language, which I am afraid makes it significantly easier for fraudsters overseas to act against our people. It is true that a significant amount of that crime is not here in the UK but abroad, so working with partners around the world is important.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): There were 3.7 million instances of fraud last year. Will the Minister say why only 0.1% of cases make it to court?

Tom Tugendhat: We are working on that challenge with the Ministry of Justice, and the hon. Gentleman is right to highlight it. Often, the reason is that many of those crimes are committed abroad or are not followed up. Sometimes, that is because people are embarrassed to report them, which is a great shame because they should not be embarrassed—they are crimes like any other. Often, it is because it is very difficult to collect evidence. That is exactly why we have launched the new national fraud squad to help police forces across the country, working with the regional and organised crime units to bring not just the evidence but eventually the prosecution through the Crown Prosecution Service, to make sure that we have not just reports of fraud but prosecutions and convictions.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): Just over a year ago, the anti-fraud Minister Lord Agnew resigned in anger at the billions being lost and written off in covid fraud payments. He said to the Treasury Committee on which I sit:

“There is not anybody who would condone a weak system that allows money to fall into the laps of crooks, and that is what I saw happening.”

Lord Agnew was a Conservative Minister. Can the Minister tell us what has changed, if anything, such as the amount of money in covid fraud payments recovered or the attitude of the Treasury?

Tom Tugendhat: As the hon. Lady knows well, this Government take fraud very seriously in these matters. I say that with absolute confidence because we have just worked up a national fraud strategy for the first time in many years. We have the money and the commitment, and now we have the officers behind it. This is an extremely important area of crime that we have been taking seriously in order to ensure that it reduces alongside other areas of crime. That is exactly what this Government will do.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): According to the Government, fraud is now the most common crime in the UK, costing almost £7 billion a year, with one in 15 people falling victim. The number of victims has skyrocketed amid the cost of living crisis, and victims are left without hope. Police forces up and down the country are crying out for resources to tackle the ever growing and advancing ways in which criminals exploit people to commit fraud. If the Government care and are serious about fraud and its victims, why do Ministers persistently exclude fraud from crime statistics?

Tom Tugendhat: That is a slightly strange question, because fraud is in the Crime Survey of England and Wales, so I simply do not understand which surveys the hon. Lady is looking at. She may be thinking of the crime surveys before 2010, which are hard to compare because Labour did not count fraud—but we do.

Visa Applications from Afghanistan: Women and Girls

6. **Munira Wilson** (Twickenham) (LD): What steps her Department is taking to support women and girls applying for UK visas from Afghanistan. [905039]

The Minister for Immigration (Robert Jenrick): More than 24,000 people have arrived in the UK from Afghanistan under or since Operation Pitting, of whom 21,000 have been resettled under the Afghan relocations and assistance policy or the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme. There is not a visa application centre in Afghanistan for security reasons, but those who have left the country can make a visa application in the normal way. The ACRS is designed to support vulnerable people such as women and girls at risk.

Munira Wilson: For the fourth time in recent weeks, I feel compelled to raise on the Floor of the House the case of five British children who have been in hiding in Kabul for the past 18 months. Four of those British passport holders are girls and only one of them is allowed to attend school. I and my team have not been able to bring them to safety, to be with their family in the UK, because their Afghan mother cannot secure a visa. I am grateful that the Minister has looked at this case personally, but it has stalled again, because his officials are insisting she travels to Pakistan to do her biometrics. He will be aware that it is totally unsafe for a woman to risk her life to travel on her own, without a chaperone, to Pakistan to get a visa, even if Pakistan grants her a visa to travel there. So please, will the Minister waive the requirement for biometrics in this case and those of other women and girls who face mortal danger, as this family does?

Robert Jenrick: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for the tenacious way in which she has represented her constituents. She knows that I intervened personally to seek a swift resolution to this case. I am told that UK Visas and Immigration has the application under consideration and is speaking with the hon. Lady's office to help progress the application, and I hope we can resolve it very soon.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Does the Minister accept that the female population of Afghanistan is enslaved at present? Has he seen the amazing film by the courageous Sky correspondent, Alex Crawford, called “Women at War: Afghanistan”, which spells that out? Will he spare a moment to look at early-day motion 1188, marking the 90th anniversary today of the founding of the Academic Assistance Council, now the Council for At-Risk Academics? I came across that organisation while it was trying to rescue female academics from potential enslavement and bring them to this country so that they could join the faculties of the University of Southampton, among others.

Robert Jenrick: I would be pleased to look at the material that my right hon. Friend recommends to me, in particular the early-day motion. The treatment of women and girls in Afghanistan by the Taliban is abhorrent—we all condemn that. That is one of the reasons we have created the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme, to support as many as we possibly can.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I recently had a meeting with the Prime Minister to discuss the plight of female judges and prosecutors who were encouraged by the United Kingdom to take up those roles, when they were trying to produce a democracy under the rule of law in Afghanistan. I would like to see humanitarian visas for some of those women, so that they can come to the United Kingdom. The Prime Minister seemed quite sympathetic and said he would take the proposal away and look at it. Will the Minister assure me that the Home Office would also be sympathetic to that request?

Robert Jenrick: I would be very happy to look into that. I remember that the hon. and learned Lady has campaigned on this issue for some time, since the fall of Kabul, so perhaps a useful way forward would be for she and I to meet to discuss this further.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): As part of the Government's resettlement scheme for Afghan citizens facing threats of persecution from the Taliban, the Home Office granted visas to the Afghan women's junior development football team. The women's parliamentary football team played a match against them and, despite the studded tackle that left me wincing in agony, I was struck by their gratitude for and appreciation of our generous and lifesaving hospitality. However, there are many sportswomen left in Afghanistan, banned from participating in their sport by the Taliban and under threat of severe recriminations if they even dare to kick a ball, ride a bike or wield a cricket bat. What is the Minister doing to support those women and girls, particularly if they wish to come to the UK to play their sports?

Robert Jenrick: As my hon. Friend has said, the Taliban have banned Afghan women and girls from competing in sports and exercising in gyms. Afghan women who competed in sports, ranging from football to cycling, are now forced to stay home, amid the kind of intimidation to which she refers. I think particularly of the bravery of those Afghan women who recently posed for photos with the Associated Press, alongside the equipment that they used to be able to use, now covering their faces with burqas. These are the reasons why we have made our important and generous offer through the ACRS, which is a scheme we want to take forward to help more women and girls out of Afghanistan to a place of safety and a new life in the UK.

Yarl's Wood: Serco

7. **Richard Fuller** (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): What discussions she has had with representatives of Serco on improvements to security at the Yarl's Wood immigration removal centre. [905040]

The Minister for Immigration (Robert Jenrick): The Government take the protection of the public and security incidents at immigration detention centres extremely seriously. I met senior Serco executives on 4 May to discuss their response to the incident at Yarl's Wood in my hon. Friend's constituency. An independent investigation into the incident is now under way; we will consider its findings in detail.

Richard Fuller: Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking the chief constable of Bedfordshire, Trevor Rodenhurst, for working with other police forces across

the country? I understand that all but one of those who absconded have been rearrested, and that arrests have been made of others who have facilitated people being out of detention. However, there remain serious questions to be answered, both about the comparative ease with which people were able to abscond from the facility and about the interaction between Serco and the police. Will my right hon. Friend please look at those issues?

Robert Jenrick: I join my hon. Friend in thanking Bedfordshire police for leading the national response to the incident. He is correct that of the eight men who escaped, only one now remains at large and we are determined to find him as quickly as possible. There are robust security measures in IRCs, but they are now being reviewed again in the light of this incident. I have met senior Serco executives to hold them to account for their conduct and to ensure that they take the incident extremely seriously. I know that my hon. Friend will be visiting Yarl's Wood soon; I would be very happy to speak to him and understand his reflections.

Small Boat Crossings

10. **Suzanne Webb** (Stourbridge) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to reduce the number of small boat crossings of the English channel. [905044]

21. **Tom Randall** (Gedling) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to reduce the number of small boat crossings of the English channel. [905055]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman): Our Illegal Migration Bill will end illegal entry as a route to asylum in the United Kingdom, breaking the business model of the people-smuggling gangs and restoring fairness to our asylum system.

Suzanne Webb: Tackling illegal immigration, like small boats, is a hot topic for many of my constituents; I hear about it time and again on the doorstep, and I see it in my inbox. Can my right hon. Friend assure the people of Stourbridge that it is this Government who can be trusted to make every possible effort to address this complex problem and ensure we stop the illegal boats?

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Prime Minister and I are determined to stop the boats—we are doubling the number of UK-funded personnel in France, and for the first time specialist UK officers are embedded with their French counterparts—whereas I am afraid the Labour party has consistently voted against our measures, not just in the Illegal Migration Bill but in the Nationality and Borders Act 2022. We know that Labour Members would scrap Rwanda. The truth is that they do not want to stop the boats; they want to open our borders.

Tom Randall: In a recent interview, the Leader of the Opposition was unable to say whether he would repeal the Public Order Act 2023, which protects the public against seriously disruptive protests. Given this flip-flopping on key legislation, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is only this Conservative Government who can be trusted to stop the boats, and that it is entirely possible that the Opposition, having tried to vote down the Illegal Migration Bill several times, will change their mind on that as well?

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. The British people would be forgiven for failing to keep up with changing Labour policy. On the one hand, Labour Members opposed our Public Order Bill; on the other hand, they said that they would not repeal it. They are in favour of campaigning to keep foreign criminals in the country, yet they want to scrap our Rwanda plan. This Government, this Conservative Prime Minister and this side of the House are focused on stopping the boats, taking the fight to the militant protesters and standing up for the British people.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Last December, the Prime Minister promised that the Home Office would recruit another 700 new staff to the small boats operational command. How many of those 700 staff are now in post?

Suella Braverman: Last year, the Prime Minister set out a detailed plan on how we are stopping the boats. The hon. Gentleman is right to refer to our increased personnel on our small boats operational command. I am pleased to say that we are making very good progress on increasing the personnel working on the channel. We have increased the number of caseworkers, we are making progress on our asylum backlog and we are increasingly bearing down on this issue.

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): Afghans make up one of the largest cohorts of small boat migrants, in part because the legal routes are not working. Let me give the Home Secretary a quick example. Families who have been approved under the Afghan relocations and assistance policy are stuck in Islamabad and are now being told that they need to source their own accommodation to get here, but there is no published guidance on how they should go about doing that. Given the obvious challenges of securing accommodation, not least if they are stuck in a hotel room in Pakistan, can the Home Secretary say precisely what support her Department is providing to this cohort of people who are stuck in Pakistan?

Suella Braverman: Both the Afghan relocations and assistance policy and the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme make clear the criteria by which people will be assessed when they are applying to come to the United Kingdom. I am proud that this country and this Government have welcomed over 20,000 people under those schemes. Of course there will be individual cases and we are happy to consider them, but overall the scheme has worked well and thousands of people have benefited from it.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): One of the justifications for using former military bases rather than hotels was that they would be a deterrent. We now learn from the Home Office that RAF Scampton will not take people from hotels, but that it might be a detention centre or it might take migrants from Manston. The whole policy is in chaos. Is that why the Home Secretary's own civil servant, on 6 February, recommended to her that the Home Office should agree to stop work on proposals for RAF Scampton and agree that it should immediately notify the local authority that it was no longer developing proposals for the site? Why has the Home Secretary ignored her own civil servants?

Suella Braverman: I very much appreciate the efforts of my right hon. Friend in standing up for his constituents; he is doing a fantastic job. What I would gently say to him is that we have over 40,000 people accommodated in hotels today and we are spending over £6 million a day on that accommodation. It is an unacceptable situation, and that is why the Prime Minister and I have made it a priority to bring on and deliver alternative, appropriate and more cost-effective accommodation.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The problem is that there are no safe and legal routes. I have children in my constituency who are separated from their parents because they were brought to the UK under the UNHCR scheme and their parents cannot now come and join them. They have moved from Afghanistan to Pakistan, but they have no means of coming here to be with their children. Why is the Home Secretary keeping families apart as opposed to reuniting them?

Suella Braverman: I just do not agree with the hon. Lady's characterisation. I am incredibly proud—*[Interruption.]* I am incredibly proud of the immense generosity that the Conservative Government and, more importantly, the British people have demonstrated over recent years. We have welcomed over half a million people seeking humanitarian protection to these shores through safe and legal routes. On top of the country-specific routes, there are non-country-specific routes through which people can apply. The reality is that we have millions of people seeking to come here and we have to take a balanced approach, but overall we have extended the hand of generosity and we have a track record of which we can be proud.

Vagrancy Act: Repeal

11. Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): What progress she has made on repealing the Vagrancy Act 1824. [905045]

The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp): My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) is a tireless campaigner on this issue and I know that the whole House is grateful to him for championing and introducing the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. As we made clear at the time of the passage of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, the Government are committed to the repeal of the Vagrancy Act 1824, and as soon as suitable replacement legislation is ready—which we hope will be fairly soon—we will introduce it as soon as parliamentary time allows. At the same time, we will repeal the Vagrancy Act.

Bob Blackman: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. More than a year ago in a vote in both this House and the other place, we agreed to repeal the 1824 Vagrancy Act, yet it seems as if the Home Office is trying to reintroduce it to deal with aggressive begging. I think the whole House would agree that people who are street homeless need to be helped and assisted, not arrested. When will we see the enactment of that legislation so that the police can be given the powers to help people who are street homeless rather than threaten them?

Chris Philp: My hon. Friend is right. The people who are homeless and need assistance should receive that help. I know that our colleagues in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities are working

hard to make sure that that happens, but we also need to make sure that members of the public are protected from aggressive or nuisance begging, so where the repeal of the Vagrancy Act leaves lacunae in the law, we need to ensure that they are filled. That is why we will repeal the Vagrancy Act once the replacement legislation is ready and, as I have said, we will do that as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his response to the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman). Homelessness is a scourge and a problem across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The Minister is known to be a compassionate man, and he understands the issue very well. What discussions have taken place with the Northern Ireland Executive on the Vagrancy Act to make sure that what happens here also happens in Northern Ireland so that it benefits our people, too?

Chris Philp: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question, which he asks with his customary courtesy and compassion. We want to have discussions with the Northern Ireland Executive as soon as it is reformed, which we hope will be soon. I am pleased to tell the House that rough sleeping levels in England, where the Government have direct responsibility, are about 35% lower than in 2017, and we look forward to working with our friends and colleagues to bring about the same results in Northern Ireland.

Foreign Disinformation

12. **Christian Wakeford** (Bury South) (Lab): What discussions she has had with Cabinet colleagues on countering foreign disinformation in the UK. [905046]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman): Countering foreign disinformation that seeks to subvert and undermine the UK's democracy, prosperity and security is vital. The National Security Bill, which is currently making its way through Parliament, will further strengthen our ability to counter hostile state threats.

Christian Wakeford: It is now more than two years since *The Times* reported that Iranian cyber specialists were peddling disinformation in an attempt to influence the result of the 2021 Scottish Parliament elections. In the same year, the US Department of Justice shut down 36 Iranian-linked websites in a disinformation crackdown. How do the Government intend to combat and disrupt the threat of disinformation spread here in the UK by the murderous Iranian regime?

Suella Braverman: Disinformation is the concerted effort to create and deliberately spread false or manipulative information, and the hon. Gentleman is right to say that hostile states such as Iran use disinformation as a hostile act against the United Kingdom's interests. We are constantly reviewing our position on Iran, and this is something we take very seriously at the top of Government.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): Microsoft's digital defence report outlines how nations including Russia, China and Iran are deploying social media-powered propaganda operations to shape opinion, discredit adversaries and

incite fear, with harrowing examples of Russia's use of hybrid warfare in Ukraine. During the passage of the National Security Bill, the Labour party called for an annual report on the extent of disinformation originating from foreign powers, which this Government rejected. Does the Home Secretary accept that the Government have been far too slow in responding to the scale of this threat, and that such an annual report represents the bare minimum that the Government should be doing to protect the UK from foreign hostile and sustained cyber-interference?

Suella Braverman: I disagree with the hon. Lady's characterisation that the Government have been too slow to act on Russian state threats. Following the invasion of Ukraine last year, the UK introduced trade sanctions in relation to internet and online media services, preventing designated entities from using platforms to connect with UK audiences online. The Government designated TV-Novosti and Rossiya Segodnya on 4 May 2023, choking off the Russian Federation's ability to disseminate misinformation across the internet through its state-sponsored RT and Sputnik brands. There has been a lot of effort and a lot of work to counter Russian state disinformation.

Topical Questions

T1. [905059] **Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman): Fraud is a despicable crime that accounts for more than 40% of all crime in England and Wales. The Government's fraud strategy will do far more to block fraud at source by working closely with the private sector and law enforcement. The Online Safety Bill obligates tech platforms to protect users from fraud, and we will consult on banning cold calling for financial products and clamp down on number spoofing. We will ban devices that let criminals send mass scam texts or disguise their number when making scam calls. New powers will take down fraudulent websites.

I have told police forces that I want tackling fraud to be a priority, and a new national fraud squad with 400 new investigators will go after the worst fraudsters. We will change the law so that more victims of fraud get their money back, and Action Fraud will be replaced with a state-of-the-art system.

Siobhain McDonagh: My constituents Mrs L and Mr M, from Hong Kong, came to the UK on a British national overseas passport. They came to see me because they had been paying into a pension for the whole of their careers and sold their home before coming to the UK, but because of their BNO visa status, their bank account was frozen at the direction of the Chinese state, in contradiction to Hong Kong law. They are not alone; the Home Office has issued BNO visas to more than 160,000 Hongkongers who have moved to the UK. Does the Home Secretary think it is right that at the behest of the Chinese communist party, BNO passport holders are being denied access to their own money, from their own bank accounts—

Mr Speaker: Order. Topical questions have to be short. People cannot have full questions on topicals, please. I am sure you have come to the end and that the Home Secretary will have a grip of the answer.

Suella Braverman: I am very concerned by the issue the hon. Lady raises. We have welcomed more than 100,000 people from Hong Kong via our BNO scheme. We have also had similar reports and we have heard from a group of BNOs who have raised concerns of a similar nature. My right hon. Friend the Immigration Minister, and potentially the Security Minister, will get back to her on the details, but I share the concern she is raising.

T2. [905060] **Mr Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury) (Con): For a long time, businesspeople in Africa have sometimes found it difficult to get visas for short visits to this country, because the system has been centralised and there are sometimes small errors on their application. Not only they but we lose business because of that situation, so will the Minister examine it to see what can be done to improve the system?

The Minister for Immigration (Robert Jenrick): I would be happy to take a further look and to learn from my hon. Friend's experience. I am pleased to say that UK Visas and Immigration is now processing all new visit visa applications within the service standard of 15 days, with 323,000 applications from those with African nationalities last year.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Home Secretary.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): On a difficult anniversary, I pay tribute to the brave soldier Lee Rigby and to the innocent children, women and men who lost their lives, and the many more who were injured, at the Manchester Arena, as well as to their families, who remind us of the commitment to never let hatred win.

At the heart of the Home Secretary's responsibility is to ensure that laws are fairly enforced for all. But when she got a speeding penalty, it seems that she sought special treatment—a private course—and asked civil servants to help. She has refused to say what she asked civil servants to do, so I ask her that again. Will she also tell us whether she authorised her special adviser to tell journalists that there was not a speeding penalty when there was?

Suella Braverman: As I said earlier, in the summer of last year I was speeding. I regret that. I paid the fine and I accepted the points. At no time did I seek to avoid the sanction. What is serious here is the priorities of the British people. I am getting on with the job of delivering for the British people, with a record number of police officers and a plan to stop the boats, and by standing up to crime and for policing. I only wish the Labour party would focus on the priorities too.

Yvette Cooper: The trouble is that the Home Secretary is failing to deliver for the British people too, and everyone can see that she is not answering the basic factual questions on what she said to the civil service and to her special adviser. It matters because it is her job to show that she is abiding by the ministerial code, which she has broken before, on private and public interests, and to enforce rules fairly for everyone

else. Time and again, she seems to think that she is above the normal rules: breaching security even though she is responsible for it; trying to avoid penalties even though she sets them; reappointed even after breaking the ministerial code; and criticising Home Office policies even though she is in charge of them and is failing on knife crime, on channel crossings, on immigration and more. The Prime Minister is clearly too weak to sort this out. If the Home Secretary cannot get a grip of her own rule-breaking behaviour, how can she get a grip on anything else?

Suella Braverman: I have some gentle advice for the right hon. Lady. The person who needs to get a grip here is the shadow Home Secretary and the Labour party, as they have wholly failed to represent the priorities of the British people. When, Mr Speaker, will the Labour party apologise for campaigning to block the deportation of foreign national offenders? When, Mr Speaker, will the Labour party apologise for leaving this country with a lower number of police officers—

Mr Speaker: Order. May I just say that I have no responsibility for the Labour party?

T4. [905062] **Chris Loder** (West Dorset) (Con): My right hon. Friend the Minister for Immigration will know that Portland port, although in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax), is very close to the constituency border of West Dorset. My constituents in Chickerell and wider West Dorset are becoming increasingly concerned about the absence of information on the risk assessment and on the additional resources that will be made available to Dorset Council and Dorset police. Has he any further information that he can share with the House today?

Robert Jenrick: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the manner in which he has defended his constituents on this difficult issue. Although housing asylum seekers in more rudimentary accommodation such as barges is undoubtedly in the national interest, we are acutely aware of the challenges faced by the local communities in which they will be moored. That is why we are working closely with Dorset Council, with the hon. Gentleman and with my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax).

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): My heart and the hearts of all those on the SNP Benches go out to those affected on the anniversary of the Manchester Arena tragedy, particularly the family and friends of Eilidh Macleod whose memorial trust stands as a legacy to her love of music.

Speeding can affect a person's eligibility for leave to remain in the UK, so should not the same motoring offence and, indeed, the further breaches of the ministerial code by attempting to get special treatment affect the Home Secretary's right to remain in her job?

Suella Braverman: As I said earlier, in the summer I was speeding. I regret that I was speeding. I accepted the points and I paid the fine. At no point did I seek to avoid the sanction. What I find regrettable, however, is the SNP's wholesale failure to deliver for asylum seekers,

to deliver for justice and to deliver for vulnerable people. Its Members are opposing our Bill to stop the boats, they are opposing support to break the people smuggling gangs and they are opposing a pragmatic approach.

T5. [905063] **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Will the Home Office ensure that the contracts for the use as asylum hotels of the Rothwell House Hotel and the Royal Hotel Kettering are terminated as soon as possible?

Robert Jenrick: I know how strongly my hon. Friend feels about this issue. I will of course look into those contracts, but the enduring solution to this issue is to stop the boats in the first place. That is why we brought forward the Illegal Migration Bill.

T3. [905061] **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Members of Turning Point UK have protested three times in my constituency in recent months, attempting without success to spread hatred and division in our community. Does the Home Secretary have any concerns about this organisation and how it receives its funding?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Miss Sarah Dines): I thank the hon. Member for her question. Full details should be coming to us to look into that. However, the Government take hate crime of any sort extremely seriously, which is why we have done basic policing and increased the number of police officers to more than ever before—over 200,000.

T8. [905066] **Gareth Johnson** (Dartford) (Con): The right to protest is a fundamental right in this country, but that right does not extend to deliberately blocking roads and stopping people going about their daily lives. Therefore, will the Minister support the police if they choose to use their full range of powers to stop those who abuse the right to protest?

The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp): I completely agree with my hon. Friend. The right to protest emphatically does not extend to trying to ruin or disrupt the lives of fellow citizens who are trying to get to hospital for treatment, to get their children to school or to get to their place of work. That is why this House recently legislated with the Public Order Act 2023. It is a great shame that the Opposition voted against it. This Government stand on the side of law-abiding citizens, and we fully support the police in using those powers.

T6. [905064] **Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi** (Slough) (Lab): The more the Home Secretary tries to evade the question, the more the British public will conclude that something underhand and fishy is going on. Will she answer a simple question? Did the Home Secretary ask civil servants to arrange a private speed awareness course?

Suella Braverman: As I have made clear, last summer I was speeding, and I regret that I was speeding. I was notified of the matter, I paid the fine and I took the points. At no point did anything untoward happen and at no point did I try to avoid the sanction.

T9. [905067] **Rob Butler** (Aylesbury) (Con): Antisocial behaviour is a blight on the lives of too many of my constituents, and their frustration is often exacerbated because it is not always clear whether it is the local council

or the police who can resolve their problem, despite the best intentions of both to help. How can my right hon. Friend ensure that people are not passed from pillar to post, and that when they make complaints about bad behaviour it is tackled swiftly?

Chris Philp: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. The Government recently published our antisocial behaviour action plan. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and her colleague the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities are jointly chairing a taskforce to ensure that action is taken. We are setting up a number of hotspot patrols around the country to ensure that the blight of antisocial behaviour is heavily policed against and that, where it occurs, it is dealt with quickly and thoroughly and no one is left behind.

T7. [905065] **Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): If the Home Secretary insists on exempting private landlords from minimum housing standards for asylum seekers, local councils and fire authorities will not be able to enforce basic safety and overcrowding standards. Does that not mean that the worst landlords, instead of improving their properties, will make a fortune from Government funding while exploiting vulnerable families and young children who are waiting years for a decision on their asylum application?

Robert Jenrick: I can assure the hon. Lady that our intention is that there will be no diminution in accommodation standards, whether for asylum seekers or anybody else, but it is critical that we get those people out of hotels, saving the taxpayer hundreds of millions of pounds per year, and house them in the most appropriate forms of accommodation.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con): My constituents are rightly appalled by the organised nature of so much immigration crime. Can my right hon. and learned Friend set out what work is being done to tackle those organised groups' operations at source, and what impact that is having in reducing the numbers of arrivals of illegal immigrants?

Suella Braverman: Part of our plan to stop the boats focuses on causal factors such as serious organised immigration crime gangs, which are networked and highly resourced. We have had some success in arresting hundreds of people involved in those gangs and disabling several such gangs, but we are employing more resource in our National Crime Agency and increasing the numbers of officers working with the French so that we can clamp down on the problem at cause.

T10. [905068] **Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): In her previous resignation letter, the current Home Secretary wrote:

"Pretending we haven't made mistakes, carrying on as if everyone can't see that we have made them, and hoping that things will magically come right is not serious politics."

Was she right? Has she made a mistake? Will she accept responsibility? Will she resign?

Suella Braverman: As I said earlier, in the summer of last year I was speeding. I regret that I was speeding. I paid the penalty and I accepted the points. At no time did I seek to avoid any sanction or consequence.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Given the 56% rise in transphobic hate crime between 2021 and 2022, are the Government concerned, and what strategies will they put in place to get that horrifying number down?

Miss Dines: Transphobic crimes are hateful and, although people do not realise it, they represent as much as 3% of all hate crimes recorded. The Government are determined to stamp it out, which is why we are funding groups such

as True Vision that are working hard in this area—I know my hon. Friend is working hard too—and funding initiatives such as the national online hate crime hub, an essential capability designed to allow individuals to have specialist intervention and work. We are also working on education, with £3 million of funding going to five anti-bullying organisations between August 2021 and March 2024. It is only with better education and the work of my hon. Friend that we will make progress in this area.

G7 Summit

3.34 pm

The Prime Minister (Rishi Sunak): The whole House will join me in remembering the victims of the horrific Manchester Arena bombing six years ago today. Our thoughts are with them and their families. Our thoughts are also with the family of Lee Rigby on the 10th anniversary of his murder, and I pay tribute to his son Jack, who is honouring his father's memory by raising money for other bereaved military children. As Jack's mum says, Lee would be very proud.

I have just returned from the G7 summit in Japan, where I was humbled to be the first Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to visit Hiroshima. On behalf of this House and the British people, I recorded our great sorrow at the destruction and human suffering that occurred there, and our fervent resolve that it should never again be necessary to use nuclear weapons.

As I report to the House on the G7 Summit, I want to address head-on a mistaken view that is heard too often: the idea that Britain is somehow in retreat from the world stage, or that our influence is in decline. I reject that utterly. What we have seen in recent months is this Conservative Government delivering the priorities of the British people, and bringing our global influence to bear on some of the world's biggest challenges. Nowhere is that clearer than on Ukraine.

It was a pleasure and a privilege to welcome my friend President Zelensky back to the UK last week. His attendance at the G7 summit was a historic moment. When Putin launched his war, he gambled that our resolve would falter, but he was wrong then, and he is wrong now. Russia's military is failing on the battlefield; its economy is failing at home, as we tighten the stranglehold of sanctions; and the image of the G7 leaders standing shoulder to shoulder with President Zelensky in Hiroshima sent a powerful message to the world: we will stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes.

Of course, we have seen a huge collective effort across our allies, and not least from the United States, but I am incredibly proud of our role at the forefront of international support for Ukraine. We were the first country in the world to train Ukrainian troops; the first in Europe to provide lethal weapons; the first to commit tanks; and, just this month, the first to provide long-range weapons. Now we are at the forefront of a coalition to train and equip the Ukrainian air force. We gave £2.3 billion in military aid last year—that is second only to the United States—and will match or exceed that this year. Putin should know that we are not going anywhere. We know that Ukraine will not only win the war, but can and will win a just and lasting peace, based on respect for international law, the principles of the UN charter, and territorial integrity and sovereignty.

We bring the same resolve to the biggest challenge to the long-term security and prosperity of our age: China. As the G7 showed, the UK's response is completely aligned with that of our allies. We are working with others to strengthen our defence ties across the Indo-Pacific; diversify our supply chains in areas such as critical minerals and semiconductors; and prevent China from using economic coercion to interfere with the sovereignty of others—concrete actions, not rhetoric.

Our economic security is not just about managing the risks of China. We are taking advantage of our post-Brexit freedoms with a hugely ambitious trade policy. We have concluded negotiations on the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership—a trade deal with the world's fastest growing region. We have signed critical minerals partnerships with Canada and Australia, and a semiconductor partnership with Japan. The Windsor framework secures the free flow of trade within our UK internal market, and on Friday, we announced almost £18 billion of new investment into the UK from Japanese businesses. That is a huge vote of confidence in the United Kingdom, creating significant numbers of good, well-paid jobs, and helping to grow the economy.

And we are acting globally to tackle illegal migration. It is the British Government who will determine who comes to Britain. We must stop the boats and break the business model of the criminal gangs. To do that, we are deepening international co-operation to tackle illegal migration, through new deals with Albania, France and, starting just at last week's Council of Europe, with the EU border force, too. At this weekend's summit, we have secured agreement that we will increase G7 co-operation. So our foreign policy is clearly delivering for the British people. By strengthening our relationships with old friends and new, from the Indo-Pacific to Washington to Europe, we are delivering a diplomatic dividend for the UK.

That is not all. We have announced billions more for our defence—the largest contributor in Europe to NATO. We have signed an historic agreement to design and build the AUKUS submarine, giving the UK, Australia and the US interoperable submarine fleets in the Atlantic and the Pacific. We have launched a new programme to build the fighter jets of the future with Italy and Japan. We have announced that in 2025, the carrier strike group will return to the Indo-Pacific once more, and in Sudan, the British military completed the largest evacuation of any country. If anyone thinks the UK is no longer able to wield hard power in defence of our values, just ask the Ukrainian soldiers driving British tanks or firing our long-range missiles.

All that is how we will prosper at home and defend our values abroad. That is how our foreign policy is delivering for the British people, and that is why, on the world stage, Britain is forging ahead—confident, proud and free. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Speaker: I call the Leader of the Opposition.

3.41 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for advance sight of his statement, and I join him in his comments in remembering the victims of the Manchester Arena bombing and in marking the awful murder of Lee Rigby.

The war in Ukraine is entering a critical stage. Freedom must win out over tyranny, and Putin's aggression must fail. As the Ukrainians continue to defend themselves and prepare for an offensive to push Putin's forces out, it is crucial that they know the nations of the G7 continue to support their fight without waver. We will stand with them for as long as it takes. We will stand with them because their decisive victory is the route to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.

Therefore, Labour welcomes the strong show of support for President Zelensky. We welcome the decision by our partners on F-16 fighter jets. We also welcome restrictions on exports that aid the Russian war machine, and we welcome the tightening of the vice on the mineral trade that is funding Putin's aggression. I urge the Prime Minister to proscribe the Wagner Group as terrorists and to ensure Britain's sanctions are not just in place, but enforced. No one has been fined for breaching sanctions since the war began.

As I told President Zelensky when I met him in Kyiv, whichever party is in power in the UK, there will be no let-up in Britain's resolve. We will continue to support Ukraine's military and its people in their quest for freedom, peace and justice. When their moment of victory comes, we will be there to help them rebuild from the rubble of war. Does the Prime Minister agree with me that, when it comes to Ukraine, it is important that we continue to show that we are united across this House?

I also welcome the commitment to de-risk our economic relationship with China. It is in our national interest to engage with China. It will be a crucial global partner in the effort to reach net zero, and we have a trading relationship worth £100 billion. But that pursuit should never come at the cost of economic security, and we should never leave ourselves vulnerable to economic coercion. We must be clear-eyed about the facts. China is increasingly aggressive in the Pacific. It shows disdain for democratic values and human rights, and it is seeking to exploit economic leverage. A decade of ignoring these facts and Tory Governments cosying up to Beijing has gifted the Chinese Communist party a stake in Britain's key infrastructure. We need to change tack and Labour is willing to work with the Government on this. It is time for a full audit of UK-China relations, and to work more consistently with our allies to develop a long-term plan for western engagement and a long-term plan for economic security because—as this winter has shown us—in the modern world, economic security is national security.

As the world races to invest in new technologies and to make its supply chains more robust, we must make sure that British businesses can take advantage. The Prime Minister has rightly pointed out the importance of the semiconductor industry: semiconductors are the brains of our electronic devices, indispensable components of cutting-edge manufacturing. The US and the EU have big plans to grow and nurture their sectors, to remove any vulnerabilities from their supply chains. We have waited a long time for the UK to present its strategy—it finally arrived last week—and an industry leader described it as “frankly flaccid”. Does that worry the Prime Minister as much as it worries me?

While others build resilience and seize opportunities, this Government seem content with managed decline, and this is not the only area where I fear we are being left behind. The US and the EU used the G7 to continue important talks that would allow European companies to share in billions of dollars of US tax incentives for electric vehicles and green technologies, and vice versa. Last week, we saw warnings about the future of the UK car industry. People who work in the sector are very worried. They want leadership, so can the Prime Minister confirm that his Government will secure the same or better access for British manufacturers, and when can we expect to hear progress on this?

When the Inflation Reduction Act was passed, the Government's response was not to outline what opportunities it offered to Britain; it was to say that it was “dangerous”, and to suggest that an active industrial strategy is not the British way. Wake up—it is not the 1980s anymore. A race is on. We need to be in it and we need to win our share of the jobs of the future. We cannot afford to be stuck in the changing rooms complaining about how unfair life is.

As the war in Europe continues to rage, Hiroshima was a fitting stage for the G7 summit. A city that has seen unimaginable horrors has risen from its past. It can serve as an inspiration for those in Ukraine who fight daily for their freedom. Their future can be bright. From Ukraine to China to climate change, today's challenges are big, but if we stay united with our allies and partners—if we work together—they are not insurmountable and, if we are focused, if we have a plan, the economic opportunities of the future are bigger still. Britain must seize them with both hands. Our future can be bright too.

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his comments at the beginning with regard to Ukraine. Just with regard to the Wagner Group, we have already sanctioned the Wagner Group in its entirety and we do not as a routine matter comment on proscriptions, as he well knows.

With regard to sanctions, in April, we announced new sanctions targeting those who were aiding and abetting the evasion of sanctions on Russian oligarchs and, in the integrated review refresh, we announced £50 million over the next few years for a new economic deterrence initiative that will work on sanctions enforcement and compliance in co-operation with our allies.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked about clarifying our approach to China. That was done in the integrated review refresh—he may have missed it. It was spelt out clearly, and indeed was warmly welcomed, not just by foreign policy commentators in the UK but around the world. It has been mentioned to me specifically by leaders and statesmen from many different countries as a template that they have followed in their own national security strategies.

With regard to co-operation with our allies, again, that is something that is already happening and we are leading the way. The right hon. and learned Gentleman may have missed that the G7 communiqué launched a co-operation platform on economic coercion, something that we spoke about in our integrated review refresh and has now been brought to fruition. That will not just be co-operation of G7 allies: over time, it will be broadened to ensure that we are working together to combat countries when they attempt to coerce other countries economically.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman made various points on climate change and the G7's record. What he failed to mention is that, out of all the G7 countries, the country that has the best record on reducing climate emissions is the United Kingdom. It is very welcome that other countries are catching up with our record on climate change. We applaud them, and it is something we have fought hard for them to do, so it is great that they are now doing it.

I will not mention the right hon. and learned Gentleman's other points, other than to say that we have a different point of view. We do not believe that the way to drive

[The Prime Minister]

economic success and prosperity is to subsidise the most. That is not the route that will lead to the best outcomes and that was something that the G7 itself acknowledged. I again point him to the language in the communiqué that particularly warned against subsidy races, pointing out that they were a zero-sum game when they come at the expense of others. Actually, we should be working co-operatively, as we are. Lastly, for all his negative talk, the proof is in the simple fact that on Friday we announced £18 billion of new investment in the UK economy from a range of leading Japanese businesses. They have enormous faith and confidence in the United Kingdom—why doesn't he?

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

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): I applaud the Prime Minister's recognition that the Chinese Communist party is the greatest threat we face and that we must de-risk to keep our people safe. We will engage when in the global interest, but we cannot allow the Chinese Communist party to cast defence as escalation. Can I urge my right hon. Friend to consider three tests when it comes to de-risking? The first is transnational oppression. We must be strong at home if we wish to deter abroad. The second is techno-authoritarianism. We must prevent reliance on CCP technology that is stealing our data and will undermine us. Finally, we must uphold the international rules-based system, because the CCP is trying to undermine and capture it. Can I also urge the creation of an economic Ramstein on Ukraine that mirrors that of the military, because we have failed to suffocate the financial war machine that is allowing Putin to continue with this war? The Prime Minister can lead that with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. It would make a meaningful difference and end this war sooner.

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for her questions and for her work on these issues in particular. With regard to her latter question, at the G7, we announced more sanctions particularly targeting the military-industrial complex of Russia's war machine. I think that will go some way to addressing her concerns and her point, but there is of course more to do and we look forward to engaging with her on that. With regard to China, her points are all well made. I look forward to discussing with her how we can strengthen the new anti-coercion platform that we have established—I know she has talked about that in the past—where we, working with other countries, can make an enormous difference to more vulnerable nations' ability to stand up to economic coercion, whether from China or other hostile states.

Mr Speaker: I call the leader of the Scottish National party.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): I begin by echoing the sentiments of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in relation to the Manchester bombing and the appalling death of Lee Rigby so many years ago.

The symbolic importance of the G7 summit taking place in Hiroshima goes without question, as does the importance of the presence of President Zelensky in Japan. It also goes without saying that Ukraine's war

and its fight for democracy is our fight, too, and all of us on these Benches and across the House are fully united in our support for the President and the people of Ukraine. In order for Ukraine to be successful, we need unity among all those nations that believe in peace. In that regard, can I ask the Prime Minister whether he had any conversations with those nations that still at this moment in time are importing crude oil from Russia, and whether he expressed any concern about other nations that may be benefiting from products that have been derived from that crude oil?

We did hear strong words from the G7 on the situation with China. However, I am intrigued by the Instagram intervention of the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss). I would be grateful for the current Prime Minister's view in respect to whether that was helpful, whether he agrees with her that China poses a strategic threat to the UK and whether he would echo those sentiments.

On the economy, it would be remiss of me not to reflect on the fact that the UK has the lowest growth in the entire G7. Our economy is still below pre-pandemic levels. In contrast, the United States has seen its economy grow by around 5.3% in the intervening time. Did the Prime Minister take any lessons from those allies in Japan about how to secure proper economic growth?

The Prime Minister: On China, our approach is laid out in detail in the integrated review refresh. I reiterated it yesterday and will not go over it again, but China, as I said, represents a systemic challenge. It is the greatest challenge we face. In fact, I said it is an "epoch-defining challenge", given its ability and intent to reshape the world order. Its behaviour is increasingly authoritarian at home and assertive abroad, which is why we should be robust in defending and protecting ourselves against that.

On sanctions, we are working in tandem with the European Union and the US to intensify diplomatic engagement with third-country partners to highlight potential circumvention risks on sanctions and we will continue to do so.

More generally on the question of peace and discussion with partner countries, it was excellent to have a discussion on Ukraine and peace with partner countries outside the G7—I think it was perhaps one of the most meaningful sessions of the summit—where countries agreed to the principles of a just and lasting peace being based on the UN charter and, indeed, on the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty. That is very welcome because, while many people may have ideas for what peace in Ukraine looks like, a ceasefire is not a just and durable peace and we will keep ensuring that the peace Ukraine has is one that it deserves and is truly just and lasting.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): Could I welcome this statement and the work of the Prime Minister at the G7? We are rightly rekindling those international statecraft skills, as we see in Ukraine, going from NLAWs—next-generation light anti-tank weapons—to main battle tanks, training on Salisbury plain, the Storm Shadows and, of course, helping secure those F-16s; and on China, with more robust language as we deal with China's aggression. But of course, as we rightly step forward, that will place an ever greater burden on our armed forces. I think he knows where

I am going with this: could I ask him when we are likely to see an increase in the defence budget to 2.5% of GDP?

The Prime Minister: I know my right hon. Friend has long championed this, and rightly so, which is why I was pleased, as Chancellor, to increase our defence budget by £24 billion—the largest sustained increase since the end of the cold war. Just recently, the Chancellor added an initial £5 billion of spending over the next two years both to strengthen our nuclear enterprise and to rebuild stockpiles, which is something I know he has been interested in, and we outlined an ambition to increase defence spending to 2.5%. We are on track to get to 2.25% in the next couple of years, at which point we will take stock and see where we are economically and fiscally but, as I have said, the threats our country faces are increasing and it is right that we invest appropriately to protect ourselves.

Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): Can I join the Prime Minister in paying tribute to the victims of the Manchester Arena bombing and the family of Fusilier Lee Rigby?

I welcome the Prime Minister's update. He is right that the UK and our allies must be steadfast in our support for Ukraine. He was also right to announce new sanctions on Friday to further restrict Russian businesses from selling their products into the UK. Now we must take further action to support Ukraine. That includes encouraging individuals in this country who have directly invested in companies still active in Russia to sell their personal shares now. Does the Prime Minister agree that these people should end their investment, so they stop supporting the Russian economy and thereby Putin's war efforts?

The Prime Minister: We were one of the first countries to put in place an incredibly comprehensive sanctions regime against Russia. We have sanctioned, at this point, over 1,500 people—tens of billions of dollars of assets. Indeed, because of our actions, something like over \$200 billion-worth of Russian state assets are currently now frozen. All that is contributing to a significant squeezing of the Russian economy, as we are seeing, and its ability to replenish its war machine, and we will keep looking for other opportunities to tighten the vice, as we did this weekend.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): If, against all original expectations, Ukraine succeeds in expelling Russia from her territory, will the time then have come for us seriously to consider admitting Ukraine to NATO, so that no future psychopathic Russian leader will ever be tempted to invade her again?

The Prime Minister: As the NATO Secretary-General has already said, Ukraine will become a member of NATO. The most immediate task that faces us is, as my right hon. Friend knows, to provide the support that Ukraine needs to be successful on the battlefield, and to provide the longer term security agreements and arrangements that Ukraine deserves, and to do that in a way that is multilateral—that is something I discussed with leaders across the G7. In doing so we will send a strong signal to Russia that we are not going anywhere, increase the long term deterrent effect, and strengthen the incentive for it to withdraw its troops now, and not attempt to wait anybody out.

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): Many people in Newport West have been eagerly waiting for the Government's semiconductor strategy, including 600 hardworking employees at Newport Wafer Fab. After three years of waiting, rather than coming to this House, the Prime Minister made the announcement in Japan on Friday last week, avoiding parliamentary scrutiny yet again. That is unacceptable in my view. How can we expect effective research and development to be carried out within the semiconductor industry, as trumpeted by the strategy, without well-funded domestic manufacturing capacity?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady may have missed the £1 billion of investment in the UK semiconductor industry contained in the strategy, and the fact that it was welcomed by leading companies from the sector. It has taken the right amount of time to get the strategy together, because it is the right strategy for Britain. Every country has different strengths, and every country plays a different role in the supply chain. We are focused on what we do best, which is in compound semiconductors, as the hon. Lady will know well from south Wales, but also semiconductor design and intellectual property. Those are the strengths we are investing in, which give us leverage in a large global supply chain. That is why the strategy was warmly welcomed, and is the right strategy to strengthen our security.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Among many other achievements this weekend, may I thank the Prime Minister for ensuring that education did not drop off the global agenda, and that the communiqué reaffirms the G7's commitment to global education? It is an issue that we in the UK have led on for many years. More than 200 million children in the world right now are in need of urgent educational support, and that has been made worse by conflict and climate change. May I urge my right hon. Friend to continue to encourage our friends, particularly France and Japan, to contribute to Education Cannot Wait?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for all her work in this area previously. She will be proud, as I am, that the Foreign Secretary launched the women and girls strategy in March, and one particular thing in that was to continue putting women and girls at the heart of everything to do with education. UK aid has supported 8 million girls to gain a decent education, which is part of our pledge to enable all girls to have access to 12 years of high quality education. That is something we will continue to champion in all international fora.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): I declare an interest as chair of the international Parliamentary Network on the World Bank & International Monetary Fund. I also welcome the commitment in paragraph 10 of the G7 communiqué to enhance development finance, tackle the imminent debt crisis, tackle climate change, and advance progress towards the sustainable development goals. Would that be an awful lot easier if the UK stepped up and met the African Development Bank's calls for hybrid capital, matched Japan's commitment to share 40% of the new special drawing rights, and used the €3.5 billion that we get back from the European Investment Bank to help build a bigger World Bank? At a stroke, that would help to restore the global leadership and development that we have so needlessly and dangerously squandered.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman failed to mention that we are currently the third largest spender in the G7 on development aid as a percentage of GDP, and one of the largest contributors to funds such as the Global Fund and the multilateral institutions that he names. We have everything to be proud of. When it comes to reform, as we discussed at the G7—I began this work as Chancellor—we are pushing for reform of the multilateral development banks, so that we can stretch their balance sheets. We are also pioneering the work of using climate resilient debt clauses in our bilateral lending—that was a specific ask from the development finance community that we are taking forward. Indeed, as Chancellor I put in place the common framework for debt relief—something the right hon. Gentleman will be familiar with—and we are now working hard to deliver the benefits of that to countries. I think when I announced it we were the first country to announce that we would recycle our SDRs, and that is making an enormous difference. Every country contributes in different ways, but we should be very proud of our record.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on putting Ukraine front and centre at the G7 summit. Will he make it clear that that is not just because we believe it is morally right to support Ukraine in her own self-defence, but is because the successful outcome of the war in Ukraine is intrinsically tied up with our own strategic and national interest, and that of the whole western world, upon which our own security and prosperity depend?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend put it well; I agree with every word he said. I would go slightly further. Ultimately, what are we fighting for? We are fighting for the values that we believe in of democracy, freedom and the rule of law. The only thing that I disagree with him on is that while he said the western world, actually what has been striking and welcome in the conflict has been the support of countries such as Japan. I paid enormous tribute to Prime Minister Kishida in Hiroshima for that leadership, because it has rightly recognised, as have other countries and allies such as Australia, that our security is indivisible. Whether in the Pacific or the Atlantic, the values that we all hold dear are universal, and we should all work together and fight hard to defend them.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): The semiconductor partnership with Japan is very welcome indeed, but although the Prime Minister mentioned domestic investments to the hon. Member for Newport West (Ruth Jones) a moment ago, I understand that that £1 billion is focused entirely on research. Is he similarly committed to manufacturing—at Newport, for example—or is he happy to leave that to Taiwan, the United States and, of course, the European Union?

The Prime Minister: What we are focused on is growing our semiconductor industry and making sure that we are resilient against future shocks. There are lots of different ways to do that. Indeed, we just signed a new semiconductor deal with Japan, as the hon. Member acknowledged, and we will continue to find opportunities to do that with others, but the idea that we can insource a global manufacturing supply chain in the UK is simply not right. We should focus on our strengths. We will support manufacturing where it makes sense. In

compound manufacturing in particular, the capital intensity is far less than in more basic fabs and chips, so we have a strategy that works for the UK's strength, and particularly works for south Wales, and I am confident that it will be successful.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): The Prime Minister rightly mentioned illegal migration—it would be good to hear what the G7 is proposing to deal with it, particularly in terms of co-operation by our French allies—but the truth is that legal migration dwarfs anything from illegal migration. In the last 20 years, the population of the UK has increased by 8 million, of which 7 million is legal migrants. What will he do to back up the Home Office in making serious efforts to stop legal migration, which is changing the country forever, which is totally unsustainable and which we have promised to deal with again and again?

The Prime Minister: As my right hon. Friend can probably imagine, that was not a topic of conversation around the table in Hiroshima, but I and the Government are committed to bringing down the levels of legal migration. With regard to illegal migration, co-operation with allies is yielding tangible benefits for the UK. He talked about France; the new deal with France strengthens physical co-operation with French forces on the ground. It also strengthens co-operation and intelligence sharing. At the Council of Europe last week, we opened up conversations to work more closely with Frontex, the EU's border agency. Italy will ensure that illegal migration is a specific topic that is mentioned, discussed and worked on at next year's G7 summit under its presidency, and I will continue to raise it at all the international fora where I am present.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): As the Prime Minister mentioned, President Zelensky attended the G7 summit. One thing that I understand is important to him is that Ukrainian culture has an audience across the world, yet there are concerns that musicians from the Ukrainian Freedom Orchestra and the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine will not be able to tour the UK later this year because of the heavy financial and administrative burden of obtaining UK visas. The Prime Minister will understand that funding visa fees and travelling to obtain visas is so much more difficult for musicians in war-torn Ukraine. Last year, the Home Office agreed to waive visa fees and expedite the visa process to allow Ukrainian musicians to perform here. Does he agree that Ukrainian musicians still deserve that support? Will he ask the Home Secretary to ensure that we offer that support as we stand with Ukraine?

The Prime Minister: With regard to Ukrainian culture in particular, it was a great pleasure for us to host Eurovision on Ukraine's behalf, which was a fantastic success and was warmly welcomed by the Ukrainian Government and President Zelensky. I am happy to look into the matter that the hon. Member raises, but as she will understand, our overwhelming priority right now is to support Ukraine to ensure that its counter-offensive is successful. That will occupy the bulk of our attention.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con): Clearly, the move towards onshoring or nearshoring key strategic products is sensible—we saw why that is so necessary

during the pandemic and with other issues—yet there seems to be a tendency across the developed world for the natural, logical, strategic need to nearshore key products to turn into protectionism. What discussions took place about that at the G7, and what can my right hon. Friend do to ensure that we do not revert to a protectionist world and abandon the benefits of free trade?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend makes an excellent point, and he can rest assured that I raised exactly that point with my colleagues in Hiroshima. He will be pleased, as I was, that there is language in the G7 communiqué that commits all G7 countries not to act at each other's expense, and not to do so in a way that amounts to zero-sum competition, but he is absolutely right to identify the risk. Other countries acknowledge it, which is why the G7 communiqué is strong on this point. Going forward, we will see much greater co-operation between allies, so that we do not engage in protectionism, which is not something that will drive prosperity and growth in any of our countries.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): May I welcome what the Prime Minister said about China, particularly his intention to diversify our supply chains in areas such as critical minerals? The Prime Minister knows that China probably mines around 70% of all rare earth minerals and produces around 90% of all processed rare earth minerals globally. What investments is he planning to support to ensure capacity anywhere in the world to stop companies in the UK and elsewhere being required to buy from China?

The Prime Minister: We are strengthening investment here at home and increasingly playing our part in the critical minerals recycling chain. Recycling in particular, which is a key part of how we can ensure long-term sustainability, is an area where there is an enormous growth opportunity in the UK, and we are investing directly in that. As the right hon. Member will know, we have just signed critical minerals agreements with Japan and Australia, with more to come, as I continue conversations with other leaders. In particular, our new economic coercion unit, which is being established, will work to ensure that China cannot exert undue influence on countries that possess critical minerals, to ensure that they can trade those minerals freely and fairly.

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): I should declare that I have the honour to be the Prime Minister's trade envoy to Japan. Next week marks the 30th anniversary of the opening, by the then Prince Charles, of Toyota's manufacturing plant in Derbyshire. It has been a tremendous asset for both our countries. Does the Prime Minister agree that in a turbulent world—one in which, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) says, protectionism is on the rise—our two countries, Japan and the UK, are more like-minded than ever, and even more than at that time? Will the Prime Minister commit to work closely with Japan to manufacture the next generation of cars, as well as new technologies, from offshore wind to satellites and AI?

The Prime Minister: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his appointment; I know he will do a superb job, and I agree with him. As the recent Hiroshima accords say, the relationship between the UK and Japan

is the strongest that it has ever been across all areas. Whether on scientific collaboration, trade and economic growth, or indeed security, the partnership is strong, and the recent accords that we have signed will take it to even greater depth and levels of co-operation.

On the issue of auto manufacturing, I was pleased to meet the president of Nissan while I was in Tokyo, who had also recently met the Chancellor. As my right hon. Friend can see from the announcements, there is confidence in the UK economy, and we will continue to work closely with Japanese automakers to ensure that there is investment in the UK and that we can make the next generation of electric vehicles here.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The Prime Minister did finally mention climate change in his response to the Leader of the Opposition, but this G7 summit was a disaster for the climate, flying in the face of expert warnings that if we are serious about staying below 1.5 degrees, there can be no new exploration of oil and gas. While the communiqué acknowledged the new fund for loss and damage, it failed to deliver any new funding for it. Oxfam has estimated that the G7 countries owe the global south a staggering \$8.7 trillion for the harm already caused by their excessive carbon emissions. Will the Prime Minister now lead the way on that fund, and commit to new and additional funding specifically for loss and damage in advance of the COP28 summit?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady obviously missed the fact that this was the first G7 commitment to stop building new coal plants. It was the first G7 collective renewable energy target, and it confirmed that the developed countries would meet their commitment to provide \$100 billion in climate finance per annum—something that has been warmly welcomed. Again, I point her to what I said to the Leader of the Opposition. She failed to point out that of all the G7 countries, we have the best record on reducing climate emissions.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): As the Prime Minister knows, it is Putin's wish and Ukraine's fear that the conflict goes long and battle fatigue sets in. My right hon. Friend has been clear—as has the Leader of the Opposition—that we will give that long-term support, but what was his assessment of his colleagues whom he met at the G7, particularly from countries such as India, which have not always shown full commitment to the struggle in Ukraine?

The Prime Minister: As I pointed out earlier, the session with partner countries that were invited, including India, Brazil, Australia and others, was very good in confirming support for a just and durable peace in Ukraine. On my hon. Friend's first point, he makes an excellent observation. That is why we have been working hard with other countries to put in place bilateral and multilateral long-term security arrangements.

I have long discussed that with President Zelensky and have spoken to other leaders, because my belief is that if we can put some long-term multilateral security arrangement in place as soon as possible, that will show President Putin that we are not going away and that there is no point trying to wait us out, because Ukraine will get long-term support to defend itself—not just last year, this year and next year but for years to come.

[The Prime Minister]

That is important for us to do, and my hon. Friend can rest assured that I will continue having those conversations and pushing that point with our allies, all the way in the run up to the Vilnius summit.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): The Government's No. 1 priority should be to strengthen the resilience of our economy so that we can stand more firmly on our own two feet in this dangerous and turbulent world. It was disappointing, therefore, that in the Prime Minister's statement he failed to make any reference to the central role that steel plays—a key industry that builds our economic and national security and resilience. Given China, the US and the EU Governments are investing hundreds of billions of pounds in their steel industries, can he set out what steps his Government are taking to ensure that we build this vital building block of our manufacturing base?

The Prime Minister: The Government are committed to supporting the UK steel industry. The hon. Gentleman knows full well that I cannot comment on discussions of a commercially sensitive nature with particular companies, but he will know our track record. As Chancellor, during the pandemic I provided financial support to a steel company in south Wales because I believed it was the right thing to do. If he needs any evidence of our commitment to the steel industry, particularly in Wales, he does not need to look too far.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend on his stance on Ukraine and on a successful G7. He rightly mentioned the problem of mass immigration, particularly illegal immigration. Without doubt, one of the aggravating factors is the EU's open border policy. Was there any discussion to re-look at that?

The Prime Minister: There was no discussion at the G7, as he might expect, but illegal migration was discussed when I was at the Council of Europe last week. As my hon. Friend can see, we have started conversations with the EU about closer co-operation with the EU's border agency Frontex. We can work together upstream to share intelligence and make sure that we break the cycle of the criminal gangs. He can expect further conversation and co-operation in that vein because, ultimately, this is a shared challenge. Illegal migration was up 50% to 60% in the European continent last year, so we are not alone in facing this challenge. We will work with others to constructively solve it.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): The Wagner Group has already admitted to murdering 40 children and hundreds of adults sheltering in a basement in Bakhmut. Mere sanctions are not a strong enough message. What does that terrorist organisation have to do before the Prime Minister will take action to proscribe it?

The Prime Minister: We are ensuring that those who commit war crimes in Ukraine will be held accountable and brought to justice. That is why we took a leading role in supporting evidence gathering and providing both financial and technical legal support—we have recently provided more than £1 million for those efforts.

We very much welcome the recent announcement by the International Criminal Court to bring to justice those who have committed war crimes, particularly those against children, and we will continue to play a leading part in the coalition, ensuring that those who commit those crimes are brought to justice.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): The global environment faces more challenges than it has for many years, not least an existential threat to the rules-based international order and threats to the essence of our democratic values. Does the Prime Minister agree that the UK is uniquely placed to build the networks and relationships that are needed to stop those threats from becoming a reality?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are uniquely placed: our international engagement and diplomacy in the last few months has shown that we have strong relationships, not just in the United States but across Europe and increasingly in the Indo-Pacific as well. All those relationships are strengthening our security at home and abroad, and delivering real benefits for the British people.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): The Prime Minister mentioned the United Nations in the context of his remarks about Ukraine, and he will be aware that the United Nations has quite rightly condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Will he comment on the calls made by Secretary-General Guterres to attempt to negotiate a ceasefire, supported by President Ramaphosa and the Pope? What comment will he make about the statement made this morning by President Lula of Brazil? He is right that a ceasefire is not peace, but any peace process has to be started by a ceasefire, otherwise this war will go, and get worse and worse.

The Prime Minister: I could not disagree with the right hon. Gentleman more. A ceasefire is not a just and lasting peace for Ukraine. Russia has conducted an illegal and unprovoked invasion of another country. It has committed heinous war crimes. The right, and only, response to that is for Russia to withdraw its forces from Ukraine. All plans, masquerading as peace plans, that are in fact attempts just to freeze the conflict where it is, are absolutely wrong and they should be called out for exactly what they are.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the substantive and central role he played at the G7 summit and the important progress made in advancing the G7 agenda, which is of growing importance to our security and our economy? What is his assessment of how far India is now moving to share this agenda, not least in its relations with Russia?

The Prime Minister: As I said, the session with partner countries, including India and others, was positive in its conversation on Ukraine and on the principles of what a just and lasting peace would look like. Such a peace should be based on the principles of the UN charter and respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of countries. Those are principles that we believe in, and on which the United Nations was founded and peace in Ukraine should be brought about.

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): Did the Prime Minister have any success in convincing countries, such as India and Brazil, to take a stronger stance against Russia's invasion and partial occupation of Ukraine?

The Prime Minister: One benefit of President Zelensky attending the G7 summit was the ability for him to talk directly to those leaders, and he did so, particularly in that session but also in other conversations. It was a very powerful message that he could deliver in person. I hope that message will go around the world and people saw the symbolism that it represented. As we have seen, at the United Nations over 140 countries have condemned Russia, which remains largely isolated on the global stage, and we continue to bring others to the cause.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): The UK's key role in G7 Tokyo decisions highlights the fact that this Government are doing more on the world stage, not retreating from it, especially in the Indo-Pacific region and south-east Asia, where I have the honour to serve the Prime Minister as trade envoy. Does he agree that this is a good time, in the last year of the term of office of President Jokowi of Indonesia—the largest member state in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the current ASEAN chair—for both our countries to scope out the will and capacity for a wide-ranging bilateral free trade agreement?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for all the work he does to promote our trade in the region and strengthen our relationship with countries such as Indonesia. I discussed his missives in person with President Jokowi and we had a good conversation about how we can strengthen our trading relationship, not least through the JETCO, the Joint Economic and Trade Committee, which we already have and which we are looking forward to building on in future.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): If it is the Prime Minister's firm resolve that it should never again be necessary to use nuclear weapons, why is he spending billions of pounds on renewing Trident?

The Prime Minister: Look, of course on this issue we will disagree with the Scottish nationalist party, but we remain committed to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, to which we are a signatory along with 190 other countries. That offers us the best tool available to bring about eventual global disarmament, but it will have to be step by step and it will have to be a negotiated approach, because we have to recognise the escalating security threats that we face and the role that our nuclear deterrent plays in keeping us safe.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Qualcomm, Graphcore and Arm are among the major semiconductor manufacturers that welcomed the UK's semiconductor strategy. The Prime Minister is right to focus on where we are best and where we can play an outside role in this industry. At its heart, however, this is also about lessening our semiconductor dependence on Taiwan. Will the Prime Minister assure me and the House that that will not come with greater risk of seeing a decrease in relations between China and Taiwan?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments about the semiconductor strategy, which of course is an area on which he speaks with authority. Our long-standing policy on Taiwan has not changed. We have a clear interest in peace and stability in the Taiwan strait and will completely resist any unilateral attempts to change the status quo. We continue to have deep and growing ties, in a wide range of areas, with Taiwan, whether that is on economic, trade, cultural or educational matters.

Andrew Western (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): The Prime Minister spent time at the G7 dealing with reports that his Home Secretary may have breached the ministerial code. Will the Prime Minister take the opportunity to update the House on whether he has yet met his independent adviser and whether there will now be an investigation into whether the ministerial code has been broken, and to confirm that if the Home Secretary has breached the ministerial code she will be sacked?

The Prime Minister: Well, I can confirm that that was not a topic of conversation at the G7 summit, but in the interests of being generous: I have always been clear that where such issues are raised, they should be dealt with properly and professionally. Since I have returned from the G7, I have been receiving information on the issues raised, I have met both the independent adviser and the Home Secretary, I have asked for further information and I will give an update on the appropriate course of action in due course.

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): I very much welcome the £18 billion of new Japanese investment for the UK. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he will be working to ensure that as much as possible of that investment comes to businesses in Stoke-on-Trent, and that we can grow the number of skilled, well-paid jobs in Stoke-on-Trent?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is a fantastic champion for Stoke and his constituents. The great news about this investment is that it is coming in a range of industries, which means that all parts of the UK, I am confident, will benefit. Whether it is in auto manufacturing, clean energy or the industries of the future such as quantum and semiconductors, there are fantastic opportunities. Ultimately, that is why our international diplomacy is working; it is delivering concrete benefits and jobs for people here at home.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call Jonathan Edwards.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): Diolch, Madam Deputy Speaker. The sanctions strategy against Russia is being undermined by so-called leakage to other countries. For instance, Russian oil exports to India have reportedly increased substantially, a point that I suspect President Zelensky will have made to Prime Minister Modi during their discussions at the summit. Did the Prime Minister make similar points during his bilateral talks with Prime Minister Modi?

The Prime Minister: As I have said, the G7 allies are working in tandem to intensify diplomatic engagement with third-country partners to highlight potential sanction

[The Prime Minister]

circumvention risks. We also, as I have said, are investing £50 million in a new economic deterrence initiative, which will back up our own sanctions implementation and enforcement.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for leading discussions at the G7 in Hiroshima on countering and guarding against the national security threats that are coming from China. In that vein, will he consider blocking companies such as BGI that are harvesting genomic data—as they have done in the United States and in academia in Canada—from activities in this country?

The Prime Minister: Our new National Security and Investment Act 2021 gives us the powers to block hostile investment into sensitive sectors. My hon. Friend will know that we have used those powers to block Chinese investment in Newport Wafer Fab, for example. We obviously look at every transaction on a case-by-case basis, but we now have one of the most robust frameworks anywhere in the world for protecting our companies and our intellectual property from foreign interference and theft.

Richard Foord (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): Liberal Democrats welcome those parts of the Prime Minister's statement that relate to Ukraine, but I would like to take that a little further and ask him about Russian misinformation. President Biden said of the supply of F-16 fighter aircraft that he had received assurances that the fighter jets would not be used to

“go on and move into Russia”.

President Macron said something similar in relation to the supply of French weapons, but misinformation from the Kremlin abounds about NATO's intentions. Is the Prime Minister prepared, like the Presidents of the United States and France, to talk about how British long-range missiles will be limited to targets in Ukraine for the liberation of Ukraine?

The Prime Minister: The Defence Secretary has already made clarifications around our use of Storm Shadow, but we should all remember that Ukraine is engaged in self-defence. Indeed, NATO itself is a self-defence alliance. Ukraine has faced an illegal and unprovoked act of aggression and invasion from Russia and we should be able to give it all the means necessary to defend itself against those attacks.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Prime Minister very much for his statement and his support for Ukraine on behalf of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. He has clearly shown that his words become actions, and for that we thank him very much. I think that every one of us recognises a good deed there. I declare an interest as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on international freedom of religion or belief. I very much welcome the progress that has been reported by the Prime Minister on an essential trade deal, but I would also like to know whether he had an opportunity to raise the issue of freedom of religious belief with his counterparts, because an essential component of any trade deal must be the core value of human rights alongside religious freedom.

The Prime Minister: I know that the Foreign Secretary engages on this topic regularly with all our allies where it is relevant, and we will continue to do so, because we will stand up for freedom of expression and religious belief, not just in this country but in countries around the world.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the Prime Minister for his statement. We now come to the statement from the Home Secretary, but before I call her, I would like to remind hon. Members that they should not refer to any specific cases currently before the courts and that they should exercise caution with respect to any specific cases that might subsequently come before the courts, in order not to prejudice those proceedings.

Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse: Report

4.33 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman): With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the Government's response to the final report of the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse. The inquiry lasted seven years and its findings are harrowing, involving widespread child sexual abuse going back decades and shameful institutional failures in child protection. Each case represents an intensely personal story of the pain and suffering of a child enduring something that nobody should endure. I am so sorry that anyone has. The interests of victims and survivors are at the heart of the inquiry's report, and of the Government's response. I want to thank the more than 6,000 victims and survivors who bravely came forward to share their testimonies. I was humbled and moved when meeting several of them recently. Today is about ensuring their voices are heard and reflected in our work, so that future generations do not suffer as they did. I promise that their courage will count.

I pay tribute to the chair of the inquiry, Professor Alexis Jay, and her team for their fearless commitment to uncovering horrendous societal, professional and institutional failures, and for years of meticulous and diligent work. We must use this moment to bring this crime further out of the shadows, to provide proper support to all victims and survivors, and to deliver real and enduring change.

This Government have repeatedly shown our determination to stop the scourge of child sexual abuse. Just last month the Prime Minister and I announced new measures to tackle the evil of grooming gangs, but there is zero room for complacency and the inquiry's final report confronts us with a necessary moment for further reflection. It is more than a collection of recommendations; it is a call for fundamental cultural change, societal change, professional change and institutional change.

I am pleased to say that this Government have risen to the inquiry's challenge. We are accepting the need to act on 19 of the inquiry's 20 final recommendations. That includes driving work across Government to improve victims' experience of the criminal justice system, the criminal injuries compensation scheme, workforce regulation, access to records, consistent and compatible data, and communications on the scale and nature of child sexual abuse. The Government's response does not represent our final word on the inquiry's findings, but rather the start of a new chapter.

We will continue to engage with victims and survivors, with child protection organisations and with Professor Jay to ensure they retain sight of our work and confidence in our delivery. The full Government response will be published online at gov.uk. The Welsh Government have responded separately on matters relating to Wales alone.

I will now highlight our response to some of the most consequential recommendations. We need to stop perpetrators in their tracks, and we need better to protect and support the children they seek to prey upon. To do this we must address the systemic under-reporting

of child sexual abuse. As I announced in April, the Government accept the inquiry's recommendation to introduce a new mandatory reporting duty across England. Today, I am launching a call for evidence that will inform how this new duty can be best designed to prevent the continued abuse of children and ensure they get help as soon as possible.

The inquiry recommended a redress scheme for victims and survivors of historical child sexual abuse, which the Government also accept. Of course, nobody can ever fully compensate victims and survivors for the abuse they suffered, but what we can do is properly acknowledge their suffering and deliver justice and an appropriate form of redress. This is a landmark commitment. It will be complex and challenging, but it really matters. As the inquiry recommends, we will carefully consult victims and survivors; we will draw on lessons from other jurisdictions; and we will make sure we honour the inquiry's legacy as we design the scheme.

We accept that there is more we can do to ensure that those who have suffered get access to the provision they need to help them recover and rebuild their lives. We have already introduced the Victims and Prisoners Bill, which will ensure that the criminal justice system delivers on victims' entitlements. It will also introduce a new statutory duty on local partners to work together when commissioning support services for victims of sexual violence, but where we need to go further, we will. We will elicit views on the future of therapeutic support, including systemic changes to provision, through the extensive consultation we are undertaking on redress. It is right that we consider these things together so we can better deliver the support needed by child and adult victims and survivors of abuse.

The inquiry rightly demands proper leadership and governance of child protection. In response to the inquiry's recommendation for a new child protection authority, the Department for Education's implementation strategy "Stable Homes, Built on Love" has set out major reform to children's social care. Although taking a different form, we are confident that these reforms will fulfil the proposed functions of such a child protection agency and ensure a coherent response across all parts of the system to child sexual abuse. The Government will, however, closely monitor the delivery of our commitments through our newly established child protection ministerial group, inviting scrutiny from victims, survivors and other partners. We will keep this House and the other place regularly updated on our progress.

The inquiry makes two recommendations relating to the horrifying and growing threat of online child sexual abuse. The Government's Online Safety Bill will be a truly world-leading law that will make the UK the safest place to be online. The strongest measures in the Bill are reserved for child sexual abuse, leaving companies in no doubt about their duties to remove and report child sexual abuse material found on their platforms, and to use technologies such as age verification. Child sexual abuse is a global crime, which is why we continue to lead work with international partners to bring pressure to bear on the big tech companies, which must face up to their moral duty to protect children.

There is no greater evil than hurting a child. This landmark inquiry found that for far too long stopping child sexual abuse was seen as no one's responsibility. We must ensure that child abuse is brought out of

[Suella Braverman]

the shadows, we must make it everyone's responsibility, and we must give those who have suffered the confidence that their voices will be heard, their needs will be met and they will be protected. We owe a great debt of gratitude to the victims and survivors who came forward, to their families and to campaigners. Today is their moment, and it must be a watershed moment. I commend this statement to the House.

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

4.42 pm

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary for advance sight of her statement, and join her in paying tribute to the victims and survivors of this hideous crime. Many of those victims and survivors have been crucial to establishing the inquiry in the first place and have been involved, working hard to make sure that voices are heard. Their strength should be recognised and their calls to action must be heeded.

There is no more hideous crime than child sexual exploitation and abuse, a crime that preys on vulnerability and leave scars that are felt for the rest of a young person's life. The independent inquiry set up by the Home Secretary's predecessor, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), identified failings across a wide range of institutional settings, including local councils, the Anglican and Catholic Churches, and organised groups and networks. In each area, action is needed to make sure that abuse is tackled wherever it is found.

I welcome the Government's acceptance that there needs to be a redress scheme for victims and survivors of historical abuse. I ask the Home Secretary what the timetable and next steps will be on that, as that trauma can last a lifetime and is truly devastating for those who experience it.

May I also say to the Home Secretary that the rest of the statement is inadequate as a Government response to such a serious and weighty report? I am glad that she has accepted the need to act on 19 of the 20 recommendations, but that is not the same as accepting the recommendations or as setting out what action she is actually going to take. For example, the inquiry said that victims and survivors should receive

"a guarantee of specialist therapeutic support",

but all her statement says is:

"We will elicit views on the future of therapeutic support".

We know that that therapeutic support is inadequate and that there are lots of views already—the whole point of the inquiry was to gather those views and that evidence. On many of the recommendations, there is little detail. All that the Home Secretary has done is simply point to what the Government are doing already. I hope that there is more in the full report to which she refers, but there is far too little in the statement today to give us any confidence.

Labour called for mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse nearly a decade ago. The Government finally agreed to do it in April, but all the Home Secretary has done today is open a call for evidence. Well, there have already been many calls for evidence. In fact, the inquiry gathered lots of evidence. At best, she could have launched

her own call for evidence some time ago. Why is mandatory reporting not in the Victims and Prisoners Bill? That is our opportunity to make progress rapidly.

The Home Secretary's response to online sexual abuse is far too weak. She has referred to the Online Safety Bill—we know that that is long delayed and watered down—but this is not just about the legislation; it is also about the action that is taken. Since then, we have had an inspectorate report on online abuse that describes the police response to online child sexual abuse and exploitation as

"too often leaving vulnerable children at risk",

with examples of police taking up to 18 months to make an arrest after becoming aware that children were at risk of abuse. There was nothing on that in her statement. What action will she take on policing?

New evidence from the Internet Watch Foundation found that the number of web pages containing category A material has more than doubled since 2020—just in the past few years alone. Again, the response is wholly inadequate.

Charging rates have got worse and worse. Every year, approximately 500,000 children will be sexually abused, only one in five of whom is likely to report their abuse. Only 11% of the reported cases result in a charge, down from more than 30% in 2015. It has got so much worse over the past few years. That means that the overwhelming majority of child sexual abusers face no consequences—criminals are getting away with these terrible, terrible crimes. It has got even worse than the last time we discussed this topic in the House in October.

On child protection and the Disclosure and Barring Service, again, we have warned about gaps in the disclosure and barring system, and there are still problems with it. Only last year, we had unaccompanied asylum-seeking children being placed in hotels without properly trained DBS staff. What has the Home Secretary done since then even to reform child protection in her own Department?

Children and teenagers have paid the price of the country's failure to tackle child sexual abuse and exploitation. The Home Secretary's predecessor rightly set up this inquiry, but there is a responsibility on every single one of us, and in particular on the Home Secretary and the Government, to make sure that action takes place. This is about the victims and the survivors, but it is also about future generations of children whose safety and lives will be at risk if we do not see action.

Suella Braverman: I thank the right hon. Lady for her questions and her response, and for the utmost seriousness with which she has approached this topic.

As I said in my statement, the report represents fundamental change to the way in which we deal with child abuse. I hope that the recommendations that we are taking forward today demonstrate the Government's commitment to tackling this evil. The right hon. Lady asks about timetable and pace. On the speed of the report and our response, I hope she will appreciate that it is important not only that the independent assessor, Professor Jay, took the time to get the report right, but that we consider things thoroughly now so that we make the most of the recommendations and ensure that we deliver the level of reform that will make a meaningful

difference on the ground to victims and survivors and that will make a difference in culture to prevent this from happening again.

This is reform on a level not seen before. It will mark a step change in our approach to child sexual abuse. We need to, and we will, get this right. If that takes time, that is time well spent. I do not want to give victims and survivors the false impression that implementing these big commitments will happen overnight. What I can promise them is that this response heralds a new start; it signifies a change in direction and it represents an acknowledgement of what they have been through, what they have testified to and the work of this inquiry.

The Government have accepted the need to act on 19 out of the 20 recommendations. We are accepting the vast majority of them. I hope that that reflects our genuine and real commitment to getting this right. I have also committed today to closely monitor police force data on child sexual abuse, not only to ensure that the police are appropriately prioritising that terrible crime, but to identify where they need partners such as tech companies to improve their response. Let me be clear: we will do whatever it takes and whatever is necessary to protect children from abuse—no ifs and no buts.

Let me issue a few thanks. I put on the record my thanks to my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), one of my predecessors, for launching this inquiry, recognising the problem and starting this important work. I put on record my thanks to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education, to my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor and to other Cabinet Ministers who have come together to support this Government response. This issue will require a whole-of-Government, multi-agency response if we are to genuinely protect the interests of children.

Above all, I thank the victims and their families for sharing their stories and for helping us to take this big step forward. I have had the honour of meeting members of the victims and survivors consultative panel; today I met professionals who are working on the frontline, members of the police force and members and employees at the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, hosted at Barnardo's and funded by the Home Office. I have visited The Lighthouse in Camden, which provides therapeutic support to children who have encountered this kind of horrific abuse, and I have worked with and met the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. I thank all the professionals on the frontline.

Child sexual abuse is a complex issue and its enormity cannot be underestimated. I am enormously grateful to the victims and survivors for their courage. The abuse should never have happened, but I hope that with these changes we will make a difference and prevent future abuse from taking place. We owe that to past victims and their families.

Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con): I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for her statement. When I launched the independent inquiry, I said that people would be shocked at the level of abuse of children that had taken place in this country, and indeed the final report showed an appalling and shocking level of abuse—not just historical abuse, but abuse that carries on today. The Government's response is very important. Those who wish to abuse children will look for opportunities

to work with children in order to undertake that abuse. Will my right hon. and learned Friend please give a little more detail about the Government's response to the recommendations in the report on the Disclosure and Barring Service, including those on the use of the disclosure regime for those working with children overseas and on extending use of the barred list of people who are unsuitable to work with children?

Suella Braverman: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to point out that we need to enhance the rigour of scrutiny and standards within the workforce when it comes to professionals who have direct contact with or responsibilities relating to children. That is why several of the recommendations relate to registration. We accept the recommendation on the registration of care staff in residential care. We also accept the recommendation on the registration of staff in young offender institutions and secure training centres, and we are exploring the proposals on how to operate it. We are looking at the recommendations relating to the barred list of people who are unsuitable for work with children, and the recommendation relating to the duties to inform the Disclosure and Barring Service about individuals who might pose a risk. We are accepting those recommendations as well and exploring the ways and the form in which we can deliver them.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): I have a long history with IICSA; I was one of the MPs who first lobbied the then Home Secretary for it, and I am incredibly grateful to the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) for commissioning it, but that was seven years ago. That is seven years of victims and survivors laying out their stories, and telling us what we already knew: that this is an epidemic. In that time, the Government could have been doing very practical things to prevent it. The Home Secretary says that she accepts the need to act. That is not the same as acting. She said that victims would have visibility in the work that will be done, and that there would be consultation and monitoring. Where is the funding? Where is the actual getting on with the recommendations? What is the one recommendation that the Home Secretary does not accept? She has not told us that.

Suella Braverman: I have been fully transparent. I have come to the House today to set out our response, and we are also publishing our detailed response to the inquiry, which sets out the detail that the hon. Lady requests. As for what the Government have done, I reject the accusation that we have not acted. I am very proud of the effort that this Government have made so far to get to the point at which we can accept the vast majority of the recommendations. Now the work starts.

We need to ensure that we get the recommendations right and deliver them in a meaningful way. I do not apologise for taking the time to get that right. Accepting the redress scheme is a landmark commitment that the Government are making today. That will ensure that victims of this heinous crime secure redress. We need to decide what form that will take—not every victim or survivor is the same—and how that redress can be delivered. There are many forms that redress can take. We need to assess what is appropriate for the victims, and listen to survivors, so that we get the scheme right. I am determined to do so.

Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con): I welcome the Home Secretary's statement. IICSA's final report rightly said that the pace of technological change is of significant concern. Indeed, since the report was published, some seven months ago, we have seen a seismic shift in artificial intelligence. AI is already bringing fantastic benefits for society, but it also brings threats; I know that the Home Secretary is fully aware of that. Those threats are especially acute for children. For instance, huge amounts of AI-generated child sexual abuse imagery are already being created and shared by paedophiles. As we have heard, the report was commissioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) some eight years ago. It has taken us that long to reach the point of action. In the AI age, we can no longer take so long to act. What processes has the Home Secretary put in place to ensure that her Department and laws keep up with the pace of change of technology?

Suella Braverman: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the rapid pace of development in technology is a challenge to grapple with when it comes to protecting children online. I pay tribute to him for standing up for child victims when he was Home Secretary, and taking a stance against this heinous crime. Our Online Safety Bill is making its way through Parliament. It is future-proofed to allow the regulator to keep pace with technological developments. From the Home Office point of view, I am working with the National Crime Agency and GCHQ to identify the new challenges posed by AI. In this field, there are opportunities but also real risks posed by the proliferation of AI, and we need to ensure that our law enforcement agencies are equipped to deal with them.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): The Home Secretary stated that the inquiry rightly demands proper leadership and governance when it comes to the protection of children. Another area that demands proper leadership, and where protection is needed, is child criminal exploitation. Sadly, a number of young children who are criminally exploited are sexually exploited as well. Girls are used by criminal gangs. They are gang raped multiple times and asked to perform sexual acts. When those girls report that to the police, they are viewed as gang members; they are not treated as victims. Does the Home Secretary agree that if we are to treat those girls as victims, we need a proper statutory definition of child criminal exploitation?

Suella Braverman: Child sexual exploitation is abhorrent, and this is part of our response in stamping it out. Since the inquiry published its final report, we have published our Victims and Prisoners Bill, which places new duties on local commissioners to commission sexual violence services according to need, including for children. When the Bill becomes an Act, there will be new powers and strengthened opportunities to enable police and crime commissioners to respond to particular needs in their areas, such as the issues that the hon. Member raises.

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con): I thank the Home Secretary for making the statement to the House and for visiting Rother Valley to meet me and victims of child sexual exploitation only last month. As well as helping survivors of child rape and families such as those who were affected in Rotherham and Rother Valley,

we must work to ensure that those who failed in their duties of care may no longer hold positions of authority. Does she agree with the points that I set out in my recent ten-minute rule Bill—the Public Office (Child Sexual Abuse) Bill—which would ensure that nobody who enabled, facilitated or ignored child sexual abuse had any position of authority?

Suella Braverman: I thank my hon. Friend for his very important campaigning on this issue and for his advocacy for victims. I found it incredibly powerful to visit him in his constituency and to meet campaigners and other victims and survivors of child sexual abuse.

We are introducing the duty to report; that is one of the key recommendations and one of the key measures that we are taking forward. We want to get this right. We need to ensure that those in positions of authority—whether they are in local authorities or are social workers, teachers or police officers—undertake their roles and responsibilities and discharge their duties, and ensure that the right balance is struck in protecting children. Professor Jay makes it clear that a duty can bring about a culture change. That is what I want to see.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): I join the Home Secretary and shadow Home Secretary in paying tribute to the brave victims who have come forward as part of this inquiry. Young people in care are some of the most vulnerable members of our society, targeted by abusers because they do not have the support networks that other young people grow up with. Although thousands of foster carers, children's home staff and others do an amazing job of providing a stable, loving environment, the report highlighted the shocking abuse that many children in local authority care experience. Will the Government accept the inquiry's recommendation to amend the Children Act 1989, so that the courts can intervene when local councils are not exercising their parental responsibilities properly?

Suella Braverman: I think the amendment to the Children Act to give parity of legal protection to children in care is the recommendation to which the hon. Member refers, and we accept in spirit the need for parity. We are exploring ways in which we can best empower children in care to challenge what is going wrong in their care through the independent review of children's social care and national panel reviews. Importantly, we have the national safeguarding review panel, which takes action and looks in depth into serious incidents. That can discharge a lot of the functions that have been called for in this inquiry.

Jackie Doyle-Price (Thurrock) (Con): I welcome much of what my right hon. and learned Friend has said this afternoon, but she is right when she observes that this is a question of cultural behaviour. The truth is that state institutions have failed these victims for decades, based on institutional bias against their social background as much as anything else. We know that perpetrators are very clever in seeking out their victims, and in seeking out those who will be believed least. As she pointed out, this requires a whole of Government response to challenge the behaviour of state institutions so that they are more vigilant and take these things seriously.

To probe my right hon. and learned Friend a bit further, how will she achieve a change in behaviour across the criminal justice system? It is only a matter of weeks

since she responded to the Casey review, which again showed some of these behaviours. Also, on lifetime therapeutic support for victims, it is now six years since NHS England committed to a lifetime care pathway, yet local commissioners are still not commissioning the necessary services. What can she say this afternoon about ensuring that the Government really do deliver on this and that this does not just sit on the shelf?

Suella Braverman: I am very cognisant of that risk, and the one thing I want is to be held to account for my words today. I want another update to this House on progress—on delivery of our response—in due course.

In terms of how to bring about a culture change, the report is very clear. I believe that mandatory reporting—a duty, a legal obligation—will direct and force professionals' minds into a particular way of thinking. That will be accompanied by training, and it must be accompanied by peer support. That is how we will bring about a culture change so that we avoid and eliminate turning a blind eye to apparent problems that are of a heinous nature.

On the support available and what the Government have done already, there have been significant increases in Government funding for victims of sexual violence, including child sexual abuse. The Home Office's support for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse has got funding of over £4.5 million, and we have distributed that to charities that provide vital support. The NHS long-term plan commits an additional £2.3 billion for the expansion and transformation of mental health services. We now need to ensure that that gets down to the grassroots level and reaches the victims and survivors, but a lot of work has already gone on within Government.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): It is estimated that just one in five child victims report to the police, but in my experience in local government, young people who were disclosing that they were being abused needed an independent advocate and an independent voice to go to, so that they would be listened to and treated with sympathy. It is not necessarily reporting to the police that is required, so what can the Home Secretary say about what she is doing to open up those avenues, so that people can report with confidence that they will be listened to?

Suella Braverman: The issue that the hon. Gentleman raises is precisely the reason why I am a passionate supporter of independent sexual violence advisers, as well as independent domestic violence advisers: they are also relevant for children who are victims of sexual violence. We have already increased the number of ISVAs available to victims of sexual violence, including children, so that when someone makes a complaint and enters the criminal justice system, they will have an independent professional who is on their side to help them navigate a very traumatic and daunting process, who can provide clarity and the vital support that can make the difference between a successful prosecution and an unsuccessful one.

Laura Farris (Newbury) (Con): I have previously declared an interest, because I was counsel to the inquiry from 2016 to 2017.

Given that the inquiry looked at cases that were often decades old, there is a risk that we see its conclusions as belonging to the past, rather than the present. One of

the recommendations of the inquiry is creating a protective environment for children, and although that will have meant something different in some of the contexts that we looked at, we know now from the Children's Commissioner that one of the biggest drivers of child sexual exploitation is the ubiquity of violent online porn, particularly when the perpetrator is also a child.

Can I therefore ask the Home Secretary what reassurances she can give that the Online Safety Bill really will protect children from viewing this kind of content? Rather more boldly, could I ask her whether she would consider working with her counterparts at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to regulate the content of some of the big porn providers such as Pornhub, which we know through a body of evidence hosts and promotes child sexual exploitation in some of its online content?

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend speaks with expertise, and she raises a very important point with which I agree: the ubiquity, as she puts it, of online pornography and its accessibility by children is a major factor in the incidence of criminal behaviour of this type. The Online Safety Bill will mark a game changer in the protection of children online, and will take us forward in preventing children from accessing this heinous material. Through the Bill, companies will need to take a robust approach to protect children from illegal content and criminal behaviour on their services. They will also need to assess whether their service is likely to be accessed by children and, if so, deliver safety measures for them. Those safety measures will need to protect children, and there will be measures relating to age verification. In my mind, that represents a robust step change in how we protect children online.

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): As co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on safeguarding in faith communities, may I thank the Safeguarding Minister, the hon. Member for Derbyshire Dales (Miss Dines), for her letter to our group written on 12 May? We appreciate that there are many recommendations in the inquiry's final report, and they need careful consideration, but given the years of historical abuse and the years of inquiry, may I urge the Home Secretary to do all that she can to ensure that these wrongs are righted and that we see action, not more consultation, for the victims and survivors, and as quickly as possible?

Suella Braverman: I want to move as quickly as possible as well, and I want to get it right. For example, with the redress scheme, we have the very helpful starting point of Professor Jay's recommendation. We have now accepted that recommendation. There are various models around the world of how a redress scheme can operate, such as those in Australia and Scotland and more localised examples. We need to ensure that the right criteria are established, that the process is robust and fair, and that ultimately the victims and survivors get the redress, the justice and the closure that they seek.

Robbie Moore (Keighley) (Con): I welcome today's statement, and I put on record my thanks to all those who helped influence the report, particularly the victims of child sexual exploitation. I also thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) for instigating the report.

[Robbie Moore]

Unfortunately, child sexual exploitation haunts my community in Keighley, and I have held many a roundtable with victims and their families who have had to go through incredibly traumatic experiences. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) for coming up when she was Home Secretary to listen to some of those terrible stories. One of the things that definitely came across was a lack of trust and the disappearance of trust in the very organisations that should be there to protect the most vulnerable in society, whether that is the police, our local authorities or healthcare systems. That was further illustrated by a report by the Bradford safeguarding partnership in July 2021, which looked at only five children across the Bradford district who had experienced child sexual exploitation. That is why I want to see a full Rotherham-style inquiry into child sexual exploitation across the Bradford district, so that we can get to grips with some of the complexities at a local level.

Will the Home Secretary give a commitment to work with all Departments on this issue? We need a whole of Government approach involving not only the Department for Education but the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, because it is only when we all work with those Departments, and at a local level with local authorities and devolved mayoralities, that we can get to grips with and tackle this issue once and for all.

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend speaks powerfully, and I pay tribute to him for all his campaigning on behalf of his constituents on this very serious issue. The reports relating to Rochdale, Telford and Rotherham are all very powerful in their conclusions, and they speak to a similar situation to that to which he refers. The mandatory duty seeks to address professionals not taking action by placing a legal obligation on professionals to identify signs and indicators of child sexual abuse, and by providing them with the right training so that they have the know-how to deal with these delicate but devastating matters. It will be a game changer. Professionals on the frontline will have at the forefront of their professional training what child sexual abuse looks like, how to identify it and what action to take to stop it.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): The recent appalling court case on the murder of Finley Boden, which led to the conviction of his parents for murder, exposed serious questions about the social work practised at Derbyshire social services and indeed the actions taken by the court. For that reason, the recommendation for the creation of a new child protection authority was very much welcomed. Can the Home Secretary tell us what specific proposed functions of the child protection agency she believes will be better delivered by the

Department for Education's implementation strategy? Why does she believe that approach is better than the creation of a child protection authority, as recommended in this report?

Suella Braverman: May I put on record my sympathies to the family of the hon. Gentleman's constituents? When it comes to the child protection authority, we absolutely agree that we need a sharper focus on improving practice in child protection and ensuring that we are all playing our part to keep children safe. Since the inquiry reported, the Department for Education, in responding to the care review, has set out a bold vision for reform of social care and child protections—"Stable Homes, Built on Love"—and the Government are confident that those reforms will deliver the intention behind the inquiry's recommendation for a new child protection authority.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): Can I put on record my tribute to my constituents who gave evidence to IICSA? They relived their trauma so that changes can be made in future and they are among the most courageous people I know.

One of the recommendations from IICSA's final report is for the introduction of arrangements for the registration of staff working in care roles in children's homes, including secure children's homes. This is an obvious practical recommendation that would make a material difference to the safety of children living in local authority care, but it was originally recommended in 2018 and there was really no excuse for the Government not to act at that time to implement it. Since that time, children have continued to suffer abuse and neglect in children's homes, including those run by the Hesley Group in Doncaster and the Calcot homes in Oxfordshire. Can I ask the Home Secretary why she waited five years to act and can she update the House on the timescale for implementing this very important recommendation?

Suella Braverman: We accept the meaning and significance of recommendation 7, to which the hon. Member refers, on the registration of staff working in care roles in children's homes. We are exploring the proposals to introduce professional registration of the residential childcare workforce as part of the "Stable Homes, Built on Love" strategy—key and landmark reforms to our care system. But we recognise the important contribution of the residential childcare workforce in caring for some of the most vulnerable children in our society, and the importance of ensuring that they have the skills required to safeguard, support and care for those children. We are backing them with investment and reform.

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

Points of Order

5.17 pm

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Last Thursday, there was a debate on psilocybin access rights, a technical and detailed area of policy, changes to which are hoped to transform the effectiveness of current mental health treatments. How can Back Benchers successfully use the procedures of this House to enable debate to hold the Government to account for proposed policy changes they will not make if the responsible Minister will not reply to the debate, particularly when the debate is led by colleagues who have long made personal study of that particular area of policy, such as the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) and myself, and not least when they are reinforced by the harrowing personal experience of hon. Members of this House such as the hon. Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols)?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order.

The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp)
rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Minister is here and I believe that he would like to respond, so I suggest we ask him to make a brief response.

Chris Philp: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Very briefly, I regret that I was not in Parliament at the time of the debate. I did give my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) advance notice of that. I was at the defence establishment in Porton Down at the time. As often happens, another Home Office Minister, the Minister for Immigration—a very capable Home Office Minister—replied. I have previously met one to one with the hon. Member for Warrington North (Charlotte Nichols) to discuss this in detail, and I replied to an Adjournment debate just a few weeks ago. As I said at the time, I have, subsequent to the debate and the meeting, asked the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs to accelerate its work on removing barriers to research for all schedule 1 drugs, including psilocybin. So I take this opportunity to assure my hon. Friend that I have asked for that work to be accelerated, and the calls that he and other Members have made have been heard.

Crispin Blunt *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I feel that the Minister has given quite a long response, but I call Crispin Blunt.

Crispin Blunt: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I regret to say there was an inaccuracy in my right hon. Friend's response. When I alerted him to the date of the second debate on psilocybin access rights, on 18 May, he told me that he had an engagement that day. However, it never occurred to me for a moment that he would put that engagement ahead of his duty

replying to this House. I certainly got no communication at all that he had made a decision not to attend Parliament to reply to that debate.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I hope the hon. Gentleman will accept that it is not my responsibility to decide which Ministers respond to debates, but I think it is courteous that the Minister has come here today and given an explanation. If the hon. Gentleman is not satisfied with that response, I am sure he will pursue it with the Minister. Perhaps a meeting might be arranged.

Crispin Blunt *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: I do not want to prolong this too much further because we are in danger of going backwards and forwards over the same issue. The hon. Gentleman is clearly not happy that the Minister was not there for the debate, but the Minister has explained his reasons. The hon. Gentleman may not be happy with those reasons, but there is not a great deal I can do about that. But his point has been heard and I suggest we move on.

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Earlier this afternoon at Home Office questions, the Immigration Minister, who I have notified of this point of order, appeared to suggest that it was my responsibility that no asylum seekers, through the dispersal scheme, had been housed in Midlothian. Midlothian is a warm and welcoming community and we look forward to welcoming anyone from anywhere at any time. Despite the Minister suggesting that there had been no attempt to have any asylum seekers, through the dispersal scheme, housed in Midlothian, on 22 February, I was notified of the Home Office's intention to house asylum seekers in my Midlothian constituency, but, on 1 March, the Home Office notified me that it no longer intended to proceed with that dispersal. Perhaps it is not for me to say, but if the Home Office were to engage with local authorities, local councils or the Scottish Government, these sorts of issues could be dealt with. I ask for your advice, Madam Deputy Speaker, as to how I can best ensure that the record is correct and that there is no slur on the Midlothian constituency through the suggestion that it is not welcoming of anyone from any background coming to it, and as to how the record can be corrected to reflect that.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point of order. He does not have to notify Ministers that he intends to raise a point of order. I do not know whether he did or not—

Owen Thompson *indicated assent.*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Okay. The hon. Gentleman has made clear his view about what the Minister said. I know that there are hon. Members and Parliamentary Private Secretaries present who, it feels to me, are going to report back what the hon. Gentleman has said very quickly, as I am sure will the Whips. He has put his point of view on the record and I am sure that, if any necessary corrections need to be made, the Minister will do so, or he may communicate directly with the hon. Gentleman.

Non-Domestic Rating Bill

Considered in Committee

[DAME ROSIE WINTERTON *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

LOCAL RATING: LIABILITY AND MANDATORY RELIEFS
FOR OCCUPIED HEREDITAMENTS

5.24 pm

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Rosie Winterton): Before I call the mover of amendment 4, I remind the Committee that, while I am in the Chair, I can be addressed as Madam Chair or Dame Rosie, but not as Madam Deputy Speaker. We always have to remind colleagues of this as we move into Committee.

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I beg to move amendment 4, page 1, line 10, at end insert—

“(2A) In section 64 (Hereditaments) of the Act—

(a) omit subsection (2), and

(b) in subsection 4(3), after “subsection” omit “(2)”.

(2B) In section 65 (Owners and occupiers) of the Act—

(a) omit subsection (8), and

(b) omit subsection (8A).”

The intention of this amendment is to abolish liability to non-domestic rates of advertising when a right is granted permitting the use of land for advertising (section 64) or when land is used for advertising or the erection of an advertising structure (section 65).

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means: With this it will be convenient to consider the following:

Amendment 5, page 3, line 3, leave out “one year” and insert “five years”.

The intention of this amendment is to extend the delay in uplifts to business rate bills.

Clauses 1 to 4 stand part.

Amendment 1, in clause 5, page 16, line 3, leave out from “(b),” to end of line 4 and insert “omit “fifth””.

This amendment would require local non-domestic rating lists to be compiled every year.

Amendment 6, in clause 5, page 16, leave out line 4 and insert “in every fifth” substitute

“no less frequently than in every third”.

The intention of this amendment is to move towards revaluations on local non-domestic rating lists at no more than three-yearly intervals.

Amendment 7, in clause 5, page 16, leave out line 4 and insert

““on 1 April in every fifth year afterwards”

substitute

“on 1 April 2026 and on 1 April in every year afterwards”.

The intention of this amendment is to move towards annual revaluations on local non-domestic rating lists from April 2026 onwards.

Amendment 2, in clause 5, page 16, leave out line 6 and insert “omit “fifth””.

This amendment would require central non-domestic rating lists to be compiled every year.

Amendment 8, in clause 5, page 16, leave out line 6 and insert ““in every fifth” substitute

“no less frequently than in every third”.

The intention of this amendment is to move towards revaluations on central non-domestic rating lists at no more than three-yearly intervals.

Amendment 9, in clause 5, page 16, leave out line 6 and insert

““on 1 April in every fifth year afterwards”

substitute

“on 1 April 2026 and on 1 April in every year afterwards”.

The intention of this amendment is to move towards annual revaluations on central non-domestic rating lists from April 2026 onwards.

Amendment 3, in clause 5, page 16, leave out lines 12 and 13 and insert—

“(ii) the year beginning on 1 April 2023 and each year beginning 1 April after that date”.

This amendment would make every year from now on a relevant period for transitional provision under the 1988 Act.

Amendment 10, in clause 5, page 16, leave out lines 12 and 13 and insert—

“(ii) the period of three years beginning on 1 April 2023 and each year beginning on 1 April from 1 April 2026 onwards.”

The intention of this amendment is to move towards each single year being the relevant period for transitional provision under the 1988 Act.

Clause 5 stand part.

Amendment 11, in clause 6, page 16, line 15, at end insert—

“(za) in subsection (4), for “different from what it would be” substitute “less than it would be”.

The intention of this amendment is to effectively abolish downwards transition.

Amendment 12, in clause 6, page 16, line 17, at end insert—

“(c) in making these regulations the Secretary of State shall ensure that no ratepayer pays a higher amount in business rates than the amount derived from multiplying the uniform business rate by the property’s rateable value.”

The intention of this amendment is to remove downward transitional phasing.

Clauses 6 to 12 stand part.

Amendment 13, in clause 13, page 21, line 31, leave out “paragraph 4G” and insert “paragraphs 4FA and 4G”.

This is a paving amendment for Amendment 14.

Amendment 14, in clause 13, page 22, line 26, at end insert—

“4FA The definition of a person (“P”) for the purpose of paragraphs 4C to 4E does not include a person who is in receipt of relief of 100 per cent with a chargeable amount of nil.”

The intention of this amendment is exclude businesses who have nothing to pay from the duty to notify HMRC and the VOA.

Amendment 20, in clause 13, page 23, line 35, at end insert—

“4LA Paragraphs 4K and 4L do not apply if P is eligible for small business rate relief (for example, because the rateable value of the hereditament for which P is or would be a ratepayer is less than £15,000).”

This amendment would exempt businesses in receipt of Small Business Rate Relief Exemption from annual reporting if there is no change to report.

Amendment 15, in clause 13, page 27, line 44, at end insert—

“(5A) After paragraph 5ZF (inserted by subsection (5)) insert—

“Rebate in case of failure by valuation officer to provide confirmation

5ZG Where the valuation officer has not provided confirmation to P of a change following a notification by P that will affect the valuation of a hereditament within 60 days of the valuation officer receiving that notification, the total amount of non-domestic rates payable on that hereditament is reduced by—

(a) £100, and

(b) (b) a further £60 for each day until the confirmation is received by P, up to a maximum of £1,800.””

The intention of this amendment is to impose reciprocal penalties on the VOA for failure to notify ratepayers on changes in their rate assessments.

Clause 13 stand part.

Amendment 17, in clause 14, page 32, line 37, at end insert—

“(e) after paragraph 2C insert—

“2D(1) This paragraph applies where—

(a) a hereditament consists wholly or in part of land on which an advertising right is exercisable; and

(b) the right is not severed from the occupation of the land.

(2) For the purposes of determining the rateable values of the hereditament under paragraph 2 above, the rent at which the hereditament might reasonably be expected to be let shall be estimated as if the advertising right did not exist.

(3) In this paragraph “advertising right” means a right to use any land for the purpose of exhibiting advertisements.””

The intention of this amendment is to provide that the rateable value of hereditaments which consist wholly or in part of land on which an advertising right is exercisable to be calculated as though the advertising right does not exist.

Clauses 14 to 18 stand part.

Amendment 18, in clause 19, page 39, line 11, at beginning insert “Subject to subsection (4A)”.

This is a paving amendment for Amendment 19.

Amendment 19, in clause 19, page 39, line 17, at end insert—

“(4A) Section 13 may not be brought into force until at least 6 months after guidance has been published by the Valuation Office Agency on the requirement this Act will place on business ratepayers.”

This amendment is to ensure that guidance is made available to business ratepayers before the duty to notify comes into effect.

Clauses 19 and 20 stand part.

New clause 1—*Valuation Office Agency performance targets*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must within three months of the date on which this Act is passed prescribe by regulations performance targets for the Valuation Office Agency to respond to requests for updates to the central and local non-domestic rating lists and to challenges to the valuations on those lists.

(2) The Secretary of State may by regulations require the Valuation Office Agency to report at least annually on its performance in such detail as the Secretary of State may require in or by virtue of those regulations.

(3) The Secretary of State must lay before Parliament any reports made under subsection (2).

(4) Any regulations made under this section must be made by statutory instrument and are subject to negative procedure (annulment by either House of Parliament).

(5) Regulations under subsection (1) may not come into force until an impact assessment has been laid before Parliament.”

This new clause would require annual reports from the VOA on its performance against targets to be set by the Secretary of State.

New clause 2—*Non-domestic rating: retail sector review*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must conduct a review of the effect of non-domestic rateable values on the retail sector.

(2) The review must be commissioned no later than 6 weeks after the date on which this Act is passed.

(3) The review must assess the impact of non-domestic rateable values on competition between different parts of the retail sector, for example—

(a) stand-alone businesses operating from a single shop premises in a village, town or suburban high street setting,

(b) chain stores with multiple premises in city centres and out-of-centre shopping malls, or

(c) mainly online operations based on making deliveries from very large warehouses or fulfilment centres.

(4) The report of the review must be laid before Parliament no later than 1 May 2024.”

This new clause would require a review of the differential impact of business rates on different parts of the retail sector.

New clause 3—*Non-domestic rating: hospitality sector review*—

“(1) The Secretary of State must conduct a review of the effect of non-domestic rateable values on the hospitality sector.

(2) The review must be commissioned no later than 6 weeks after the date on which this Act is passed.

(3) The review must assess the consistency of approach to setting of non-domestic rateable values between hospitality businesses occupying premises of similar size and trading style, including—

(a) public houses,

(b) restaurants

(c) live performance theatres, and

(d) exhibition spaces.

(4) The report of the review must be laid before Parliament no later than 1 May 2024.”

This new clause would require a review of the differential impact of business rates on different parts of the hospitality sector.

Amendment 25, in schedule, page 47, line 2, at end, insert —

“18A In the Non-Domestic Rating (Alteration of List and Appeals) (England) Regulations 2009 (S.I. 2009/2268), omit regulation 15 (Advertising rights).

18B In the Non-Domestic Rating (Alteration of List and Appeals) (Wales) Regulations 2009 (S.I. 2005/758), omit regulation 15 (Advertising rights).

18C In the Non-Domestic Rating (Miscellaneous Provisions) (No. 2) Regulations 1989 (S.I. 1989/2303), omit regulation 4 (Advertising rights).”

These consequential amendments would be required to remove references to advertising rights following the abolition of liability to non-domestic rating in respect of advertising rights effected by Amendment 4 to Clause 1 of this Bill.

Government amendments 21 to 24.

That the schedule be the schedule to the Bill.

Peter Aldous: I shall start off where I left off in the Bill’s Second Reading debate. By way of background, the Bill is to be welcomed, although it is important that it is viewed as the start of the process of fundamentally reforming business rates and not the endgame. It probably would have been preferable to have heeded the advice of the Chartered Institute of Taxation and for the Government to have brought forward a new consolidated business rates Bill, rather than to amend the Local Government Finance Act 1988. That would have sent the message to businesses both large and small that real change was on the way. However, we are where we are and we must ensure that, ultimately, this Bill paves the way to reducing business rates to an affordable level, putting the business rates system on a long-term, more easily understood footing and removing those barriers to regional growth.

[*Peter Aldous*]

We must have in mind the ultimate end goal, which should be to get the uniform business rate multiplier back down from in excess of 50p in the pound to the more affordable 30p in the pound, which is where we started when the system came in in the early '90s. To get to that, we need annual valuations, the abolition of the multitude of complicated reliefs and to digitalise the Valuation Office Agency. The Bill moves us in that direction—although perhaps a little too tentatively. Moreover, the duty to notify, which takes up much of the Bill, adds a bureaucratic burden on businesses and there are some unintended consequences that we should avoid. We must have in mind the need at all times for increased transparency. The amendments that I tabled have those considerations in mind.

Any adjustments to the business rates system should be guided by two principles: reducing the regulatory burden on businesses and, as I said, reducing the uniform business rate multiplier. We should look at the Bill with those considerations in mind and aim to move towards a sustainable system that provides a long-term revenue stream that businesses can find bearable, which has not been the case so often in recent years.

A properly functioning property tax system is critical to achieving a vibrant and sustainable economy. For most of this century, an outdated and unresponsive business rates system has placed enormous strain on many businesses, particularly those in the retail and hospitality sectors. Moreover, that strain has not been shared equally across the country. That illustrates how the current system is a hindrance—a logjam—to levelling up. We need non-domestic rates to be more responsive to changes in the economy so as to ensure that the system does not place an undue and unfair strain on businesses. If we can achieve that, we shall be more able to attract long-term investment into our towns and cities, and we shall be better placed to meet other vital policy objectives such as revitalising our high streets and achieving our net zero aims and goals.

Clause 5 relates to the frequency at which revaluations take place.

As I have mentioned, we need to move to the end goal of annual valuations, so that business rates are more in line with the economic outlook. I have tabled amendments 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 with that objective in mind. To achieve a responsive business rates system, valuations should be carried out as regularly as possible. The Bill is a good first step, and increases valuations from every five to every three years, but it should provide the flexibility for a future Government to require more frequent valuations—ultimately, every year. Annual revaluation could bring bills more in line with commercial property values, rather than lagging many years behind. Even with a three-year list and a two-year antecedent valuation date, occupiers will be paying business rates bills in early 2026 that are based on valuations from nearly five years beforehand.

Annual revaluations are essential if the Government are serious about modernising the business rates system. They take place in countries as diverse as Hong Kong and the Netherlands, and thus there is no reason why they should not take place in England and Wales. To conclude on this issue, the enormous administrative burden placed on ratepayers by the new duty to notify

would certainly not be worth the distress and inconvenience it will cause if it does not ultimately result in the introduction of annual revaluations. In that context, I urge the Government to give full consideration to these amendments.

Clause 13 sets out the requirement for ratepayers to provide information—this is the new duty to notify, which, as drafted, places an unnecessary burden on businesses. Amendments 13, 14 and 15 have the objective of reducing that burden and imposing penalties on the Valuation Office Agency.

Amendments 18 and 19 relate to clause 19, and would ensure that guidance is made available to business ratepayers before the duty to notify comes into effect. The new duty to notify will place an onus on all ratepayers to provide the Valuation Office Agency with any information that they reasonably believe could impact on the business rates valuation. This is an enormous additional ask, not least for the 700,000 businesses which, up to now, have not been subject to business rates and might be completely unaware of what is proposed. The duty requires ratepayers to notify the VOA of changes to their properties within a 60-day window, and carries the risk of financial sanctions and even imprisonment if they fail to comply.

As a former chartered surveyor, I cannot see how such a burdensome duty on all commercial property occupiers—including, as I have said, current non-ratepayers—can be justified as necessary to administer a move to three-yearly revaluations. This duty might be bearable for businesses if it assisted the VOA in administering the move to annual revaluations. For small businesses, it will cause more pain than the gain that will be derived from moving to three-yearly valuations.

The new duty will leave many ratepayers wondering what might qualify as a notifiable change. The VOA is yet to publish any guidance; thus many businesses will take no chances and will notify the VOA of any changes to their properties. The VOA will hence be hoist with its own petard, as it will be flooded with paperwork.

As I mentioned on Second Reading, many businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises without any rating expertise, will turn to rogue rating advisers for help. Business rates advisers do not require a licence to practise, and many unscrupulous operators will see the new duty to notify as an opportunity to take advantage of small businesses.

While the ratepayer has a short period in which to notify the VOA of any changes to the property, as the Bill stands, the VOA has no such obligation. It can, in effect, respond to notifications at its leisure. I therefore propose a reciprocal provision that places on the VOA a 60-day timeframe in which to respond to notifications, with rebates to the ratepayer equivalent to the fines set out in clause 13 that accompany a failure to comply.

Clause 6 is a short and simple but nevertheless extremely important clause, which gives effect to the removal of downwards transitional phasing, as announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on 17 November last year in his autumn statement. That was a positive step, but clause 6 as drafted does not permanently remove the threat of downwards phasing, which is a punitive tax that unfairly penalises occupiers whose rateable values have fallen. It is wrong to force those whose property values have fallen to subsidise those whose property values have risen.

The clause as it stands simply removes the requirement for transitional phasing mechanisms to be revenue-neutral. That means that the Government no longer need to fund any upwards transitional mechanism with a corresponding downwards transitional mechanism. However, that means that a downwards mechanism can be easily introduced by a future Government without any parliamentary scrutiny. Amendments 11 and 12 would plug that loophole and permanently abolish downwards transitional phasing. If any future Government want to reintroduce it, they should come to Parliament and make the case for it, rather than bringing it in through the back door.

Amendment 16 would delete clause 14, which, from my perspective, is inequitable and unfair to businesses. As it stands, clause 14 exempts Government legislation from qualifying for the pursuit of a material change of circumstances. That would remove a vital check on Government and would allow future Governments to legislate with impunity at the expense of businesses right across the country, leaving them no recourse to challenge legislation that interferes with their ability to do business.

A material change in circumstances gives ratepayers recourse to pursue relief on their business rates when circumstances outside their control hinder their ability to do business. Clause 14 exempts Government legislation from being a qualifying reason for a material change in circumstances. I anticipate that the Government have included this clause because they want business rates to be a predictable source of revenue, even if their own legislation or action undermines the very rateable value of the properties occupied by businesses.

During the covid lockdown, to prevent the spread of the virus, the Government forced a number of businesses to cease trading. However, instead of accepting that there had been a material change of circumstances for those occupiers and allowing appeals to be launched, the Government introduced a locally administered compensation scheme. With clause 14, the Government are seeking the freedom to introduce any legislation at any time that might alter the rateable value of a property. That is both unprecedented and wrong.

Clause 14 can be viewed as a power grab that sets a dangerous precedent and tells occupiers that they will have to accept the detrimental impact of legislation on their ability to do business, with no legal recourse. Amendment 16 would delete clause 14, restoring the ability of ratepayers to claim a material change of circumstances, regardless of how the change in circumstances arose.

Amendments 4, 5, 17 and 25 would amend and add to clauses 1 and 14 and part 1 of the schedule. They address a niche issue, albeit an extremely important one. The out-of-home advertising industry includes adverts on billboards, walls, digital posters, street furniture, bus shelters, buses and railway stations, which we see every day as we go about our lives and probably take for granted. The industry provides an important form of income for local authorities, and it is estimated that almost half the revenue generated goes back into local communities. These amendments would abolish the liability to non-domestic rating in respect of advertising rights.

The removal of business rates on advertising rights from the rating lists would have three advantages. First, it would increase the value and level of services provided

by local authorities. Secondly, it would remove a competitive disadvantage to growth that impacts the out-of-home advertising industry, but that does not apply to its rivals—broadcast, print and online media. Thirdly, it would reduce the high level of inefficiencies relating to advertising rights applied through the Valuation Office Agency, local authorities and the out-of-home advertising industry.

As drafted, the Bill will directly and adversely impact the industry's ability to invest in local communities. That runs contrary to the Bill's objective of reducing barriers to business investment. In 2023, business rates charged on advertising rights are an antiquated, out-of-date and ineffective tax. Advertising rights are the only remaining right attracting liability for non-domestic rating. The liability to non-domestic rating in respect of sporting rights was abolished by the Local Government and Rating Act 1997. Amendments 4, 5, 17 and 25 would remove that anomaly.

In conclusion, I have enormous respect for the Minister and for his co-sponsor of the Bill, my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury. Although Treasury Ministers are not currently present on the Front Bench, I am mindful that the Bill has been drafted from a Treasury perspective, gathering in all that money. That is incredibly important—don't get me wrong—but I suggest we also need to look at the issue through the prism of business.

Whether large, medium-sized or small, businesses need confidence, certainty and a fully reformed business rates system that takes on board some of the amendments I have put forward. A fully reformed system will mean that businesses will know where they stand, and business rates will not be the elephant in the room. People will be able to invest in, build on and expand their businesses with a degree of confidence, leading to increased profits. What that will do—joy to the Treasury—is increase taxation. The Bill makes a start and provides an opportunity for us to turn the vicious circle of business rates into a virtuous circle.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the shadow Minister.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): As I stated on Second Reading, the Opposition support the measures in the Bill overall because it is crucial that local authorities and businesses have clarity as soon as possible so that they can prepare for what is to come. We have worked constructively to improve the legislation before it gets to them, but the Bill is still lacking in areas that small businesses are crying out for help with.

On Second Reading, I raised the matter of the pressures that small businesses, particularly small chains such as convenience stores, will be under as a result of the intensified reporting requirements. Although it is certainly important to increase accountability for businesses submitting their finances, stakeholder groups such as the Association of Convenience Stores and the Shopkeepers' Campaign have drawn attention to the stifling impact that the new requirements could have on their businesses. Some small and medium-sized enterprises may resort to outsourcing their account reporting, risking another financial hit in return. We have yet to see the Government addressing those concerns or considering any alternatives.

5.45 pm

The Bill still does not have enough detail on how new reliefs will be implemented by local authorities, or on how they will be compensated for income forgone. Crucially, the Bill is also missing a crucial assessment of any new administrative burdens that might arise for councils and of how they will be supported in handling them. Need I remind the Committee that local government is already operating on skeletal budgets, trying to do the utmost for residents with declining resources? Since 2010, core funding for councils has reduced by £16 billion. Needs have only risen as we have endured austerity followed by a catastrophic mini-Budget. The funds announced by the Chancellor in the spring Budget do not touch the surface of the challenge that councils currently face.

It is, of course, welcome that the Government have committed to consult local authorities and other stakeholders on how to address business rates avoidance and evasion. When we are asking local authorities to put enhanced resources into new reliefs, we must also ensure that they are getting their fair due back from businesses. The Government could go further in that regard by tightening up the rules around empty properties and charitable reliefs. The Welsh Labour Government may be a good example for the Minister to look into; further thought should also be given to allowing councils to set their own business rates multiplier, tailored to their local economy and to the needs of their businesses.

We cannot ignore the fact that we desperately need reforms to how we tax online businesses in this country. That has been woefully missing from the strategy from this Government so far. When will we see a serious review of taxing digital giants? The Government are failing—they are failing in their responsibility to tax fairly. While business booms for major online corporations, our bricks and mortar businesses continue to struggle through.

Another failure from the Conservatives is their complete refusal to raise the small business rate relief threshold. Labour's proposal to raise the threshold to £25,000 would have saved our high streets more than £1 billion. If Ministers will not listen to me, will they please listen to the Federation of Small Businesses? It backs our measure and says that it would lift over 200,000 small businesses out of business rates altogether. Why did the Minister and his colleagues decide that that money was not worth saving? Perhaps it was because they are not the ones footing the bill.

I turn to the amendments. Colleagues have tabled some reasonable amendments to the Bill that would result in some burdens being lifted, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as enhancing transparency in local authority processes. However, further thought is needed on the unintended consequences of those alterations.

The hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) has tabled a range of amendments. With regard to his amendment 4, the Local Government Association rightly points out that a consequence of abolishing liability to non-domestic rates of advertising would be a reduction in income for local authorities.

At a time when councils are more stretched than ever, we cannot seriously consider adding more financial constraints to this already flawed Bill. New clause 1, in

the name of the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Helen Morgan), is one such amendment, which is attempting to be constructive but could create difficulties for local authorities further down the line. The Opposition have always been in favour of stronger transparency, so in principle we support the idea of more frequent updating and local non-domestic rating lists. However, the amendment prompts a question about resourcing.

If the Government opt to require annual reporting from the VOA according to targets that they set, they will need to outline how they will support local authorities. Again, this is an added burden on staff time that has not been accounted for. I do not need to remind the Minister that the decline in funds over the past 13 years has led to staff being overstretched, with vacancies high and workloads even higher. Colleagues must agree that adding more pressure on to a diminishing workforce without extra resources is only going to reduce the quality of services.

Amendment 20, also tabled in the name of the hon. Member for North Shropshire, is a more straightforward suggestion. It would ease burdens for small businesses, relinquishing them from the need to report to the VOA in years when there is no change in their business. It would free up valuable resources in those hard-pressed companies and free up time for VOA staff to focus their attention on assessing businesses that have actually had circumstantial changes. We are supportive of this common-sense measure. It would be a welcome change to the Bill, and it would be a welcome change if Ministers were willing to take on this constructive suggestion.

Ultimately, however, what we are attempting to do with this Bill is to make minor improvements to a problematic and outdated business rates policy that, if we are fortunate enough to be in government, Labour would abolish anyway. These discussions might all prove futile if the British people entrust the Labour party to bring in the change that we so desperately need. Labour in power would scrap the dysfunctional system of business rates entirely. No longer would high street businesses be forced to close their shutters due to soaring rents and rates. Online giants would finally pay their dues, paying British taxes on the trading that they do in our country. Small and medium-sized enterprises would be supported from being start-ups to successful national businesses.

All this would take place alongside our promise to abolish the shameful non-domiciled tax status that too many of the super-wealthy in this country exploit. By raising the digital services tax paid by the likes of Amazon, we will be able to raise the threshold of small business rates relief, helping more home-grown SMEs to thrive in our retail sector. Labour is the party of business. We have a plan to make it fairer, easier and safer to trade in our country, after 13 years of crushing economic failure. We will create new green jobs, boosting Britain's income and therefore our ability to support local businesses. A huge part of that will involve finally addressing the problem that this Bill only skirts around. The current business rates system hinders entrepreneurs and is starving our once-thriving high streets of viable businesses. Over the last 13 years, we have seen managed decline, from village to town to city, and it will take clear thinking and bold action to stop that. Sadly, both are missing from this timid Bill.

Helen Morgan (North Shropshire) (LD): I rise to speak to amendments 1, 2, 3 and 20, as well as new clauses 1 and 2, tabled in my name. I note the excellent speech by the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous), who tabled amendments with very similar objectives to my own. This Bill is a disappointment to all businesses who are struggling through tough financial conditions. Not only are prices going up for every single purchase that they make, but many small businesses were forced to lock into gas and electricity contracts at astronomical rates last year and are no longer receiving any meaningful support with those energy costs. They may also be struggling with interest rate rises on their borrowings following the period of economic chaos caused by the Government last autumn.

This Government committed to reviewing the system of business rates fundamentally in their 2019 manifesto, but this Bill offers only peripheral changes to an outdated system that does not work for a modern economy. The Bill offers to change the timescale of revaluations from every five years to every three years. This is a welcome reduction, but Liberal Democrats believe that it does not go far enough. The reality for businesses is that a three-year gap between revaluations means that they will continue to pay rates that are far from reflective of the real economic conditions they are operating in. Amendments 1, 2 and 3 would require non-domestic rating lists to be compiled every year and make every year from now on a relevant period for transitional provision under the Local Government Finance Act 1988. Annual revaluations are possible. We only need to look to the Netherlands, where they have been taking place since 1995. There, rateable values are allowed to move with the local economy. This means the tax that businesses are required to pay better reflects the conditions that they face.

I also want to spend a little time on amendment 20, tabled in my name. It is estimated that as a result of the Bill as it stands, 700,000 small businesses who currently pay no business rates at all will need to submit annual reports to the Valuation Office Agency, even when there has been no change to the premises they occupy. These small businesses, like many in North Shropshire, are already plagued by seemingly endless monthly and quarterly Office for National Statistics returns, along with their ongoing tax and financial reporting requirements.

The Bill adds yet another administrative hoop for these businesses to jump through and threatens hefty penalties if forms are completed incorrectly. This piles unnecessary pressure on to small businesses and it will not raise any more tax for public services. These businesses already receive a notification to inform the VOA if there is a material change in their premises, so there is nothing to be gained from this element of the Bill. Amendment 20 attempts to deal with this problem by removing the requirement for annual reporting of no change for those businesses in receipt of small business rate relief. I urge the Minister to support amendment 20, which I intend to push to a vote, and to cut unnecessary red tape for the small businesses we desperately need to help, in order to drive economic growth and breathe new life into the high streets of our historic market towns.

I also wish to speak to new clause 1, tabled in my name. It seems very one-sided to impose punitive fines on businesses for failing to report updates to the VOA on time, without any reciprocal expectations of that

agency. As I outlined on Second Reading, dealing with the VOA over changes to a premises can be a protracted affair, and all the time that that is going on, businesses face uncertainty about their rates liability and, critically, cannot plan their cash flow. New clause 1 would require the VOA to report to the Secretary of State on its performance in detail at least once a year. This report should correspond to targets to be set by the Secretary of State. The new clause also calls for the findings of these reports to be laid before Parliament. I have suggested targets, rather than legally binding levels of service, to reflect the fact that no two premises are the same and that updates can be complex and can be challenged, but those targets would at least set an expectation of performance and ensure some accountability for the VOA.

Lastly, I wish to draw attention to new clause 2. I think there is general agreement on both sides of the Committee that we want to see our high streets and market towns thrive. This is especially true in places such as the five historic towns in my North Shropshire constituency, where the local high street is not just a practical place to go to but a social lifeline for many residents. Those high street shops are in competition with online retailers whose warehouse premises have a much lower rateable value per metre squared, putting the high street at a disadvantage. This was confirmed in the Treasury Committee's "Impact of business rates on business" report in 2019.

Disappointingly, however, the Bill does not take this discrepancy into consideration. Instead, the Government will continue to drain physical retailers through rates that do not reflect the challenges they are already facing, leaving many at a tipping point and struggling to compete on an unfair playing field. New clause 2 would require a review of the impact of non-domestic rateable values on competition in different parts of the retail sector, so that Members could understand the true scale of the issue and inform policy accordingly. This review should be commissioned within six weeks after the date this Act is passed. Overall, I urge Ministers to support these amendments and new clauses in order to improve the Bill, which is just not ambitious enough in fundamentally reforming an out-of-date tax system.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Lee Rowley): I am grateful to all colleagues across the Committee for their contributions today. I think all of us spoke on the Bill's Second Reading, and we have rehearsed the arguments on a number of these points already. It is important to reiterate from the Government Front Bench that this Bill delivers significant reforms for the business rate system. It increases the frequency of revaluations, which I think has been generally welcomed across the Committee today. It also modernises the administration of the tax and it provides new reliefs to support things such as property improvements. Taken along with the nearly £14 billion-worth of taxpayer subsidy for businesses this year, it helps to manage the tax burden amid the ongoing pressures that the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Helen Morgan) mentioned.

I will now turn to the contributions that hon. Members and hon. Friends have made today. My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) made an incredibly constructive set of comments, and I completely understand the sentiments behind many of the amendments he has tabled. He set a challenge at the outset of his speech,

[*Lee Rowley*]

saying that he is looking to move towards annual valuations, the removal of complications and the adoption of digitalisation. We are making progress in two of those three areas, which I hope is not bad, and he has indicated that, overall, this is a step in the right direction. We are moving from five-yearly valuations—in reality, they have happened every seven or eight years in some instances in recent years, for good reason—to three-yearly valuations. We are moving towards the collection of further digital data, and we are continuing to support businesses, where we can, through the reliefs we have put in place.

6 pm

My hon. Friend spoke about greater frequency of valuation, and I acknowledge the desire of Members on both sides of the Committee to move towards more frequent valuation. I hope the Government's move from five years to three years is a step in the right direction. We have said we will look at this again in the coming years, where we are able to do so. That change, which has been mentioned in every speech today, comes alongside the necessity to change how we approach business rates in general.

Fundamental changes to the system would require an extremely significant amount of upheaval, which we do not support, so the country has to look at how we change the collection of data and how we change the processes to make them more effective. We currently have a process of check, challenge and appeal. Our changes, including through the collection of additional data, will help to reduce and remove at least the check process. We have to acknowledge that if we were to move to annual valuations, more data would have to be provided in one way or another, because the 2 million checks in the current process would not work if we moved to a greater frequency.

Amendments 13 and 14, and other amendments, talk about 100% relief and how ratepayers must still comply with duties. Although I understand the concerns my hon. Friend outlined, the information collected on specific properties is often used in the valuation of other comparable properties, many of which may not receive 100% relief. A small business that occupies a single shop might pay no rates, whereas the same property would be liable for rates if it were used by another business, such as the Co-op. We have to have in mind the broad gamut of business rates when we consider the collection and use of data.

My hon. Friend spoke on Second Reading and in Committee about his concerns on material changes in circumstances. Although I understand his concerns, I reiterate the Government's position that, subject to the will of the Committee, these changes are being introduced to reflect and respond to the kinds of extraordinary events we saw with covid. Although we hope those extreme circumstances never happen again in our lifetime, we seek to ensure that we have the powers that may be necessary in such circumstances.

The hon. Member for Luton North (Sarah Owen) is my friend everywhere other than in this Chamber. I am grateful for the Opposition's overall support for the Bill. We have differences on its implementation, which she cogently outlined, but I am grateful for her constructive approach to the Bill. On reforming online sales, I gently

remind her that revaluations in recent months have seen around a 20% reduction in average costs for retail and a 27% increase in the average costs for online distribution warehouses. She asked when there will be reform, and that reform is already under way.

I hope I have covered the points raised by the hon. Member for North Shropshire, who spoke of the need for greater frequency of revaluation for business rates and any business taxation. As she indicated, the Liberal Democrats do not believe the Bill goes far enough and believe that annual revaluation is possible. She specifically highlighted the Netherlands. Although comparisons are difficult—the UK and the Netherlands are fundamentally different countries with different populations and different approaches—the Netherlands moved to annual revaluation in stages, and we are moving from five years to three years. We will look to see where we can improve in future, where possible.

Although I accept that the hon. Lady will probably press amendment 20 to a vote, I will gently try to dissuade her from doing so. She rightly outlined the huge importance of small businesses to our economy, and all parties in this House share her concern about ensuring that the viability and vitality of the small business sector can be maintained, grown and improved, but I remind her that, as a result of decisions made by this Conservative Government over the past 13 years, 720,000 business already have 100% small business rate relief and a further 76,000 businesses are within the taper, so they receive partial relief. A 75% discount is being introduced as a result of this year's revaluation for the hospitality, retail and leisure sectors.

Small businesses want certainty, which they will not get from the Liberal Democrat policy of fundamentally changing the business rates landscape, and they want to know that the Government of the day, who are responsible for such changes, have an understanding of the macroeconomic picture and of the importance of being able to fulfil their promises. The proposals from the Liberal Democrats and Liberal Democrat-supporting reports in recent years would reduce our income from business taxation, which would need to be covered. That means taxes would need to go up elsewhere.

The leader of the Liberal Democrats continues to speak to the media and in this place about tens of billions or hundreds of billions of pounds of additional spending. If we were to remove the income from business rates, the Liberal Democrats would have to ask themselves where they would get that money from and how they would pay for the black holes created in our tax system.

Helen Morgan *rose*—

Lee Rowley: The hon. Lady is going to tell me exactly where she would find several hundred billion pounds to fill her black hole.

Helen Morgan: Amendment 20 is about cutting red tape for small businesses. Does the Minister agree that he is talking about policy objectives that are not relevant to the Bill?

Lee Rowley: That tells us everything we need to know about the Liberal Democrats. They want to talk about only this Bill, ignoring every other policy. They look one way when talking to one part of the country, and the other way when talking to the other part of the country.

That shows the Liberal Democrats' lack of seriousness in understanding how taxation actually works, in understanding how to run a modern, dynamic market economy and in understanding how we need to pay our way to make sure our economy is successful in the long term. It is for those reasons that we oppose amendment 20.

Peter Aldous: The points I made were genuine. I think this Bill needs to be changed, and I hope the Government will have an open mind in considering whether to do so in the other place. We may well review this situation again.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 2 to 12 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 13

REQUIREMENTS FOR RATEPAYERS ETC TO PROVIDE INFORMATION

Amendment proposed: 20, on page 23, line 35, at end insert—

“4LA Paragraphs 4K and 4L do not apply if P is eligible for small business rate relief (for example, because the rateable value of the hereditament for which P is or would be a ratepayer is less than £15,000).”—(*Helen Morgan.*)

This amendment would exempt businesses in receipt of Small Business Rate Relief Exemption from annual reporting if there is no change to report.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Committee divided: Ayes 168, Noes 282.

Division No. 234]

[6.9 pm

AYES

Abrahams, Debbie	Cummins, Judith
Aldous, Peter	Daby, Janet
Ali, Tahir	Dalton, Ashley
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	De Cordova, Marsha
Amesbury, Mike	Debbonaire, Thangam
Anderson, Fleur	Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Ashworth, rh Jonathan	Dixon, Samantha
Beckett, rh Margaret	Doughty, Stephen
Begum, Apsana	Dowd, Peter
Benn, rh Hilary	Eagle, Dame Angela
Betts, Mr Clive	Eagle, rh Maria
Blake, Olivia	Efford, Clive
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Elliott, Julie
Brennan, Kevin	Elmore, Chris
Brown, Ms Lyn	Eshalomi, Florence
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Esterson, Bill
Buck, Ms Karen	Evans, Chris
Burgon, Richard	Farron, Tim
Butler, Dawn	Fletcher, Colleen
Byrne, Ian	Foord, Richard
Byrne, rh Liam	Fovargue, Yvonne
Cadbury, Ruth	Foxcroft, Vicky
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Foy, Mary Kelly
Carden, Dan	Furniss, Gill
Champion, Sarah	Gardiner, Barry
Charalambous, Bambos	Gill, Preet Kaur
Clark, Feryal (<i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i>)	Glindon, Mary
Cooper, Daisy	Green, Sarah
Cooper, rh Yvette	Greenwood, Lilian
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Greenwood, Margaret
Coyle, Neil	Griffith, Dame Nia
Creasy, Stella	Gwynne, Andrew
Cryer, John	Hamilton, Fabian
	Hardy, Emma

Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Lavery, Ian
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lightwood, Simon
Lloyd, Tony (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Maskell, Rachael
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonald, Andy
McDonnell, rh John
McMorrin, Anna
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, James
Nichols, Charlotte

Norris, Alex
Olney, Sarah
Oppong-Asare, Abena
Owatemi, Taiwo
Owen, Sarah
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillipson, Bridget
Pollard, Luke
Rayner, rh Angela
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Cat
Smith, Nick
Smyth, Karin
Sobel, Alex
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Wakeford, Christian
West, Catherine
Western, Andrew
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitley, Mick
Whittome, Nadia
Wilson, Munira
Winter, Beth
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:

Mr Alistair Carmichael and
Wendy Chamberlain

NOES

Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Barclay, rh Steve
Baron, Mr John
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Brine, Steve
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Buckland, rh Sir Robert

Burghart, Alex
 Butler, Rob
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carter, Andy
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, rh Alex
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, rh Michelle (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, Sir James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, rh Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Garnier, Mark
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kniveton, Kate
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Lopresti, Jack
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn

Macleane, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McPartland, rh Stephen
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Morrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Mr Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
 Warman, Matt
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, rh Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim
Tellers for the Noes:
Steve Double and
Scott Mann

Question accordingly negated.

Clauses 13 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 14 to 20 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule

CONSEQUENTIAL PROVISION

Amendments made: 21, page 50, line 33, leave out “an order” and insert “regulations”.

This amendment and amendments 22 to 24 correct drafting mistakes which refer to “regulations” as “orders”.

Amendment 22, page 50, line 34, leave out “such an order may not” and insert “no such regulations may”.

See the explanatory statement to Amendment 21.

Amendment 23, page 50, line 36, leave out “it” and insert “the regulations”.

See the explanatory statement to Amendment 21.

Amendment 24, page 50, line 38, leave out paragraph (b) and insert—

“(b) in subsection (9AA)—

(i) for “an order under paragraph 5G” substitute “regulations under paragraph 5FB”;

(ii) for “order” in the second place it occurs substitute “regulations”;

(iii) for “it” substitute “the regulations”.”—(*Lee Rowley.*)

See the explanatory statement to Amendment 21.

Schedule, as amended, agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair.

Bill, as amended, reported.

Bill, as amended in the Committee, considered.

Third Reading

6.24 pm

Lee Rowley: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

It has been a pleasure to support the progress of this Bill through the House. I do not seek to detain the House for long, but let me say briefly that the Bill offers some of the most substantial reform to the business rates system since its inception in 1990 and meets our commitment to reform and reduce the burden of the tax on business. By moving to more frequent revaluations from 2026, we are delivering on a key ask of business. We have been up-front with the House and with businesses that meeting this commitment is a major ask, which is why we have made some changes to the way ratepayers interact with the Valuation Office Agency. That principle was accepted by respondents to the review that predated this legislation.

Our approach has been to listen and to take appropriate action. I have already mentioned the evidence-based approach that we adopted in that review and the close dialogue that we foster with our partners in business and local government. We are also taking action to reform transitional relief, which was the No. 1 one ask from stakeholders on business rates ahead of the 2023 revaluation. That is a major commitment, a major step to supporting fairness and a major improvement in the credibility of our business rates system.

Finally, we are happy to have agreed to the Welsh Government's request for various measures to be extended to Wales, and also to be supporting Northern Ireland with a data sharing measure.

I conclude by expressing my thanks to all Members for their contributions on Second Reading and in today's debates. Although we have not agreed on everything, this has been a useful and constructive session. I am grateful to the Clerks of the House for supporting the smooth running of the Bill and to all of the teams across the Department and those in the Treasury, His Majesty's Revenue and Customs and the Valuation Office Agency for their help in preparing the Bill. I look forward to watching the Bill's progress in the other place, and I commend it to the House.

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

6.26 pm

Sarah Owen: Throughout the condensed debate on this Bill, it has become clear that, although well meant, this was a missed opportunity to do better—to do more for businesses across the country. Yet again, the Government have managed to miss the point, despite multiple people, even from their own Benches, trying to guide this legislation into a better place.

A step in the right direction could and should have been a leap. This was a chance to provide businesses with more than short-term sticking plaster fixes. Instead, we see small businesses worrying over the administrative burden of meeting the new duty to notify requirements and questioning what hefty punishments will be handed down for any genuine errors. The hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) quite rightly pointed out that they include even imprisonment.

The Federation of Small Businesses, the shopkeepers, the corner shops, the Association of Convenience Stores—the backbone of many of our urban and rural communities—have all voiced their concerns. Those concerns have been echoed by Members from all parts of the House, but have sadly fallen on the deaf ears of this Government.

However, there has been some agreement in these debates—that the current outdated, dysfunctional business rates system is not fit for purpose. The only difference is that the Government continue to tinker around the edges while Labour would scrap it root and branch. That is what small and medium-sized enterprises have spent years lobbying for.

Labour has a plan for British business. We will support entrepreneurs to turn their ideas into reality. We will ensure that bricks and mortar businesses stay on our high street by making their tax contributions proportionate. Labour will make online tech giants finally pay their fair share of tax—something that Conservative Ministers have had neither the will nor the ability to do. By raising the digital services tax paid by the likes of Amazon, we will be able to raise the threshold for small business rates relief, helping more home-grown small and medium-sized businesses to thrive in our retail sector.

Among the common-sense reforms that we put forward was to provide short-term support by raising the threshold for small business rates relief this financial year. As I have said previously, raising the threshold to £25,000 would save our high streets more than £1 billion. This support is not only what small local businesses need, but what our high streets and towns are crying out for.

I know that Small Business Saturday takes place just once a year nationally, but it is something I do in Luton North nearly every Saturday. I meet entrepreneurs, small businesses, innovators and creators in my town who are doing amazing things in our community, with our community and for the good of our community. Every Small Business Saturday shout-out that I do is to celebrate them and their contribution to our local economy. I know the very real difference it would make to them and to every small business across the country if we raised the threshold of business rates relief to £25,000 now, and ultimately if we did away with the outdated and unfair current business rates system altogether.

[Sarah Owen]

I genuinely hope that that the small steps in the right direction made today can be built on and improved in the future by a Government of whatever political stripe—hopefully a red one. We must stem the decline of our high streets and tip the tax balance between digital and physical businesses. We cannot continue to see high street shops boarding up their windows while online giants get away without paying their fair share.

Lastly, I thank every hon. Member who has spoken, including the Minister, I thank the Clerks and I thank the stakeholders, who have briefed well and lobbied fairly on behalf of their members' interests.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

STRIKES (MINIMUM SERVICE LEVELS) BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 16 January 2023 (Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill: Programme):

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

(2) The Lords Amendments shall be considered in the following order: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 3.

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.—(Mike Wood.)

Question agreed to.

Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill

Consideration of Lords amendments

Clause 4

EXTENT

6.31 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Kevin Hollinrake): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 1.

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

Lords amendment 2, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendment 4, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendment 5, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendment 6, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendment 7, and Government motion to disagree.

Lords amendment 3.

Kevin Hollinrake: This Bill was introduced with the intention of balancing the ability to strike with the rights and freedoms of the public, by applying minimum service levels on strike days to protect the lives and livelihoods of the public. We should not ignore the fact that the economic costs of these strikes have been estimated at around £3 billion, and much of that impact falls on business sectors that are already facing difficulties, such as the hospitality sector.

The Bill brings the UK into line with many other countries: Spain and France have statutory minimum service levels in ambulance services and they also, along with Belgium, have statutory minimum service levels in fire services. In some countries, such as the United States of America, Australia and Canada, some services are prohibited from taking any strike action altogether. However, the Government are not suggesting we go that far.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): In the European countries the Minister mentioned where there is minimum service provision, is it not the case that that minimum service provision is agreed by negotiation, and that workers there do not get sacked for striking?

Kevin Hollinrake: All jurisdictions differ, and the way that minimum service levels are set differ. Some are set by the Government; we have done that, through consultation with stakeholders, and we will decide what the right level of minimum service will be. All jurisdictions differ somewhat, but the key point is that in many jurisdictions there are restrictions placed on the ability to strike.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): On the issue of stakeholders and jurisdictions, may I turn the Minister's attention to the devolved Administrations? The SNP Scottish Government have been crystal clear in their opposition to this tawdry piece of legislation. In the interests of the UK Government's respect agenda when it comes to the devolved jurisdictions, why are they

ploughing ahead with this Bill that drives a coach and horses through the fundamental human right to withdraw one's labour?

Kevin Hollinrake: I will deal with that question in a second; it is covered by one of the Lords amendments that I will speak to, so I will address it when I come to the element of my speech relating to the devolved Administrations.

The Bill returns to us with a number of amendments made in the other place. I would like to be clear that, with the exception of our own Lords amendment 3, the Government consider the majority of the changes to be designed to make the Bill either less effective or entirely ineffective in achieving its aims. The Government will therefore be disagreeing with those amendments.

I will speak first to Lords amendment 3, which was tabled by my colleague Lord Callanan in the other place and provides clarity in respect of the matters to which an employer must not have regard in respect of trade union membership and activities when deciding whether to identify a person in a work notice. The amendment addresses a point raised by the Joint Committee on Human Rights in its report on the Bill.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The Minister and I have had some correspondence about the Bill in my capacity as Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, but can he not see that many of the concerns we expressed in our report on the Bill are echoed by the amendments that the Lords have brought, and also by organisations such as the TUC and the Equality and Human Rights Commission? Why is he not giving them more weight?

Kevin Hollinrake: At times in life we have to agree to disagree, do we not? The Government feel that the Bill strikes a balance, but the hon. and learned Lady does not, and I respect her opinion. I studied carefully the letter she sent me and I responded to it.

Joanna Cherry: I am not talking about the report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights alone; I am saying that many of our concerns are widely supported by other groups such as the EHRC, the TUC and, now, the majority of their lordships. Will the Minister not reconsider the response he gave to my Committee's report?

Kevin Hollinrake: Of course we have considered those concerns, and we considered the amendments in the other place. We feel that what we are proposing with this legislation strikes the right balance. I fully accept that the hon. and learned Lady disagrees with that position.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Is it not the case that the Government's own, belated, impact assessment suggests that the Bill is ineffective? It is just unworkable. In fact, I think both the Secretary of State for Education and the Transport Secretary have said the same. The Bill will just make matters considerably worse in terms of industrial relations.

Kevin Hollinrake: That is not what has been said, and I disagree with that perspective. The fact that other jurisdictions and other nations use this approach to making sure there are minimum service levels to protect the public, their lives and their livelihoods is indicative that it is the right thing to do. Indeed, as the hon.

Gentleman knows, derogations exist in parts of our public services that do exactly what we are requiring services to do with minimum service levels; it is just that they do not work effectively all the time.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister finds himself in an isolated position. At the Health and Social Care Committee on 9 May, NHS Providers, NHS Employers and NHS Confederation all said that the Bill was incredibly unhelpful and that additional legislation could make things more difficult, rather than improving the situation. Sir Julian Hartley, the chief executive officer of NHS Providers, said so. Why is the Minister going against the employers, not just the trade unions?

Kevin Hollinrake: We do not see that as being the case and we do not agree with that position. We think the Bill is effective and that it is the right thing to do to make sure that people can go about their daily lives unhindered, without fear or concerns about not being able to access vital public services.

I turn next to Lords amendment 1, which changes the application of the Bill from the whole of Great Britain to England only. The amendment would mean that strike action would continue to have disproportionate impacts on the public in Wales and Scotland. As the Government have always maintained, the purpose and substance of the Bill is to regulate employment rights and duties and industrial relations in specified services. Industrial relations is clearly a reserved matter and therefore we consider it right and appropriate to apply the legislation to the whole of Great Britain.

I also point out that the employer has statutory discretion on whether to issue a work notice ahead of the strike, specifying the workforce required to achieve the minimum service level. We hope that all employers will issue work notices to ensure that minimum service levels are achieved where it is necessary to do so. Employers must consider any contractual, public law or other legal duties that they have.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): The Lords passed an extremely sensible amendment asking the Government simply to consult before they go further with this legislation. To give an example of why consultation is needed in my constituency, there is no such thing as a minimum service for air traffic controllers. In effect, that means that the Government are barring air traffic controllers from ever taking industrial action. Those sorts of consultations need to take place before the Government, as others have said, inflame the industrial relations climate in this country.

Kevin Hollinrake: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, we have already consulted. Those consultations closed around the middle of May. We will obviously look carefully at all the submissions made; it is important that we do. Ministers—I have one sat next to me: the Minister of State, Department for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman)—will make sure that stakeholder submissions are properly taken into account.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Kevin Hollinrake: I will make some progress. Lords amendment 2 would require a consultation be carried out and reviewed before use was made of the power to make regulations setting minimum service levels. The primary stated motivation for tabling the amendment was to increase parliamentary scrutiny of the regulations implementing minimum service levels. Although there may be some merit to the intentions behind the amendment, it is, in the Government's view, duplicative, and would ultimately delay the implementation of the policy. For those reasons, we disagree with it.

I turn to Lords amendments 4 and 5, and the associated tidying amendments, Lords amendments 6 and 7. In the Government's view, the amendments were tabled to make the Bill inoperable.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): Will the Minister explain how the legislation complies with all International Labour Organisation conventions?

Kevin Hollinrake: We believe that it does. The ILO endorses the use of minimum service levels to make sure that the provision of public services is maintained during periods of industrial action. We are happy with our position on that.

We resist Lords amendments 4 to 7 on the principle that the Government have a duty to pass effective legislation. It is regrettable that Opposition Lords have sought to undermine that principle. Lords amendment 4 would mean that there were no consequences for a worker who did not comply with a work notice. The Government disagree with the amendment, as without those consequences, employers would be powerless to manage instances of non-compliance, and strikes would continue to have a disproportionate impact on the public. That would severely undermine the effectiveness of the legislation. Given that the amendment would make the Bill ineffective, as I suspect the Opposition intended, the Government cannot support it.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): It looks as though the unelected House has a better understanding of what happens in the workplace than the Government do; that should worry the Minister. Can he name other countries where a worker could be dismissed in such circumstances?

Kevin Hollinrake: In some countries, such as those I referred to earlier, strikes are banned completely for those working for some blue light services. We already have that situation in the UK for the armed forces, prison officers and the police. There would be a breach of contract if people in those positions were to strike.

Joanna Cherry rose—

Kevin Hollinrake: I will make progress, if I may. Lords amendment 5 also seeks to make the Bill inoperable. It would mean that there were no legal consequences for a union that induced people to go on strike when they had been identified, through a work notice, as needing to work, or for a union that failed to take reasonable steps to ensure that their members complied with work notices. The amendment would mean that unions had no responsibility for ensuring that their members did not participate in strike action and attended work if named in a work notice.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): Minimum service levels are entirely sensible; it is an idea whose time has come, and it shows that we support the working people in this country, unlike the Opposition parties. On the awfulness of Lords amendment 5, given that we have here the Minister of State, Department for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), I wanted to ask this. Secondary legislation will be used to decide which industries are to be covered by the measures. The Bill is particularly targeted at rail, but I would like at some point to have a conversation with the Minister about including the Solent ferries. They are truly a lifeline service, because unless my constituents fancy swimming the Solent, they do not have an alternative to ferries, whereas people have an alternative to rail and other services.

Kevin Hollinrake: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that point. He has raised it with me offline. I am of course very happy to have a proper discussion with him about that, and I know that Transport Ministers would also be happy to.

Alan Brown: On making unions responsible for forcing workers to comply with work notices, does the Minister not understand that unions work for and on behalf of their members, and reflect their wishes? If their members wish to go on strike, how is it just or moral to force unions to make their workers break that strike?

Kevin Hollinrake: There is a balance to be struck, and what I think is just and moral is ensuring that public services are maintained. That is the balance that we are trying to ensure. We are not at all saying that people cannot strike; we are saying that a minimum service level should be maintained during the strike.

Lords amendment 5 would mean that there were no consequences for trade unions that failed to meet their responsibilities. If we remove the consequences for trade unions that fail to take reasonable steps, we will be far less likely to achieve minimum service levels, as trade unions might attempt to persuade workers not to comply with work notices, and to take strike action instead.

6.45 pm

Everyone has a role to play in ensuring that minimum service levels are achieved. The approach that the Government have chosen is fair and proportionate. As with Lords amendment 4, Lords amendment 5 makes the Bill ineffective, and the Government disagree with it. We also disagree with Lords amendments 6 and 7, which are tidying amendments tabled following the passing of Lords amendment 5.

To close, the Government disagree with all amendments but their own, for the reasons that I have given. I hope that the other place will reconsider its amendments and agree to withdraw them, so that we can, in line with the wishes of the elected House, get on with rebalancing the rights of workers with the right of the public to go about their daily life.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Let me start by drawing the attention of the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests, which reflects the fact that I am a proud trade unionist, and have been for a very long time. As the Minister outlined, today we

return to the Conservatives' sacking nurses Bill because the other place has reached the same conclusion as us: this Bill is as unworkable as it is unnecessary. It is not just an almighty, anti-democratic attack on working people, but a threadbare Bill that does not stand up to a shred of scrutiny. Today we consider a number of Lords amendments.

Let me be clear: Labour Members oppose this Bill in its entirety, and we stand ready to repeal it when in government. That said, we thank Members of all parties in the other place who made the thoughtful and sensible amendments that we are considering tonight. They do not solve all of the very long list of issues with this legislation, but they take the sting out of its worst elements to a significant extent. For that reason, Labour Members will reject all attempts by the Government to remove the amendments.

This evening, we will hear a raft of excuses for the Bill, and for why we cannot uphold the Lords amendments. We will hear that the Bill is about protecting public safety—well, I don't know; there are not many Government Members here and willing to defend it. We will hear that Government Members all want minimum service levels all the time, but it is Tory Ministers who are failing to provide the minimum service levels that we need in our public services.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that nurses are taking action in order to protect patients? We hear continually about cases in which there are only two nurses on a night shift, trying to manage a ward of 30 patients. Is that not evidence that nurses are taking action because they have been pushed to the brink? Are they not doing the right thing by holding the Government to account through their actions?

Angela Rayner: I absolutely agree. I worked alongside my hon. Friend on workers' rights for many years. I was a care worker for many years, and had to take industrial action once. People, especially in public service, do not do that lightly. The nurses' union took its first ever industrial action recently. We have seen an unprecedented amount of strike action, and there is an absolute crisis in vacancy numbers in our public services because of this Government. The real risk and danger to public services at the moment is from this Conservative Government. After 13 years in office, they have really run down our public services, and they are not listening to the people who are trying to deliver those services.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Does the right hon. Member agree that one of the most frustrating things about the Bill, which appears to be totally ineffective, is that the minimum service levels that it sets out are very often not met in normal working times?

Angela Rayner: The hon. Member makes a crucial point, which I was trying to make to the Minister: on non-strike days, minimum service levels do not apply at the moment. Many of the people providing our public services are absolutely screaming at the Government, "We need more people working in those services. We are having record vacancies. We are having people leave the profession because of the mismanagement by this Conservative Government." Take our fire and rescue services: how does the closure of 80 fire stations across the UK keep the public and our brave firefighters safe? Take our precious NHS: how does having 7.3 million patients left

on waiting lists keep people safe? And take our overstretched schools: how do record teacher vacancies keep our children safe?

Janet Daby: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Regulatory Policy Committee's opinion, published on 21 February, red-rated the Government's impact assessment for the Bill as "not fit for purpose"? Does she agree that, in fact, it is the Government who are not fit to govern?

Angela Rayner: I absolutely agree. How will threatening key workers with the sack in the middle of an unprecedented recruitment and retention crisis do anything to provide the level of services that the public deserve?

We will also hear tonight that the Bill brings us into line with international standards, but what does the Minister have to say to the ILO's director general who slammed down the Bill in January? The Minister did not effectively answer the questions that were put to him during his opening statement. What does he say to President Biden's labour Secretary, who also raised concerns?

We are going to hear that the Bill is the only way to bring strikes to a close. We are now in May and there is no end in sight to the current wave of industrial action, harming the public, small businesses and, not to mention, the workers who lose a day's pay. Might I give the Minister some friendly advice? Strikes are ended by getting round the table, not by insulting the very workers who kept the country going during the depths of the pandemic.

The Bill is one of the most sinister attacks on working people I have seen, and I speak as a trade unionist, an employer and a Member of this House. It gives Ministers the power to threaten every nurse, firefighter, health worker, rail worker or paramedic with the sack. Other Government Members wanted even more people to be in scope. I do not think they want anybody anywhere to have trade union rights in this country. This is being done at their whim. They have literally gone from clapping nurses to sacking nurses.

In the words of my noble Friend Baroness O'Grady, Lords amendment 4 is about

"the individual freedoms, dignity and livelihoods of workers."—*[Official Report, House of Lords, 26 April 2023; Vol. 829, c. 1242.]*

Labour is proud to support that amendment. We ask any Government Member—there are not many of them here—who believes in the right to protection from unfair dismissal to vote with us tonight.

We also stand by the provision in Lords amendment 4 to require employers to serve work notices and to prove that individuals have received them. The Government's proposal not only threatens workers, but burdens employers, including our overstretched public services and small businesses. That only goes to show the Bill's complete unworkability and proves the point of all employers who have condemned it.

The Bill also represents an almighty attack on trade unions—unions made up of ordinary working men and women. We are all grown up enough to acknowledge the integral role they play in our economy and our democracy. I think we can all agree that attempts to attack their ability to represent their members is morally, economically and democratically wrong. In its original form, the Bill would require them to take "reasonable steps" to ensure compliance work with notices, without any

[Angela Rayner]

clarity on what that means. The Government have effectively conceded the flaws in their drafting of the Bill in their concession on Lords amendment 3. That is welcome, but not enough. The Minister asks us to vote tonight for vague and unclear wording that gives us no idea of what they actually require trade unions to do. So we will vote to keep Lords amendment 5 and by extension, Lords amendments 6 and 7.

Alan Brown: The right hon. Lady has not really mentioned Lords amendment 1, although I note that she said that Labour Members would vote to retain it, and that is welcome. Given that Lords amendment 1 would limit the territorial extent to England, does that mean that Labour now recognises the need to fully devolve employment law to Scotland to completely protect us from Westminster?

Angela Rayner: We want a Labour Government for the whole United Kingdom, but we also appreciate Lords amendment 1 and the devolved powers. We believe in devolution. We were the party of devolution. We were the ones who gave devolution because we absolutely believe in it, but we also believe that we need a Labour Government to get rid of the Conservative Government in Westminster so that we can change the whole United Kingdom for the better.

Another one of the most troubling aspects of the Bill has been the profound lack of scrutiny. The Bill presents the Secretary of State with huge and unchecked powers to set, impose and police minimum service levels and to amend, repeal and revoke primary legislation. This is about not just laws that the Government already have passed, but even those we pass in the future, yet we have no real idea why they would need that power nor how they intend to use it.

Where there has been measly scrutiny, the wide-ranging consensus has been that the Bill is a total disaster. The Regulatory Policy Committee called it “not fit for purpose”. The Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Joint Committee on Human Rights sounded the alarm. The impact assessment was also published late, finding that this legislation could lead to more industrial action and have unknown knock-on consequences. Consultations have been launched in a haphazard way and only for certain sectors, without any explanation. There has been no meaningful consultation on the Bill as a whole, not least with the very people that it will have an impact on. If the Government had nothing to hide, they should have nothing to fear. Labour Members will vote to keep Lords amendment 2 and to protect the democratic scrutiny that the House is meant to provide.

There are serious concerns about what the Bill will mean for devolution. I have mentioned the unprecedented Henry VIII powers, which allow Ministers to make decisions about services that are entirely run by the devolved Administrations, including the elected Governments of Wales and Scotland. The Bill sets a dangerous precedent, using powers reserved to Westminster in one area of law to interfere in other areas that have been devolved. Perhaps the Minister has noticed that the Welsh Senedd and the Scottish Parliament have refused legislative consent. There has been no attempt to seriously engage with them or with devolved

Administrations with powers over sectors listed in the Bill, including not just London, but my patch of Greater Manchester. This is a question not of changing the devolution settlement, but of defending it from the threat of the Bill. That is why we will vote to uphold Lords amendment 1.

This is one of the worst pieces of legislation in modern times, and looking over the last 13 years, that says a lot. But it is not just Labour Members who think that. The Bill has been widely and routinely condemned by: the Regulatory Policy Committee; the Equality and Human Rights Commission; the Joint Committee on Human Rights; NHS providers; the rail industry; the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development; the CEO of the confederation of recruitment companies; the CEO of the NHS Confederation; President Biden’s labour Secretary; the ILO; all UK trade unions; the TUC; the Welsh and Scottish Governments; the former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg); the right hon. Member for Stevenage (Stephen McPartland); the Transport Secretary; the Education Secretary—what a shambles! If it was not so serious, it would be a joke. This is from a Government who are desperately trying to distract from the 13 years of their own failings and who are playing politics with key workers’ lives.

The Bill is shoddy, unworkable and unnecessary. For the sake of every nurse, teacher and firefighter across the UK, and for the sake of our British democratic institutions, I urge the whole House to join us in supporting the thoughtful and sensible amendments from the other place and to vote down the Government’s vindictive motions tonight.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I call the SNP spokesman.

Alan Brown: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to follow the shadow Minister, the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner). I agree with what she said, and I welcome her comments on devolution protecting the devolved Parliaments. I also welcome the commitment from Labour to repeal this legislation if it is in Government, but I would point out that there have already been a number of Labour U-turns recently, and now we have heard the mantra that Labour is not going to be in power to do the job of repealing nasty Tory legislation, so there is a concern that Labour will not do what its representatives have promised at the Dispatch Box. It is also amazing that in an earlier intervention from the Tory Benches, we heard the mantra that the Tories are the party of workers. The party of workers will not even have one Back-Bench contribution to today’s debate on the Lords amendments—that is how interested they are in the workers in reality.

7 pm

Lords amendment 1 is very welcome. However, I have to point out that it is slightly bizarre that it was the Labour Lords who voted through that amendment, which limits the territorial extent of the Bill to England, while Labour MPs previously abstained on our amendment 32, which would have required the consent of the Scottish Parliament for the Bill to apply to Scotland. Why did Labour MPs not previously vote for our amendment 32? Was it because of the Bain principle? What has changed?

However, Lords amendment 1 hopefully means that Labour recognises the democratic deficit of Westminster overruling the wishes of the devolved Administrations. It means recognising that it is for the devolved Administrations to decide what is right for our nations, so by default—as per the question I asked in my intervention earlier—it means that Labour should now be recognising the need for employment rights to be devolved. The Scottish Trades Union Congress backs that position as well: its general secretary, Roz Foyer, has previously stated that

“Now more than ever, Scotland needs the devolution of employment law to outlaw, once and for all, the use of zero-hours contracts, giving workers security, certainty and workplace rights from day one of their employment.”

It really is time for Labour to get on board with the concept, and commit to the devolution of employment rights and the legislation to do so.

It is also worth noting that there was no need for Lords amendments to protect Northern Ireland when it comes to the Bill's territorial extent. That is because Labour previously devolved employment law to the Northern Ireland Assembly, so if it is good enough for Northern Ireland, clearly the so-called most powerful devolved Parliament in the world should also have employment law devolved. At the Dispatch Box, the Minister tried to justify Westminster interfering yet again because somehow, Wales and Scotland will be disproportionately hit with strikes if Westminster does not impose its will. The reality is that Scotland has seen the least strike action out of all the nations, because we have better trade union relations and have actually negotiated in good faith with the unions. That is how we get less strike action, not Westminster imposing legislation that we do not want on the devolved Parliament.

Some 61 Liberal Democrat Lords also voted for Lords amendment 1, so the same challenge now goes to the Lib Dems: do they now agree that employment-related legislation should be devolved? The hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) usually likes to intervene; it would be good to know what the Lib Dems' position is on employment law, if they are voting to protect Scotland in terms of the territorial extent of the Bill. No? We are not getting anything from the Lib Dems. Finally, if we are talking about the theme of democratic deficits, is it not incredible that there are 14 elected Liberal Democrat MPs in this House and 83 Liberal Lords down the road? Does that not just show the democratic deficit of the unelected place?

The key thing about Lords amendment 1 is that in protecting the devolved Administrations from the Tory assault on workers' rights, it also respects the wishes of the voters in the devolved nations. The Tories can loosely argue that they had a transport minimum services Bill as part of their manifesto, and they can argue that they were voted in to deliver on their manifesto, but given that the Tories were roundly rejected once again in Scotland and Wales, it is quite clear that they do not have any mandate whatsoever to implement the Bill in Scotland or Wales.

As we pointed out previously, as Liberty and others have observed, and as the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne observed as well, the Bill allows unknown assaults on the devolved Administrations. The Henry VIII clauses that allow both existing and future legislation to be overruled are completely outrageous. The Tories

continually deny that they are making power grabs while enacting enabling legislation to interfere in devolved matters—again, the Minister's comments from the Dispatch Box illustrated that perfectly. Now we have the genius that is Lord Frost, who negotiated the Brexit deal that he now tells us is absolutely rubbish, arguing for powers to be stripped from the Scottish Parliament. As the Tories lurch further to the right, what is to say his view will not prevail? Lords amendment 1 in itself does not prevent other attacks on devolution, but it does stop anti-strike legislation being imposed on the devolved Administrations. As such, I fully support the amendment, while recognising that we still need to fully devolve employment law.

Turning to Lords amendment 2, I have to start by saying yet again that the entire Bill is shameful in its intent. It gives way too much power to the Government, and it is being rammed through Parliament—not only was its impact assessment published after the Bill went through the Commons; it was classed as “not fit for purpose” by the Regulatory Policy Committee. As such, Lords amendment 2 adds a bit of transparency by requiring the Government to consult on minimum service levels and assess the impact on the right to strike, as well as on the effectiveness of services and on the wider public—information that the Government should be seeking to understand anyway. The Government should embrace the amendment instead of opposing it. This is about demonstrating that their intent is not solely Government imposition and conflict with trade unions and employees, so they really should think again about supporting the amendment.

The UK Government like to remind us—as happened earlier, when the Minister was at the Dispatch Box—that minimum service levels exist in other countries. However, as I said previously, those requirements are agreed through negotiation. The general secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation, Esther Lynch, has said that

“The UK already has among the most draconian restrictions on the right to strike in Europe. The UK government's plans would push it even further away from normal, democratic practice across Europe.”

When the Minister refers to what goes on in other European countries, he really should read up much better. Lords amendment 2 does not even bring the UK back in line with international norms, but it provides more transparency and it should not be controversial.

I will now turn to Lords amendments 4 and 5, and consequential amendments 6 and 7. Amendment 4 seeks to remove the most pernicious aspect of the Bill: the concept that employers can name particular individuals to comply with a work notice, forcing them to make the horrible decision between crossing a picket line and risking being sacked for exercising what should be their fundamental right to strike for fair pay and conditions. No matter what flannel the Government put on it about minimum service levels existing in other countries, the sacking of individual workers for noncompliance will make the UK an international outlier. Amendment 4 will rectify that by ensuring that a breach of a work notice is not a sackable offence, which of course is the international norm.

Amendment 5 removes another awful part of the Bill: the removal of protections for unions. It should not be considered even remotely acceptable that the Government

are putting obligations on unions to ensure that employees comply with work notices. As Liberty has pointed out, proving that unions have not taken reasonable steps is completely unworkable, especially as the Government have not even defined what “reasonable steps” would look like.

The Government also need to understand the wider human rights concerns around the Bill. As the Joint Committee on Human Rights wrote in its report on the Bill,

“We find it hard to see how it is compliant with Article 11 ECHR to expose any participant in industrial action to the risk of dismissal simply because a trade union fails to take unspecified ‘reasonable steps’... In our view, the Government has not provided sufficient justification for this consequence or explained why the minimum service scheme could not be effective without it.”

Quite clearly, Lord amendment 5 has to be agreed to in order to prevent such a breach of human rights. The JCHR also highlighted the lack of an alternative mechanism allowing for independent resolution of disagreements that would meet the standards of the ILO, and the outrageous aspect of employers being able to claim up to £1 million in damages against unions.

Even worse in terms of how the Bill operates, new section 234E in the schedule forces unions effectively to act in a manner contrary to their very purpose by forcing them to work against the interests of their members and undermine their own legal strike action. As it stands, the Bill is just a vehicle for conflict with unions and employees. It is so obvious, and it is a sign of a Government with no long-term intention of having collegiate collective bargaining and who want to do their best to make unions and strikes impotent, instead of understanding that striking is a last resort following failed negotiations.

Lords amendment 4 rightfully puts duties on the employer to serve notice and to prove they have served it correctly on an individual. If we are to believe the Government’s premise that minimum service levels are about health and safety and the protection of life, it should hardly be onerous to expect an employer to ensure that work notices are correctly served.

In summary, the Government should accept Lords amendments 4, 5, 6 and 7. Assuming that the Government win the votes tonight, I hope that the Lords do the right thing and reinstate the amendments, as well as Lords amendment 2. With Lords amendment 1, it is no small irony that it is unelected Labour and Liberal Lords who recognise the democratic deficits of Scotland and Wales having unwanted policies imposed upon us. It is time that Labour recognised that these Lords amendments are at best a sticking plaster. We need full devolution of employment law and workers’ rights to Scotland. Labour must commit to that if it is to form part of the next Westminster Government. While we obviously want full independence, full devolution of employment law is a pragmatic step forward. That reflects the wishes of the trade unions, which I would hope a proper Labour party would be reflective of, because we know that that lot over there on the Government Benches certainly are not listening.

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab): I rise this evening as a proud trade unionist, proud to declare my interest as a member of two great unions—Unite and Unison—and proud to represent a constituency that is

at the heart of the labour movement. I know that every single worker who marches in the Durham miners’ gala will be opposed to this Bill, which is autocratic, undemocratic and unworkable. It is autocratic because it gives enormous powers to the Secretary of State through Henry VIII powers, reducing Parliament’s role to a rubber stamp. It is undemocratic because it is another poorly written Bill rushed through Parliament that will undoubtedly see the intervention of the courts after Royal Assent. It is unworkable because trade unions and their members will not accept this blatant attack on their rights, and nor should they.

Since the Combination Act 1799, the party on the Government Benches has tried to suppress working people’s rights, but it has never succeeded in that, and it never will. The right to strike is a fundamental human right that goes hand in hand with freedom of association. History shows us that working people are never afraid to challenge an oppressive Government. We have seen that in the recent wave of industrial action, where workers are prepared to fight for decent pay, against poverty wages, for secure jobs and for their communities. They will continue, whether or not this Bill becomes law, and the public will be on their side.

Ministers could have used this time to negotiate with trade unions, tackling the real causes of industrial unrest. Instead, they have wasted Parliament’s time with a Bill that the Joint Committee on Human Rights has said falls short of human rights obligations. Amendments made in the other place have sought to put flesh on this skeleton Bill—amendments that the Government will reject this evening.

It is disgraceful that this Bill seeks to undermine devolution using Henry VIII powers. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter) on her amendment in Committee, and I welcome the amendments from the other place. The British Government should not be interfering in areas where they have no responsibility. It will simply deepen the divide between London and the devolved Governments, and it is a joke that Ministers talk about public safety during strikes when the Bill itself does not even mention safety. It is all just a smokescreen to attack workers’ rights even further.

On the Government’s watch, austerity has removed 20% of firefighters since 2010, making all our lives less secure. It is the same with nurses. Tens of thousands left the job they love just last year, and now the Government want to make nurses’ lives and the lives of millions of other workers even harder. Why are Ministers not tackling the causes of this issue—the cost of living crisis that is making the lives of my constituents a misery?

7.15 pm

Either way, the Bill will need to be repealed as soon as possible, and I am pleased that the leader of the Labour party has committed to doing so. Whether or not Conservative Members agree with the scope of the Bill, there can be no doubt that it is autocratic, undemocratic and unworkable. Conservative Members, who claim to be democrats, must on principle oppose the Bill and join Labour MPs in the Lobby this evening.

David Linden: It is a pleasure to be called in this debate, and it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mary Kelly Foy). I am glad that she touched on point that any future Labour Government

would repeal this Act. I am just struck, as was my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown), by the quote from the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), who said:

“We can’t come into office, picking through all the conservative legislation and repealing it... It would take up so much parliamentary time. We need a positive agenda.”

If a positive agenda is not standing up for the principle of human rights and democracy, I do not know what is. Perhaps when the Labour Front Benchers sums up at the conclusion of the debate, they will outline exactly how quickly this Bill will be repealed from the statute book, as well as anti-trade union legislation more generally.

As others have done, I declare an interest. I am a member of the Unite trade union, which opposes this Bill, and I am happy to stand in solidarity with it. We are very much beyond the looking glass when it takes Members of the House of Lords to be the people standing up for the principles of democracy and human rights; none the less, I thank their lordships for the amendments they have made to the Bill.

As I was sitting here listening to the Minister opening the debate, I found it rather ironic that we are discussing minimum service levels when the Conservative party’s Back Benchers have literally not turned up for this debate. Other than Bill and Ben, the PPS flower pot men, there are literally no other Conservative MPs here to scrutinise this legislation. If the Government want to talk about minimum service levels, let us have Conservative MPs who campaigned for Brexit by talking about Parliament taking back control coming here to talk about the horrific Henry VIII powers that give unprecedented power to a Secretary of State who would be completely out of control.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun mentioned that statistically, when we look at the amount of industrial action that has happened across these islands, Scotland has had the lowest. That is because we take a partnership approach with trade unions. Yes, there are times when the Scottish Government and local authorities in Scotland will have difficult conversations with trade unions, but by and large we understand that the best way to resolve those disputes is to come to the table, not to use legislation as a way of trying to strike down the trade unions and to big up the likes of Mick Lynch and Sharon Graham as some sort of bogeyman or Grinch. That is exactly what this Bill is designed to do. It is designed to be a wedge issue for the next general election, and that is why it is so important that Labour Members stand up and oppose this Bill, even if they cannot stand on picket lines.

Lords amendment 1 relates to the principle of devolution. I was certainly heartened by what we heard earlier about the opposition to Lords amendment 1, but the reality is that First Minister Humza Yousaf, First Minister Mark Drakeford in Wales and the Governments in both Wales and Scotland have outlined their absolute opposition to this Bill, which we consider to be an affront to democracy and to the basic fundamental human right to withdraw one’s labour. That is one reason I would like to see employment law devolved to the Administrations in Edinburgh and Cardiff. It is good enough for Northern Ireland. Let us not forget that because of the territorial application of this Bill, we will find ourselves in the ridiculous situation where healthcare staff who go on strike in Scotland, England and Wales will be subject to

the sack, whereas people in Northern Ireland who choose to use their fundamental human right to withdraw their labour will not. For a Government who talk about how important the Union is and how important it is that we do not have divergence of policy, this does rather fly in the face of that argument.

Tonight we will vote against all the Government’s motions on the Lords amendments they are opposing, but when the Bill goes back to the other place, I urge their lordships to hold firm against this Government. They should not give in, because Parliament was told we would be taking back control, and all we are seeing is a Government running out of control and running roughshod over some of our most basic rights. Of course, we were told Brexit was all about strengthening employment rights. The Government talk about that, but what they have brought forward is this tawdry Bill, which once again tramples all over people, just as Thatcher tried to do.

The warning to people in Scotland is that, for so long as they continue to have Conservative Governments they did not vote for—indeed, they have not voted for them since 1955—they will continue to get legislation that tramples on workers’ rights. The only way to protect our Parliament and to protect our workers’ rights is with the powers of independence, not Tories whom we did not elect.

Christine Jardine: I rise to support the Lords amendments and to oppose the Government’s intention of rejecting them. I am no longer a trade union member, but I was, so a lot of this Bill offends my belief in the right of the individual to withdraw their labour and the rights of the trade unions.

Lords amendments 4 and 5 would tackle the unfair obligation on the trade unions to ensure that members comply with a work notice. The thought of sacking anyone for going on strike is particularly difficult for me, because I actually have experience of that. I have experience of my husband being sacked, in 1989-90 in Aberdeen, because he went on strike. I know the damage it did to us and to a lot of people’s careers. To take away the right to object to what people believe is an unfair practice or to ask for better pay is, to me, a contravention of rights that people have fought long and hard for in this country. So I will be voting no on those two motions, as will the other Liberal Democrats.

On Lords amendment 1—

Alan Brown: The hon. Member is coming on to Lords amendment 1, and I hope she will support that amendment on the Bill’s territorial extent. Has she had time to think further about the earlier point that the logical extension of the Liberal Democrats supporting amendment 1 is the devolution of employment law to Scotland?

Christine Jardine: I thank the hon. Member for his intervention, but remind him that we are here to discuss this Bill and its implications, which are very serious. Yet again, there is an attempt to divert us on to the constitutional issue, which in this particular instance is not appropriate. Yes, I will be voting against—

David Linden: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Christine Jardine: Not at the moment, thank you. I have not actually finished speaking—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. For the sake of clarity, may I say that the hon. Lady is absolutely right? This is a very narrow debate on these Lords amendments.

Christine Jardine: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I will tell the House exactly how we are going to vote: we will vote no on the Government motion to disagree with Lords amendment 1. Like the Labour party, we are very proud of the devolution settlement in Scotland and the achievement of devolution in Scotland and in Wales, which I would remind SNP Members they actually opposed at the time. They campaigned against it, because they were in favour of independence and did not want devolution, so the commission did not involve them. But that is not what we are here to talk about. We are here to talk about this Bill.

David Linden: Will the hon. Lady give way on that point?

Christine Jardine: No, thank you.

The Bill is fundamentally flawed, not least in the fact that it will do nothing to address the current shortfalls in employment in the public sector. It will do nothing to protect the rights of patients in hospitals, which as the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) said, are what the nurses who have been on strike are seeking to protect. It will do nothing to help them.

The arguments against this Bill were rehearsed thoroughly on Second Reading, and I do not want to spend too much time going through them again, but I pay tribute to the Lords for their amendments, which do go some way to addressing the failings that so many of us identified on Second Reading. The Liberal Democrats will be voting no to the Government's attempts to reject the Lords amendments, because they would improve what is a flawed—I believe, fundamentally flawed—Bill.

Sam Tarry (Ilford South) (Lab): In its original form, this Bill represented what many call a sacker's charter, because it was a mishmash of unworkable draconian assault on workers' rights. I would say it is one of the biggest setbacks for workers' rights in generations. If it passes, it will shackle trade unions, ordinary workers and a whole list of people struggling for fair wages in so many sectors of our economy. It will place unacceptable restrictions on the fundamental right for workers to withdraw their labour, and to defend their and their colleagues' pay, which at the moment mostly seems to mean defending themselves from the Government's inability to offer fair pay rises in so much of our public sector.

Worst of all, particularly in a sector such as the railways, the Bill will worsen industrial relations, create more delays on rail and create a worse situation for passengers. It will worsen industrial relations overall. I note that one union did successfully get a decent pay rise, because the Government clearly could not stomach the fight with it. It was our beloved firefighters who did actually get a decent raise out of this Government.

This Bill is anti-democratic because it gives the Secretary of State enormous power to define and introduce minimum service requirements. It is draconian because, in its

original form, workers could be sacked for participating in industrial action supported through their own democratic processes. By the way, with trade unions facing enormous damages, we should bear in mind that they are the biggest voluntary organisation movement in this country, with more than 6 million people, and the majority of the reps do not get a single penny for the trade union work they do.

The Bill is also counterproductive, because the Government's own analysis says that minimum service levels could lead to more strikes and more non-strike industrial action—in other words, action short of strike—so what on earth is the point of going ahead with it? It is unnecessary to its very core, because it is already custom and practice, especially in the NHS and the blue light services, for cover to be agreed by unions during industrial disputes.

Kevin Hollinrake indicated dissent.

Sam Tarry: The Minister shakes his head, but that is a fact. If he does not believe me, I will take him to my local hospital to see that and to have discussions with the union reps, who regard the safety of their patients as their outright priority.

Rachael Maskell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way on that very point, because I used to negotiate those deals with employers when I was head of health at Unite. Those negotiations are about the relationship that we build between the employer and the worker, but that will not be possible under the Bill, which is why employers have asked that it does not proceed.

Sam Tarry: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. When we cast around for anybody actually supporting the Bill who is not a Minister or on the Conservative Benches, we struggle to find anyone. In fact, the Rail Safety and Standards Board chief executive has said nobody thinks this is workable and that it will worsen industrial action. The chief executive of Greater Anglia, who is obviously involved in the railway industry, has said nobody—nobody—in the whole of the rail industry has even asked for this. Then, as we heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) and many other Members who have spoken, there are the condemnations from the ILO general secretary.

This attack on rights is making our country an international laughing stock. The Government have said many times that the Bill matches or is very similar to some of the minimum service level processes in many other countries, but there is not a single person in Europe saying this is good idea, because it is not anything like what is in place in comparable countries around the world—not at all. One in five workers could be covered by this Bill's provisions. They are the nurses, firefighters, teachers, paramedics, rail workers, civil servants and key workers the Government praised during the pandemic, who are all at risk of arbitrary dismissal. What a slap in the face for the heroes we clapped for weeks on end during the pandemic.

Let me turn to Lords amendment 4, on unfair dismissal. Currently, workers who are on strike are automatically deemed to be unfairly dismissed if they are sacked when taking part in an official, lawful strike. The Bill as introduced would remove that protection for those named by an employer in a work notice. It would mean that

someone disciplined for not following a work notice could lose their job and then their livelihood. Lords amendment 4 is much fairer. It would reverse that measure and prevent the failure to comply with a work notice from being regarded as a breach of contract or constituting lawful grounds for dismissal. To be fair to the Government, I have not heard even them say that people should be sacked for trying to enact democratic rights. That would be a U-turn on what the Government said when minimum service level legislation was first brought forward. It was pledged in the 2019 Queen's speech that

"sanctions are not directed at individual workers."

The Bill clearly does do that, but the Lords amendment would help the Government to develop the policy set out in their own manifesto, so why not go ahead and back it tonight?

7.30 pm

Staffing shortages within public services are at record levels. NHS job vacancies number 133,446, and one in eight newly qualified teachers left their job in the first year of teaching—yes, one in eight teachers are leaving the job in the first year of taking it up. No wonder we have such a crisis in education. Sacking workers for speaking up about their pay and conditions will worsen morale and worsen the staffing crisis in so many of our most important sectors. NHS Providers has gone further and warned that without this amendment, asking trusts to enforce work notices will damage relations and the good will that is already in place and that, as my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) said, is crucial to successful local negotiations.

In the other place, Baroness O'Grady said that no other European country with minimum service levels does this—that is the point I made earlier. She said it will make Britain

"an outlier in Europe and would constitute a gross infringement of an employee's individual freedom."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 26 April 2023; Vol. 829, c. 1234.]

Without Lords amendment 4, the Bill will constitute a fundamental violation of workers' freedom and the democratic right to withdraw one's labour. Something that makes me proud to be British is that we fought for and won that right over the past 200 years or more.

Lords amendments 5, 6 and 7 are on union rights. In its original form, the Bill will place trade unions in an untenable position when their members democratically vote for industrial action. We have the recent example of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, which got even higher numbers in its second ballot for industrial action than it did the first time. We hear from the Rail Minister that we ought to put the deal straight to the members, but perhaps the RMT should put it straight to the members, as they would probably vote against it by an even bigger margin.

The Bill states that if unions fail to "take reasonable steps" to ensure that their members who democratically voted for industrial action cannot participate in that same action, they could face an injunction or be asked to pay huge damages. Strikes could be regarded as unlawful, stripping workers of all protections, including but not limited to automatic unfair dismissal protections. We have some pretty big trade unions in this country, and for unions with more than 100,000 members—there are quite a lot in the TUC—damages could be more than £1 million. That is £1 million taken by this Government

from workers who are democratically making decisions about their future and to defend their pay, more often than not against that very same Government. It is outrageous.

The Joint Committee on Human Rights stated that it is

"hard to see how it is compliant with Article 11 ECHR to expose any participant in industrial action to the risk of dismissal simply because a trade union fails to take unspecified 'reasonable steps' required in respect of those subject to a work notice."

That is not technical jargon; it means that the threat of litigation, and the obligations on unions to help ensure compliance with work notices imposed by employers, would require unions to act in a way that would undermine their own industrial action and their responsibility to represent their members. That is what union members pay their subs to do.

The right to strike is a hallmark of any democratic society, and it is recognised and protected by United Nations treaties, ILO conventions, the European social charter, and the European convention on human rights. When many people in those organisations condemn the Bill as unworkable, unnecessary and an attack on rights in this country, that tells me that this measure has been driven by political machination and the desire to have a distraction from a failing Government, and has little to do with enhancing industrial relations in this country.

Lords amendment 5 and the subsequent technical amendments would protect unions from being forced into undermining their own otherwise lawful and legitimate strike action. It would also remove an employer's recourse to secure injunctions to prevent unions from conducting a strike that has been legally balloted—something that has happened for decades in this country and is seen as one of the fundamental cornerstones of our democracy. I urge Members across the House to vote against the Government's motion to reject Lords amendment 5 and the related technical amendments.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne said, the scale of international and civil society criticism is pretty extensive. The list is huge. The chief executive of the Rail Safety and Standards Board, the managing director of Greater Anglia and NHS Providers have also said that the Bill will damage relationships and trust between staff and leaders. The director general of the ILO has rebuked the Government over it. The US Secretary of Labour has said:

"I would not support anything that would take away from workers"

and 121 politicians from 18 countries recently signed a joint statement opposing the Bill. That included signatories from the Government parties in Australia and Spain as well as the former Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte. These are not some left-wing rabble turning up to say, "Hey, this is something we don't want"—these are respected global leaders saying that our country is in the wrong place on this Bill.

In addition, an open letter has been written by 50 civil rights groups, including Liberty, Human Rights Watch and Oxfam, which all condemned the Bill. Race equality organisations, including the Equality Trust, the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants and the Runnymede Trust—all respected, established organisations—have all raised concerns that black and minority ethnic workers

could also be unfairly targeted. Campaigners for women's rights, among them the Fawcett Society, Pregnant Then Screwed, the Equality Trust and the Women's Budget Group, have also warned that women could be disproportionately affected. No one who is not on the Government Benches thinks that the Bill is a good idea—not employers, not workers and not the international community. So I would like to hear at the end of the debate from the Minister: why is he so insistent on pushing ahead with something that is both unworkable and so undemocratic? Perhaps, for once, the Government could sanction the people around the negotiating table to end the industrial disputes in teaching, in the NHS and in the transport sector and instead put British workers and our rights first.

Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab): I declare an interest as a trade unionist with more than 50 years' experience and as a proud member of Unite the Union. I rise to speak in support of amendments 5 and 4, tabled by Lord Collins and Baroness O'Grady, among others, but before I turn to the substance of those important and thoughtful amendments, I want to say that no number of amendments could ever make the Bill acceptable to those of us on this side of the House who believe in the fundamental right of workers to pursue fair and equitable treatment at work. Its central purpose—to prevent workers from exercising their right to take strike action—is an affront to the most basic principles of democracy, and the idea of forcing a worker to cross their own picket line strikes at the heart of trade unionism.

Not for the first time, this Government have suffered the ignominy of being condemned by the international community for their deviation from democratic norms, with 121 politicians from more than 18 countries recently condemning what they described as the

“the UK Government's attempt to limit workers' rights and its attempt to justify it with comparisons to international norms.”

The Bill's specific provisions, especially those that seek to make unions liable for the actions of their members who fail to adhere to work notices, betray an utter ignorance on the part of Ministers about the nature of employment relations in the UK. The Bill is opposed not just by the trade unions, but by the vast majority of the business community. Paul Nowak, general secretary of the TUC, expressed the feelings of many when he said that the Bill will serve only to poison industrial relations in this country and exacerbate the disputes that it seeks to end. This is yet another dangerous gimmick from a Government who at every stage have refused to settle demands for fair pay from public sector workers.

I want to single out Lords amendment 4, tabled by Baroness O'Grady, which would provide a much-needed safeguard for workers from the almost inevitable exploitation of work notices by unscrupulous employers. Amendment 5, tabled by Lord Collins, would excise proposed new section 234E, which would oblige trade unions to ensure that their members comply with a work notice. That is surely one of the most abhorrent measures in the entire Bill. It would in effect compel trade unions to undermine the effectiveness of their own lawful actions. It is a proposal as ludicrous as it is alarming and it should be consigned to the scrapheap.

I have closely followed the contributions in the other place concerning the Bill and salute the attempts to mitigate the worst excesses of what nevertheless remains

a vindictive, anti-democratic and unworkable piece of legislation. I have no doubt whatever that Government Members will refuse altogether to listen to the concerns raised in the other place, and I say with absolute certainty that the Government will shortly come to regret this deplorable attempt to restrict the rights of their citizens.

Stephanie Peacock (Barnsley East) (Lab): I am pleased to speak in this important debate in support of Lords amendments 4 and 5 to the minimum service levels Bill. As a proud member of a trade union, I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

The Bill is a fundamental attack on working people's rights and freedoms, meaning that workers are at risk of being punished for exercising their right to strike. As someone who has been on strike as a teacher, I know that the decision to withdraw labour is not an easy one; it is a last resort when workers feel they have no other option; when conditions and pay are no longer tolerable.

The Bill would make seeking an injunction easier and broaden the circumstances that allow this process to take place. Therefore, where strikes are fairly balloted and otherwise lawful, employers would have more scope to be able to bring an injunction against trade unions under the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992, potentially putting a stop to fair industrial action and flying in the face of fundamental workers' rights. As the Bill broadens the circumstances under which minimum service levels apply, that means a poor employer could issue a work notice where one is not needed, to workers they know are part of the trade union, and sack them for failure to comply with the notice when they strike, as they are likely to do. The Bill allows scope for bad employers to use loopholes to target specific employees. Amendment 4 seeks to prevent this from being possible; it would be a huge backward step. Amendment 5 aims to ensure that unions are not obliged to ensure that their members have to comply with work notices, which would undermine their own otherwise lawful strikes.

Furthermore, the Joint Committee on Human Rights says that the penalties imposed on trade unions and workers for failing to comply with work notices are “severe” and that the Bill would be likely to lead to disproportionate involvement from employers, particularly where a strike does not involve risk to life and limb. The Committee said that the Government should reconsider whether “less severe measures” would be more effective. Lords amendment 4 would prevent workers from being vulnerable to dismissal for failure to comply with a work order.

The Bill is unworkable and the Government know it. The Transport Secretary admits that it will not work, the Education Secretary does not want it and the Government's own regulatory watchdog has called it “unfit for purpose”. It offers no solutions and it would not have prevented the recent wave of industrial action. It is a distraction from 13 years of failure. So why are the Government insisting on pushing ahead? They have rushed this through Parliament, presented the findings of the impact assessment to the Bill late and provided only four and a half hours for the Committee of the whole House.

There are serious concerns about how the Bill will be implemented in practice. In countries such as Spain and France that already have minimum service levels in

place, more days have been lost to strikes than in the UK and that can lead to legal battles, which further delay solutions to industrial action.

In 1984, striking mineworkers in Barnsley were branded “the enemy within” by the Government when they went on strike to defend their industry. We still feel the economic effects of that political attack. Today, the Government are again blaming hard-working people—this time, for the Government’s economic failure.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): I rise to speak in support of all the Lords amendments, but I especially want to focus on Lords amendment 4 and Lords amendments 5 to 7, because they are about protecting two key democratic principles: the rights of the worker to withdraw their labour; and the role of trade unions to represent workers—and not bosses and not the Government—when workers decide to withdraw their labour.

Lords amendment 4 would mean that a failure to comply with a work notice would not be deemed to be a breach of an employment contract, so the person could not be dismissed as a result. Lords amendments 5 to 7 would ensure that trade unions do not have any responsibility to ensure that their members comply with the work notice. We need to be clear about what the Bill is about and why the Lords amendments are necessary. The Bill is about perverting the role of trade unions in our democratic society. It is about trying to turn the trade unions into not the servants of workers, but the servants of bosses, or even the servants of a Conservative Government.

7.45 pm

How can the Government argue that it is reasonable for the role of a trade union to include encouraging its own members to cross picket lines in a strike that has been declared lawful and that its members have voted for? It is obscene. It is an attack on key freedoms. It is incredible that we even have to speak out in defence of those basic principles. For all the Government’s talk that the Bill is about public safety and service levels, these Lords amendments get to the heart of the Bill. It is a fundamental attack on the rights of individual workers to strike and on the role of trade unions. This wretched legislation will see workers who have democratically voted for strike action forced by their employer to go into work. That is why Opposition Members are saying that it is an attack on the right to strike.

As I have said, the Bill will see trade unions forced to play a role in policing their own members into work—and if they do not, they will face legal action and heavy fines. What kind of role would trade unions have if trade union officials near picket lines are not persuading trade union members not to go to work, but obliged by this legislation to persuade trade union members to break democratically agreed upon strike action? If we think about it, it is very sinister. It is an unprecedented encroachment on the role of trade unions in our democratic society. It is a fundamental attack on one of our core democratic rights. *[Interruption.]* It is almost like bringing in legislation requiring the Minister to stand near polling stations and request that people vote Labour. I give way.

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on making an incredibly good speech. I was not trying to intervene; I was suggesting

that, if the Minister had something to say, I am sure that my hon. Friend would be happy to give way to him.

Richard Burgon: I would. My hon. Friend is always light on his feet in the Chamber, as he has shown, but I would be happy to give way to the Minister if he has anything of merit to say as this pernicious piece of legislation passes through with no acceptance by the Government of the common-sense and democratic decency of the amendments from the other place. Their anti-strikes Bill is no one-off—this is why the Lords amendments are so necessary. It is part of an authoritarian drift by a Government who, as we have heard, are desperate to close off any challenges to their reactionary agenda, be that at the ballot box, on the picket line or on protests.

The Bill, this attack on the right to strike, follows restrictions on the right to vote through the disgraceful voter suppression strategy. It follows restrictions on the right to protest through the disgraceful Public Order Act 2023. This anti-strikes Bill, like the Public Order Act and voter ID, should be thrown into the dustbin of history.

It is deeply concerning that, in 2023, we are having to rely on members in the other place to send these Lords amendments back when we are facing such draconian attacks on democratic rights, including the democratic right to strike, the democratic freedom to withdraw labour and the democratic role of trade unions to represent their members—workers, not bosses and not the Conservative Government.

I end by refuting the Government’s empty claim that this legislation is really about bringing the UK into line with International Labour Organisation norms. That is absolutely not the case. I previously tabled an amendment, backed by 30 Members on a cross-party basis, to prevent this legislation from being enacted until a judge had certified that the UK was meeting its International Labour Organisation obligations. The Government refused to accept that amendment; I wonder why. Perhaps it is because they know that their claim that the Bill brings us into line with other countries and International Labour Organisation standards is hollow rhetoric. The truth, as the European Trade Union Confederation has said, is that

“The UK already has among the most draconian restrictions on the right to strike in Europe, and the UK government’s plans would push it even further away from normal, democratic practice across Europe.”

Members do not need to be trade unionists to understand the common sense and democratic decency of these Lords amendments, and they certainly do not need to be socialists. Any Member of this House who values the hard-won freedoms of individual workers and trade unions in our society should back these Lords amendments. Not to do so would be completely shameful and go against the hard-won democratic freedoms that we have secured in this country through struggle. Indeed, it is shameful that we have had to protest outside Parliament today and to argue for those freedoms in this Chamber tonight.

Chris Stephens: Let me start by referring the House to my entry in the Register of Members’ Interests and the fact that I am a proud member of the Glasgow city branch of Unison, one of the largest trade unions across these islands.

[Chris Stephens]

Like many other Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East (David Linden), I am completely puzzled as to why there seems to be industrial action on the Government Benches every time we discuss industrial action law. Could it be that Government Members are so outraged by this Bill, and indeed support the Lords amendments, that they are at the TUC rally outside? I doubt it somewhat. Or is it simply the fact—as I believe to be the case—that Government Back Benchers do not have the confidence in their own arguments for this legislation to come here and defend the Government's position?

It seems that the unelected House—the comrades in ermine down the corridor—has a greater understanding of what happens in workplaces across these islands than the Government do, and we can see that in some of the amendments. It is quite incredible that the Government oppose an amendment that would make it the employer's responsibility to serve a work notice. The Government then say that they want to keep the measures in the Bill for dismissing a worker. This is quite incredible.

Imagine the scene. The day after industrial action, a poor individual who went on strike goes back to their work and is asked by the employer, "Where were you yesterday?" They are going to answer, "I was on strike." But they are then told, "Well, you were served a work notice," and that person will rightly say, "Where's the proof from you as the employer that I was served a work notice?" The employer is going to say, "Under the legislation, we don't need to serve the work notice, but we have the right to dismiss you, because we think you should have been served one," and they will end up being dismissed—with no right, incidentally, as I understand the legislation, to an employment tribunal. You really could not make this up.

The Government also oppose a sensible amendment to ensure oversight of the powers in the Bill. A Government who are confident in their own legislation should welcome an amendment to ensure oversight of the Bill and a Committee of each House to look at how the powers are exercised. Of course, as the Minister has indicated, he opposes that Lords amendment, too.

Then we have Lords amendment 1. I heard the Minister say that industrial relations is reserved. Well, not quite, Minister, because when there are elections to Scotland's Parliament or the Senedd in Wales, political parties—at least the sensible and good ones—will have in their manifestos how industrial relations should be addressed in areas of devolved competence. That would seem the sensible approach for a good political party to take, which is why there are debates in both those devolved Parliaments about the fair work agenda. We should have more of those debates in this place—but of course, the Government would not know fair work or the fair work agenda if it crossed them in the street.

The reason I think the Lords have got it right in their amendment 1 is that the Government seem to believe, and take the position, that they know better than the Scottish Parliament or the Welsh Senedd about devolved areas of responsibility. In seeking to reject Lords amendment 1, the Government are arguing that Ministers at Westminster level have the expertise to know what the minimum service levels should be in transport, health or anything else in Scotland or Wales, when they cannot

even manage their own minimum service levels in this Chamber. What chance have we got that they will understand?

If anyone seriously believes that a Minister in this place has an understanding of what the minimum service level should be in a devolved competence, then I would suggest that they must be a right Michael Blackley. Frankly, you could not make it up. It is laughable position, and the Lords have got it right. In this respect, the law should apply to England only, and then England's representatives should decide whether, possibly, the legislation should apply at all.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making excellent points about the importance of industrial relations and Scotland having the expertise to deal with that. Does he agree that industrial relations in Scotland in recent years have been much improved on the situation under the Westminster Government, certainly in negotiating pay and conditions for workers in Scotland?

Chris Stephens: I thank my constituency neighbour for that excellent intervention, because as my good Friends the Members for Glasgow East and for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) indicated earlier, the area of the United Kingdom with the least industrial action is Scotland. That is because there seems to be a mature relationship between employers and trade unions in Scotland—far more mature, it would seem, than in England, for example, where we see Government Ministers bashing trade unions on a daily basis on the sofas of breakfast television.

I want to end my remarks, because I am conscious that others want to speak in this debate. The fact that the Government want to dismiss workers for exercising the human right to withdraw their labour is what makes this an absolutely despicable and disgraceful piece of legislation, which would tie them in with countries such as Russia and Hungary. We might think that those are not examples that the Government should follow. It seems quite frankly bizarre that they do want to follow them. I will be in the No Lobby tonight, because I agree with these Lords amendments.

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): I would like to declare my interests as a proud trade union member all of my life.

Obviously I want to discuss the amendments from the other place, but I have to say that this should basically be classed as the anti-strike Bill. This is a Bill that very few people want, far less like. Despite the fact that there are very few people on the Government Benches, we will watch them flow through the Lobby tonight—again, to attack working people of this country. Nor should we be surprised by any of this, because when the Government are down—when they are out; when they are under pressure; when they are out of steam and have nothing left to say, after 13 years of destruction of this country—what can bring them together? The answer is attacking trade unions, attacking working people and, we should not forget—and we will never forget—attacking key workers, because that is what this Bill does. It is about culture wars and politics of distraction. Like rats when cornered, they revert to type.

The amendments from the other place are extremely important. The thinking behind each of the amendments is that people understand the real intentions of the Bill.

They are not what has been suggested by the Minister and others on the Government Benches. We need to be honest about what the Bill is actually about.

8 pm

If someone working in any industry who is a member of a trade union, and who has a ballot—with this country's restrictive legislation—and jumps through the hoops of the threshold and wins that, they have a majority for industrial action. The issue might be pensions, or it might be health and safety, for heaven's sake. In an attack on working people introduced in this place, this legislation states that regardless of the ballot result from that democratic process, they are expected to ignore it. They could be under pressure from the boss, the employer and then the Government. Under the new legislation, if I was at a workplace and I had been advocating action—as a last resort, as it always is—I would break the law.

Andy McDonald: Does my hon. Friend agree that, given the significant amount of industrial unrest over the last several months and, indeed, years, where people do not think they are listened to, the introduction of this legislation will deepen their resolve? They will show by their actions that they will not tolerate an attack on their freedoms and their basic employment and human rights.

Ian Lavery: It is extremely important that people understand that once we see nurses, doctors, teachers and key workers facing the sack, there will be resistance in this country. I kid you not, there will be resistance in this country like we have never seen before, because these are basic human rights. We cannot instruct ordinary hard-working people; key workers; the people who got us through the pandemic; the people who put the Great in Great Britain. We cannot, under any circumstances, allow this legislation to sack individuals.

Lords amendment 4 refers to the work notice. My friend, the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens), eloquently made the point about the notification of a work notice. If someone has not had notification of a work notice, how could they ever be accused of breaching it if they are not aware that they have it? This is pretty simple stuff. I am not a barrister or a solicitor, but I understand it. And you know what, Mr Deputy Speaker, the Members on the Government Benches understand it, too. There is no doubt about that. When those people are asked the following day, "Why weren't you here? You had a work notice," and they reply, "I didn't have one", they will be told, "You did. How did you not understand that?" They can be sacked for that. Under this legislation, they can be sacked for not adhering to something that they did not even know they were part of. How bad is that?

Chris Stephens: It is actually worse than the hon. Gentleman is presenting it, because the person dismissed would not have the right to go to an employment tribunal.

Ian Lavery: Absolutely. I fully agree with those sentiments.

When employers are considering who they might wish to give the work notice to, Lords amendment 3 suggests that when deciding whether to identify a person in a work notice, an employer cannot consider whether the person "has or has not" taken part in trade union activities, made use of their services or had a trade union raise issues on their behalf. That amendment should not be needed in the UK in 2023, because everybody clearly

understands that if bosses give work notices, they have a clear idea who they will give them to: the trade union reps and the people who do not have a fantastic employment record. That is why that Lords amendment about who the company identifies for a work notice is really important.

In reality, this legislation is simply a battering ram against ordinary working people. I have mentioned the resistance that will be shown in this country if we start sacking the nurses, the teachers and the posties. Blaming the posties for breaking the universal service obligation; blaming the teachers for education in their classes; blaming the nurses for the backlog—you name it, that is what the bosses will do. That will start under this legislation, as they will have the power to sack people. This is a sackers charter, no doubt about that, criminalising our heroic workers.

There will be resistance like we have never seen before. The difference is that the public are on the side of the workers on this one, so be ready. I raise a stark warning: be ready. When the bosses have the books out, ready to sack individuals, and when the Government are telling them who to sack and what the reasons might be, they should be ready for the resistance, because there will be huge issues. How can the Government expect a trade union to take responsibility for individuals who might not want to accept a basic human right? It is bizarre. It is absolutely crazy. I am trying to explain it, but it is very difficult; it is not simple. The trade unions have a huge role to play.

The Bill not only escalates an already febrile atmosphere in this country; it is a vicious attempt to pin the problems that we have on trade unions, from a party that has completely run out of steam. When will the Government start doing their job, for heaven's sake? How many more hospital appointments need to be set back? How many teachers need to be made redundant or letters and parcels be delivered late before they stop making excuses and demonising workers, and get on with the job that they were elected to do?

Rachael Maskell: My hon. Friend is making an outstanding speech about the reality of industrial relations. Does he agree that trade unions do not have any jurisdiction over their members; it is the members who have the jurisdiction over the trade unions? Therefore, it is for the members to decide what action they take or do not take. The Government do not seem to get it.

Ian Lavery: My hon. Friend makes a good and valid point that the trade unions are the workers themselves. It is as simple as that.

In conclusion, will Government Members tell us why we are not having a minimum service Bill for non-strike days? In the past year or so, in particular when the paramedics and ambulance workers have gone on strike, efficiency has increased and has been first class on strike days. On non-strike days, like the 360-odd days other than those strike days, unfortunately what we see is people lying on pavements or having heart attacks who cannot get an ambulance. Let us look at a Bill for non-striking days so we can enhance the efficiency of all of the services outlined tonight. If the Minister did that, he would get our support.

Kevin Hollinrake: I thank all Members, on both sides of the House, for the robust debate we have had as the legislation has passed through both Houses. It is fair to

[Kevin Hollinrake]

say that the discussion and debate about the legislation has pretty much divided along party political lines. Our position is that this legislation strikes a balance between the right to strike and the right of the public to go about their daily business and daily lives.

It is also fair to say that we could have chosen an option that went much further. As I said earlier, the USA, Australia and Canada have completely banned strikes in certain sectors, prohibiting them completely. Spain and Belgium have similar legislation on minimum service levels. Indeed, in France there are penalties of up to six months in jail for anyone who is under a requisition notice to return to work.

It is interesting that many Opposition Members have talked about restricting the right to strike. Well, we already restrict the right to strike for the armed forces, the police and prison officers. Will Opposition Members repeal that legislation to allow people who work in those parts of our society to strike? There are already some restrictions; we are putting in place sensible restrictions that are already in place in many other countries.

The guidance from the International Labour Organisation says:

“A minimum service may be set up in the event of a strike, the extent and duration of which might be such as to result in an acute national crisis endangering the normal living conditions of the population.”

It is clear the ILO supports the kinds of measures we are putting in place. I have heard Opposition Members say that no one wants this legislation but interestingly, when surveyed, 56% of the public say that they do, against 31% who do not.

Earlier today, the deputy Leader of the Opposition tweeted her support for the 121 politicians who have condemned the Bill. May I gently urge her to look at some of the people who signed that letter? Some of those signatories are anti-Zelensky, anti-Ukraine, anti-Israel and pro-Russia. I urge her to look at that again and withdraw her tweet.

We believe the legislation strikes the right balance between the right to strike and the rights of the public to go about their daily business and protect their livelihoods. There have been over £3 billion of costs to our economy because of these strikes, which is putting many businesses and many jobs in danger. The Bill presents a fair balance between the rights of workers and the rights of the public.

Chris Stephens: The Minister is generous in giving way. He mentions balance. Can he tell me what is balanced about a piece of legislation, which he supports, whereby an employee who does not get a work notice can be dismissed?

Kevin Hollinrake: There have to be measures that employers can use to make sure people comply with the work notice—that is how it works in many other countries. The reality is that nobody will be sacked as a result of the legislation. There are other disciplinary measures that can take place. We already have derogations in place on a voluntary basis that do not always prove ineffective. We are formalising the process to allow these measures to take place in other vital public services.

The amendments would make the legislation ineffective, which is why I urge all Members on both sides of the House to vote with us and disagree with the amendments.

Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 1.

The House divided: Ayes 288, Noes 227.

Division No. 235]

[8.14 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, Mr Steve
Barclay, rh Steve
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Benton, Scott
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, rh Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, rh Sir Robert
Burghart, Alex
Butler, Rob
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, rh Alex
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Simon
Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Colburn, Elliot
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, Claire
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth

Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Donelan, rh Michelle (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, Sir James
Duguid, David
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Ellis, rh Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, rh Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Frazer, rh Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Garnier, Mark
Gibb, rh Nick
Gibson, Peter
Gideon, Jo
Glen, rh John
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Grundy, James
Gullis, Jonathan
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris

Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 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
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherylyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David

Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Mr Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt

Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather

Whittaker, rh Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Scott Mann and
 Steve Double**

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Bonnar, Steven
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Sir Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Coyle, Neil
 Creasy, Stella
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Daby, Janet
 Dalton, Ashley
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dixon, Samantha
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)

Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foord, Richard
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah

Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lowell-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
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 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
 Oppung-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillipson, Bridget

Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qaisar, Ms Anum
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Sarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Wakeford, Christian
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Navendu Mishra and
 Mary Glindon

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 1 disagreed to.

Schedule

MINIMUM SERVICE LEVELS FOR CERTAIN STRIKES

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 2.—(Kevin Hollinrake.)

The House divided: Ayes 286, Noes 231.

Division No. 236]

[8.28 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Butler, Rob
 Carter, Andy
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, rh Alex
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth

Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, rh Michelle (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, Sir James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, rh Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony

Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkins, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 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
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Mackrory, Cherylyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly

Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Mr Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 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
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob

Tellers for the Ayes:
Scott Mann and
Steve Double

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Bonnar, Steven
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Sir Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Coyle, Neil
 Creasy, Stella
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Daby, Janet
 Dalton, Ashley
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dixon, Samantha
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)

Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foord, Richard
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal

Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 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
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 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
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy

Qaisar, Ms Anum
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Wakeford, Christian
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Navendu Mishra and
 Mary Glindon

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 2 disagreed to.

8.39 pm

More than two hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the 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).

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 4.

The House divided: Ayes 286, Noes 232.

Division No. 237]

[8.40 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Butler, Rob
 Carter, Andy
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, rh Alex
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia

Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, rh Michelle (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evnnett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, rh Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver

Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 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
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherylyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Marson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Morris, Anne Marie

Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Mr Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt

Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie
 Warburton, David (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather

Whittaker, rh Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob

Tellers for the Ayes:
Steve Double and
Scott Mann

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Bonnar, Steven
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Sir Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Coyle, Neil
 Creasy, Stella
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Daby, Janet
 Dalton, Ashley
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha

Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dixon, Samantha
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foord, Richard
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart

Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 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
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 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
 Owatemi, Taiwo

Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qaisar, Ms Anum
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Wakeford, Christian
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:

Mary Glendon and
 Navendu Mishra

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 4 disagreed to.

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 5.—(Kevin Hollinrake.)

The House divided: Ayes 287, Noes 232.

Division No. 238]

[8.51 pm

AYES

Adams, rh Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Butler, Rob
 Carter, Andy
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, rh Alex
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Simon
 Clarke, Theo (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinenage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, rh Michelle (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duddridge, Sir James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Ellis, rh Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, rh Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony

Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkins, Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 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
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Lopez, Julia (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Manson, Julie
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Milling, rh Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Mullan, Dr Kieran

Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryl
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Mr Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, Laura
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallis, Dr Jamie

Warburton, David (*Proxy vote cast by Craig Mackinlay*)
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, rh Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John

Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, Craig
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Scott Mann and
 Steve Double

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Adley*)
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Fleur
 Ashworth, rh Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Bonnar, Steven
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Ms Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Sir Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clark, Feryal (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Cooper, Daisy
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Coyle, Neil
 Creasy, Stella
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Daby, Janet
 Dalton, Ashley
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dixon, Samantha
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin

Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foord, Richard
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan

Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 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
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Brendan O'Hara*)
 McMorin, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 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
 Owatemi, Taiwo
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qaisar, Ms Anum

Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Sobel, Alex
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Trickett, Jon
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Wakeford, Christian
 Webbe, Claudia
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Whitley, Mick
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Navendu Mishra and
 Mary Glindon

Question accordingly agreed to.
Lords amendment 5 disagreed to.
Lords amendments 6 and 7 disagreed to.
Lords amendment 3 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 1, 2 and 4 to 7;

That Kevin Hollinrake, Mike Wood, Alexander Stafford, Jane Stevenson, Imran Hussain, Navendu Mishra and Alan Brown be members of the Committee;

That Kevin Hollinrake be the Chair of the Committee;

That three be the quorum of the Committee.

That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—(*Jacob Young.*)

Question agreed to.

Committee to withdraw immediately; reasons to be reported and communicated to the Lords.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

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

INTERNATIONAL IMMUNITIES AND PRIVILEGES

That the draft International Criminal Police Organisation (Immunities and Privileges) Order 2023, which was laid before this House on 20 April, be approved.—(*Jacob Young.*)

Question agreed to.

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

REHABILITATION OF OFFENDERS

That the draft Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) (Amendment) (England and Wales) Order 2023, which was laid before this House on 24 April, be approved.—(*Jacob Young.*)

Question agreed to.

SCOTTISH AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That John Lamont be discharged from the Scottish Affairs Committee and Mark Menzies be added.—(*Sir Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

Ordered,

That Rachel Maclean be discharged from the Women and Equalities Committee and Jackie Doyle-Price be added.—(*Sir Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

National AI Strategy and UNESCO AI Ethics Framework

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Jacob Young.)

9.6 pm

Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): I am grateful, Mr Deputy Speaker, that this Adjournment debate on the regulation of artificial intelligence has been granted. I declare my interest as set out in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Britain is at a turning point. Having left the European Union, irrespective of what people thought about that decision, we have decided to go it alone. This new chapter in the long history of our great nation is starting to unfold, and we have a number of possible destinations ahead. We stand here today as a country with great challenges and an identity crisis: what is modern Britain to become? Our economy is, at best, sluggish; at worst, it is in decline. Our public services are unaffordable, inefficient and not delivering the quality of service the public should expect. People see and feel those issues right across the country: in their pay packets, in the unfilled vacancies at work, and in their local schools, GP surgeries, dentists, hospitals and high streets. All of this is taking place in a quickly changing world in which Britain is losing influence and control, and for hostile actors who wish Britain—or the west more broadly—harm, those ruptures in the social contract present an opportunity to exploit.

Having left the European Union, I see two destinations ahead of us: we can either keep doing what we are doing, or modernise our country. If we take the route to continuity, in my view we will continue to decline. There will be fewer people in work, earning less than they should be and paying less tax as a consequence. There will be fewer businesses investing, meaning lower profits and, again, lower taxes. Income will decline for the Treasury, but with no desire to increase the national debt for day-to-day spending, that will force us to take some very difficult decisions. It will be a world in which Britain is shaped by the world, instead of our shaping it in our interests.

Alternatively, we can decide to take the route to modernity, where workers co-create technology solutions at work to help them be more productive, with higher pay as a consequence; where businesses invest in automation and innovation, driving profits and tax payments to the Treasury; where the Government take seriously the need for reform and modernisation of the public sector, using technology to individualise and improve public services while reducing the cost of those services; and where we equip workers and public servants with the skills and training to seize the opportunities of that new economy. It will be a modern, innovative Britain with a modern, highly effective public sector, providing leadership in the world by leveraging our strengths and our ability to convene and influence our partners.

I paint those two pictures—those two destinations: continuity or modernity—for a reason. The former, the route to continuity, fails to seize the opportunities that technological reforms present us with, but the latter, the route to modernity, is built on the foundations of that new technological revolution.

This debate this evening is about artificial intelligence. To be clear, that is computers and servers, not robots. Artificial intelligence means, according to Google,

“computers and machines that can reason, learn, and act in such a way that would normally require human intelligence or that involves data whose scale exceeds what humans can analyse.”

These AI machines can be categorised in four different ways. First, reactive machines have a limited application based on pre-programmed rules. These machines do not use memory or learn themselves. IBM's Deep Blue machine, which beat Garry Kasparov at chess in 1997, is an example. Secondly, limited memory machines use memory to learn over time by being trained using what is known as a neural network, which is a system of artificial neurons based on the human brain. These AI machines are the ones we are used to using today. Thirdly, theory of mind machines can emulate the human mind and take decisions, recognising and remembering emotions and reacting in social situations like a human would. Some argue that these machines do not yet exist, but others argue that AI such as ChatGPT, which can interact with a human in a humanlike way, shows that we are on the cusp of a theory of mind machine existing. Fourthly, self-aware machines are machines that are aware of their own existence and have the same or better capabilities than those of a human. Thankfully, as far as I am aware, those machines do not exist today.

That all might be interesting for someone who is into tech, but why am I putting it on the public record today? I am doing so because there are a number of risks that we as a Parliament and the Government must better understand, anticipate and mitigate. These are the perils on our journey to continuity or modernity. Basic artificial intelligence, which helps us to find things on the internet or to book a restaurant, is not very interesting. The risk is low. More advanced artificial intelligence, which can perform the same tasks as a junior solicitor, a journalist or a student who is supposed to complete their homework or exam without the assistance of AI, presents a problem. We already see the problems faced by workers who have technology thrust upon them, instead of being consulted about its use. The consequences are real today and carry medium risks—they are disruptive.

Then we have the national security or human rights-level risks, such as live facial recognition technologies that inaccurately identify someone as a criminal, or a large language model that can help a terrorist understand how to build a bomb or create a novel cyber-security risk, or systems that can generate deepfake videos, photos or audio of politicians saying or doing things that are not true to interfere with elections or to create fake hostage recordings of someone's children.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Gentleman on bringing this debate forward. It is a very deep subject for the Adjournment debate, but it is one that I believe is important. Ethics must be accounted for to ensure that any industries using AI are kept safe. One issue that could become increasingly prominent is the risk of cyber-threats, which he referred to, and hacking, which not even humans can sometimes prevent. Does he agree that it is crucial that our Government and our Minister undertake discussions with UNESCO, for example, to ensure that any artificial intelligence

[Jim Shannon]

that is used within UK industry is assessed, so as to deal with the unwanted harms as well as the vulnerabilities to attack to ensure that AI actors are qualified to deal with such exposure to cyber-attacks? In other words, the Government must be over this issue in its entirety.

Darren Jones: The hon. Member is of course right. In the first part of his intervention, he alluded to the risk I have just been referring to, where machines can automatically create, for example, novel cyber-risks in a way that the humans who created those systems might not fully understand and that are accessible to a wider range of actors. That is a high risk that is either increasingly real today or is active and available to those who wish to do us harm.

The question, therefore, is what should we in Parliament do about it? Of course, we want Britain to continue to be one of the best places in the world to research and innovate, and to start up and scale up a tech business. We should also want to transform our public services and businesses using that technology, but we must—absolutely must—make sure that we create the conditions for this to be achieved in a safe, ethical and just way, and we must reassure ourselves that we have created those conditions before any of these high-risk outcomes take place, not in the aftermath of a tragedy or scandal.

That is why I have been so pleased to work with UNESCO, as the hon. Gentleman mentioned, and assistant director general Gabriela Ramos over the past few years, on the UNESCO AI ethics framework. This framework, the first global standard on AI ethics, was adopted by all 193 member states of the United Nations in 2021, including the United Kingdom. Its basis in human rights, actionable policies, readiness assessment methodology and ethical impact assessments provides the basis for the safe and ethical adoption of AI across countries. I therefore ask the Minister, in summing up, to update the House on how the Government are implementing their commitments from the 2021 signing of the AI ethics framework.

As crucial as the UNESCO AI ethics framework is, in my view the speed of innovation requires two more things from Government: first, enhanced intergovernmental co-ordination, and secondly, innovation in how we in this House pass laws to keep up with the speed of innovation. I will take each in turn.

First, on enhanced intergovernmental co-ordination, I wrote to the Government at the end of April calling on Ministers to play more of a convening role on the safe and secure testing of the most advanced AI, primarily with Canada, the United States and—in so far as it can be achieved—China, because those countries, alongside our own, are where the most cutting-edge companies are innovating in this space. I was therefore pleased to see in the Hiroshima communiqué from last week's G7 a commitment to

“identify potential gaps and fragmentation in global technology governance”.

As a parliamentary lead at the OECD global parliamentary network on AI, I also welcome the request that the OECD and the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence establish the Hiroshima AI process, specifically in respect of generative AI, by the end of this year.

I question, however, whether these existing fora can build the physical or digital intergovernmental facilities required for the safe and secure testing of advanced AI that some have called for, and whether such processes will adequately supervise or have oversight of what is taking place in start-ups or within multinational technology companies. I therefore ask the Minister to address these issues and to provide further detail about the Hiroshima AI process and Britain's contribution to the OECD and GPAI, which I understand has not been as good as it should have been in recent years.

I also welcome the engagement of the United Nations' tech envoy on this issue and look forward to meeting him at the AI for Good summit in Geneva in a few weeks' time. In advance of that, if the Minister is able to give it, I would welcome his assessment of how the British Government and our diplomats at the UN are engaging with the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology, and perhaps of how they wish to change that in the future.

Secondly, I want to address the domestic situation here in the UK following the recent publication of the UK's AI strategy. I completely agree with the Government that we do not want to regulate to the extent where the UK is no longer a destination of choice for businesses to research and innovate, and to start up and scale up their business. An innovation-led approach is the right approach. I also agree that, where we do regulate, that regulation must be flexible and nimble to at least try to keep up with the pace of innovation. We only have to look at the Online Safety Bill to learn how slow we can be in this place at legislating, and to see that by the time we do, the world has already moved on.

Where I disagree is that, as I understand it, Ministers have decided that an innovation-led approach to regulation means that no new legislation is required. Instead, existing regulators—some with the capacity and expertise required, but most without—must publish guidance. That approach feels incomplete to me. The European Union has taken a risk-based approach to regulation, which is similar to the way I described high, medium and low-risk applications earlier. However, we have decided that no further legislative work is required while, as I pointed out on Second Reading of the Data Protection and Digital Information (No. 2) Bill, deregulating in other areas with consequences for the application of consumer and privacy law as it relates to AI. Surely, we in this House can find a way to innovate in order to draft legislation, ensure effective oversight and build flexibility for regulatory enforcement in a better way than we currently do. The current approach is not fit for purpose, and I ask the Minister to confirm whether the agreement at Hiroshima last week changes that position.

Lastly, I have raised my concerns with the Department and the House before about the risk of deepfake videos, photo and audio to our democratic processes. It is a clear and obvious risk, not just in the UK but in the US and the European Union, which also have elections next year. We have all seen the fake picture of the Pope wearing a white puffer jacket, created by artificial intelligence. It was an image that I saw so quickly whilst scrolling on Twitter that I thought it was real until I stopped to think about it.

Automated political campaign videos, fake images of politicians being arrested, deepfake videos of politicians giving speeches that never happened, and fake audio

recordings are already available. While they may not all be of perfect quality just yet, we know how the public respond to breaking news cycles on social media. Many of us look at the headlines or the fake images over a split second, register that something has happened, and most of the time assume it to be true. That could have wide-ranging implications for the integrity of our democratic processes. I am awaiting a letter from the Secretary of State, but I am grateful for the response to my written parliamentary question today. I invite the Minister to say more on that issue now, should he be able to do so.

I am conscious that I have covered a wide range of issues, but I hope that illustrates the many and varied questions associated with the regulation of artificial intelligence, from the mundane to the disruptive to the risk to national security. I welcome the work being done by the Chair of the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee on this issue, and I know that other Committees are also considering looking at some of these questions. These issues warrant active and deep consideration in this Parliament, and Britain can provide global leadership in that space. Only today, OpenAI, the creator of ChatGPT, called for a new intergovernmental organisation to have oversight of high-risk AI developments. Would it not be great if that organisation was based in Britain?

If we get this right, we can take the path to modernity and create a modern Britain that delivers for the British people, is equipped for the future, and helps shape the world in our interests. If we get it wrong, or if we pick the path to continuity, Britain will suffer further decline and become even less in control of its future. Mr Deputy Speaker, I pick the path to modernity.

9.22 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Paul Scully): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bristol North West (Darren Jones) on securing this excellent debate and on his excellent opening speech. The issue ahead of us is an international issue, and as he said, the UK is at the forefront of AI development, with our history and with the Turing and Lovelace institutions around the country. We have amazing AI clusters, and it is right that we should be at the forefront of the solutions he talked about. It will not have escaped many of us with a long-standing interest in AI that this is a really important time for the technology's development. Of equal note is the focus that the Government are giving to ensuring that we seize the opportunities of AI while tackling the risks that have been highlighted, along with our commitment to iterating and adapting our approach as the technology continues to develop.

I welcome the opportunity to speak about how we are delivering on the commitments of the national AI strategy, including shaping the international governance of AI through active engagement in key multilateral fora such as UNESCO. I believe we are well placed to become a global AI superpower by delivering on the foundations laid down in the national AI strategy and its three pillars: investing in and planning for the long term needs of the AI ecosystem; supporting the transition to an AI-enabled economy, capturing the benefits of innovation in the UK and ensuring that AI benefits all sectors and regions; and ensuring that the UK gets the national and international governance of AI technologies right to encourage innovation and investment and to protect the public and our fundamental values.

The Government recognise that AI has the potential to transform all areas of life, from making more medical breakthroughs possible to powering the next generation of tech such as driverless cars. In 2021 we published our national AI strategy—a 10-year vision to make the UK an AI superpower. Since 2014, we have invested over £2.5 billion in AI, including almost £600 million towards the near £1 billion 2018 AI sector deal, which kick-started the growth of the already well-established AI landscape in the UK; £250 million to develop the NHSX AI lab to accelerate the safe adoption of AI in health and care; £250 million for the Centre for Connected and Autonomous Vehicles to develop the future of mobility in the UK; investment in the Alan Turing Institute, with over £46 million to support Turing AI fellowships to develop the next generation of top AI talent; and over £372 million of investment in UK AI companies through the British Business Bank.

The AI strategy also emphasises the need to invest in skills and diversity to broaden the AI workforce. Our £30 million AI and data science conversion course and scholarship programme was set up to address the lack of diversity and supply of talent in the UK AI labour market—that is diversity not as in a tick-box exercise, as some might be, but diversity of thinking to ensure that AI products, services and development have the broader thinking that the hon. Member rightly talked about.

Alongside skills, the Government recognise the need for long-term investment in computing. In March, we announced £900 million for an exascale supercomputer and AI research resource. Building on that, last month we announced £100 million in initial start-up funding for a foundation model taskforce to invest in the AI stack to build foundation model capability, ensure capabilities for key use cases and ensure UK leadership in the safety and reliability of foundation models.

We have seen huge leaps forward in our delivery on the governance pillar of the national AI strategy. In March, we published a White Paper setting out the UK's context-based, proportionate and adaptable approach to AI regulation, representing a world-leading step forward in this policy space. The White Paper outlines five clear outcome-focused principles that regulators should consider to facilitate the safe and innovative use of AI in the industries that they monitor. Crucially, the principles provide clarity to businesses by articulating what we want responsible AI to look like.

That is not all. In October 2022, we launched the AI standards hub to increase the UK's contribution to the development of global AI technical standards. Through the hub, we are working with international initiatives such as the OECD's catalogue of tools and metrics for trustworthy AI to increase global awareness of technical standards as critical tools to advance the worldwide development and adoption of responsible AI.

On that note, I turn my focus squarely to international engagement on AI, which is a key priority for the Government. As a world leader in AI, we play an important role in shaping the international development and governance of AI. We promote our interests in bilateral relationships with key partners such as the US and Japan and in multilateral fora such as the Council of Europe, the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence, UNESCO, the OECD, the G7, the International Organisation for Standardisation and International Electrochemical Commission.

[Paul Scully]

With the US, we held the inaugural meeting of the comprehensive dialogue on technology and data in January. A key deliverable for 2023 is to strengthen the UK-US collaboration on AI technical standards development and tools for trustworthy AI, including through joint research and information sharing, and support for commercial co-operation. We had previously signed in September 2020 a US-UK declaration on co-operation in AI research and development, representing a shared vision for driving technological breakthroughs in AI. With Japan, as the hon. Member rightly said, we agreed the Hiroshima accord only recently, on 18 May. It is a landmark new global strategic partnership, signifying our intent to work together to maintain strategic advantage in emerging technologies such as AI. The accord builds on the UK-Japan digital partnership that I launched in December 2022, which established a framework for deeper UK-Japan collaboration across digital infrastructure and technologies, data, digital regulation and digital transformation.

We have also been working closely with Japan as part of its G7 presidency this year. At the end of April, I attended the G7 digital ministerial meeting in Japan, where I signed the G7 digital ministerial declaration alongside my counterparts. That declaration emphasises the importance of responsible AI and global AI governance. It endorses an action plan for promoting global interoperability between tools for trustworthy AI and for co-operating on upcoming AI opportunities and challenges.

At the Council of Europe, we are working closely with like-minded nations on the proposed convention on AI—a first-of-its-kind legal agreement to help protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. At the OECD, we are an active member of the working party on AI governance, which supports the implementation of the OECD's AI principles. It enables the exchange of experience from best practice to advance the responsible stewardship of AI. At the global partnership, we are a key contributor and founding member. At the 2022 GPAI ministerial summit in Japan, we announced £1.2 million of funding to develop a net zero data space for AI applications, which is in addition to a previous £1 million investment to advance GPAI research on data justice, collaborating with our world-leading Alan Turing Institute and 12 pilot partners in low and medium-income countries.

We are also leading the development of global AI technical standards in standards development organisations such as the International Organisation for Standardisation and the International Electrotechnical Commission, and we are leading the development of AI assurance techniques as additional tools for trustworthy AI. Crucially, these techniques help to measure, evaluate and communicate the trustworthiness of AI systems across the development and deployment life cycle, to enable organisations to determine whether AI technologies are aligned with regulatory requirements.

We are also aware of the increasing prominence of AI in discussions held across other UN fora, including the Internet Governance Forum and the International Telecommunication Union, and through the Global Digital Compact's focus on AI. The Government welcome the opportunity that the compact provides for the multi-stakeholder community to set out an ambitious shared

agenda, chart a path for concrete action towards delivering it, and promote the sharing of best practice, evidence and learning.

Let me turn my attention to UNESCO. The UK was actively involved in the development of its recommendation on the ethics of AI, and UK organisations such as the Alan Turing Institute have supported the development of implementation tools. As we have heard, we, along with all 192 other UNESCO member states, adopted the recommendations in November 2021, demonstrating our commitment to developing a globally compatible system of responsible and ethical AI governance.

Our work aligns with the values of UNESCO's recommendation. For example, through our work at the Council of Europe negotiations, we are helping to respect, protect and promote human rights, fundamental freedoms and human dignity. In doing so through close collaboration with our international partners, we aim to ensure that our citizens can live in peaceful, just and interconnected societies. Through our AI and data science conversion course and scholarship programme, we are ensuring diversity and inclusiveness by addressing these issues in the UK AI labour market. Finally, as one small example of the wider work we are delivering, through our net zero data space for AI applications, funded through GPAI, we are delivering on our net zero policy objectives, ensuring a flourishing environment and ecosystem.

In summary, we have taken great strides in our delivery of the national AI strategy under all three pillars: investing in and planning for the long-term needs of the AI ecosystem; supporting the transition to an AI-enabled economy; and ensuring that the UK gets the national and international governance of AI technologies right. It goes without saying that the opportunities afforded by AI are quite staggering. Indeed, as a result of AI technologies, UK productivity could rise by up to a third across sectors, and UK GDP could be 10.3% higher in 2030 as a result of AI—the equivalent of an additional £232 billion.

But the hon. Gentleman is also absolutely right to look at the risks and talk about the dangers. We have to do this on an international basis. The AI White Paper was the first of its kind, although I would urge him to exercise caution when he says that we do not feel that we need legislation. At the moment, we are building on the layers of existing regulation, but the White Paper outlines the five principles, and we are looking at the regulatory sandboxes to test regulation with scientists, the sector and the academics involved, so that we can co-create the solutions that will be required. But we clearly have to do this at pace, because it was only a few months ago that we first heard of ChatGPT, and we now have prompt engineers, a new, relatively well paid occupation that until recently no one had ever heard of.

As a world leader in AI, it is imperative that we continue to actively engage bilaterally and in multilateral fora such as UNESCO, but also in the OECD, the GPAI and others, to shape the international AI governance landscape. Governing it effectively will ensure that we achieve the right balance between responding to risks and maximising the opportunities afforded by this transformative technology.

Question put and agreed to.

9.34 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 22 May 2023

[SIR ROBERT SYMS *in the Chair*]

Cost of Living: Financial Support for Disabled People

[Relevant document: Summary of public engagement by the Petitions Committee, on the cost of living and financial support for disabled people, reported to the House on 16 May, HC 73.]

4.30 pm

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petitions 610300 and 617425, relating to the cost of living and financial support for disabled people.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Robert. I congratulate Rachel Curtis, Abigail Broomfield and Katy Styles for creating the petitions. Abigail and Katy are here today, and more than 40,000 people have signed the petitions. I put on the record my thanks to the Petitions Committee staff for all their work, Inclusion London and Disability Rights UK for meeting me last week, and the many organisations that sent briefings and provided advice, including Oxfam, Scope, Mencap, the Royal National Institute of Blind People and Citizens Advice.

Ahead of today's debate, the Petitions Committee launched a survey, which 10,854 people completed—one of the biggest responses to a Petitions Committee survey. The plight of disabled people should concern every Member, as the proportion of the UK population reporting a disability has risen to 20% over the past decade. As a disabled person myself, I know how intense it can be for someone to share their story, so I thank each and every person who completed the survey for sharing their experience. In response to the ongoing cost of living emergency and energy crisis, 93% of respondents have had to limit their use of energy, 76% are limiting their use of transport, and 60% have limited their use of specialist equipment. Over half have had to reduce their use of medication.

Those results are shocking. Unsurprisingly, testimony of poor mental health was apparent. Some respondents described feelings of despair. Others even reported being pushed to consider suicide. One respondent wrote:

"My life is hard. I survived childhood cancer to become a disabled adult. I had so many hopes for my life but now each day I regret not dying of cancer. My life is not dignified."

A mother wrote:

"My son...is allergic to the cold. He has EpiPens and I have had to use them this winter as I can't afford the heating on all the time or I can't afford special clothing for him. I feel like a failed mother."

A person who regrets not dying of cancer, and a mother who feels like she is a failure; I ask the Minister how that is acceptable in the UK in 2023. Nearly half of those living in poverty in the UK are disabled or live with somebody who is disabled.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. She is right about the figures around poverty: one in three disabled people live in poverty—twice that of non-disabled people. While I applaud the petitions' aims, particularly the call for one-off payments as a temporary measure, does she agree that the real issue is the adequacy of social security support for disabled people, which has become emaciated over the last 12 years, and that we need to incorporate the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities into law? We have been a signatory to it since 2009, but are failing to provide adequate social protection.

Marsha De Cordova: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. She is absolutely spot on. We need a wholesale review of social security but, more importantly, the Government should commit, as Labour has done, to fully incorporate the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, so that we are protecting their civil and human rights.

It is a fact that disabled people incur extra costs. Scope's latest Disability Price Tag report found that the average disabled household faces an extra £975 a month in costs, with that figure rising to over £1,200 if accommodating the inflationary costs for the period from 2022 to 2023. The Resolution Foundation found that the gap in household income between adults with a disability and adults without a disability was 30%, including disability social security, and that the gap rises to 44% if disability social security is not included. That was across the period from 2020 to 2021. Citizens Advice data for May 2023 shows that since the first quarter of 2022 the largest cohort helped was either permanently sick people or disabled people. The Trussell Trust has reported that disabled people are hugely over-represented in food poverty demographics. And 73% of families who took part in the recent survey by the Disabled Children's Partnership said that the cost of living crisis will have a significant impact on their disabled children.

The spending of disabled households is particularly exposed to the ongoing energy crisis, given that energy bills for medical issues, and spending on specialist equipment and food, make up a disproportionate share of all spending. In response to the Petitions Committee's survey, 48% of respondents said that they had extra costs due to the use of specialist equipment.

In my view, there is no question that the blame lies with the successive years of a Conservative Government, whereby they have created a hostile environment for disabled people. That was compounded by the pandemic and the current cost of living crisis.

Government support has barely scratched the surface. The paltry support is woefully insufficient and the very definition of what we would call sticking-plaster politics. Of the disabled people surveyed who received the £150 cost of living payment, 80% said that it would not be enough to cover their increased costs for essentials. That prompts the question: how do the Government think that the payment will be sufficient when inflation is around 10% and official figures show the fastest annual increases in food and drink prices because of inflation in the last 40 years, at around 19% as of March this year?

[Marsha De Cordova]

The reality is that even cost of living payments are not always reaching people, for instance those on the new style employment and support allowance who do not qualify for any Government cost of living payment support. There was also the cruel decision to change the warm homes discount criteria during the cost of living crisis, despite the Government's own impact assessment finding that 290,000 disabled people would no longer receive the discount. For them, the £150 disability cost of living payment only offsets the loss of the warm homes discount. Why?

More worryingly, the Government have not provided specific support for disabled households incurring high energy costs. Many disabled people have told me that it is pointless to prescribe medicine if a person cannot afford to run the equipment they need to stay alive.

NHS schemes in place to cover the electricity costs of oxygen concentrators and dialysis machines are currently beset with issues and the Retail Energy Code Company has argued for establishing a service tailored for those using medical equipment. On prepayment meters, 60% of the people supported by Citizens Advice between January 2022 and February 2023 who could not afford to top up were disabled people, compared with the 40% who were not disabled or who did not have a long-term health condition.

UK household energy suppliers have agreed to a new code of practice, which means that force-fitting prepayment meters will be subject to a set of voluntary restrictions, but the industry needs to go further by banning prepayment meters for disabled people and providing more help with energy debt. Why will the Government not call for an industry-wide ban of forced installations in disabled households?

The political choice of austerity has gutted our social security system, and the consequences are real. Government-funded research suggests that cuts to social care and public health caused 57,500 more deaths in England than would have been expected if spending had continued at pre-2010 trends. The long-overdue health and disability White Paper focuses on getting disabled people into work and ramping up the use of sanctions, but the Government should be focusing on improving schemes such as Access to Work, getting rid of the delays and dealing with the outstanding applications. Access to Work is one of the best mechanisms for helping disabled people—especially those living with sight loss—to stay in work. Evidence suggests that sanctions do not work and have a negative impact on disabled people's health.

The White Paper rightly suggests scrapping the work capability assessment, but replacing it with the personal independence payment assessment is absurd, given that PIP has a totally different function. It is an extra benefit, and it does not actually meet the additional costs. We know, because we have debated this previously, that the PIP assessment is flawed and that the support that PIP offers is in many cases inadequate. The Government's own statistics show that more than 60% of PIP decisions that are appealed are overturned in favour of the claimant. The Government have never carried out an assessment of the adequacy of PIP and whether it is fit for purpose. Will they commit to assessing its adequacy and whether it works, and make improvements to the assessment?

Disabled people who receive social care can be asked to give up to 40% of their social security income to pay for social care. That leaves many in deep poverty and forces them to make the impossible choice between meeting their basic needs such as heating or eating and essential care. Research by the BBC found that more than 60,000 people are in social care debt.

There are clear actions that the Government can take to address the situation. They must increase the disability cost of living payment, and frankly they should be making those payments now; I do not understand why people have to wait until June to receive the second payment. They should extend the cost of living payments to everybody, especially those on new-style ESA. They should bring in the universal credit uplift, remove the social security benefit cap and reverse the changes to the eligibility criteria for the warm home discount.

The Government could also push the energy industry to introduce an energy debt waiver or some sort of social tariff. We know, however it is designed, that a social tariff is in isolation unlikely to meet the needs of disabled people, so it should be developed alongside a tailored cost support policy. The Government should also look at the feasibility of the warm home prescription, which aims to help people on low incomes and those with severe health conditions that are made worse by bad weather.

Energy suppliers must improve access to information for disabled people, especially blind and partially sighted people and those with a learning disability. It is their legal duty to do so, so what pressure can the Government put on them to ensure they are compliant?

The changes outlined in the White Paper are designed to get more disabled people into work, but are the Government removing barriers to help disabled people access the labour market? Are they addressing the disability employment pay gap? Disabled people are paid an average of 21% less than their non-disabled colleagues.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) outlined, changes need to be made to the social security system to make it less cruel, unfair and hostile, and to restore it to its original purpose, which was to provide a safety net for those in need. Disabled people are not asking for more; they are asking for equity. The Government should be ashamed that disabled people are dying or reporting that they want to commit suicide. Today should be a watershed moment for the Government.

Many are angry and frustrated. They feel that the Government have abandoned them, letting down the very people they should be seeking to protect the most. An example of that was the long overdue, or late, national disability strategy, which was ruled unlawful last year. Many of us did not believe that it was credible in the first place, but what have the Government replaced it with? There needs to be a fundamental rethink and change in the Government's approach to serving disabled people. The approach must be about making their lives better and not about causing preventable harm.

As I close, I thank the petitioners. I encourage hon. Members to say hello to Abigail and Katy after the debate. I had the opportunity to meet them last week, and hearing about the experiences that led them to start the petition was pretty harrowing. As I said, I hope that today can be a moment when the Government acknowledge

their flaws and failures on the part of disabled people, seek to draw a line and bring about changes that will improve their lives.

4.46 pm

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Robert, to follow the hon. Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) and, indeed, to have a second bite of the cherry in speaking about this topic, given that last Tuesday I could not make it to the debate secured by the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows). It is always good to have a second coming, I have to say—although in my case perhaps not. We have had an eloquent debate so far.

I am sure that we will hear many numbers in the course of the debate. Two stick out to me. One comes from Kidney Care UK, which cites the average annual extra cost to an individual facing dialysis as £1,918. The second big figure comes from the charity Contact a Family, which works with disabled children. It says that the average cost of the energy needs for the disabled children that the charity works with is £1,596. That covers such matters as pumps, monitors, hoists and electric wheelchairs, all of which are related to an individual's health condition. That is one type of extra cost that the disabled face in regard to energy needs.

The second type of cost does not really relate to health needs but is a consequence of a person's disability. I chair the all-party parliamentary group for assistive technology. Many people with profound and severe disabilities, particularly cerebral palsy, rely on computer or some sort of IT aids to engage with the wider world. They are vital to their quality of life. Such aids can be voice recognition software, eyeball-controlled software and so on. All that relies on electricity, which of course costs money as well. Those needs are a consequence of their disability but are not health needs per se.

The third sort of extra cost is that those with any sort of disability need to maintain their home at a higher temperature than might otherwise be the case merely to keep themselves warm. On that point, I give a small plug to my Westminster Hall debate at 4 pm on Wednesday, which is about furniture poverty and affordability. One area that I will focus on is the fact that all too often new tenants move into social housing and find that floor coverings have been removed, and they cannot afford to replace them. They end up with a much less well-insulated property, which for many of them affects their health. Those are the three areas that we need to consider.

Having read the *Hansard* report of last week's debate online in preparation for this debate, and listening to questions, I think a consensus is emerging. The phrase "social tariff" crops up time and again, and there is much discussion about the role of personal independence payments and a recognition of the £150 that the Government have made available. There is also a lot of talk about the lump sum of £650, which one of the petitions refers to. There are positives and negatives with all of those, in my view.

I am always interested in how the personal independence payment works. It clearly has an important role to play, and is designed to meet the additional costs that people face due to their disability in their day-to-day lives. There has been a long-term debate over the extent to which it fulfils that goal. The purple pound—the premium

that so many people face—is not always reflected in PIP. Whether a non-means tested benefit, which PIP is, is the right avenue to support the energy needs of the most vulnerable in society is a debate worth having. We should not automatically assume that PIP is the answer to every problem. If that is the argument, Members have to justify to me why millionaires should benefit equally to some of my poorest constituents, and why those constituents should not get more intense and focused support.

The second issue is around the social tariff. Social tariffs sound all well and good; everyone thinks they are a wonderful idea. A social tariff has to be paid for, and that subsidy is often taken from other bill payers' accounts, where it often ends up on a standing charge. What we risk doing by our continual focus on solving every problem with a social tariff is that it then gets put on a standing charge, and there is an ever decreasing circle where more people will see their standing charges go up and then have cause to revert to a social tariff themselves because they cannot afford their bills, thereby increasing the standing charges. In reality, that would not occur, but it is a logical inference. Once again, we cannot keep solving every problem in our energy system and our cost of living crisis by placing them on a standing charge—other ways have to be found.

I accept that the intention behind the £650 payment is a good one. My point is that it is an arbitrary figure. It certainly does not reflect the overall costs experienced by many of the people I just mentioned, which go far above £650. While good, I do not think it is necessary the answer either.

The hon. Member for Battersea briefly made mention of the Retail Energy Code Company, and its report. I am going to give it a bit more of a plug, because I think it is much more exciting than the hon. Member suggested.

Marsha De Cordova: What?

Paul Maynard: The hon. Member mentioned the Retail Energy Code Company only briefly, and I wanted to talk a little more about it because the detail in it is actually quite interesting. I am not mocking the hon. Member at all, I just have the time to cover it in more detail, whereas she had more to cover. I urge her not to take offence unnecessarily.

The Retail Energy Code Company advises energy companies on the code of conduct they must adopt towards their customers. Given some of my casework, I am not sure how much the energy companies are listening to it, but that is its role within the energy sector. Andrew Mower, who has been working with it on a set of proposals on how to deal with energy costs for disabled people, has done a superb job in exploring this area and finding some of the flaws in the proposals that have been made in recent months.

In particular, it is worth looking at the NHS schemes that exist at the moment for those on oxygen concentrators and dialysis machines. It is a perfectly good model; I am glad to see the NHS recognising that it has to help people meet energy costs, but it is not universal. It goes back to my old friend the postcode lottery. In addition, the subsidy does not go up when energy prices go up, so people are always playing catch-up. People are paid in arrears, so they have to stump up the cash to pay their

[Paul Maynard]

bills in the hope that they will get the money back at some future date. That money may not actually reflect the bill they have to pay.

It is interesting how the NHS model, which we think may be the answer to many things, actually causes as many problems as it solves. Similarly, with social tariffs, Mr Mower points out the immense difficulty they have found in the broadband sector when trying to come up with a social tariff that actually works and does not disrupt the market in perverse ways with unintended consequences that could see social tariffs costing more than the one that is available on the market to families now. Social tariffs by themselves are quite difficult to get right and need to be extremely flexible. I am not convinced that Ofgem spending hours each week reinventing what this week's social tariff should look like every time the energy cap changes is actually the answer either.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman is very informed and detailed on this topic so I defer to his superior knowledge, but does he not agree that the Retail Energy Code Company, Ofgem and all those involved in the market are clearly failing the most vulnerable in our society? I have vulnerable and disabled constituents who are turning off their energy just so they can survive, yet the disaster of the structure and the standing charges—which the hon. Gentleman mentioned—means they are no better off, but they are freezing cold.

Paul Maynard: I share the hon. Lady's view about the reality that her constituents, and indeed mine, are facing. I share some of her criticisms of the energy companies themselves. The Retail Energy Code Company is trying to provide an answer, which I hope the energy companies will listen to and I hope might just persuade her that it is worth a second look, but I do not know. Time will tell, perhaps.

When coming up with proposals for the disability sector, many charities emphasise the broadness of eligibility and auto-enrolment. That is entirely logical and sensible for them to do. They have learned from the reality of the priority services register. In my constituency, I find that the people who really ought to be on that register are the least likely to be on it, so charities are right to be concerned about whether some sort of voluntary enrolment would actually get to where we want it to go. At the same time, they are missing out the potential for a more tailored scheme, which goes back to my earlier point. Everybody's energy costs are going to be different, and one-off payments do not necessarily meet that challenge.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making a very thoughtful speech about a complex issue. Does he accept that having some money, while imperfect, has to be preferable to being left without that amount of money?

Paul Maynard: Something is better than nothing. However, part of the art of speech making is building an argument, as I hope the hon. Lady understands. I have not yet culminated my argument in what I think we should do. By all means, she can agree or disagree with my critique of what is being proposed, but I am about to come on to what I think should be done, which I hope might just persuade her yet again.

Mr Mower looked at what is being done in the Australian states. They have gone into great detail on this topic, looking at all the different forms of medical equipment that people are using and their energy intensity. Each piece of equipment has a different energy consumption rate. It cannot just be measured by minutes or hours; some of them are more energy intensive than others. Australian states have done calculations enabling them to oblige energy firms to discount the energy at the point of consumption. There is then no need to request a rebate from an energy company, or some supplementary top-up, because it occurs at the point of consumption of that energy. That helps to solve the problem of how we support those with energy-intensive equipment needs. However, I agree it does not meet the needs of those who have to heat their properties generally for their own health benefits.

The hon. Member for Battersea briefly mentioned the issue of the warm home prescription, which the Energy Systems Catapult has been introducing. It has had a limited roll-out in Gloucestershire, and I think it is now operating in four areas as a pilot. It has great potential, but where I issue caution is that we need to understand, if we do not already, whether it is actually saving the NHS money. The idea is that a social prescriber looks at a person's energy consumption, the insulation in their home and their energy needs, and works out whether a form of prescription to help with energy prices is a way of forestalling more expensive treatment for more severe health conditions at some future date. That is quite hard to capture in a short period of time because we have not seen the long-term consequences yet, but that measure seems positive to me. It would deal with the issue of people needing to warm their homes over a longer period of time, so it is a twin-track approach.

I have tried to put Mr Mower's report into my own words and not read it out verbatim, because that would be a boring way to make a speech. In his conclusion, he said that the electricity costs of these consumers—in other words, those who rely upon equipment—would best be met through a scheme that can tailor support to the needs of each eligible consumer, rather than a policy targeted at a wider range of vulnerable consumers, so that they can have full confidence that the costs of the relevant equipment are being met. To me, that is the key word in this debate: confidence. The hon. Member for Battersea mentioned it, as did other Members in interventions. Individuals with severe health conditions who do not continue to heat their properties and run their equipment are running the risk of disadvantageous health outcomes because they do not have the confidence that they will be able to afford their bills.

I urge the Minister, and the Minister for Energy Consumers and Affordability, who was present briefly, to really engage with the Retail Energy Code Company and look at the matter in great detail to bring together the NHS and the Social Prescribing Network—I know that social prescribing is the answer to everything in life these days, but in this case it might just be—and try to work out with Ofgem whether the twin-track approach could solve the problem that we are seeking to solve.

5 pm

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak with you in the Chair, Sir Robert. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea

(Marsha De Cordova) on leading this important debate. We know that the serious implications of rising prices for fuel, transport and food have fallen much harder on some people. People with disabilities face a higher risk of poverty. The poverty rate for individuals who live in families where someone is disabled is 28%—nine percentage points more than those who live in families where no one is disabled. They are also less likely to be able to make savings on their bills for reasons related to their disability. We have heard a great deal about how the size of bills impacts many people.

I will talk about one of the petitioners: Katy Styles, who is here today. She is an unpaid carer for her husband who has motor neurone disease, and she is a campaigner for improved support for carers. She put it like this:

“It’s not a question of putting on an extra jumper for us. When someone has a muscle wasting disease their ability to stay warm is compromised, so homes need to be heated for longer and at higher temperatures. Not heating your home can lead to chest infections and in turn this can lead to a stay in hospital”.

We are focusing an awful lot on households with someone with a disability, but the extra costs for heating are borne by not only the person with a disability but their unpaid carers. Well over a quarter of all unpaid carers are living in poverty, and research from Carers UK found that more than three quarters of carers said that the rising cost of living is one of the main challenges that they would face in 2023, which is hardly surprising.

Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for mentioning my fantastic constituent Katy Styles. Does my hon. Friend agree that campaigns such as We Care and people such as Katy make a real difference to us because they talk about the impact on real lives, and how the decisions that we make here affect them on a daily basis? It is not just statistics that we receive from charities and others: we know how each decision that we make here impacts on people’s real lives.

Barbara Keeley: I very much agree. It is good that Katy Styles is here today, because I have learned a lot from her about the role of carers. It is something that I care deeply about. Like her, I would like to see improved support for carers.

Returning to the point about maintaining higher temperatures in the home, people with disabilities, as we have heard, are also being hit with the increased costs of vital high-energy equipment, additional laundry and bathing needs, and transport for visits to medical appointments, which can be very costly. As my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea said, the charity Scope has found that, on average, households with at least one disabled adult or child need an additional £975 a month to have the same standard of living as households without somebody with a disability. In fact, those extra costs—she gave this figure too—rise to £1,122 a month after accounting for inflation. In this debate, we are throwing around the amounts of £150 and £650, but we should think about those figures, because £150 is nowhere near the increased costs.

The petition asked for disabled people and unpaid carers to be included in the one-off £650 cost of living support payment. We should reflect on the fact that unpaid carers are more likely to live in poverty than those without caring responsibilities: 29% compared with 20%. The Government responded to both petitions

for today’s debate stating that 6 million people in receipt of a qualifying disability benefit would receive a £150 payment last September, but only those in receipt of a qualifying benefit would receive the £650 payment. I understand that that excluded 568,000 personal independence payment and disability living allowance claimants and 523,000 carer’s allowance claimants. Carers such as Katy Styles and the We Care Campaign argue that although the one-off £150 payment was welcome—as discussed earlier, any extra amount is welcome—given the additional energy costs that disabled people and their families are bearing, it was completely inadequate in the context of the ongoing cost of living crisis. We have all seen our bills: £150 hardly goes anywhere. The We Care Campaign recommends that the Government introduce a social tariff for energy that discounts energy bills for those most in need, automatically enrolls eligible households and is mandatory for all suppliers, as advocated by the charities Age UK and Scope.

I am afraid I will not be able to get into all the ins and outs of the argument we heard earlier from the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard). To a certain extent, I disagree with him: it does not matter how many hours Ofgem spends on this issue. Ofgem should be spending time on it, because it is vital that we have a solution.

I want to talk a little about the work by Age UK. Research by Age UK found that cost of living pressures this winter led to more than half of older people cutting back on heat and power, and more than a quarter feeling too cold at home most or all of the time. Around 800,000 older people had left their home to seek warmth in a public space, such as a shopping centre or library. I heard from older constituents who were using their free bus passes to ride around in buses during the day, just to keep warm. That is a scandal. It is also not an option for some people, because people with disabilities and their carers will not be hopping on and off different buses just to try to keep warm.

I turn to eligibility for the warm home discount, which is important. The We Care Campaign recommends that the Government extend eligibility for the warm home discount to include people with disabilities and unpaid carers. The warm home discount was changed by the Government this winter, but it was not extended to include people with disabilities and unpaid carers; in fact, quite the opposite. Money-saving expert Martin Lewis estimated that 290,000 existing claimants who have disabilities and who claim only personal independence payment, attendance allowance or disability living allowance, which are not means-tested, will no longer get the warm home discount.

As a constituency MP, my experience of the changes made by the Government is of being contacted by constituents who formerly received the warm home discount but found that they were no longer eligible. In most cases, the reason given by the Government was that the discount is now targeted on properties that have a high energy cost score based on their characteristics. In my experience, however, some newer properties can be cold and difficult to heat, so we cannot just base it on the age of a property. I understand that the procedure involved using Valuation Agency-set characteristics and then pushing them through an algorithm, but Martin Lewis has shown that that is mistaken.

[Barbara Keeley]

I say to the Minister that I know from my experience that some people on very low incomes have been denied the warm home discount this winter. I feel that the changes are wrong, and I urge the Government to look at this issue again. It is time that there was extra support for people with a disability and their unpaid carers to help them cope with the unprecedented financial pressures due to the energy bill crisis and the cost of living crisis, and I hope the Government will think again after this debate.

5.8 pm

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve with you as Chair, Sir Robert. I thank the Petitions Committee for arranging this important debate.

We know that many people are struggling at the moment as a result of the cost of living crisis generally, but, as we have heard, disabled people are struggling more than most, and households that include someone with a disability spend more on food, face higher energy costs and are more likely to have a lower household income. It was really interesting to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) talk about a survey that showed some tragic results for those experiencing such conditions, and I thank her for referring to that.

As we have heard, analysis by the disability charity Scope suggests that, on average, disabled households need an additional £975 a month to have the same standard of living as non-disabled households. That rises to over £1,100 if we account for this year's inflation.

The figures account for disability payments such as PIP, which are designed to help address those costs. For some families, the costs have a shocking impact. Disabled people are almost three times as likely to live in material deprivation than the rest of the population, and 80% of households with a disabled person say that Government cost of living payments are just not enough to meet the increased costs that they face. Families might accrue costs due to expensive dietary requirements, running medical equipment or being unable to cut back on their heating because they need a higher temperature. Low temperatures can have adverse effects on the vulnerable.

This time last year, many of us would have attended a Marie Curie drop-in. Marie Curie published its report "Dying in Poverty" a year ago, which presented its research on the impact of poverty on terminal illness. At the drop-in, I and others met a lady with a terminal cancer diagnosis and her husband. They had a water meter and, without me asking, they said that they were running up huge costs because of the need to do constant washing in order to limit the risk of infection. What struck me from that meeting was how little is known about the help that is available for people through water companies and other initiatives. It is not enough to meet the general need, which is a tiny proportion in that case. Some people have much more significant costs than others.

The hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) spoke about social tariffs. I am co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on water, and we have been looking at the proposals for a social tariff for water and the impact of that. We have been working with the Consumer Council for Water. I am very disappointed to hear that the Government have dropped

the idea of pursuing that social tariff, as was revealed in answer to a written parliamentary question I submitted recently. I acknowledge some of the difficulties the hon. Gentleman mentioned, but I think we need to look at something that supports people much more generally. He also talked about proposals for an energy social tariff and whether that is the best idea. I genuinely think he made a thoughtful argument about that, but we need to look very closely at how people—including disabled people, who we are focusing on today—can be supported.

The rising cost of energy is affecting disabled families the most severely. One respondent to a *Guardian* survey said he had stopped using a CPAP machine during the day, even when he was short of breath, in order to limit his bills. Ventilators, suction pumps, feed pumps, power chairs and electric beds are all pieces of equipment that cost money to run, and families are going days without heating or showering so that they can keep this equipment turned on. It seems that there is very little understanding of what may be covered. Assurances can be given that these costs will be covered, but in many cases they are not. We need to make sure that support is available.

For some families the extra costs are coming at a time when they are desperately trying to make memories with their loved ones who have terminal illnesses. Marie Curie has reported that the costs of energy bills can rise by as much as 75% in the aftermath of a diagnosis. It has also found that 90,000 people die in poverty every year. During Department for Work and Pensions questions in December, I raised with the Minister the issue of changes to the warm home discount scheme, which removed eligibility from 300,000 disabled people, leaving many families afraid of being unable to meet their heightened energy costs.

For goodness' sake, £150 will not address the problem anyway, but it is better to have that money than to lose it as part of the system. That happened quite quietly and was little known about at the time, and it is important that we address it. The changes suggest that the Government were not willing to address the disability price tag. Excluding disabled households from the bulk of cost of living support, unless they are on means-tested benefits, forces them to absorb the additional costs themselves by emptying their pockets.

The £150 payment is equivalent to just £2.88 per week across the year. It does not do enough to reduce the costs down to the already staggering costs faced by households that do not have a member with a disability. Why should these families be worse off because one of them lives with a disability? This is a disparity that Government policy is failing to address.

Speaking in these general terms is great for drawing attention to the broader issues, but the reality is that in our constituencies each of us as MPs meets and supports people with disabilities who face exactly these problems—that is before we start talking about PIP assessments and eligibility and the support people need there. These are real people: individuals and families living in our constituencies. They are like those I and other hon. Members meet and the people we met at the Marie Curie drop-in. They deserve not to have the additional worry of struggling to meet their energy bills or of being cold and further damaging their health.

I hope having the debate will cause the Government to look again at the issue and reconsider the support they are providing. I hope they will ask themselves how

much less money and resources they are comfortable with households with people with disabilities having compared to other families. Unless the answer is tens of thousands of pounds a year, there is still a huge amount of work for the Government to do. I believe people need much more support and there is much work to do.

Sir Robert Syms (in the Chair): I call Amy Callaghan. You can speak seated if you would be more comfortable.

5.17 pm

Amy Callaghan (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir Robert, and thank you for your welcome help on that. I thank the Petitions Committee and the petitioners here today for shining a light on this important issue. I consider the word of the debate not to be “confidence” as the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) suggested, but “abandoned”. People right across these isles feel abandoned by this Tory Government. That applies even more so to disabled people—abandoned by an unkind, uncaring Government who fail to recognise their individual needs and to tailor financial support accordingly.

We need to remember and reflect on what we are actually debating. The cost of living isn’t a neat wee slogan to describe the tough times we are living through; we are debating how much it costs to live. We have all lived through the 2008 financial crash, and things are considerably bleaker now than they were back then. Currently, 46% of people right across these isles think their kids will be worse off than them, which, while shocking, is hardly a surprise, given interest rates, the soaring costs of goods and 13 years of Tory austerity. Food prices are up more than 19%, electricity is up 16% and gas is up 129%. In energy-rich Scotland, these price increases are harder to take. I have constituents desperately clutching energy bills at every surgery.

The cost of living is proving increasingly challenging for our constituents living with a disability. The Government’s £150 disability cost of living payment is, of course, welcome, but it is a drop in the ocean compared to the astronomical bills people face. What does the Minister expect disabled people to spend the £150 payment on—a weekly shop, half or less of some assistive technology, or to mitigate sanctions from his Department? Does he really think £150 is enough to make a tangible difference in the lives of disabled people?

Disabled people are disproportionately affected by the cost of living crisis. The disability pay gap means they earn an average of almost £2 less an hour than those without a disability. The rising disabled population makes that even more pertinent; it is a damning indictment of this unkind Tory Government. In-work poverty is real: because of the policies of austerity, folk the length and breadth of these isles are living in it.

On a recent visit to Deafblind Scotland, based in Lenzie in my constituency, my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) and I had a roundtable discussion with service users. We heard how challenging life can be for deafblind people, particularly given the increased cost of living and the cost of assistive technology. Across the UK, we have a public health service free at the point of need, but access to healthcare is still a class issue: 70% of people have had to limit access to medical appointments due to the lack of

financial support with the increased cost of living, and we know that disabled people are less likely to be able to afford those increased costs.

I despise the word “mitigate”. The Scottish Government are not and should not be there to mitigate bad decisions made in this place. They are there to stand up and provide for our people—to lead, not mop up the mess of bad policy decisions and bad governance by the Government of Westminster. Unfortunately, that means that they now need to shield folk from the policies of austerity.

We forget that the Scottish Government are not just providing new policies relating to the social security system; they spend £594 million each year mitigating bad policies from this place, including the bedroom tax and the benefit cap. If those Tory welfare reforms had not been imposed, it is estimated that each family in Scotland would be £2,500 better off each year. The cost of living crisis would be much harsher for people in Scotland if it were not for those mitigations.

Now for the clear blue water between the Tory Government down here and the Scottish Government up the road—a tale of two Governments. The Tory Government have removed the very welcome £20 a week increase to universal credit, whereas the Scottish Government have not just uprated social security but introduced brand new payments, including the Scottish child payment, lifting children out of poverty. We do not pay for prescriptions in Scotland, which means that everyone can access the medication they need to manage their health conditions. The Government down here have failed to do likewise, which means that 51% of people have had to limit their access to medication.

The Tory Government are failing our constituents, and Labour has no policies to turn that around. Fortunately, although Westminster continues to fail the people of Scotland, they can rely on the Scottish Government to deliver fairness and equality. Of course, we look forward to our future as an independent nation within the European Union.

5.22 pm

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate and serve under your chairship, Sir Robert. I thank my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova), for her very powerful opening speech, in which she set out many of the issues faced by thousands of people across this country, including in my constituency of Putney. I thank Rachel, Abigail and Katy for starting the petitions and enabling thousands of people to say that not enough Government time is spent in this place debating these issues on behalf of the people who are affected by them.

I want to highlight the difficulties faced by three groups of people who have come to me in my constituency: young people with cancer, people who have myalgic encephalomyelitis or chronic fatigue syndrome, and people who have had stem cell or bone marrow transplants. All of them face unique situations. The cost of living crisis is worsening people’s physical and mental health conditions and driving them into poverty. These situations are also faced by many other people with long-term illnesses and disabilities.

Research suggests that tens of thousands of 18 to 39-year-olds with cancer are struggling to pay basic living costs. More than half of the 18 to 39-year-olds

[Fleur Anderson]

with cancer surveyed by Macmillan and Virgin Money said they needed more financial support to manage the rising cost of living. One in four young people are getting further into debt or have fallen behind paying their rent or energy bills because of increased living costs, according to a survey of 2,000 people. The research found that almost three quarters of younger people with cancer were worried about the cost of food over the next 12 months. It is hitting them particularly hard at a time of life when they have not been able to save up and do not have a safety net of their own to fall back on. They were looking forward to a different kind of life from the one they are suddenly facing. More than a tenth of those surveyed said that they have to delay or cancel medical appointments because of the rising cost of petrol to get to those appointments. That is a false economy: people will be iller for longer because of the payments that they are not receiving.

People with cancer already face significant extra costs of nearly £900 when they are diagnosed—for example, for buying extra clothes or food or because of increased heating costs—but now inflation has driven those costs up. Macmillan has seen a surge in demand for its means-tested financial grants to help cancer patients with costs. Macmillan and Young Lives vs Cancer are calling on the Government to give more financial help to cancer patients. But this is not just about money. Macmillan has found that delays in the payments are also causing financial crisis. Surely that can be rectified. There is on average an 18-week wait to claim a disability allowance that could help young people with travel and heating costs. The money is there; they are just not able to get it because of that 18-week delay. Macmillan is asking the Government to take “urgent steps” to reduce those delays.

The second group of people that I want to highlight is those who have ME or CFS. I am a member of the all-party parliamentary group on myalgic encephalomyelitis, which has produced a report on this issue, which I recommend to all hon. Members and all those reading the record of this speech. It is clear from the evidence presented to the all-party group that too many people with ME are being refused the payments that are being allocated to others. They are being refused PIP by the DWP. They can decide to appeal, and many people with ME who have taken that action have gone on to win their case, but that indicates that there are flaws in the system. However, many are not able to go through the appeals process, which is complex and requires a considerable amount of preparation by the claimant, which would exacerbate their symptoms. As a result, many people with ME are existing without the financial support that they need.

There are some issues with the welfare assessments that are particular to the condition of ME. As the condition is variable throughout the day, a snapshot can sometimes not be applicable to people's general circumstances. The next issue is the length of time for which an activity can be maintained. People with ME are often scored by assessors as being able to carry out a task even though they would not be able to carry it out for a long time because of their fluctuating symptoms. Also, there are after-effects from carrying out tasks. People with ME may be able to carry out a task for an

assessment but then have extreme post-exertional malaise following the completion of that task, but that does not get assessed as part of it. And people with ME are being pressured by their private health insurers to undertake a course of graded exercise therapy, or GET, in many circumstances—despite detrimental effects for many—in order to keep their insurance-based health and disability payments.

There are many recommendations from the all-party group, which I urge the Minister to look at, in relation to the ways in which people with ME are assessed and whether they are receiving the payments that will allow them to meet their needs in the cost of living crisis.

The third group of people that I want to highlight is made up of those who have stem cell therapy or bone marrow transplants. A recent survey by Anthony Nolan found that two thirds of people who have had stem cell therapy struggled to heat their home. More than half struggled to afford food. Half struggled to afford travel to hospital. Half have taken on debts or had to move home because of this. Three quarters have had to give up work or cut their hours because of their stem cell therapy, but then are not able to get back into work. Ninety per cent. say that their physical health has worsened as a result of the financial problems that they are facing.

Often, people who have had stem cell therapy have to have very regular check-ups—once a week—after the original operation, and they may have to go further away to specialist hospitals as well, so they incur greater costs. One parent of a stem cell transplant patient said:

“The rising cost of living has crucified me...I've had to walk 12 miles a day to take my children to school.”

That was because she was not able to afford the transport. There is a healthcare travel costs scheme for certain patients, but it has a very high threshold for eligibility. As well as increased heating costs, this group of people highlights increased travel costs. A patient travel fund for stem cell patients—there are about 4,000 a year in the UK—has been recommended, as has the extension of the warm home discount. They also highlight timely access to benefits as one of their top three financial problems with the cost of living crisis.

People being on long-term sick leave presents a cost to our economy and a personal cost to people with disabilities and their families. The Government need to understand the needs and extra costs incurred by people with disabilities and the physical and mental health results of those, which drive more people into poverty.

To conclude, will the Minister meet with me and the affected groups of people with additional needs who are facing the cost of living crisis? Will the Government review the impact of the cost of living crisis on people with disabilities, which is highlighted by these petitions and so many others? Will the Government increase travel and heating payments in the short term to alleviate the current crisis, but in the long term will they overhaul the social security payment system to put the needs of people with disabilities at its centre?

5.30 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you very much for giving me the chance to speak today, Sir Robert. I thank all those who signed the petitions to enable us to discuss these issues. In particular, as I always do, I sincerely

and honestly thank the hon. Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) for setting the scene so well. She is a lady with compassion and understanding, and she delivered a message with which, as she said, we can all concur. I also thank all hon. Members who have made contributions and those who will follow, whose contributions I very much look forward to. I also look forward to the Minister's contribution. I think the Minister understands the issues, and I wish to ask him a number of questions. I hope that we can achieve the goals that we wish to achieve and get the answers as well.

I have stated many times, as have many others, that the cost of living impacts on many people. The issues have not yet subsided: we still see incredibly high costs for the most basic needs and many struggle to afford them. I also wish to give a Northern Ireland perspective on debates—hon. Members expect it and they will get it. My observations and contributions will reflect what others have said.

The debate is specifically about the cost of living and support for disabled people, and I wish to focus on that. I see this every day in my office, more so over the last period of time. I am not blaming the Government, by the way; that is not what this is about. It is about solutions. I am always about solutions—I am solution-led and solution-driven. That is what I wish to see.

Many people, especially those who are disabled and are financially challenged, are struggling to afford things in the current climate. It is important that exceptions are made for them and that their specific needs are taken into consideration. I see poverty every day in my constituency. I see families struggling to deal with it and mums who starve themselves so that their children can get food. Those are the realities of where we are, and that is why I look to the Minister and the Government to make these important changes so that we can address the issues that we see every day. Every hon. Member in the Chamber sees those issues as well.

As the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) said, the DWP needs to expedite its system and address the fact that progress takes so long for those who are disabled. We have asked this before in the Chamber, and we ask the same question today: can it be expedited? The week before last, on the front page of my local paper, there was a report on food bank referrals in my constituency. The manager of the food bank, which is the first Trussell Trust food bank in Northern Ireland, and a very active one, said that referrals were up as much as 50% in one year—wow, I need to take a deep breath when I say and understand that. Christians Against Poverty also states that referrals are significant. All those people come together to help, and I am encouraged by the number of churches and individuals who help such organisations.

The hon. Member for Putney also referred to benefit issues and ME as one example of how people cannot cope with the systems, and she spoke about how long the DWP appeals process takes. I would add to that those with anxiety, depression and emotional issues. People who come to my office can be quite anxious and extremely confused about the system. What is being done to help people with anxiety, depression and the emotional overtures that affect their everyday lives? I know the Minister wants to help, and I certainly do.

Complex physical needs compound the issues and sometimes confuse the DWP's interpretation of what is needed when a person sits in front of them. I see it very clearly. I have a member of staff in my office who does nothing but benefits because not everybody understands the benefits system. People need coaxing, help and support, and we try to provide that.

One of the petitions that we are discussing concerns the £650 payment, which people with disabilities should be eligible for. People who suffer with disabilities have very specific needs, some in relation to their diet and the food that they eat. There is an important cost factor in a specialised diet.

Liz Twist: The hon. Member reminds me of the work that we have done together on rare diseases, and Muscular Dystrophy UK has produced a report on the impact of cost of living rises and how that affects wellbeing.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Lady sets the scene very well. I thank her for that intervention because it reminds us all of the impacts on a section of the community across this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. We see the impacts every day, and we are trying to convey that to the Minister so that he can grasp what we are focusing on and give us the answers that we seek.

Inflation rates for food have gone up in the last year by 13.1% in Northern Ireland. Expanding the payment to people who suffer with disabilities would help them to stick to their routines and be able to rely on what they need to stay alive. I am not exaggerating the matter—they need it to stay alive. That is what I see in my constituency on a regular basis.

In addition, I have had numerous constituents raise concerns with me regarding the amount it costs to run certain types of medical equipment; the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) said the same thing. I deal with these matters every week: people with stairlifts, pumps for feeding tubes, electric wheelchairs, bath seats, and, more than ever, mobility scooters. Those of us who are able-bodied do things for ourselves, but we have constituents who cannot, without help, deal with the extra charges that come their way. I compassionately and respectfully urge the Minister and the Government to provide some form of grant to help ease the costs for the many people who must run medical equipment. Such issues are not momentary; they are there for a lifetime. The sad reality is that some people require those pieces of equipment to survive and continue to live. It is often a matter of life or death for them. That is the cold reality of where we are today with some of my constituents and those of others who have spoken.

Those constituents are no stranger to the increases in electricity and gas, and it is unfortunate that so many of my constituents have to deal with the impacts of that. We must do more to speak on behalf of those who are disabled and struggling to pay the increased cost of electricity and heating payments. There is certainly a conversation to be had about disabled people and employment. We need to air that today as well—today's debate is perhaps a chance to do so—but in a constructive way. For some of those on non-means-tested benefits, there is an option for getting into employment, which must be made accessible to them. I welcome the many employers who have made a constructive and positive

[Jim Shannon]

decision to be disability friendly. It is wonderful to see so many encouraged into work by so many, but there is still more to do.

Amy Callaghan: On that point about accessible work spaces, it is very hard to get this place, which legislates for equality, to adapt for people with disabilities, so how can we expect other workplaces to take the onus themselves and make work spaces more accessible for people?

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. She speaks with knowledge, understanding and a really deep request for change that she has put forward clearly and capably. When the Minister responds, perhaps he can say how this place can improve its disability access. I know that much has been done, but we live with an old building and a lot more probably needs to be done than would normally be the case.

Being able to reliably apply for extra money will always be of help to people. I understand Government policy, I welcome it and think it is positive, but will the Minister outline the Government's strategy for those with a disability who are returning to part-time work, if possible? Again, I speak with knowledge and experience. I am not smarter than anybody else—definitely not—but in such debates I just try to reflect what people tell me.

Some of those disabled people have a fear about returning to work, because they are not quite sure if they can do it. They want to go back to work, but the reality is that some of them cannot. Whether they have three days a week or perhaps two weeks together for which they cannot cope, for some people the return to work is not an option. Real compassion and understanding has to be paramount in trying to give people with disabilities the option to return to work. I seek from the Minister a clear understanding of Government policy on how that will be done in a way that reflects what people need. The fact is that they want to work, but the days and weeks that they are unable to work mean that they cannot, and we need to make that right.

In January 2023, the Resolution Foundation found that for the financial year 2020-21 the gap in household income between adults with a disability and adults without a disability was about 30% if disability benefits were included, which is quite a significant gap, and 44% if disability benefits were excluded. Furthermore, a third of adults in the lowest income group are disabled. Those figures are not the Government's fault, by the way. Those are facts. That is where we are. That is the data. But it is about how we respond in a positive fashion.

One-off payments are all very well and good, and the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys referred to that. It is good that the Government have reached out and given that extra money, but perhaps what we really need is an ongoing vision for the next year or the next period of time, whereby those benefits and the help with energy payments and so on are provided in a constructive and statistical way, to ensure that there is a vision for the future for those people who are disabled? The assessment is good when it comes to whether there is a positive impact on the efficiency of paying bills, and the one-off payment takes pressure off, but I believe that it needs to be negotiated in a different way. Of course,

the Government have reached deep into their pockets to ensure that there is help for people. However, the benefits must be felt over a longer time to truly help.

I will conclude with this comment. There is no doubt that the cost of living crisis has had an impact on everyone, but we do and we must look to the Government to consider the specific impacts right now. Again, I request the Minister and the Government to support people when times are increasingly difficult—and they are really not only difficult, but very uncertain.

Sir Robert Syms (in the Chair): We now move on to the Front-Bench speeches.

5.44 pm

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Robert, and I thank the Petitions Committee for securing this really important debate. More importantly, however, I thank the petitioners and those who signed their petition.

I pay tribute to the We Care Campaign, which provided me with an excellent briefing for today. The hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) mentioned that I had a debate in this Chamber last week—it was last Tuesday. I immediately reprised that debate during our Opposition day on Tuesday afternoon. Some of my contribution I could probably give without notes, and I am not going to repeat every statistic that I brought up. Nothing, however, has changed since last week. Even I would not have expected it to happen that quickly.

The cost of living, and how it affects disabled people and their carers, is something that this Government have to take seriously and do something about. Everyone who has contributed already has said most of what I was going to. I am going to repeat some of it because it is far too important not to repeat. There is real agreement across the Chamber today that the Government must do more to support disabled people, who are far more likely to live in poverty than those who are not disabled. They are particularly vulnerable to the rising cost of living.

Households across the UK and Scotland continue to face extremely challenging economic conditions. We know that food inflation is still at 19.1% a year, and for many disabled people on special diets the costs are even higher. We know that inflation disproportionately impacts lower income groups, and that is certainly true of disabled people, who spend a relatively higher proportion of their income on eating and keeping warm. According to Scope, disabled people are almost three times as likely to live in poverty than the rest of the population. That includes any disability benefits they get. Disabled households have to use a lot of their money to run powerful machines to help them live a more normal life. They have to pay more to get to hospital because they cannot generally use public transport. The list of things that cost more for disabled people and their households is incredible. The Government have to take it on board.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Lady is absolutely right, and has just brought to my mind the issue of being unable to travel. Some of my constituents cannot travel on buses because of their anxiety issues. They may have panic attacks when they are out; whenever they see a crowd of people they automatically focus on where they are.

They panic, and that is why they cannot use public transport. What they need is taxis. Can they afford them? No, they cannot.

Marion Fellows: The hon. Member is, as usual, absolutely right. Oh, how we missed him last week.

Last week, Scope issued its latest Disability Price Tag report. I was privileged to go to its reception last Thursday, along with the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft). It has always been the case that it costs more just to live if someone is disabled. In times when the cost of living is rising, however, and with huge inflation, it is even worse. Scope said that for a disabled household it can cost an additional £975 a month to have the same standard of living as non-disabled households. If we account for inflation, that cost rises to £1,122 per month. Not one single person in this Chamber believes that disabled households and people are actually getting that kind of money.

Against that worrying backdrop, the SNP remain deeply concerned about the UK Government's welfare policies. The cost of living payments in 2022 and 2023 were designed to help families meet rising prices. However, according to Scope, 80% of disabled people said those payments were not enough to meet the increased costs they face. That support is welcome—no one is going to say, “No, thank you”—but one-off payments, such as the £650 petitioned for, are only a temporary fix when permanent solutions are needed. Rather than offering one-off payments to shore up the incomes of struggling families, the Government should reverse the damaging policies that are impacting our most vulnerable.

Legacy benefit claimants during the pandemic did not even get the £20 a week increase. They should have had it, they should have had it restored and it should have been increased in the meantime. In its recent submission to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Human Rights Watch not only gives a damning review of the UK Government's restrictive social security policies, such as the two-child limit and the failure to reverse the cut to universal credit, but highlights:

“It is worth noting that the £20 weekly increase was never applied to an estimated 2 million people on ‘legacy’ benefits, who were still waiting to transition to the Universal Credit system”.

The Government have to take on board the lives of disabled people. The continual refusal of the UK Government to fix the extensive known problems with the social security system is unacceptable. I know that in the health and disability White Paper, the Government have looked at promising to do things later, but that is not good enough. We need changes now that actually help vulnerable people.

I always get a bit emotional when I speak in these debates and that is a fault of mine, so please forgive me, Sir Robert. I really think that the Government should look at examples from other places. In Scotland, we try really hard with a fixed budget to make life better for our citizens. The Scottish Government run their social security system on the idea of dignity and fairness, and look to deal more on a daily basis with people who have lived experience. I know that the UK Government are now doing that, and I commend the Minister for it, but they really need to do something along the lines of what the Scottish Government have done; a new disability equality strategy is in preparation, and they will keep

working with disabled groups to make it worthwhile and to do stuff that really impacts the lives of disabled people. Recently, the Scottish Government also doubled the fuel insecurity fund to £20 million and confirmed another £20 million for 2023-24. They have introduced a new winter heating payment, which replaces the cold weather payment and provides a stable amount every year to help around 400,000 low-income individuals with heating expenses. Even though there was no statutory requirement to do so, they uprated the winter heating payment by 10.1%.

The Scottish Government have a scheme whereby they look at energy efficiency and fuel poverty. It is important that the UK Government do that, because we leak energy across the UK, especially in the parts that do not have the schemes that the Scottish Government have put in place. The Scottish Government have done everything in their limited powers, but every time they mitigate some of the policies that the UK Government impose on us, they have to take the money from somewhere else. The only answer, as far as I, the SNP and almost 50% of the Scottish population are concerned, is independence.

A social tariff for energy is something that we would support, and it is necessary. The hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys, who is no longer in his place, said it might not work, but we have to grasp every opportunity possible to help disabled households, carers and families who are struggling on a daily basis with the cost of living. Politics is about choice and political will. Can we please see better choices and greater political will from the Government? Will they listen to disabled people and their carers and do better? The personal independence payment, for example, is meant to enhance disabled people's lives. As has been said already, such payments do not even touch the sides. I ask the Minister to talk about this issue and to comment on social tariffs for energy. Can we please also consider that the best solution for disabled people is to spend less money on things such as replacing Trident and to use the money saved for social benefits, so that people with disabilities, their carers and their families can live better and more cheaply?

I do not think that anyone in this room does not agree that things have to be better for the disabled community, and it is up to the current Government to try their very best, to take on board what other countries are doing, to improve lives and to grant the wish of the petitioners, who were very modest in asking for a £650 one-off payment. That will not be the answer going forward; we need solutions.

5.56 pm

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Sir Robert, and I am grateful for the opportunity to respond on behalf of the shadow Work and Pensions team. Like the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows), I may repeat some stuff from last week, but it is important to do so, because we need changes so that we do not have to keep coming back and debating this issue. There is no doubt that disabled people are being disproportionately impacted by the cost of living crisis, and it is right—sadly—that we are debating it again in this place.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) for her passionate opening contribution, for sharing the experiences of so many

[Vicky Foxcroft]

people and for explaining why it is unacceptable that people live in those situations in 2023. Like her and others, I thank Abigail and Katy for organising the petition. I also pay tribute to the countless disabled people, friends, families, advocates, disabled people's organisations and charities who signed the petitions that triggered this debate and who campaign tirelessly to promote disabled people's rights.

The hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) eloquently put forward the extra costs of having a disability. As he said, the costs will vary, depending on an individual's specific disability, but they may include assistive equipment, care and therapies. As noted in one of the petitions that triggered the debate, some people may need to run ventilators, pumps for feeding tubes and CPAP machines, and so the list goes on.

Disabled households tend to spend more on essential goods and services such as heating, food and travel, and some disabled people find it difficult to keep warm if their movement is restricted. As my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) said, those costs are also borne by unpaid carers, and we must look at the We Care Campaign. Some disabled people might need to purchase more expensive foods if they have specific dietary requirements or have difficulty preparing raw ingredients. As we know, high inflation in 2022 and 2023 has been driven by high food and energy costs. It stands to reason that disabled people are among those most affected by the cost of living crisis.

Last month, as my hon. Friends the Members for Battersea, for Worsley and Eccles South, and for Blaydon (Liz Twist) said, disability equality charity Scope released updated research on the extra costs associated with having a disability—the so-called disability price tag. When Scope last calculated the price tag in 2019, it stood at £583 per month; over the past four years, it has risen to a shocking £975 per month, equivalent to 63% of household income. That means that disabled households need to find almost £12,000 extra per year to achieve the same standard of living as non-disabled households.

My hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) articulated the challenges for young people with cancer: not having built up a safety net; the extra costs they face; and, particularly, many missing hospital appointments due to not being able to afford their travel costs. That is wasting money in the system, as well as delaying essential treatment. It is heartbreaking.

[SIR MARK HENDRICK *in the Chair*]

The impact of such rising costs is exacerbated further by the fact that disabled people also tend to have lower than average earnings. In a January 2023 report, the Resolution Foundation found that the gap in household income between adults with and without a disability was about 30% including disability benefits and 44% excluding them.

As we know, disabled people who are not able to work are entitled to claim income replacement benefits. In addition, all disabled people can claim extra-costs benefits to help cover the extra costs of having a disability. I am sure that the Minister, when he responds, will remind us that in his autumn statement the Chancellor committed to uprating benefits in line with inflation.

That, however, only took effect from the start of the 2023-24 financial year. No doubt, the Minister present will also tell us that the Government have taken steps to support disabled people through the crisis by delivering the disability cost of living payments. As my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon said, however, 80% of disabled people said that that was not enough to live on.

At a similar debate last week, I reminded the Minister that hundreds of thousands of people are no longer entitled to the warm home discount—many Members have mentioned that today—since the Government excluded those who claim disability living allowance, the personal independence payment and attendance allowance. I therefore hope he responds to our many questions about that.

In addition, Disability Rights UK and many others have said that the lack of meaningful increases in disability benefits over recent years means that the extra support given to disabled people has barely touched the sides. Trussell Trust figures show that even in early 2020, 62% of working-age people referred to food banks were disabled. A Mencap survey revealed that 35% of people with a learning disability have skipped meals to cut back on costs and that 38% had not turned on their heating despite being cold.

My hon. Friends the Members for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) and for Battersea talked of the importance of incorporating the UNCRPD into law, so I will finish with what I said last week, because it relates to that: I ask the Minister to commit to work closely with disabled people and disabled people's organisations to find a solution to this crisis.

Sir Mark Hendrick (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members that there may be a Division shortly. If that is the case, I will suspend the sitting for 15 minutes.

6.4 pm

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Tom Pursglove): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Mark. May I begin by thanking the hon. Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) for introducing this debate? We do not always agree on everything, but she undoubtedly speaks with great passion about these issues. I also thank Abigail and Katy for the work they have done to bring forward these petitions.

I thank Members from across the House for their heartfelt and thorough contributions. There is no question that any right hon. Member or hon. Member is not acutely mindful of the enormous pressures and challenges that people feel in the current climate. It is right that we come together and debate these issues. We debated them last week and are doing so again. I have no doubt there will be further opportunities going forward.

I want to set out the picture on disability benefit spending more generally to put the debate in context. Then I will go on to explain the package of support we have in place and the work that is ongoing to respond to the many issues that have been raised today. It is worth saying that we will spend around £77 billion in 2023-24 on benefits to support disabled people and people with health conditions, which is around 3.1% of GDP. In 2023-24, spending on PIP, DLA and attendance allowance will be £12.5 billion higher in real terms than in 2010. Total disability benefit spend in 2027-28 is forecast to be

over £39.8 billion higher in real terms compared to 2010. This is despite Scottish disability spend being devolved in 2020-21.

That is not to minimise for a moment the challenges that households face in the current climate, particularly those that include members who are disabled. The difficulties they are experiencing at this time, particularly around energy affordability and the cost of living, are pressing. All of us are familiar with the root causes of costs being higher. The situation in Ukraine is a significant one, and it has resulted undoubtedly in energy market volatility. That has translated into households here in the UK being put under real strain.

I said this last week, but it is important to get it on the record again: we as Ministers are not complacent. We are adamant that vulnerable energy users must be able to afford their bills, and we recognise that there are inevitably higher costs associated with many of those households' usage. That is why the Chancellor and the Prime Minister acted decisively to introduce the cost of living payments and provide structured support worth over £94 billion in 2022-23 and 2023-24. That is an average of over £3,300 per UK household.

As was mentioned in a number of contributions, we have also uprated benefits in line with inflation at 10.1%, which was the right thing to do. We listened to the views of disabled people, their representative groups, Members in this House and our constituents across the country, regardless of which party we represent. We concluded, having listened to the compelling arguments, that the right thing to do was to uprate benefits in line with inflation.

The Government prioritised paying cost of living payments worth up to £1,100 for some households during the 2022-23 financial year. The Department for Work and Pensions can be proud of the work that officials did to help us to ensure that the payment hit people's bank accounts. Some 30 million cost of living payments were paid during the course of last year, including 8 million households receiving up to £650 across two payments, over 8 million pensioner households—*[Interruption.]*

Sir Mark Hendrick (in the Chair): Order. As I said earlier, the sitting is suspended for 15 minutes for a Division in the House. If there is another Division, we will suspend for 25 minutes.

6.10 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

6.25 pm

On resuming—

Sir Mark Hendrick (in the Chair): Order. The sitting is resumed. The debate may now continue until 7.45 pm.

Tom Pursglove: Resuming from where I left off, over 8 million pensioner households received an additional £300 on top of their winter fuel payments in 2022-23, and 6 million who were entitled to an extra cost benefit, such as a personal independence payment or an adult disability payment in Scotland, received £150.

The wider package of support for the financial year included the energy price guarantee, which capped fuel bills at £2,500 for average use. Colleagues from across the House will recognise that that support has been

extended until next month. The package also included the £400 off domestic electricity bills received by every household in Great Britain, and the council tax reductions for bands A to D in England.

One part of our overall package that I think is particularly important is the household support fund, which we extended twice. Including support for the devolved Administrations in terms of consequential funding, the total has been £1.5 billion since October 2021. It is important discretionary help, which is designed specifically to allow local authorities to work with people in their communities whose particular needs are not necessarily able to be met through the wider structured package of support. This sensible, discretionary support can be provided locally on a case-by-case basis to the people who need it. It is a significant and important part of the support package, which reflects the fact that people's circumstances are often complicated and do not fit into neat boxes.

I will turn to cost of living support for 2023-24. Again, colleagues will recall the Chancellor setting out in the autumn statement our intentions for the support package for the year ahead. Eight million low-income families on means-tested benefits will get £900. My Department has already delivered 99% of the first cost of living payment of £301 to the 7.3 million households in receipt of a means-tested benefit such as universal credit. That represents payments to a value of £2.2 billion.

The hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) suggested that not much has changed since we met last week. However, I am able to provide one update that last Friday, my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Mobility, Youth and Progression laid in Parliament the regulations that will allow us to pay an additional £150 to more than 6.5 million people on an extra cost disability benefit. Those payments will land in people's bank accounts starting from 20 June. That is important help, and I am pleased that we are now able to give certainty around the timetable. We have also laid regulations that will allow pensioner households to get an additional £300 on top of their annual winter fuel payment this winter, as they did last year.

I recognise that one of the petitions focused specifically on the disability cost of living payment, and arguments about its adequacy. I want to reiterate what I said in the debate last week, because the statistics on this are quite significant. I want to stress that the rationale for each of the cost of living payments is different. The Government believe it is right that the highest amount goes to those on means-tested benefits, given that those on the lowest incomes are most vulnerable to rises in the cost of living. Having said that, we estimate that nearly 60% of individuals who receive an extra cost disability benefit will receive additional support through the means-tested benefit payment. Over 85% will receive either or both of the means-tested and pensioner benefits, which goes in some ways to the heart of the debate.

I assure hon. Members that we are absolutely committed to ensuring that disabled people and people with health conditions receive the support that they need. That is why in 2022-23 we spent nearly £69 billion in real terms on benefits to support disabled people and people with health conditions. We will continue that throughout 2023-24 by uprating disability benefits in line with last

[Tom Pursglove]

September's CPI inflation figure, as I have set out, meaning that we expect to spend around £78 billion in 2023-24—3.1% of GDP.

Jim Shannon: The Minister is setting out very clearly the Government's support, which we all acknowledge is there, but some of the questions asked by Opposition Members, and indeed by the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), were about those who have equipment such as mobility scooters, lifts to get in and out of the bath, pumps and other extra medical costs. The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft), the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson) and I also asked about those who have dietary issues. In other words, there is an extra cost factor. Will the Minister please tell us whether the money that he has just spoken about will get to those who need it the most at this time?

Tom Pursglove: I will happily elaborate on those points. A lot of points were raised during the debate that I will respond to directly, but we are of course determined that the support must get to those who need it the most. That underpins the entire ethos behind the package of support that is being provided, and I will come to some of the specifics that have been raised shortly. As I said earlier, by 2027-28 total disability benefit spending is forecast to be over £41 billion higher in real terms compared with 2010-11. Spending on the extra cost disability benefits will alone amount to some £35 billion this year, all paid tax-free in addition to any other support, financial or practical, that disabled individuals may receive.

On the point raised by the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson), I will happily meet her and the charity to which she referred. I am always happy to meet colleagues. I think that colleagues would say that I am always willing to engage as a Minister, and that I try my best to say yes to as many requests as possible. It is really important to hear the experiences of disabled people and their representative organisations, so that we have a constructive dialogue, as the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft), indicated is important. I completely accept that, and it is reflected in the work that I do, and the engagement that I have week to week. I will happily say yes to that engagement with the hon. Member for Putney. She talked about evaluation of the adequacy of the cost of living payments. I can confirm, as I did in our debate last week, that the Department is planning to do an evaluation relating to the cost of living payments later this year.

Vicky Foxcroft: What the Minister says about an evaluation is interesting. I have asked many parliamentary questions and made freedom of information requests and so forth around the Government publishing and being open and transparent with their evaluations. When that evaluation takes place, will he ensure that it is published?

Tom Pursglove: I will happily take away the shadow Minister's request for publication of the evaluation.

Vicky Foxcroft: Is that a no?

Tom Pursglove: The Secretary of State and I, and other Ministers in the Department, have been very willing to try to provide more information to the House. The hon. Lady shakes her head, but that is not right: we have come forward, for example, around the structural reforms in the White Paper. The decision that I have made within the Department, because I think that it is important for Parliament to have this information, is to provide a significant statistical release around it so that colleagues on both sides can look at the reforms and reach informed decisions when it comes to votes on the specifics of the policy. There are good reasons for the policies that we intend to pursue, and that statistical release will allow colleagues to form their judgments. I will happily take away her specific request around publication.

We provide significant statistical releases as a Department, as well as reports that are put into the public domain at their conclusion. We are in the early stages of that work, but I am happy to look at it through that lens. We provide information to support parliamentary debate and to support those we work with to get packages of support right, and it is not unhelpful, wherever possible, to provide that information in a way that is accessible beyond the Department.

The disability unit is also seeking to understand and evidence the full impact of the current cost of living on disabled people across a range of sectors. That work is ongoing. There is good dialogue and engagement with disabled people and their representative groups about it, so that we can look at the situation in its totality, understand the interventions that we have made to date and understand the needs that exist. That is relevant to some of what I will go on to say about the other points that were raised in the debate.

Let me turn to energy costs specifically. It was helpful that the Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, my hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Amanda Solloway), was here, albeit for a short time. She heard some of the debate, and I will happily relay to her the contributions that were made, because of course the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero leads on energy policy. Many hon. Members understandably referenced energy costs, particularly in relation to the cost of equipment. The Government supported families across the UK last winter through the energy price guarantee, which places a limit on the price that households pay per unit of gas or electricity. As announced at the spring Budget, households continue to be supported throughout the spring with the extension of EPG at £2,500 per year for the average household until June 2023. That will give the average British family an average saving of £160 per household throughout this period. Support is also provided through cold weather payments and the warm home discount.

I want to touch, as I did last week, on the priority services register, which is run by energy suppliers. It offers additional free services to people who are of pensionable age, are registered disabled, have a hearing or visual impairment, or have long-term ill health. The register helps to ensure that people in vulnerable situations can access extra help when needed, such as when there is a power cut.

Barbara Keeley: I wonder whether the Minister will say more about the warm home discount, which many of us raised on behalf of people who found that they

could not get it, including people who had the discount before: I felt that that was very harsh this winter. It is unacceptable that people were excluded from it because of assumed characteristics of their bills. We had quite a long exposé of various ideas about how to calculate it, but I hope that the Minister will admit that the scheme that he adopted is pretty crude. I know that it has left people on very low incomes in cold homes, and it should be looked at again.

Tom Pursglove: Again, I am happy to deal directly with that point, but I want to touch on the longer-term thinking around energy costs, which is led by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

Marsha De Cordova: I want to take the Minister back very briefly to what he said about priority customers and those who are elderly or disabled. In my speech, I mentioned that accessible information is not being provided to a number of disabled people, whether those who have a learning disability or those who are blind or partially sighted. What analysis or work is the Department doing on that? Providers have a legal duty to ensure that information is being provided to people in the right format. There is no point in having a priority scheme if providers are not meeting the needs of those they are prioritising.

Tom Pursglove: I will ask the Minister who was here earlier to provide an update to the hon. Lady on that particular point. Given that it relates to interaction with energy companies, it is important that the Minister is given the opportunity to comment on the point in question.

Before I move on to energy costs, I want to touch on the point that the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) made about water schemes. Again, I am happy to take that away. I recognise that, as she said, water companies provide support, and I am happy to raise that issue with ministerial colleagues with a direct responsibility for water policy.

The hon. Lady mentioned the work that Marie Curie is doing and spoke about people at the end of life. I want to put on the record my thanks to Marie Curie for its brilliant advocacy and campaigning, and the work it did with my Department and officials at the DWP to help us get the changes to the special rules for end of life right. That will be a significant help to many families across the country; they should be spending that time with their loved ones—their family and friends—not worrying about their finances. The changes to the special rules for end of life, which allow the fast-tracked help to be provided for longer, are important. Members of this House and the charitable sector campaigned for them—I am proud that we introduced them collaboratively—and gave us fantastic insight, guidance and support to help us get that policy right. The changes were introduced a few weeks ago, and will be helping families across the country today. The second tranche of benefits is now subject to the changes. I am pleased to say that when those applications come in, they are dealt with very quickly—within a matter of days—so that people can get that important help. I am grateful for the opportunity to highlight that.

Looking to the future, the Government recognise that we need to consider energy affordability in the longer term, and as part of that we intend to move away

from universal energy bill support and towards better targeted support for those most in need. As set out in the 2022 autumn statement, we are working with consumer groups, charities and industry to explore possible options for a new approach to consumer protection, such as a social tariff from April 2024 onwards as part of wider retail market reforms. There is ongoing engagement between Ministers and disabled people's organisations and representative groups to understand what that might look like. We will ensure those views are included as we do that work.

That work includes thorough engagement with disability organisations to consider the costs for people with medical equipment and assess the potential need for specific support for vulnerable and disabled people using energy-intensive medical equipment in the home. That new approach will be aligned with our objectives of delivering a fair deal for consumers, ensuring the energy market is resilient and attractive to investors over the long term, and supporting an efficient and flexible energy system. Any new approach will also need to promote competition within the energy markets and be consistent with our wider objectives of improving energy security and delivering net zero.

We are looking at medical equipment on a cross-Government basis. The Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England are supporting the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero's review of the energy rebates and refund schemes that are currently available for users of medical equipment at home. They are also supporting the Department's policy development work in this area, which they plan to publish for low-income, vulnerable energy consumers post April 2024. I understand that there are arrangements in place involving specialised NHS services and integrated care boards, which we will no doubt want to consider carefully as we move forward with the energy reforms I have described.

Liz Twist: On the costs for machinery, it seems that there are different understandings of what support is available. Will the work that is currently being done ensure that it is widely known and widely available to people who need it?

Tom Pursglove: Again, we had a good debate about awareness last week. One of the things I undertook to do was to see what more we could do to increase awareness. That is why having such thorough engagement, including with disabled people and their representative bodies, is key, because we want to ensure the reforms reflect their views, experiences and needs. The awareness piece is fundamental to ensuring that people are aware of the support available to them. With that in mind, as set out in the energy security plan released in March, the Government intend to consult on options for this new approach this summer. We will invite and welcome the public and our stakeholders to use the consultation to feedback on our proposals.

Jim Shannon: Further to the point made by the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist), who quantifies or decides what amount of electricity or energy is used by someone with a medical device? Will there be input from the charity and from organisations to agree the figure? I welcome the Minister indicating that that will be the case. Who will agree what the final figure will be?

Tom Pursglove: I entirely recognise the challenge of identifying that figure because inevitably people's circumstances will differ, which is exactly why, as I explained earlier, we introduced the discretionary household support fund to ensure there was that discretionary support in place in the wider health landscape to capture those circumstances. I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a specific figure today, but I go back to the point that this is exactly why the engagement piece is so important. These are issues we will no doubt want to explore in conversations to work out precisely what people need, what the average cost is and how costs above that average might best be met.

There are also other variables at play. We talked about how the situation in Ukraine has played into the higher costs that people are experiencing, particularly around energy. All of us hope the conflict will come to an end in short order, but inevitably the timings and nature of the conflict play into the levels at which those costs come through and the ways in which they are presented to people here in the UK. They are reflected in the energy bills turning up in people's letterboxes or in their emails, which people are often worried about and, of course, are having to find the money to pay. We need to look carefully at these issues in a way that tracks the nature of the energy market and how it is being affected by what is going on in the world. It speaks to the Prime Minister's determination to get inflation down and, as a Minister in his Government, I absolutely support him in that because, again, that plays into the costs people are experiencing.

I want to touch on the warm home discount scheme, which has been mentioned. We reformed the scheme in England and Wales to provide more rebates automatically and to focus the support on households in fuel poverty and on the lowest incomes. As the overall funding for the scheme is limited, we have focused support towards those on the lowest incomes and those who receive means-tested benefits. Disability benefits are not means-tested.

Overall, our analysis showed that 160,000 more households where a person is disabled or has a long-term illness would receive a rebate. In addition, the proportion of rebates received by households where someone has a disability or a long-term illness would remain higher than the proportion of the fuel-poor population with a disability and higher than the proportion of the overall population with a disability. Again, I will happily take away and reflect on the views expressed in the debate and will ensure that Ministers elsewhere in Government are aware of them.

On prepayment meters, which were briefly touched on, Ofgem published a new code of practice on 18 April. That has been agreed with energy suppliers to improve protections for customers being moved to a prepayment meter involuntarily. That is, of course, a step in the right direction, with better protections for vulnerable households, but the code of practice is not the end of this process. We have always been clear that action is needed to crack down on the practice of forcing people, especially the most vulnerable people, on to prepayment meters. The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero will continue to work closely with Ofgem and the industry to see that the code leads to positive changes for vulnerable consumers and will not hesitate to intervene again if necessary. And I have no doubt that if we do not see the

progress that we want, we will have more debates in this House around this issue. I know it is of real concern to people, having seen egregious cases reported in the media, which is also reflected in our inboxes as constituency MPs.

I also want to say something about energy efficiency, because the best way of protecting households is by lowering the costs of the energy that we consume and reducing our usage, and that means taking further steps on energy efficiency. This Government have set a new and ambitious target to reduce final energy demand from buildings and industry by 15% by 2030, and we have created the new energy efficiency taskforce, which is charged with driving improvements to bring down energy bills for households and businesses.

Based on proposals announced last year as ECO+, our new energy companies obligation scheme will deliver £1 billion of additional investment by March 2026 in energy efficiency upgrades, such as loft and cavity wall insulation. It will extend help to a wider group of households in the least efficient homes in the lower council tax bands, as well as boosting help for those on the lowest incomes.

Marsha De Cordova: The Minister is absolutely right to talk about energy efficiency in one context. On the other hand, however, it is important to truly acknowledge that disabled people face additional energy costs because of their disability. Energy efficiency is one thing, but really this issue is about addressing the challenge faced by disabled people right now in relation to the costs of living, in particular energy costs.

Tom Pursglove: I entirely accept that, and I do not think that I have suggested otherwise, but of course where we can help with people's energy costs in the whole, we should do that. It is right that as a Government we do our bit to try to help, through those schemes, to provide that insulation support, which inevitably assists with some of those challenging costs that we are dealing with through the wider support that I have described.

We plan to lay legislation by the summer to take forward those measures that I have just set out. Energy efficiency measures in the fabric of our buildings, such as loft and cavity wall insulation, will lead to less demand on the electricity and gas grids, which in turn could help us to mitigate the impact of high and volatile international gas prices. This could also reduce energy bills for consumers, as well as helping vulnerable households out of fuel poverty.

Finally, I wanted to say something about the White Paper reforms that the Government proposed six weeks or so ago. It is absolutely right that we unlock the potential of those who wish to work and to do that with the right support. I mention this issue because there have been a few comments about it and I was able to say that we will be providing that statistical release, which I think will give colour to those reforms and allow people to make judgments about them and understand the rationale behind the direction of our proposals.

However, I regularly hear from disabled people who would like the opportunity to work, but that structural barrier within the system—that worry, or jeopardy, about trying work and it not working out, and then having to go through reapplication and reassessment processes—just cannot be right. Undoubtedly, though,

that is getting in the way of so many people unlocking their potential and taking on work, if that is something they want to do.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) touched on opportunities for part-time work. Those are exactly the sort of opportunities that we want to unlock for people. Getting rid of the jeopardy that people feel is in the system and, undoubtedly, that work opportunity will help with households' resilience when it comes to the costs that they experience more generally.

The hon. Gentleman asked specifically what sort of support we are putting in place around that. For example, there was the announcement that the Chancellor made around universal support. The pioneers for that are the individual placement and support in primary care. We know that works; it has a 68% success rate with the supported employment model of identifying an employment opportunity that is right for someone, supporting them into that role and then helping them to retain it.

Schemes such as Access to Work Plus are also exciting and provide great opportunities. We are currently evaluating some of our initial testing of that scheme, but it is about crafting a job role and working with an employer that is keen to take on a disabled person, ensuring they are able to unlock that opportunity in a way that is right for that individual. It is about working with them on a tailored, personalised basis, which is exactly the basis that I am determined we will progress the White Paper reforms on. The overarching sentiment, and the fundamental safety net, is that we would never ask anyone to do something that is inappropriate for them.

Alongside those measures, we also want a better journey through the benefits system for people who need support. I am not complacent about that. There have been contributions today that touched on PIP journey times, and I can confirm that they are down to 14 weeks. That is where we wanted to get to. Previously, people were experiencing unacceptable waits. I am also asking officials to stretch and see what more we can do to take that further and get certainty for people as early in that journey as possible.

Some of the measures we talked about in the White Paper speak to the wider effort we want to make to improve experiences of the benefits system. With the severe disability group, for example, I hope to be able to say more about the work we will do to kick that on and test that model. We think the model is right, because it reduces the assessment burden on people, particularly where their conditions are unlikely to improve. I would argue that scrapping the work capability assessment provides a good opportunity. We have many debates in this House on that over the years. I am also thinking back to debates before my time here—that was a very controversial issue. Scrapping that assessment is the right thing to do, and it allows us an opportunity to focus on quality decision making over and above the current picture.

We want to better gauge fluctuating conditions in the benefits systems, and we want to test that to see what we could do to provide better-quality support and help for people navigating the benefit system with fluctuating conditions. That is as well as the feedback that came through loud and clear in the responses to the Green Paper: they said that they wanted to see the Department matching expert assessors with their particular conditions,

because they think that greater understanding will lead to better outcomes. I am looking forward to the opportunity to debate those issues in the weeks and months ahead.

Barbara Keeley: It seemed like the Minister was winding towards his last few sentences, so I did not want us to end the debate without once again thanking carers and the We Care Campaign, who have done such a wonderful job. The Minister has not mentioned carers much, which is disappointing given that carers were mentioned such a lot previously. The Minister talked about people with disabilities wanting to get back into work, which is admirable, but we ought to be constantly thankful for the hundreds of thousands of people who have given up work so that they can care. We owe them a massive debt.

I think I am right in saying that his Government have not done anything like as much work as previous Governments have for carers. They do not have a national carers strategy any more, which we did under previous Governments. It is a pity that, it having been raised so many times in this debate, he has not mentioned carers more.

Tom Pursglove: I have not finished my remarks yet. It is important to thank carers, who do a remarkable job and provide incredible support, often to loved ones, family members, and friends. I recognise that is often very challenging, which is why we provide support through the carer's allowance. The hon. Lady was not in last week's debate, but I committed to look at carer's allowances and the thresholds. It is an issue that is being raised fairly regularly in the context of these debates, and I repeat that commitment today. I want to see if the balance relating to carer's allowance is right, and whether there is more that we can do.

Fleur Anderson: I would just like to add the needs of young carers to this conversation. There is an all-party parliamentary group on young carers and young adult carers, and we have heard powerful testimonies from young carers, as I have from my constituents. It is welcome that the delay to payments is being reduced from 18 weeks to 14, but that is still over three months' rent, which is unaffordable for many people. They will often lose homes and have to give up many opportunities, and it is very crippling. I have been to the national assessment centre for PIP, and I do not know what the barrier is—I do not know why the delay is not coming down further and why the process cannot be streamlined. I wonder whether the Minister could say what is stopping it coming down any further. Has the national PIP assessment centre been set a target date?

Tom Pursglove: Where we are at the moment is that the journey time for PIP is 14 weeks. I am happy to provide the hon. Lady with some more information separately, and I will gladly write to her, but the whole thrust of the reforms that we are seeking to introduce is about trying to get journey times down as much as possible and getting more decisions right the first time. I think all of us would want to see greater certainty for people as quickly as possible, and I am keen to hear people's experiences and expertise about how we can best do that, which is precisely why the tests and trials were included in the White Paper package. The package features a holistic set of reforms and is undoubtedly the largest welfare reform that we have seen for over a decade, but we have to get it right, because there is such

[Tom Pursglove]

an opportunity here. I really hope that over the course of the coming weeks, months and years, we can have a constructive debate in the House about how we take such opportunities forward. I think that would be a valuable insight as we progress with that work.

Marsha De Cordova: Can the Minister elaborate a bit more? We all know that an personal independence payment is an extra costs benefit, but under the proposals in the White Paper, the Government are seeking to use that assessment framework as a replacement for the WCA. We have called for it to be scrapped for years, and we are really pleased that the Government have finally listened to disabled people, the Opposition and others, but does he recognise that PIP is an extra costs element of support? Therefore, using it to try to replace an income replacement form of social security cannot be right.

Tom Pursglove: The feedback that we hear time and again is that people want to see the assessment burden considerably reduced. I would like to hope that all of us can rally round and say that we think that is the right thing to do, so that we can respond to the feedback and act on it. I am not envisaging fundamental change to the PIP assessment being required but, again, what we will do within the new system—we will come forward with more detail about the specifics and the mechanics of how it will work—is to see greater tailoring and a greater opportunity to work with people to understand their needs, aspirations and requirements.

Where work is appropriate, we will work with people to try to explore that work outcome. Things such as universal support and IPSPC—individual placement and support in primary care—are important parts of that. The additional work coach time commitment that we have made, which has just gone live in the second third of jobcentres and will go live in the final third in very short order, is really important in helping to set out the direction of travel that we are looking to take, and it will give a feel for the system that will be in place. But we obviously require primary legislation to deal with the fundamental challenge, which is the jeopardy that people feel within the current system around trying work, it not working out and then having to go back through reassessment and reapplication processes, which is highly undesirable. It is right that we address that, but I am not anticipating there being fundamental reform to the PIP assessment.

I want to add a bit more on carers before concluding, because it is a theme that came up consistently during the course of the debate. We are focusing support on the carers who need it most, and about 380,000 carer households on UC can already receive around £2,000 extra through the carer element. Where a household is in receipt of UC with a carer element, they will be entitled to up to £900 in cost of living payments and, if the disabled person lives in the same household, a £150 disability cost of living payment. For carers who can undertake some part-time work, we increased the carer's allowance earnings limit to £139 a week from April.

But I hear the arguments that the hon. Lady makes. I made a commitment last week that I would go away and really think hard about the thresholds and the

levels at which they are set. I will consider the wider context of these debates and also the structural reforms and the wider picture. Undoubtedly, the learning from covid and opportunities for people around work are perhaps markedly different from what they were prior to the pandemic, and different people's care and responsibilities will take a different form. Fundamentally, I am willing to look at that issue. There is a lot of cross-Government work going on around a host of issues relating to disabled people and people with health conditions. I am very willing to raise her wider points with DHSC colleagues.

I agree with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys: there is a lot more consensus in these debates than is often credited. All of us want to see the same outcome, which is that people are properly supported and receive the help that they need to get them through these difficult times. As I said earlier, it is right that the Prime Minister wants our Government to focus on getting inflation down, because inflation is playing a significant part in the costs that people are experiencing.

We have been responsive to date in the support that we have provided, but our minds are not closed. We continue to engage and will continue to keep under review the package of support. There are some important measures coming down the track and there will be a lot of opportunity for colleagues and disabled people and their organisations to help influence that to make sure we get it right.

7.7 pm

Marsha De Cordova: I start by briefly thanking all of the speakers. It has been a good debate. I thank my neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson), my hon. Friends the Members for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield), for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), for Blaydon (Liz Twist), and for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams), and the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon), for East Dunbartonshire (Amy Callaghan), and for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard). I thank them all for their contributions.

The Minister outlined a lot in his response. He mentioned a lot of work that he is looking into, taking back or that is being done, but what has been overwhelming in this debate is that disabled people need support now and any further delay will not help them. If he has not read the survey responses, I ask him to please take time to read them because they really signify the urgency of this debate and the urgency of the support that disabled people need. I highlighted in my speech that this is on the back of 13 years of austerity and the hostile environment that his Government have unfortunately created, compounded by the pandemic and now the cost of living crisis. Although I appreciate some of his words, it is really important that he takes that on board.

Everybody has mentioned the warm home discount, but the Government's impact assessment highlighted that nearly 300,000 disabled people will lose out. What about those people? We did not hear anything about how we are going to support them. We all know the challenges that disabled people face. I hope that the Government will use this debate as an opportunity to think hard and fast and introduce proposals to provide immediate financial support.

The Minister did not acknowledge the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, which was signed by the previous Labour Government and will be implemented, but why will his Government not implement it now, given that they no longer have any strategy in place to support disabled people?

I want to thank our petitioners Katy and Abigail, who are here this afternoon, for their tireless hard work and for sharing their own experiences. I know the challenges that they face and how difficult it is to live independently with a disability, so I thank them once again.

Finally, we need to look at the social model of disability as opposed to looking at the medical context. If we think about it from a social model perspective, we

recognise that it is the societal barriers that need to be broken down to enable disabled people to live an independent life with their human rights preserved.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petitions 610300 and 617425, relating to the cost of living and financial support for disabled people.

7.10 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 22 May 2023

DEFENCE

Defence Estate Update

The Minister for Defence Procurement (James Cartlidge):

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) continues to review its estate with a view to securing better value for money. The MOD therefore welcomes the High Court's decision dismissing the recent challenges from Annington.

In 1996, the Ministry of Defence, in what was effectively a sale and leaseback agreement, granted a 999-year lease of over 55,000 service family accommodation homes to Annington Property Ltd and immediately leased the homes back on 200-year underleases. In 2018, the National Audit Office concluded in its review of the arrangements that taxpayers are between £2.2 billion and £4.2 billion worse off as a result of the sale and leaseback arrangements.

In January 2022, the then Minister for Defence Procurement informed the House of the steps MOD was taking to explore the extent of its statutory leasehold enfranchisement rights. MOD sought to test these rights through the issuing of enfranchisement notices for eight properties. These notices were designed to explore the extent of the MOD's statutory rights, which are available to all qualifying leaseholders, and to help determine whether enfranchisement can secure better value for taxpayers. Annington was aware that the MOD could seek to enfranchise and had previously referred to that possibility in public facing documents.

Since then, claims have been brought against the Secretary of State for Defence by Annington, Annington Limited and Annington Holdings (Guernsey) Limited in respect of these test notices on both private law—declaratory—and public law—judicial review—grounds in relation to the notices and MOD's right to enfranchise more generally. The ensuing trial was held in February 2023 and judgment has now been handed down.

We welcome the decision of the High Court, which has dismissed all the challenges brought against MOD. The High Court has confirmed that the MOD acted lawfully, that the MOD was entitled to issue the enfranchisement notices and that those enfranchisement notices were valid.

Given our obligations to secure value for money, this decision has the potential to provide the MOD with more flexibility in the management of its estate to the benefit of service personnel and their families and potentially wider Government objectives. I note three points:

Firstly, no formal decision has been taken on further enfranchisement of the estate, but the MOD will consider further the potential implications for securing better value for money for the taxpayer in light of the High Court's findings. The MOD will consider relevant factors, including the ongoing operational requirement for the properties and the economic case for enfranchisement, which may differ between sites.

Second, if the MOD does pursue enfranchisement of other units and the parties cannot agree the enfranchisement premium, the relevant premium will be determined by an independent tribunal in accordance with the relevant legislation by reference to a market value, with both parties having the opportunity to present their respective views. If the tribunal

were to determine that the cost of enfranchising the units is less than the present value of the rental liabilities, then enfranchisement is likely to represent value for money for taxpayers.

Third, we continue to work with Annington and, most importantly, the MOD is focused on providing good quality, desirable homes for service personnel and their families.

[HCWS789]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Global Health Framework

The Minister for Health and Secondary Care (Will Quince):

We are pleased to announce the publication of the "Global Health Framework: Working together towards a healthier world". The framework sets out our vision to play a leading role in improving health globally and in building resilience to future threats. It outlines the actions we will take over 2023-2025 in support of health and for a safer and more prosperous UK and world. It is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-health-framework-working-together-towards-a-healthier-world>.

The pandemic shone a spotlight on the importance of global health and the need for strong health systems to protect nations and economies from future global health threats, not least the need for collective action to deliver the third sustainable development goal—to "ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages".

The framework aims to harness capabilities across Government to deliver our global health aims as set out in the international development strategy and recently published "Integrated Review Refresh". Historically, the UK has been a proud leader in global health. We are well placed to continue this leadership by building on our strengths such as the UK's health system, our expertise in public health and our excellent health science and research sector.

We will use this leadership to achieve the key aims of the framework.

We will strengthen global health security through improving our preparedness and response to future epidemics, pandemics, drug-resistant infections, and climate change.

We will reform the global health architecture, including through a strengthened World Health Organization, to drive more coherent governance and collaboration across the international system.

We will strengthen country health systems and address key risk factors for ill health, working towards ending the preventable deaths of mothers, babies and children in the world's poorest countries, and enabling women and girls to exercise their rights.

Finally, we will advance UK leadership in science and technology, strengthening the global health research base of UK and partner countries, while supporting trade and investment.

Our global work contributes to the UK's ability to handle health threats and strengthens our life sciences sector. A significant part of the solution to the challenges we face at home will come from overseas and having strong relationships with other countries. The global health framework therefore sits alongside the wider international engagement conducted by the Government to achieve better domestic health outcomes. For example,

our involvement in global health research means we can be at the forefront of technological innovation and bring those benefits to our own population, while being part of global disease surveillance systems ensures we have access to early evidence of health risks that could affect the UK directly or indirectly.

Over the next two years we will collectively progress key activities across the four objectives set out in the global health framework. We will work across Government to maximise the impact of these ambitions. Now is the time to act to realise the importance of health for all by treating it as a global priority.

[HCWS786]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Interpol General Assembly 2024

The Minister for Security (Tom Tugendhat): I am pleased to inform the House of the date and location for the UK hosted Interpol General Assembly in 2024.

Interpol and the UK have agreed that the General Assembly will take place between 4 and 7 November 2024 in Glasgow. The city brings experience of hosting COP26 in November 2021, the largest event of its kind that the UK has ever hosted. The agreement followed consultation with the NCA, Scottish Government, Police Scotland and other delivery partners and stakeholders.

The Government are committed to global safety, protecting our citizens, and working with the rest of the world to combat criminal threats. Hosting the Interpol General Assembly highlights this steadfast commitment to make the world a safer place. It is a key opportunity to drive innovation and leadership in international police co-operation and tackle major crime trends and security threats facing the world, including serious and organised crime, counter-terrorism and fraud.

The event at Glasgow's Scottish Event Campus (SEC) next year will be Interpol's 92nd conference, bringing together over 1,000 senior delegates from across Interpol's 195 member countries. The General Assembly is Interpol's highest governing body and the largest global gathering of senior law enforcement officials and heads of ministries. The General Assembly meets annually and is responsible for major decisions affecting general policy and resources. This event will include elections for 10 key leadership posts, including the new Secretary General.

In the run-up to November 2024, the UK Government will continue to work with key stakeholders to make the event a success for the whole of the United Kingdom, for Glasgow and for Interpol.

[HCWS785]

Police Covenant Annual Report

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Suella Braverman): I am today laying before Parliament the first annual report concerning the police covenant. The report will also be available on www.gov.uk.

There are few jobs that are as physically and mentally demanding as those found within policing. Every day police officers and staff put themselves in harm's way, standing between the public and those that would do them harm. These roles, and the single-minded attitude it takes to excel at them, are rightly appreciated by

law-abiding members of the public. It is only right that we recognise the demands that are placed on those who work in policing and do all we can to support our police in minimising the impact on those in the police force, their families, and those who have left the service.

The police covenant is a pledge by Government, and by society as a whole, to ensure that members of the police workforce suffer no detriment as a result of their role. The covenant acknowledges the sacrifices made by those who work or have previously worked in our police forces. It is intended to ensure that current and retired officers, staff, volunteers and their families are all included and seeks to mitigate any impacts on their day-to-day life and their future health.

Since we launched the covenant over a year ago, significant progress has been made on all of the priority areas of work. The police covenant has delivered several new pieces of work, including pre-deployment mental health training for new recruits and improved occupational health standards for officers in service. Bereavement counselling has also now been established for the families and close colleagues of officers who have taken their own life or been killed on duty. The covenant has established a chief medical officer role whose initial priorities will be NHS engagement, reviewing the processes surrounding ill-health retirement, and suicide prevention.

As a clear measure of our progress, three of the original priorities for work have been completed, following significant changes to improve the working experience for the police workforce in those specific areas. First, the officer and staff safety review has successfully influenced changes to legislation around assaults on emergency workers brought in by the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022. Secondly, the focus on successful implementation of Operation Hampshire was increased to combat assaults made against officers. Data collection on these assaults is now improving and we have now created an annual data requirement (ADR) for forces to collate data for assaults on police staff. Finally, mental health training has now successfully been included as part of the policing education qualifications framework (PEQF) pre-deployment training for new officers and staff.

These early successes are a reflection of the constructive collaboration and combined efforts of policing partners and others involved in the covenant, such as the College of Policing, National Police Chiefs' Council, the staff associations and unions, the interim chief medical officer, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), the Welsh Government and non-Home Office forces.

While it is right to recognise these achievements, this is just the start and there remains much to do. As the nature and challenges of working in the police are constantly evolving, so too is our commitment to support the police workforce. As we close the three completed priorities, we have created three new ones to continue to make progress in further improving the working environment and supporting the police. These new areas of work include supporting police leavers, engaging with the NHS and improving roadside safety for police officers and staff.

We will maintain our drive to improve policing for the public and, through the police covenant, we will ensure that we continue to deliver for the police.

[HCWS788]

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Semiconductor Strategy Publication

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Paul Scully): I am repeating the following written ministerial statement made on 19 May in the other place by my noble Friend, the Minister for AI and Intellectual Property, Viscount Camrose:

Since the new Department for Science, Innovation and Technology was created, we have been clear on its mission to make the UK a science and technology superpower.

Today we are taking further decisive steps towards that objective through the publication of our National Semiconductor Strategy.

This strategy demonstrates how fundamental technology is to the UK and the exciting opportunities it presents. We will build on the UK's deep foundations and core strengths in semiconductor technology, as part of our commitment to become one of the most innovative economies in the world.

Semiconductors are one of the five technologies of tomorrow, along with quantum, AI, engineering biology and future telecoms. They are critical to the UK's economic and national security and to the strategic advantage we will secure on the global stage.

Semiconductors underpin our ambitions elsewhere: to lead the way on artificial intelligence, to enable advances in quantum computing and telecommunications, to power high performance computing, and to facilitate progress towards net zero and in life sciences. Advances in all of these areas will bring tangible benefits to the lives of the British people, whether that is using quantum computers to discover new life-saving drugs, or high performance computing to more accurately predict the weather. All of this will rely on semiconductors.

But we are clear-eyed about the risks given that semiconductors are fundamental to so many technologies—from ventilators to fighter jets—and their supply chains are vulnerable.

Meanwhile, hostile states can seek to acquire semiconductor technical advantage to the detriment of our national security. And a compromise to the cyber security of the hardware behind every device powering modern life is not acceptable.

The semiconductor industry exists in a fiercely competitive global landscape. A number of countries are spending vast sums on their own industries, from the US to the EU to China. The costs are colossal; a single new, advanced fabrication facility can cost £10 billion. That is roughly the cost of 20 new hospitals.

The UK has enormous strengths in the sector: in compound semiconductors, in R&D, and in IP and chip design. Our approach, informed by and delivered hand in hand with industry, is to focus on those strengths and to take them even further.

Our vision is that over the next 20 years, the UK will secure world leading positions in the new semiconductor technologies of the future by focusing on these fundamental strengths. We will foster new discoveries and technological innovation. We will bolster our international position to improve supply chain resilience and protect our security. And we will grow the UK's sector, tapping a market of huge potential.

This is why we are launching the UK Semiconductor Infrastructure Initiative and investing up to £200 million into our semiconductor sector over the years 2022-25, and up to £1 billion, over the next 10 years. This is also why we are launching a new UK Semiconductor Advisory Panel, to ensure that Government, academia and industry are all working together to deliver on the priorities set out in this strategy.

Our strategy represents the culmination of what Government, industry and academia have already done in this sector. And it sets our vision for its future. It is rightly differentiated from the approaches other countries are taking to build large-scale silicon manufacturing capabilities, instead focusing on what is right for the UK. A wealth of exciting opportunities lie ahead: to grow the economy, to create highly skilled jobs, and to be at the cutting-edge of technology that revolutionises every aspect of modern life.

I will be placing copies of the strategy in the Libraries of both Houses, and it will also be made available on www.gov.uk.

[HCWS787]

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**not later than
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