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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 15 November 2023

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: I can now announce the arrangements for the election of the Chair of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. I declared the Chair vacant yesterday. Nominations will close at noon on Tuesday 28 November. Nomination forms will be available from the Vote Office, Table Office and Public Bill Office.

Only Members from the Conservative party—*[Interruption.]* Are Members going to listen? Some people might want to put their names in. *[Interruption.]* Only Members from the Conservative party may be candidates in this election. If there is more than one candidate, the ballot will take place on Wednesday 29 November between 11 am and 2.30 pm in the Aye Lobby. A briefing note with more information will be available from the Vote Office.

I also remind Members that the private Members' Bills ballot book is open today in the No Lobby until 6 pm, at which point it will be taken to the Public Bill Office and remain open for signatures until the rise of the House. The ballot draw will be held at 9 am tomorrow in Committee Room 15.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Online Fraud

1. **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): What steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to tackle online fraud. [900097]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Saqib Bhatti): Tackling fraud is a priority for this Government. The Online Safety Act 2023 requires regulated companies to mitigate the risk posed by fraud and scams on their services. In addition, Ofcom will publish codes of practice recommending steps for companies to take.

Sir Desmond Swayne: What will companies actually have to do under the terms of the Act?

Saqib Bhatti: All companies in scope of the Act will need to take action to tackle fraud where it is facilitated through user-generated content or via search results. They must take measures to prevent fraudulent content from appearing on their platforms, and swiftly remove it if it does so. Additionally, there will be a duty on the

largest social media platforms and search engines that will require them to tackle fraudulent adverts on their services.

Mr Speaker: I welcome new Members to the Front Bench.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for that response. I have heard from numerous constituents who have been victims of online scams where perpetrators ask for bank details over the phone. What steps can the Minister take to make people, especially elderly people—they are the ones who come to me—more aware of what to look out for in terms of online scams, to ensure that the money that they have earned over their lifetime is not stolen?

Saqib Bhatti: As I said, there will be a duty on the largest social media platforms that will require them to tackle fraudulent adverts. That will have a significant impact in preventing a range of online frauds, including romance scams and scam ads. I will also talk to the Economic Secretary to the Treasury on the hon. Member's behalf, because the Government have a fraud strategy.

Telecoms Network Replacement

2. **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What recent discussions she has had with (a) Ofcom and (b) telecommunications providers on the planned replacement of the copper wire network. [900098]

The Minister for Data and Digital Infrastructure (Sir John Whittingdale): We have regular meetings with Ofcom and telecommunications providers to discuss the migration from analogue to digital, and in due course the retirement of the copper network. Ofcom has set out high-level conditions for the gradual deregulation of BT Group's copper-based network in the future, but it is too early to determine the process that will trigger the complete deregulation. Ofcom will consider that in the next regulatory review period.

Mr Carmichael: Last year, some of my constituents in Shetland were without electricity for six days. Moving to voice over internet, they will have a resilience of one hour. What assurance can the Minister give me that my constituents will not be left cut off without communications after the copper network is withdrawn?

Sir John Whittingdale: The decision to migrate from the public switched telephone network to voice over internet is one for the industry, but nevertheless we are following this very carefully. Ofcom has regular discussions, and I, too, have been meeting Ofcom. The right hon. Gentleman is right that we need to make it certain that vulnerable consumers are protected. Ofcom will ensure that providers give them back-up in the event of a power outage, and it will be their duty to ensure that that is sufficient.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): I am all in favour of new infrastructure being rolled out, and the replacement of old technologies with new ones. What discussions has the Minister had with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on how we can ensure that telecoms providers use any existing ducting, rather than putting up telegraph poles unnecessarily?

Sir John Whittingdale: I have a great deal of sympathy with my right hon. Friend's question, as I know that this matter is causing concern for a number of Members. We are very keen that unnecessary infrastructure should not be built where existing ducts can be used. We have set out regulations on that, and Ofcom oversees it. Local authorities will be able to make reports to Ofcom if existing ducts are not being sufficiently used and it is felt that the infrastructure is not necessary.

AI-generated Content: Social Media

3. **Ms Anum Qaisar** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): What steps her Department is taking to tackle harmful AI-generated content on social media. [900099]

9. **Owen Thompson** (Midlothian) (SNP): What steps her Department is taking to tackle harmful AI-generated content on social media. [900108]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Saqib Bhatti): The Online Safety Act 2023, which recently received Royal Assent, has been designed to keep pace with emerging technologies. The Act will regulate AI-generated content in much the same way that it does content created by humans. It covers AI-generated content shared by users with other users, search results generated by AI and AI-generated pornography. In addition, the Act will criminalise the sharing of deepfake intimate image abuse, including when that is AI-generated.

Ms Qaisar: May I take this opportunity to welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box? I will not embarrass him by calling him a friend, but I wish him the best of luck.

As the world transitions into the new age of AI, the Tories are leaving the people of Scotland at risk from harmful AI-generated content and social media. Will the Minister outline why the Scottish Government was blocked from participating in one of the first major AI safety summits?

Saqib Bhatti: I thank the hon. Member—I will embarrass her and say that we are friends. However, I respectfully disagree, because the Scottish people were represented by the UK Government.

Owen Thompson: Meta, having recognised the threat that unrestricted use of AI could represent in elections and democracy, has banned the use of generative AI in its political adverts. Why does a private company seem to be doing more to curb the spread of electoral misinformation than this Government?

Saqib Bhatti: The Government take the integrity and security of our democratic processes very seriously. We will continue to safeguard against future risks, strengthen our resilience and ensure that the regulatory framework is as effective as possible. DSIT supports wider cross-Government efforts to protect UK democratic processes, including through the defending democracy taskforce and election cell, and will be working closely with social media platforms to ensure that the right systems are in place to identify and remove harmful material, including deepfakes, where it breaches platform terms of service.

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

Greg Clark (Tunbridge Wells) (Con): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend on his appointment and welcome him to the Dispatch Box.

GCHQ this week says that it expects hostile disruption of the next election through deepfakes using AI. Is my hon. Friend absolutely confident that the Electoral Commission has all the powers it needs to prevent that, and why are the Government not implementing their suggestion in the White Paper to introduce the legislation to empower regulators?

Saqib Bhatti: I thank my right hon. Friend for his kind remarks. As I said, the Government will take this issue incredibly seriously, and I am confident that, through the defending democracy taskforce and election cell, we will be able to do the utmost to protect ourselves from election interference. I offer to meet him to discuss this further and see what else can be done.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): I too welcome my hon. Friend to his role. What discussions has he or his Department had about raising public awareness of the impact that AI will have on society, and increasing understanding that not all content, harmful or otherwise, might be what it seems?

Saqib Bhatti: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks. We have just had a global, leading AI safety summit, which had immense coverage on that and also focused on frontier risks. We have always been clear that we will take a pragmatic, proportionate and contextual approach. With the 28 countries plus the European Union who have agreed to the Bletchley declaration, there is a great opportunity to use AI for our benefit, but we should also be wary of the risks involved.

AI Regulation

4. **Preet Kaur Gill** (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): What steps the Government are taking to regulate AI. [900101]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Saqib Bhatti): The AI regulation White Paper set out how we will regulate AI through a flexible framework. We have taken steps to implement our approach, including establishing a central AI risk function and the AI Safety Institute. We are engaging closely with regulators and their sponsoring Government Departments to understand their readiness to regulate AI effectively.

Preet Kaur Gill: This weekend I was disturbed by news of a deepfake audio of Sadiq Khan circulating online, clearly manufactured to whip up hate and disinformation. That is cause for grave concern for elected representatives. As the National Cyber Security Centre warned yesterday, advances in artificial intelligence will be exploited by "malicious actors" seeking to spread disinformation and undermine our democracy, and the technology is already falling into the wrong hands. With elections next year, does the Minister recognise the urgent need for binding, not voluntary, regulation of frontier AI?

Saqib Bhatti: I share those concerns and have been following the news. It is not just the video at the weekend; there has been another one, which is about the Leader of the Opposition—that is incredibly concerning. We are working with media organisations and online platforms, and looking at this closely with the defending democracy taskforce.

Tracey Crouch (Chatham and Aylesford) (Con): This week, the Science and Technology Committee has been in Brussels listening to how the EU is progressing with its regulation of AI. Despite the commitment to introducing legislation in the White Paper, it was not included in the King's Speech. Why not?

Saqib Bhatti: The Government have been clear that we will take a contextual and proportionate response. The key is to understand the risks involved. The Government are not saying that there will not be any legislation in the future; we are saying that we need first to understand the risks and then to adapt accordingly. The Secretary of State is in the United States at the moment. What is clear from the Bletchley declaration, and from the conversation that I had with her yesterday, is that we are seen as a global leader in this field, and other countries are looking to us to lead the way.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): I welcome the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Andrew Griffith), to his role, and I congratulate the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Meriden (Saqib Bhatti), on his appointment and on the birth of his child. I hope that he is getting some sleep in these busy days.

AI has potential benefits across the public sector—I have seen that in hospitals, where it is already delivering huge benefits to patients—but the new safety institute, which will gather together world-class talent, is not being tasked with finding new uses to improve our public services. Why not?

Saqib Bhatti: I thank the hon. Member for his question and his kind remarks—I can assure him that I am getting some sleep.

The AI Safety Institute will look at the risks involved. We will be working with the private sector, and we have always been clear that AI brings many benefits and we will ensure that we have a regulatory framework that encourages innovation and growth in the private and public sectors.

Rural Connectivity

5. **Paul Howell** (Sedgefield) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to improve rural connectivity. [900102]

The Minister for Data and Digital Infrastructure (Sir John Whittingdale): We have already announced 12 Project Gigabit contracts to extend gigabit-capable networks in rural and hard-to-reach areas of the UK. More contracts are set to be announced shortly, from the extensive pipeline of procurements. Through the shared rural network programme, we are also jointly investing over £1 billion with the industry to encourage 4G mobile coverage to 95% of the UK landmass by the end of 2025.

Paul Howell: My Sedgefield constituency has faced many trials and tribulations in trying to get rural broadband, particularly in Killerby, Summerhouse and Mordon. When I last met the leader of Building Digital UK, I was encouraged about progress. Can the Minister reassure me that he also believes that progress is being made?

Sir John Whittingdale: My hon. Friend has been a fantastic champion in campaigning for improved connectivity for his constituents. In the north-east as a whole, we have seen faster growth of gigabit broadband coverage than in any other region of the UK. None the less, I am encouraged to hear of his discussions with BDUK. I hope that a contract will be signed shortly to improve coverage still further, including in the towns that he mentions. I am happy to keep him updated as soon as we are in a position to make further announcements.

Richard Foord (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): Northleigh is like many other villages in rural Devon in that it has been waiting eight years for superfast broadband. There are 51 houses in Northleigh that are still waiting to be connected. Residents and small businesses are subject to constant emails saying, "Use your vouchers," but they cannot because contractors are unaccountable. Does the Minister agree with my constituents that the voucher scheme is ineffective and should be scrapped?

Sir John Whittingdale: I do not agree with that. The voucher scheme has delivered gigabit broadband to thousands of constituents up and down the country. At the same time, we are rolling out the procurement contract. I know that there are particular challenges in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but we have already extended gigabit coverage to 78% of the United Kingdom. I am happy to ask BDUK to discuss with him any specific challenges in his constituency.

Net Zero Technologies: University Research

6. **Alistair Strathern** (Mid Bedfordshire) (Lab): What steps she is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help support universities with research and development on net zero technologies. [900103]

The Minister of State, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (Andrew Griffith): I thank my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), for the outstanding contribution he has made to British science and technology.

The Government are investing around £4.2 billion in net zero research and innovation over the current spending review period, including through UK Research and Innovation and other Government Departments.

Alistair Strathern: I thank the Minister for that answer. I am incredibly proud of the leading role that Cranfield University in my constituency is playing, not just in pioneering research around net zero but in commercialisation of that technology. Can the Minister outline what further support we can offer companies such as Cranfield Aerospace Solutions in my constituency, to make sure we capture that economic benefit locally in the future?

Andrew Griffith: I share the hon. Member's pride in the wonderful work done by Cranfield University and Cranfield Aerospace Solutions. We are providing £1.6 billion

of funding for the UK's nine Catapults, including the High Value Manufacturing Catapult, some of which will go to the Cranfield Digital Aviation Research and Technology Centre. I hope to join the hon. Member in visiting that wonderful institution.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): The Minister is new to his task, and a very wide portfolio it is. In the wall-to-wall briefings he is currently getting, will he particularly ask for briefings on British science in the Arctic and the Antarctic? We have 78 universities that are leading in that field—we are the fourth largest polar scientific research nation. We are a leader in that area, and the Minister needs to know all about it.

Andrew Griffith: I know that my hon. Friend does fantastic work highlighting polar research through the all-party parliamentary group for the polar regions. I will be happy to champion that work, and to meet him regarding that important domain for science.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I welcome the Minister to his role. I hope he will share his predecessor's enthusiasm for, and commitment to, science.

Climate change presents huge challenges and huge opportunities. Labour would champion university clusters and spin-outs as engines of sustainable regional growth, but right now great green job-creating businesses such as Low Carbon Materials, a Durham University spin-out, and Airex, an award-winning retrofit start-up, are bogged down by Tory red tape, with some new products subject to 11 different regulators. Will the Minister adopt Labour's proposal for a regulatory innovation office to unblock the system, end damaging uncertainty and drive much-needed growth?

Andrew Griffith: I thank the hon. Lady for her question, and look forward to working collaboratively with her. I absolutely share my predecessor's determination to drive forward British science, including the all-important work on net zero.

Topical Questions

T1. [900112] **Priti Patel** (Witham) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Minister for Data and Digital Infrastructure (Sir John Whittingdale): This week, the Secretary of State is building on the momentum from the artificial intelligence summit by meeting with key partners and policymakers in the United States, championing Britain's leading global role in AI, space, tech, online safety, quantum and other areas. It is only two weeks ago that Britain convened 28 countries and the European Union at Bletchley Park to sign the world's first agreement on tackling the risks of frontier AI. This followed the historic passage of the Online Safety Act 2023, which has been viewed across the world as the gold standard of online child safety legislation. The Secretary of State will be consolidating and accelerating Britain's global advantage in these priority areas, ensuring that the special relationship grows even stronger when it comes to science and technology, and that the collaboration between our two countries—

Mr Speaker: I call Priti Patel.

Priti Patel: My right hon. Friend will know that the planned retirement of the public switched telephone network in 2025 will bring very significant concerns across rural communities, particularly in Essex—he will be familiar with that. Can he provide some assurance about the work that is under way between the Government and telecommunications providers to help improve services in Essex, particularly where we have poor broadband connectivity?

Sir John Whittingdale: As I suggested earlier, the retirement of the PSTN land network is a decision for the industry, but the Government have a key role to play in ensuring vulnerable consumers are protected through the transition. I have regular meetings with communications providers and Ofcom to discuss progress on that.

With regard to Essex, I share my right hon. Friend's concern—my constituency is the neighbouring constituency to hers—about the need to ensure that vulnerable constituents are protected. I can assure her that I will continue—

Mr Speaker: Order. We have only about seven minutes, so the Minister really has to be a bit more cautious in how much time he is using.

I call the shadow Minister.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): The Prime Minister has said that terrorist groups could use artificial intelligence to build chemical or biological weapons, but he has still failed to act decisively to regulate AI, even though the US and the EU are both taking action. Will the Minister tell the House whether the Secretary of State is using her current trip to the US to learn from the Biden Administration, or will our country have to put up with yet more dither and delay?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology (Saqib Bhatti): The Government have always been clear that we will have a contextual and proportionate response to AI. I spoke to the Secretary of State yesterday, and it is very clear that the US sees us as global leaders and will be working with us.

T3. [900114] **Matt Vickers** (Stockton South) (Con): Teesside was built on steel and now, thanks to Ben Houchen, British Steel is bringing steelmaking back to Teesside. Green steel will be forged thanks to a new £1.25 billion arc furnace, leading the way in decarbonising our industries and bringing highly skilled jobs. Does my hon. Friend agree that any business looking to invest in green tech and energy in the UK should look to Teesside first?

The Minister of State, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (Andrew Griffith): Teesside is a wonderful net zero powerhouse, and I commend the green steel project. That is one reason why Teesside was chosen to pilot the Innovate UK programme of launchpads, each of which will receive up to £7.5 million.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I welcome the new Front-Bench team to their positions. Since November 2020, £1.1 billion of taxpayers' money has been invested in the Rosalind Franklin Institute as a mega-lab to defend Britain against future pandemics. Can one of the new team explain why the mega-lab has been put up for sale?

Andrew Griffith: The Government are investing record amounts in innovation and research in technology, including across the life sciences sector. I will happily meet the hon. Lady to discuss this matter in more detail.

T5. [900116] **Andy Carter** (Warrington South) (Con): What impact does the Minister think the passage of the Online Safety Act 2023 into law will have on children and families in Warrington South and across the country?

Saqib Bhatti: As a father, this issue concerns me greatly. The Online Safety Act is the most powerful child protection law in a generation. All in-scope companies will need to take robust steps to protect children from illegal content and activity on their services. Those safety measures will need to protect children from harmful and age-inappropriate content and activity, such as bullying and content that promotes eating disorders and self-harm.

T2. [900113] **Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): Will the Minister help to co-ordinate a comprehensive analysis of the most successful enterprise zones across the UK and the ways in which zones that have not been as successful can maximise the opportunities such zones provide, such as in Coleraine in my constituency?

Sir John Whittingdale: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to flag up the value that successful enterprise zones can bring to local communities. I want to see DSIT sectors benefiting as well, and I am happy to co-ordinate further with colleagues in other Departments to explore those opportunities.

T8. [900119] **Elliot Colburn** (Carshalton and Wallington) (Con): Given the revolution in AI, what steps is my hon. Friend taking to ensure that young people in Carshalton and Wallington have access to the skills they need for the future?

Andrew Griffith: The Government are committed to ensuring that the UK has talent that supports research and innovation and drives growth. That is why we are investing millions in the brightest researchers through scholarships, PhD placements and fellowships in technologies such as artificial intelligence and quantum.

T4. [900115] **Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): What are Ministers doing to ensure that Members of this House are not included in disinformation reports compiled by the counter-disinformation unit in their Department simply for being critical of the Government? Their own Back Benchers are particularly interested to know.

Sir John Whittingdale: I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that the counter-disinformation unit is there to flag up to platforms potentially misleading information, but it has no power to have it removed. I can give him an assurance that it does not identify any Members of this House or professional journalists.

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): Research and development tax credits have been remarkably successful in promoting investment by small and medium-sized enterprises. However, the Suffolk chamber of commerce has highlighted that the system has ground to a halt due to the sledgehammer approach of His Majesty's Revenue and Customs to tackling fraud. Will my hon. Friend liaise with HMRC and the Treasury to ensure that a more pragmatic approach is adopted?

Andrew Griffith: My hon. Friend is a champion of his constituency, and I am happy to speak to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury on that important matter on his behalf.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [900070] **Richard Thomson** (Gordon) (SNP): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 15 November.

The Prime Minister (Rishi Sunak): At the start of the year, I made halving inflation my No.1 priority. Today, we have delivered on that commitment. There remains more to do, but this is a strong step forward.

Also this morning, the Supreme Court gave a judgment on the Rwanda plan. It confirmed that the principle of removing asylum seekers to a safe third country is lawful. There are further elements that it wants additional certainty on, and it noted that changes can be delivered in the future to address those issues. The Government have been working already on a new treaty with Rwanda, and we will finalise that in the light of today's judgment. Furthermore, if necessary I am prepared to revisit our domestic legal frameworks. Let me assure the House that my commitment to stopping the boats is unwavering and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will be making an oral statement shortly to the House.

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

Richard Thomson: When the Prime Minister took office, he promised to lead a Government marked by "integrity, professionalism and accountability at every level."

What is it about the judgment of David Cameron and his relationship with Lex Greensill, or his lobbying for Chinese state interests, that made the Prime Minister consider him a suitable candidate to be Foreign Secretary?

The Prime Minister: I am delighted that the former Prime Minister has rejoined the Government as Foreign Secretary. He brings unrivalled experience and relationships across the world, and will do a fantastic job championing British interests everywhere he goes.

Q3. [900072] **Scott Benton** (Blackpool South) (Ind): Tackling illegal immigration is a crucial issue for my constituents, many of whom will be extremely disappointed by this morning's judgment from the Supreme Court. Is the Prime Minister able to update the House on what that decision means for the Government's plan to tackle illegal immigration?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. I know he has championed this issue, and that it matters to his constituents. As I said, the judgment confirms that the principle of removing asylum seekers to a safe third country is lawful. The Government have already been working in advance on a new treaty with Rwanda, which we will finalise in the light of today's judgment to address the challenges that were raised. I say again that if it becomes clear that our domestic legal frameworks or international conventions are still frustrating plans at that point, I am prepared to change our laws and revisit those international relationships. The British people expect us to do whatever it takes to stop the boats, and that is precisely what this Government will deliver.

Mr Speaker: I call the Leader of the Opposition.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): The Prime Minister obviously thinks so little of his own MPs that he has had to peel David Cameron away from his seven-year exile in a shepherd's hut and make him Foreign Secretary. A few months ago, the Intelligence and Security Committee said that the now Foreign Secretary's role in a Chinese investment fund may have been—these are its words—

“engineered by the Chinese state”.

I hardly need to remind the Prime Minister of the threat posed by the Chinese Communist party or the intimidation of Members of this House. When will he instruct the Foreign Secretary to give full public disclosure of his work for Chinese interests?

The Prime Minister: As I said, I am delighted that the former Prime Minister has rejoined the Government as Foreign Secretary. As an individual with unrivalled experience, he will help Britain to navigate an uncertain world in challenging times. Of course, like every other Minister, he will go through the normal process with the independent adviser. The Government's position on China is clear: China represents an epoch-defining challenge. That is why we have taken strong and robust steps to protect ourselves against the risk that it poses. We will take no lessons from the Labour party on protecting our national security. It has taken almost £700,000 from an alleged Chinese agent. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Those on the Front Bench just need to calm down.

Keir Starmer: For someone who has spent the last few weeks complaining about recycling bins, it is ironic that the Prime Minister's latest reset involves recycling the architects of 13 years of Tory failure. This is the Prime Minister who reanimated the career of the right hon. and learned Member for Fareham (Suella Braverman) in order to resuscitate his own, just days after she was sacked for a national security breach. Is he ashamed that he was so desperate to become Tory leader and so scared to face a vote that he put someone so totally unfit for office in charge of Britain's national security?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman mentions 13 years, but we should remember what happened at the beginning of those 13 years. It is this party that restored the country's financial security

after the Labour party left no money behind. It is a bit rich to take lectures on security from a man who wanted to make the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) Prime Minister of our country.

Keir Starmer: The right hon. Member for Islington North is not even a Labour MP any more. It is a changed party with strong leadership. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. We have a lot of very important business today with some important votes. I want to get through this speedily.

Keir Starmer: For 13 years, our security has been undermined by this Tory Government, and now we have the most ridiculous, pathetic spectacle of all: the Prime Minister's Rwanda scheme, cooked up with his national security threat former Home Secretary, has blown up. He was told over and over again that this would happen, that it would not work and that it was just the latest Tory gimmick, but he bet everything on it and now he is totally exposed. The central pillar of his Government has crumbled beneath him. Does he want to apologise to the country for wasting £140 million of taxpayers' cash and wasting his entire time in office?

The Prime Minister: Obviously the right hon. and learned Gentleman did not hear what I said about our approach to Rwanda. When it comes to stopping the boats, Rwanda is one part of our plan, which has already delivered a reduction in the number of small boats this year by a third. He talks about apologising and he talks about the right hon. Member for Islington North not being a Labour MP now. Yes, he was not a Labour MP when he declined 15 different times to say that Hamas are a terrorist organisation this week, which is shameful, but he was a Labour MP—indeed, the right hon. and learned Gentleman served with him. He told the country that the right hon. Member for Islington North would make “a great Prime Minister”. At that point, the right hon. Member for Islington North described Hamas as friends. Does he want to apologise for that now? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Are we serious? [HON. MEMBERS: “Yes.”] Oh, I would not challenge. I have to say that our constituents are watching this. They are very concerned about the affairs of today and the votes later. A lot of Members wish to speak. Those who do not want that to happen, please, go outside and have a conversation there. If you want to bawl and shout, do it elsewhere, but it will not be happening in here today.

Keir Starmer: I am so glad that the Prime Minister agrees that this is a changed Labour party. While he was wasting his time on this gimmick, the asylum backlog has swollen to 175,000 people. Taxpayers are paying £8 million a day on hotel bills, and 615 people arrived by small boat last Sunday alone. Plan A has failed. After this session, whether he likes it or not, he will have to go back to his office, back to the drawing board and start from scratch. Can he assure the British public that he will drop what his former Home Secretary calls his “magical thinking” and start treating small boat crossings with the seriousness they deserve?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Gentleman talks about a changed Labour party—perhaps we will see that this evening. He cannot even make his

party do the right thing when it comes to standing by Israel in the vote later today. He talks about taking small boat crossings seriously. He has opposed every single measure that we have taken. Let me update him on what we have done this year. The number of illegal Albanian arrivals is down by 90%. Some 20,000 people have been returned this year. The number of crossings is down by a third. He mentioned hotels. We are closing 50 of them, with money being saved for taxpayers. All those measures, by the way, were opposed by the Opposition. What is his plan? Ah, yes, there we have it: a cosy deal with the European Union that would see the UK accept 100,000 illegal migrants. He does not want to stop the boats; he wants to welcome more of them.

Keir Starmer: It is very straightforward: the Prime Minister promised that he would stop the boats this year. Today is 15 November. He has wasted all his time on a gimmick, and now he is absolutely nowhere. Will he level with the British public and finally admit that he has failed to deliver on his promise?

The Prime Minister: This Government have done more to tackle illegal migration than any in the past. Let us review: the right hon. and learned Gentleman has been on the wrong side of this issue his entire career. This is a man who described all immigration law as racist. He said it was a mistake to control immigration, and he has never once in this place voted for stricter asylum rules. It is clear that while he might want to listen to the open-border activists, I am siding with the British people.

Keir Starmer: If the Prime Minister was confident about his promise, he would have given an answer saying that he stands by it and will deliver it by the end of the year. The absence of that answer is absolutely amazing in the circumstances. He has had three reshuffles, a forgotten conference speech, an empty King's Speech—he even found time to fanboy Elon Musk—but not one of them has made the slightest difference to the lives of working people. If we had a pound for every time he had a reset, the cost of living crisis would have been over long ago.

The Prime Minister likes to think of himself as the man from silicon valley, the tech-savvy Californian, the country's first AI PM, and yet his big idea is to keep turning his Government on and off at the wall and hope that we see signs of life. Is he starting to feel that, as somebody once said, he was the future once?

The Prime Minister: I slightly missed the end of that. I was glad to hear the right hon. and learned Gentleman finally bring up the cost of living—on that, he is right, as it is the No. 1 challenge facing families up and down the country—and he talked about delivering on promises, but he failed to recognise that today was the day we delivered on the most important pledge I made: to halve inflation. We are delivering on that commitment and easing the burden for families up and down the country. Everything we would see from the Labour party would jeopardise that progress—borrowing £28 billion a year, undermining our energy security and giving in to his union backers with inflation-busting pay rises. That is not a sensible plan; it would push up mortgage rates, push up inflation and harm working families. All the while, we are going to continue delivering for the country.

West Midlands: Economic Growth

Q4. [900073] **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What assessment he has made of recent trends in economic growth in the west midlands.

The Prime Minister: I am sure that my hon. Friend will be delighted that the west midlands now tops regional rankings for foreign direct investment. The Government are investing significantly in the region, including through hundreds of millions of pounds of levelling-up fund and towns fund investments, and introducing a new pilot scheme to help businesses in the region become more energy efficient.

Michael Fabricant: I thank my right hon. Friend for that encouraging answer. On behalf of my constituents in Lichfield, may I thank him for having the guts to stop HS2? May I ask that, for the area in the north of my constituency where construction is still going on, that happens swiftly, and that in areas that will not have HS2, compensation is given swiftly to those people who are expecting it?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his question and for his consistent campaigning on this issue. I recall his last question at Prime Minister's questions on this very topic. I reassure him that we are committed to fair treatment for people affected by the changes, while protecting taxpayers appropriately. Wherever property has been acquired for HS2, property owners have been fully compensated, and any outstanding cases will be settled. We are developing a programme to sell the surplus land on HS2 phase 2, ensuring that it delivers value for money and does not disrupt local property markets. I will ensure that the Rail Minister meets him swiftly so that he can speak on behalf of his constituents.

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

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP): In 2010, the then Prime Minister and now Foreign Secretary, David Cameron, said:

“People in Gaza are living under constant attacks and pressure in an open-air prison.”

Does the current Prime Minister not agree that if there is not an immediate ceasefire, we all in this Chamber will be watching on as that open-air prison is turned into a graveyard?

The Prime Minister: No one can deny the suffering that the people in Gaza are undergoing at the moment. I spoke about this on Monday, and I spoke about it consistently with Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the Palestinian Authority. We are doing everything we can to get aid into the region and we have repeatedly and consistently called for humanitarian pauses, to get aid in and get hostages and foreign nationals out as quickly as possible. We will continue, as will the Foreign Secretary, to make sure that happens.

Stephen Flynn: How much worse does it need to get? In Gaza, 4,609 children are already dead. Babies in the neonatal intensive care unit are dying because they do not have access to oxygen. For Members across the House, this is a question of values and of conscience.

Does the Prime Minister not agree that should there be a vote on an immediate ceasefire, Members across the House should be afforded a free vote?

The Prime Minister: Our position as a Government is clear: it is right that Israel is able to defend itself. That is a principle that we support. It has suffered an appalling terrorist attack—Hamas is a terrorist organisation—and it is not just Israel's right but its duty to protect its citizens. At the same time, at the United Nations and bilaterally with all our partners we have consistently called for humanitarian pauses to ensure that more aid can get in, and hostages and foreign nationals can get out. That is the right thing to do. We will continue to do everything we can to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people. I am confident that our efforts are already making a big difference on the ground.

Engagements

Q5. [900074] **Mark Eastwood** (Dewsbury) (Con): Kirklees Council has closed Dewsbury sports centre; delivered just 14% of education, health and care plans within the 20-week target; and is unable to deliver a five-year land supply. Those are just three of its many failings. Now it wants to introduce extortionate car parking charges, punishing hard-working families and destroying the high street in our towns and villages. Does my right hon. Friend agree that Labour-run Kirklees Council is no longer fit for purpose?

The Prime Minister: I share my hon. Friend's disappointment with the Labour-run council in Kirklees. Just this week we saw a Labour councillor suspended for antisemitism. As he said, it has also closed Dewsbury sports centre and is proposing to increase car parking charges, punishing local businesses and shoppers in the run-up to Christmas. Clearly, the council is no longer fit for purpose. Local residents deserve better.

Neale Hanvey (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Alba): Last week, Members from across the House heard testimony from a young Israeli man who lost both his peace-campaigning parents in the 7 October attack. This morning, we heard from Palestinians who have lost generations of families in the south of Gaza because of the military attacks there. This is a question of humanity and morality. The Prime Minister has an opportunity to lead the calls for peace, or to endorse death, violence and destruction. Which will he choose?

The Prime Minister: I think that is an extremely naive and simplistic way of looking at the problem. The hon. Member failed to mention the fact that a proscribed terrorist organisation perpetrated an awful attack on over 1,000 individuals. Israel has every right to defend itself in those circumstances. People in that country would expect nothing less than for it to provide security for its citizens. Of course, alongside that, it must abide by international law. We will do everything we can, as I have said, to ensure that aid flows in and alleviates the suffering of the people in Gaza.

Q11. [900081] **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): Proposals for a new rail station at Edginswell have been looked forward to for a decade, but a final funding gap exists. Will some of the funds released by the decision to scrap further phases of HS2 be used to resolve that?

The Prime Minister: I can assure my hon. Friend that our decision on HS2 means that every region of the country will now receive more transport investment than it would have done before, including the south-west. I am pleased that there is funding to protect the vital rail link between Exeter and Plymouth, that there will be a £2.8 billion road resurfacing fund, and that his constituents in the south-west will continue to benefit from the £2 bus fare until the end of next year. We have previously provided almost £8 million to progress the station that he mentions. I can reassure him that the Rail Minister will have heard his representations and will continue to update him on the progress being made.

Q2. [900071] **Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): David Cameron was the well-paid public face of Lex Greensill. Greensill's companies are facing criminal investigations in Switzerland, Germany and here in the UK. David Cameron messaged Ministers and officials 62 times over Greensill's covid loan guarantees. The Treasury Committee called that

“a significant lack of judgement”.

What does his appointment say about the Prime Minister's own judgment?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Government commissioned Nigel Boardman to review all those issues and strengthen the system following those recommendations. I am very confident that this nation will be well represented abroad by the former Prime Minister. He is a Prime Minister with unrivalled experience of foreign affairs and will help Britain to navigate an uncertain world in challenging times. In contrast, the Labour party would offer to the country a shadow Foreign Secretary who backed the Leader of the Opposition's predecessor to be leader, was paid to appear on Russian television and even voted against Trident. Does that sound like a man who should represent Britain?

Q12. [900082] **Greg Smith** (Buckingham) (Con): The inflation numbers published this morning were very welcome, but the tax burden continues to bite. Will the Prime Minister agree in principle that the concept of higher rate tax was never meant to drag in police sergeants, band 8 nurses, teachers with additional responsibilities and others, and that a priority for his Treasury Ministers should be to return fairness to the tax thresholds?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend and am pleased that the vast majority of people will continue not to pay the higher rate. I share his ambition to cut taxes for working people. Right now, inflation is falling and we are sticking to our plan, which is delivering a halving of it this year. That is the most effective tax cut we could have delivered for the British people this year, rather than making it worse, as the Labour party would do, by borrowing money irresponsibly and in a way that would just drive up inflation and interest rates. But I want to reassure him that I absolutely share his ambition to cut taxes for working people. As we stabilise the economy, that is something both the Chancellor and I are keen to deliver.

Q6. [900076] **Janet Daby** (Lewisham East) (Lab): My son loves football, and I understand that the Prime Minister is a big Southampton supporter. After his latest Cabinet

reshuffle, I wonder whether he can answer me this: since 2010, have we seen more Southampton managers sacked or have we seen more Housing Ministers come and go? The answer might help to explain why the Government are failing so miserably on new home ownership.

The Prime Minister: I am pleased that the last figures show that actually we had a record number of first-time buyers. We are delivering 1 million homes over this Parliament, while at the same time the Labour party blocked our plans to unlock 100,000 homes. When it comes to Southampton, I am also pleased that we are on, I think, a seven or eight-game unbeaten run.

Q13. [900083] **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): If a two-state solution is to have a chance, Hamas must be defeated, but there will also first have to be a more enlightened policy of administration in the occupied west bank, mustn't there?

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question. The UK's long-standing position on the middle east peace process is very clear: we support a negotiated settlement, leading to a safe and secure Israel alongside a viable and sovereign Palestinian state in Gaza and the west bank. I spoke about this on Monday. Both Israelis and Palestinians have a right to live in peace and security. The longer-term governance of Gaza and security needs to be looked at in the round. It is something that I have discussed repeatedly with President Abbas. We agree with the United States that Gaza should ultimately be under the control of the Palestinian Authority. We will continue to support President Abbas and his people to get to that outcome.

Q7. [900077] **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): A new generation of drugs, Orkambi, Symkevi and Kaftrio, is transforming the lives of patients with cystic fibrosis. People who would otherwise be waiting for double lung transplants are now living happy, healthy lives. However, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence is now saying that we cannot afford those drugs. Will the Prime Minister and his new Health Secretary get around the table with NICE and the drugs company to ensure that the children who are being born with cystic fibrosis today are given those life-saving drugs in the same way as the children who are currently living with cystic fibrosis?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Lady for raising an important issue, and I will of course ask the Health Secretary to look into it. As she will understand, NICE operates independently of Government, but if there is a conversation that can be had, I will ensure that it takes place.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): In view of the events of the last six weeks, can the Prime Minister tell the House why the Government have not proscribed the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps?

The Prime Minister: This Government continue to take strong action against Iran while people in the UK and around the world are under threat from the regime. We have sanctioned more than 350 Iranian individuals and entities, including the IRGC in its entirety. The National Security Act 2023 implements new measures to protect the British public, including new offences for espionage and foreign interference. While the Government

keep the list of proscribed organisations under review, it is, as Members will be aware, a long-standing convention that we do not comment on whether a specific organisation is being considered for proscription.

Q8. [900078] **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): The Prime Minister has just said that David Cameron had unprecedented experience, so what would he say was his finest foreign policy achievement? [*Laughter.*]

The Prime Minister: There are many, many to pick from, but what I would say is that under his leadership this country hosted what was widely considered to be one of the most successful G8 summits of recent times.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): It was great to welcome the Prime Minister to Chelmsford earlier this year, when he launched his antisocial behaviour strategy. He will be pleased to know that the local police have been consistently stepping up their activities. Last week they arrested 24 people for many crimes, and last night they took out a major county lines gang. Will the Prime Minister please join me in congratulating all those in our local police force, and would he like to come back to Chelmsford and go out on patrol, because he would be very welcome?

The Prime Minister: It was great to visit my right hon. Friend and to launch the Government's antisocial behaviour plan. I thank her for raising awareness about the important work that her local policing team are doing, and I am pleased that they have been empowered by our strategy. Antisocial behaviour makes life miserable for many, which is why the delivery of our plan is so important, and it is making a difference across the country, including in her part of the world. I was also pleased to see that under this Government, by the most recent year for which we have data, crime had decreased by 56% since 2010.

Q9. [900079] **Kate Osborne** (Jarrow) (Lab): It is insulting that in the week that marks 20 years since the abolition of section 28, the Prime Minister has appointed a Minister without Portfolio who frequently attacks the LGBTQ+ community and who, with their so-called war on woke, seeks a return to those awful days, denying our human rights and attacking our very existence. Does the Prime Minister agree that he has manifestly and repeatedly failed? It is time for him to resign and to call a general election.

The Prime Minister: Actually, this Government and previous Governments have a proud record in championing LGBT rights. It was this Government who introduced same-sex marriage. We will continue to ensure that everyone in our society can live with tolerance and compassion, and have every opportunity available to them. That is what we have delivered, and that is what we will continue to deliver.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): Last year, through the Homes for Ukraine scheme, my family and I welcomed a refugee family to our home. I am proud that this country has always offered refuge to those who need it. However, it is essential that we in this country decide who comes here. The Prime Minister has rightly said that he will do whatever it takes to stop the small boats and the evil trade around them, but is it not apparent

after this morning's ruling that what it will take is a new law to override the Human Rights Act and cut through the thicket of case law built up by judicial activism, so that we can bring back control of our borders and stop the small boats?

The Prime Minister: It is right that we go through the judgment carefully and properly. As I have said, the Government have already been working in advance on a new treaty with Rwanda to address the concerns that were raised previously and were raised by the Supreme Court, which also acknowledged that changes can be delivered to address those issues. Let me repeat, however, that if it becomes clear that our domestic legal frameworks, or indeed international conventions, are still frustrating plans after that point, I am prepared to change our laws and revisit those international relationships, because we are absolutely committed to stopping the boats.

Q10. [900080] **Dawn Butler** (Brent Central) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for meeting my constituent Noam. It has been 40 days since his mum, Ada Sagi, was kidnapped by Hamas on 7 October. We all condemn Hamas's actions and fight for the return of all hostages. Noam wants the language of love to be louder than the language of hate. Some 11,000 Palestinians have been killed, more than 4,000 of them children. International law is important. Does the Prime Minister agree that we can support Israel but also call out breaches of international law?

The Prime Minister: I have been consistent from the start that while Israel has a right to defend itself, it is important that it complies with international law. It is a point I have made in every meeting or phone conversation I have had with Prime Minister Netanyahu. It was a privilege to meet the hon. Lady's constituents and to hear of the pain they are going through, which I have enormous sympathy for. That is why we are doing everything we can to bring hostages home. We are engaged intensively in diplomatic activity in the region and working to get foreign nationals and British nationals home, and I am pleased to say that well over 200 have now left Gaza. We will continue to do everything we can to ensure that everyone can safely leave who needs to.

Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con): The Prime Minister knows that I stand unapologetically with my steelmakers in Scunthorpe. He knows that I believe, as many across this House do, that the UK must retain a virgin steelmaking capability, for strategic reasons if nothing else. Will he reassure the House that he is personally following developments at British Steel and doing all he can to retain what is a vital sovereign capability?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is a fantastic champion for her local steelworking community. I hope she is reassured by the action that this Government have already taken to support steelmaking in our country, reaching a landmark agreement with Tata Steel to safeguard thousands of jobs there, as well as during the pandemic.

I agree that it is important for our industrial base, and we will continue to have constructive conversations with all those companies to ensure that we can support them in their transition to a cleaner, greener steelmaking future.

Q14. [900084] **Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP): According to the British Independent Retailers Association on a matter that affects every constituency across this kingdom, 82% of retailers do not even bother reporting physical attacks on their staff, and shopkeepers need to sell an additional 12 items to make up for each item that is stolen. Will the Prime Minister support the efforts being made by the association and by many Members across the House to ensure that retailers are protected, that theft against them is called out and that they are supported in every way possible? And today, at a meeting in Dining Room C, will he encourage its members from those shops in their efforts?

The Prime Minister: First, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his work as vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on retail crime. He is absolutely right about the importance of this issue. I worked in my mum's shop—her pharmacy—growing up, and I understand exactly what he is talking about when small businesses are the victims of crime. Our expectation and our agreement with police forces—we did this earlier this year—is that all shoplifting should be followed up where there is evidence such as CCTV footage and that any violent or abusive behaviour towards shopworkers, particularly those who provide a valuable service to the public, is never acceptable. That is why we introduced a statutory aggravating factor for assaults on workers who provide a service to the public. I commend my hon. Friend for everything he is doing on this issue.

Mr Speaker: Final question. I call Sir William Cash.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give the House an assurance that he has made it clear to the new Foreign Secretary, who of course we wish well, that his policy and conduct of EU-related affairs will be consistent with the Government's 2019 election manifesto and the referendum and that he is now fully committed to UK parliamentary sovereignty, self-government and democracy in accordance with the Government's subsequent legislation?

The Prime Minister: I am delighted to give my hon. Friend that assurance, because this Government are seizing the opportunities of Brexit, aided by his advice and support. We passed the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 to ensure that we can regulate our growth industries more competitively, and we have signed trade deals with the fastest growing regions across the world including, most recently, the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership. It is this Government who are delivering the benefits of Brexit to every part of our country, and long may that continue.

Illegal Immigration

12.35 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (James Cleverly): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the Government's plan for ending illegal immigration.

The Supreme Court has today upheld the judgment of the Court of Appeal, meaning that we cannot yet lawfully remove people to Rwanda. The important thing to note is that today's judgment was made on the basis of facts from 15 months ago. The Government, of course, fully respect the Supreme Court, but its judgment does not weaken our resolve to deter people from making these illegal, dangerous and unnecessary journeys.

This is a lengthy judgment that we now need to digest and reflect upon. We take our obligations to the courts very seriously, which is why we have already taken action to address a number of points raised by the lower courts. It is only through breaking the business model of illegal people traffickers that we can fully take control of our borders and save lives at sea. This is why the Prime Minister backed our deal with Rwanda, passed legislation to deliver it and said, last December, that other countries would follow our lead. We have now seen that other countries are, indeed, also exploring third-country models to address illegal immigration, including Austria, Germany and Denmark. Italy's deal with Albania is a new and innovative model for processing asylum claims.

Nothing in today's Supreme Court judgment dims our commitment. The Supreme Court said there are issues with Rwanda's asylum system that could create the possibility of someone being returned to a country where they could face persecution. I am struck by the Court's remarks about the risk of refoulement:

"The structural changes and capacity-building needed to eliminate that risk may be delivered in the future, but they were not shown to be in place at the time when the lawfulness of the policy had to be considered in these proceedings."

The judgment was making reference to the earlier proceedings.

We have a plan to provide exactly that certainty. We anticipated this judgment as a possible result and, for the last few months, have been working on a plan to provide the certainty that the Court demands. We have been working with Rwanda to build capacity and to amend our agreement to make it clear that those sent there cannot be sent to any country other than the UK. Our intention is to upgrade our agreement to a treaty as soon as possible, which will make it absolutely clear to our courts and to Strasbourg that the risks laid out by the Court today have been responded to, will be consistent with international law and will ensure that Parliament is able to scrutinise it.

The Prime Minister has said that, if our domestic legal framework frustrates our plans, he is prepared to change our laws, but we are not going to put forward proposals simply to manufacture an unnecessary row for political gain. We have a plan to deliver the Rwanda deal—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members are not listening, but they might want to listen to this. We have a plan to deliver the Rwanda deal and we will do whatever it takes to stop the boats.

Illegal immigration is a huge global challenge, and that challenge is growing. It was a topic that I regularly raised with countries across Europe and around the wider world in my former role as Foreign Secretary. Across Europe, monthly illegal migrant numbers are trending upwards, with an exception: our numbers are falling. Illegal immigration is dangerous, it undermines the laws of our country, and it is unfair on those who come here legally and on the British people who play by the rules. It must and it will stop.

This is a wonderful country. I recognise that because I have just had the chance to see it as others see it from overseas. Inevitably, people aspire to come here. But more people coming here illegally is not fair on those struggling to get GP appointments, housing or access to schools, or on those people living near to asylum hotels. The impacts are felt by some of the poorest in our society and we have a duty to address their concerns. While the Conservative Government have taken action to protect our country, the Labour party has voted time and again—more than 80 times—not to protect our borders.

Rwanda is ready and willing to help. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees operates its own refugee scheme in Rwanda. Rwanda is ready to receive thousands of people, process their claims, give them excellent care and then support them to integrate in Rwanda; this is an African country full of potential and promise. We have a future-focused, mutually beneficial partnership with it, and we have a plan to deliver it.

The Rwanda plan has only ever been one tool in our toolbox. We have a plan to drive down numbers and our plan is working. Before the Prime Minister launched his 10-point plan last December, the number of people entering the UK illegally in small boats had more than quadrupled, but while illegal migration in the rest of Europe continues to rise, crossings to the UK are now down by a third.

We are tackling illegal immigration at every stage of the journey of a would-be illegal migrant, and our plan is working. Last year, the Prime Minister signed the largest ever small boats deal with France. We have expanded our joint intelligence cell to deepen intelligence sharing and dismantle the criminal gangs. Cutting-edge surveillance technology is in play, and we have beefed up security infrastructure, such as more CCTV, at key border crossing points along the channel. We have ensured that more French officials and officers patrol French beaches, and they are working closely with UK staff. So far in 2023, nearly 22,000 crossing attempts have been prevented because of the close co-ordination between British and French officials. That means less money that the British taxpayers have to spend on hotels, less profit for the criminal gangs and fewer people to process. It sends a clear message to the gangs and to those who want to cross that we will stop them.

As Foreign Secretary, I worked closely with my right hon. Friend the Immigration Minister to agree a new deal with Albania, with better data sharing, closer operational working and financial support. In response to the work that he and I did, the number of Albanian small boat arrivals has fallen by 90%—I repeat that figure of 90%—so far during 2023, and we have returned more than 4,600 people in just 10 months. We want to ensure that it is harder to get into one of those boats in the first place, including by reducing the supply of boats.

[James Cleverly]

We are targeting the movement of those goods, such as dinghies and engines that are used to facilitate the crossings, in order to undermine a key component of the smugglers' business model.

Those who do make it through will not be able to stay. We have expedited returns arrangements with countries including France, Albania, Turkey and Italy. We have increased the number of illegal working raids by almost 70%. We have cut the asylum legacy backlog by more than 59,000 cases. We have freed up hundreds of hotel beds with the use of alternative sites. We have announced the closure of the first 50 asylum hotels and we have passed the Illegal Migration Act 2023, the most ambitious immigration legislation in decades, which makes clear that the only route to asylum in the UK is via one of the safe and legal routes we have put in place. Anyone who comes to the UK illegally will not be able to stay. They will be removed either to their home country, if it is safe, or to a safe third country, if it is not.

Mr Speaker, I can assure you that our commitment to ending illegal immigration is unwavering. We are a positive outlier in Europe. Our efforts are working. Small boat crossings are down. Our decision making is faster. We are removing those with no right to be here, and taking action against those who are working illegally.

We have done deals with multiple countries and will continue to do so. Arrivals down, decisions faster, returns up—we are getting on with the job and will do whatever it takes to deliver on our commitment to stop the boats. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Home Secretary.

12:46 pm

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I welcome the new Home Secretary to his post. He is the eighth Conservative Home Secretary in eight years—and what a mess he has inherited. The Supreme Court's conclusion today is damning. It exposes the complete failure of the Prime Minister's flagship Rwanda policy, of his judgment in making it the central part of his policy and of the Conservatives in getting the most basic grip on the boats and asylum chaos.

There is no serious plan on the dangerous boat crossings that are undermining our border security and putting lives at risk, the end of which we all want to see. There is no serious plan to sort out the chaos in the asylum system, including ending placing people in costly asylum hotels because of the soaring backlog. There was a readiness to spend more than £140 million of taxpayers' money on this plan—money we cannot get back now that the policy has totally failed. That adds to the Prime Minister's disastrous judgment in appointing and backing the previous Home Secretary, who was unfit for the job.

I do not agree with pretty much anything the Home Secretary's predecessor ever said, but she was right in this message to the Prime Minister:

"If we lose in the Supreme Court...you will have wasted a year and an Act of Parliament, only to arrive back at square one...your magical thinking...has meant you have failed to prepare any sort of credible 'Plan B'."

Wasting time, wasting money and letting the country down: that is the Conservatives' record.

The Supreme Court judgment outlines a catalogue of problems with the policy, but Ministers knew all about them. When it was first announced 18 months ago, I raised in the House the problems with the Israel-Rwanda deal. Ministers were warned many times about failures and weaknesses in the Rwanda asylum system, but they just pressed on. Even if the plan had been found lawful today, they have admitted it would have covered only a few hundred people anyway—at a time when 100,000 people applied for asylum in the UK last year, on the Conservative watch—and that it would have cost about twice as much per person as deciding cases in the UK.

The truth is the Government have wasted not just one but five years by failing to deal with the situation. Five years ago there were just a few hundred people crossing in boats, but they let criminal gangs take hold along the channel. They let asylum decisions collapse, so the backlog soared and there are now 20% more people in asylum hotels than there were when the Prime Minister promised to end that.

Will the Home Secretary tell us how much in total the Government have spent on the failed Rwanda plan so far? The House has a right to know. He says he wants a new treaty. How much more will that cost? Despite his optimism, the Supreme Court judgment says

"the Rwandan government indicated that the contemplated arrangements might not be straightforward to implement in practice...the provision of resources does not mean that the problems which we have described can be resolved in the short term."

Again, we have more of the magical thinking.

What does this mean for the Prime Minister's flagship legislation? He boasted about passing it only yesterday, but the Government have not actually commenced the central clauses of the law, because without Rwanda—and, frankly, even with Rwanda—the policy does not work and will just lead to an endless, ever-increasing permanent backlog. Will the Secretary of State confirm now that he will not be implementing the central tenets of that law this year? Will he also confirm that this means that the Prime Minister's pledges to introduce the new law to stop the boats and end hotel use will all be broken this year?

Why will the Home Secretary not put that money into a proper plan to tackle the boats? I do not believe that he ever believed in the Rwanda plan. He distanced himself from it and his predecessor's language on it. He may even, on occasion, have privately called it batshit. But he and I agree that we need action to stop the boat crossings that are undermining border security and putting lives at risk. We need a properly controlled and managed system for asylum and refugees.

Let us concentrate instead on the things that can work. We support the work with France along the northern coast; we want it to go further. We support the work with Albania and with other countries across Europe to tackle the gangs, but it is far, far too weak. We need a proper, comprehensive and massively scaled-up plan to go after the criminal gangs, a proper system to clear the backlog, and a proper returns unit in place so that we can end hotel use. Instead of that cost going up from £6 million to £8 million a day on his watch, let us end hotel use and save the taxpayer £2 billion. That should be common ground, so I suggest that he stops wasting taxpayers' money on more failing schemes, that

he ditches the magical thinking and the culture wars of his predecessors and that he ditches the gimmicks and finally gets a grip.

James Cleverly: One of the dangers of writing a critique of Government policy before reading the facts laid out in a statement is that the statement makes the critique obsolete. The right hon. Lady talks about hotel usage, which I remind the House is coming down. She talks about small boat arrivals in the UK, which I remind the House are coming down. She talks about forming closer working relationships with our European partners, which I remind the House we are already doing.

In response to the right hon. Lady's various questions, I have written here, "Does Labour have a plan?" [*Interruption.*] If those on the Labour Benches could curb their enthusiasm and listen to what I was about to say next, they would hear that I was going to concede that it is clear that they do have a plan. Their plan—their great idea—is to do what the Government are already doing, which is bucking the European trend. When other countries are seeing 30%, 40%, 50%, 60%, 70% or 100% increases in their illegal arrivals, we are seeing a reduction of one third in ours, bucking the trend.

We have always said that Rwanda, and the deterrent effect of the Rwanda plan, is an important tool in our toolbox; we have never claimed that it was the only one. We have always pursued a range of options—when I say "we", I mean my right hon. Friend the Immigration Minister, with me watching him from King Charles Street, although the collective "we" is appropriate here—and, as I set out in my statement, those activities are having an effect.

My final point is that the mask has slipped. The glee that I detect from those on the Opposition Benches for this temporary setback on the delivery of our plan displays what we on the Government Benches know to be true: they do not want migration control to work. They do not want to take control of our borders; they would rather delegate it to anybody else—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I want to hear the Home Secretary. I do not need those on the Front Bench—[*Interruption.*] You may pull faces, but the bottom line is that I want some quiet to hear what is being said. Our constituents at home want to hear that as well, but when you are chuntering so loudly, they cannot do so.

James Cleverly: Indeed, Mr Speaker.

Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con): May I welcome my right hon. Friend to his new position? The Home Office is a great Department of State and I hope that he enjoys his time there as much as I enjoyed my time as Home Secretary. Will he confirm that the judgment that the Supreme Court made today was not contingent on the European convention on human rights? Indeed, the fundamental judgment was made regardless of the ECHR.

James Cleverly: I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend and predecessor. She was a fantastic and long-serving Home Secretary, and I intend to compete with her on both of those metrics. She makes an incredibly important point. We looked closely at the judgment and found that it draws our attention to work that we can do, working with our partners in Rwanda, to address the

Supreme Court's concerns about people being returned to unsafe countries. That is where we will address our focus, because that will be the pathway to ensuring that Rwanda remains a key element of our basket of responses to illegal migration.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): We on the SNP Benches were very glad to see the unanimous decision of the Supreme Court today. It really is quite ridiculous for the new Home Secretary to come to the House today to tell us that his predecessor's dream will never die. It has gone. Give it up! Do something else instead! Before the extremists on his own Benches start to blame the ECHR, the Supreme Court judge, Lord Reed, was very clear that this is not just about the ECHR, but about the refugee convention, the UN convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and the international covenant on civil and political rights as well as our own domestic legislation.

The Supreme Court made it clear that Rwanda is not a safe country. At the heart of the judgment today is the principle of non-refoulement, which means that people must not be sent back into harm's way. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees provided compelling evidence of Rwanda doing so, even after it signed the memorandum of understanding with the UK, as well as in its earlier deal with Israel. The UNHCR pointed out that it had rejected claims from countries such as Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan. It is absolutely ludicrous that those claims could be rejected. It also pointed to the lack of integrity in Rwanda's own systems. It is a serious problem and one that the Home Secretary claims today that he wants to fix, but he should focus his intentions instead on fixing the multiple failings of his own Department.

What now for the Illegal Migration Act 2023 and for the people who will now be left in immigration limbo without any recourse to claiming asylum? This incompetent Tory Government cannot yeet them back to Rwanda and they will not process their claims, so what will happen to that group of people? The solution lies not in puncturing the market in rubber dinghies, but in creating functioning safe and legal routes. In the first half of the year, the largest group in small boats were Afghans. That is proof positive that the schemes that the Government claim exist are just not working.

Many people make these dangerous journeys because they have no other option. That remains the reality whoever the Home Secretary is, so I ask the right hon. Gentleman when he will stop wasting public money chasing fantasies. At least £1.4 million has been spent just on the legal challenges, never mind the rest of this incompetent scheme. When will he create a system that treats the most vulnerable in the world with the dignity and respect that they are due to rebuild their lives here in the UK?

The Immigration Minister has not even given Glasgow's MPs the meeting that he promised to discuss the people that the Government are about to make homeless through their bulk processing. If the Home Secretary will not take seriously his responsibilities on immigration and on refugees, will he at least allow Scotland to have the right to do so, because we want to welcome people to our world?

James Cleverly: On the hon. Lady's final point, if Scotland, or rather the Scottish Government—not the Scottish people—want to be more generous in practical terms to people seeking refuge here, they can do so. In my experience, they choose not to.

With regard to the work that we are doing, I made clear in my statement the various work strands that we are doing in close co-operation with countries around the world to address all elements of the illegal migration pipeline, including interrupting the logistics around this evil practice, and it is working. I draw the hon. Lady's attention to the fact that many other countries around Europe—countries that we have close working relationships with—are seeing a significant increase in their illegal arrivals, in stark contrast to the reductions we are seeing in the UK.

The hon. Lady talked about a number of things, but ultimately I am drawn to the remarks that the Court made about refolement:

“The structural changes and capacity-building needed to eliminate that risk may be delivered in the future”.

That is exactly what we are seeking to address.

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend and Essex neighbour to the great position of Home Secretary, and wish him well in all his endeavours on this incredibly difficult issue. He touched on the Supreme Court's decision and its comments on refolement. Today's judgment was clear on that, but the issue is not new; it was raised earlier this year in the Court of Appeal. If I may say so, Ministers had the opportunity to address some of the practical measures prior to today's judgment. I urge the Home Secretary to take every necessary step and measure to work with the Government of Rwanda on the practical, operational delivery of the migration and economic development partnership to give all those assurances. That partnership is clearly integral to ensuring that we break the business model and stop the evil trade of people smuggling. Addressing that principle will go a long way towards bringing in this essential deterrent in the illegal migration battle.

James Cleverly: My long-standing friend and predecessor is absolutely right. We will break the people-smuggling gangs. We will undermine their business model. We will pursue all the various workstreams that my right hon. Friend will be familiar with from her time in this fantastic office. In parallel, just as she suggests, we will work—indeed, we are already working—to address the issues raised by judges in the lower courts to ensure that we can prove what they need to see, which is that we will remove the risk of refolement.

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

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his new role. This morning at the Home Affairs Committee, David Neal, the independent chief inspector of borders and immigration, told us that the biggest challenge facing the Home Office is being professional, maintaining objectivity, being fair and understanding human rights. The inspector also said that what keeps him up at night is the question of who is protecting our borders and whether they are doing so to the best of our collective

abilities. Could the Home Secretary tell us whether today's ruling on Rwanda proves or disproves Mr Neal's concerns?

James Cleverly: The Government are responsible for the protection of this country, and it is a role and responsibility that we take incredibly seriously. It is the primary function of Governments. In this statement, and in the other statements I intend to make, and which Ministers from the Department will make from the Dispatch Box, we will show the House and the country that Conservative Members take that responsibility incredibly seriously, and we will take whatever action is necessary to ensure the protection of the people and the borders of this country. It would be helpful, frankly, if the Labour party would break the habit seemingly of a lifetime and once in a while vote to support the actions that we take.

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): As well as welcoming my right hon. Friend most warmly to this post—a post in which his and my former London Assembly constituents in Bexley and Bromley are massively proud to see him—I congratulate him on the tone and manner of his statement. It is right that, as a rule-of-law-abiding country, we respect the decisions of the courts however they go. The Supreme Court was asked a legal question and it gave a legal answer. Does he agree that it is clear that the decision is essentially fact-specific, applied to well-established legal principles, and the solution is, first, to look at how those facts can be rectified to make this compliant?

James Cleverly: My long-standing friend and former south-east London representative is absolutely right. Their lordships told us what we need to do to address their concerns. We intend to do what they said needs to be done. We will address their concerns, operationalise this plan, break the business model, and stop the boats.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Two per cent of those claiming asylum in this country are LGBTQI+ people fleeing countries where just being themselves can be a death sentence. Does the Home Secretary agree with his predecessor that they are pretending?

James Cleverly: If the right hon. Gentleman wants to know my views on things, he can ask me for my views on things, rather than asking me to comment on other people's views.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I welcome the new Home Secretary to his place and share his disappointment at this morning's judgment. As we have heard, the Supreme Court focused on the principle of non-refolement. Hopefully that can be addressed in a new treaty. Perhaps it will be made more robust if we can work jointly with other European partners who have expressed an interest in a Rwanda-type scheme. Why, however, was this not considered in the original Rwanda treaty, and which Law Officer was responsible for giving legal advice to the Home Office about how it might stand up to challenge in the courts?

James Cleverly: My hon. Friend knows that Government legal advice is for informing the decision-making of Ministers. It is not appropriate to discuss Government legal advice at the Dispatch Box, and we will not do so—he knows that. We always prepare for a range of

eventualities, as I said in my statement. We recognised that this was one of the decisions that might come from the Court. We listened carefully to the statements made by the judges in the lower courts, and we have already started to take action in response to the concerns that they have raised.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I, too, welcome the new Home Secretary to the Dispatch Box. He has a difficult job, but it is in everyone's interests that it be done well. I also welcome the part of his statement in which he said, "We are not going to put forward proposals simply to manufacture an unnecessary row for short-term political gain." That much at least will be a refreshing change, but he should be aware that his hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson), the deputy chairman of the Conservative party, is reported as having told ITV that the Prime Minister should "ignore the laws" following the Supreme Court's decision. Will the Home Secretary dissociate himself from those comments?

James Cleverly: This country prides itself on being a law-abiding country, so to hear the Government's position on things, listen to the statements of Government Ministers. I have made it clear that we respect the judgment. We listened carefully to the comments made by their lordships and the lower courts. As I said, we are already responding to the comments that they made to ensure that the actions we take, when the Rwanda scheme is operationalised, are in strict accordance with international law.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Will the Home Secretary explain to those of us who are not experts in this area why it is that people who arrive illegally on our shores from a safe nearby country cannot immediately be returned to that safe nearby country? Clearly it would be in breach of certain laws, so can he set out, perhaps in a statement, what those laws might be?

James Cleverly: Receiving countries have to consent. That is the nub of the issue. That is why it is so important that Ministers in the Department, particularly the Immigration Minister, have spent so much time working with those countries from which we have traditionally received illegal migration, including France and others—most notably, in terms of the statistics, Albania, with which we have developed an excellent working relationship. I will claim a bit of credit here, because my right hon. Friend the Immigration Minister and I formed something of a tag team with the Government in Tirana, and we are seeing the success that comes from pragmatic but determined relationships with European partners and others. I pay tribute to the Immigration Minister for that work.

Sir Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I also warmly welcome the Home Secretary to his post, not least because I know people in the Foreign Office who were rather sad to see him go. However, let me try this question again: what does he think about the 2% of people who claim asylum on the basis of their sexuality because they face massive persecution and death threats in their own country? Does he think they are pretending to be lesbian, gay or bisexual? If he does, can he provide evidence for that?

James Cleverly: The hon. Gentleman will know that we cannot prove a negative. That is a fallacy. I thank him for his kind words about my time as Foreign Secretary; he will know, since he clearly has a mole inside my old organisation, how passionately I pursued the rights of LGBT people around the world, including having some very difficult conversations where necessary. I absolutely want to make sure that those people are protected, but we should also recognise that bad people hide among good people and sometimes people lie to take advantage of the good will of others.

It is nonsense to suggest that everybody who claims to be suffering persecution because of their sexuality is lying, and I would certainly never say that, but we need to ensure that people are not attempting to abuse the process, as we do with any process or system, because that limits our ability to help those who genuinely are in need. I recognise that LGBT people do face genuine persecution around the world, and we want to support and help them.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Much of the Supreme Court's judgment today was encouraging, with a high court endorsing yet again the principle of what we are looking to do with Rwanda. As was touched on earlier, much of the decision turned on the facts, particularly those relating to refolement—that is, the risk that those transferred to Rwanda might be returned to a country where they would face persecution. May I test my right hon. Friend on what work he is doing, looking at the decision-making capability of the Home Office, to help Rwanda to build up its own decision-making capability, and how our judiciary might work with Rwanda's judiciary to address some of the Supreme Court's points in that area?

James Cleverly: I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend—*[Interruption.]* I meant to say my hon. Friend, although he deserves to be my right hon. Friend. I know that he did a lot of the work on this very subject, and his question goes to the heart of how we operationalise the Rwanda plan. Their lordships set out exactly the point he raises about capacity building and professionalising Rwanda's system. I have had exchanges this morning with my Rwandan opposite number, who I have met before. The Rwandans are keen to build and strengthen their institutional structures, and they see us as a key partner in achieving that. Together we will work to operationalise this plan. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work he did on this very issue.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The Supreme Court's judgment has put paid to the lazy, ill-informed argument that it is the European convention on human rights, and only the European convention on human rights, that is blocking this Government on asylum and immigration. This Government have spent two years formulating a policy that has proven incompatible with a multitude of international treaties to which the UK is signed up and with numerous provisions of our domestic law. The Supreme Court was very clear about that. My question for the Home Secretary is this: when is he going to explain to his Back Benchers that the UK Government's response to this judgment must be to produce a humane asylum policy that works, not to try to overcome vital checks and balances of the rule of law and human rights law that stymie bad policy decisions and protect human rights?

James Cleverly: Our immigration policies, as laid out in the figures I ran through in my statement, are having the positive effect that we committed to. We are bringing down small boat numbers, the need for hotel places and so on. I said in my statement that their lordships have set out the route to successfully operationalising the Rwanda scheme, through addressing those concerns about refoulement. We will focus on what we need to achieve to unlock that. We recognise that this is a constant battle against criminals and, as with all constant battles against criminals, we focus on what is effective and right. Their lordships set out exactly what that is, and that is what we will focus on.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I genuinely welcome my right hon. Friend to his place at the Dispatch Box. Speaking softly and carrying a big stick is always a very good way of behaving—no reference intended. I fully agree with all his intentions and the direction of travel in which he wants to go to settle this issue, in terms of proper organisation such that concerns are dealt with in the courts. Does he not agree that those who greet this judgment with glee need to remember that people are dying in the channel trying to cross in the boats?

Will the Home Secretary ask our right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney General to come to the Dispatch Box in due course to reflect on the judgment? It appears to me that it is much wider than the migration judgment, because we are now linking directly to applicability in UK law agreements that were made with the UN that were never bound into UK law. Whether one wants it or not, that widens the whole issue of what becomes justiciable, and I would be grateful if she would come to the House at some point and deal with that.

James Cleverly: I thank my right hon. Friend for his kind words. My focus in this role is making sure that the Department is highly effective in protecting the British people and protecting our borders. This is not about trying to look tough; it is about trying to deliver for the British people, and that will be my relentless focus. My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney General reminds me that her advice, like that of all very good in-house lawyers, is limited to the client, which is His Majesty's Government. However, I have no doubt I could persuade her to meet my right hon. Friend on a private basis.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Home Secretary to his new role. I am sure he would want to join me in expressing gratitude to all those in our public services who came here as refugees and make such a fantastic contribution to our country. At the heart of this case are a series of asylum seekers, one of whom I know has been confirmed as a victim of trafficking. He has been stuck in an asylum hotel since May 2022. As yet, the Government have not even begun to look at his claim for asylum. Can the Home Secretary tell us when his Department will begin to process the claims of those people and get on with finding out whether they are illegal asylum seekers? Or is he just going to continue with the charade that he can make Rwanda workable?

James Cleverly: I do not have the details of the individual case that the hon. Lady raises, so I cannot comment on the specifics, but I remind her and the

House that, as part of the Prime Minister's 10-point plan, eliminating that historic backlog of case files was a commitment. At the start of this process, the backlog stood at 91,000 cases; it has now been reduced to—

The Minister for Immigration (Robert Jenrick): Fewer than 30,000.

James Cleverly: Fewer than 30,000. So, we are delivering on our commitment to work through that backlog of cases. It was one of the areas where we made a commitment, we are delivering on it, and we will pursue all the elements of our plan.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I urge colleagues to be brief in their questions so that the Home Secretary can be brief in return. We have a very packed agenda today and I want to make every effort to get everyone in.

Sir Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): I add my congratulations to the Home Secretary on his new role. It seems to me that the key word is “time”. We cannot keep relitigating this question to achieve what seems an ever-moving target in what the courts want us to achieve. Our constituents sent us here with a very clear message: sort the small boats issue. Parliament has passed legislation to sort the issue. Can my right hon. Friend be specific about the point at which the attempts by the Government to recondition the agreement with Rwanda into treaty form will have elapsed, and a “notwithstanding” clause, of the kind that my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien) has set out, will become the only tool by which we can ensure that the will of this House takes effect? We cannot allow this cycle to continue indefinitely.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that I did just say “be brief.”

James Cleverly: I listened carefully to my right hon. Friend's comments. We are absolutely determined to maintain the deterrent effect of the Rwanda scheme. To an extent, it is already demonstrating utility by the fact that we know—anecdotally, so I will not over-interpret these figures—that the fear of it as part of our arsenal is already having a deterrent effect, which is exactly what it was designed to do. National Governments cannot just vote themselves out of international commitments. I recognise, as a former Foreign Secretary, that they are incredibly powerful tools as we try to do good around the wider world. I give my right hon. Friend the commitment that we remain relentlessly focused on ensuring that we continue to drive down the small boat crossings using the full range of capabilities at our disposal.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): The Home Secretary and the Government are right to prioritise ending illegal migration. By my count, he spoke six times in his statement about having “a plan”; the only word he left out was “cunning”, because his plans seem to be as workable, effective and chaotic as Baldrick's in “Blackadder”. That is no laughing matter, because while the plans are not working, there is still pressure on our infrastructure, there are still criminal gangs profiting

from people's misery, and people who use legal routes are being disadvantaged. Will the Home Secretary give us the commitment that, if the European Court of Human Rights continues to be a barrier to the will of this House, the Government will take action and ignore the demands of that court?

James Cleverly: The right hon. Gentleman knows that I have a huge amount of respect for him. One point that I took from the judgment today is that it is not just about the ECHR. Their lordships set out a number of international commitments that we have made, but they also set out what we need to do to get the Rwanda plan up and running. That is on a very specific legal point, which we are already in the process of addressing.

I respectfully disagree with the right hon. Gentleman, because small boat arrivals are down, unlike almost everywhere else in Europe, where they are significantly up. The use of hotel bed spaces is down because of the arrangements that we have put in place. The speed of processing has increased, and the volume of processing of asylum claims has significantly increased. There are always multiple strands to this plan, as set out in the 10 points that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister put forward, and they are having the desired effect. We will just keep working to deliver on our commitments.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the glories of our parliamentary democracy is that Governments have to obey the law in the same way that individual citizens and corporations do? Does he also agree that those who look carefully at the judgment and think that there is a simple solution, with one lever to pull, will be disappointed?

James Cleverly: I shall quote a very wise woman, Giorgia Meloni—who was herself quoting an even wiser woman, Margaret Thatcher—by saying: this is a constant battle. In that battle, both domestically and internationally, one of our real strengths, as I saw as Foreign Secretary on the international stage, is that when we speak and demand that other countries abide by the rule of law, we are taken seriously because of our posture on this issue. We will continue to ensure that we abide by the rule of law while simultaneously—we have proven that we can do both—delivering on the commitments that we have made to driving down illegal migration and stopping the boats.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I welcome the Home Secretary to his new position. One fifth of my constituency casework relates to his Department, and it is a catalogue of human misery. In just one example from the hundreds that I could give, the claimant's asylum application was made in December 2020, their interview was in November 2022, and they are still waiting for a decision. The claimant has two young children and has twice attempted suicide. That all comes at huge cost to them, the NHS and the police. Will the Home Secretary get a grip, stop the “magical thinking” and just fix his Department and the asylum process?

James Cleverly: I completely sympathise with the frustration that the hon. Lady's constituent must feel, which is reflected in the frustration that I detect in the question. I remind her and the House that we never claimed that the Rwanda deal was the totality of our

response to this issue. We made a commitment to increase the speed of decision making and to drive down the backlog, and we have demonstrably done that.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): My constituents are disappointed by the judgment, but will be heartened by the Government's commitment to stop the boats. As the Government threaten to take over RAF Scampton, my constituents are impatient and want the boats stopped as soon as possible. I understand that the Home Secretary's plan is to upgrade the treaty with Rwanda. How long will that take, could it be subject to legal challenges, and if so, how long could those legal challenges take?

James Cleverly: I am not able to give certainty on timelines—I wish that I was—but my hon. Friend will know that I have a constituency interest in getting this right, as RAF Wethersfield in my constituency is being used as an asylum centre. In my conversations with the Minister for Immigration, in a constituency capacity, we discussed the need to drive down the demand for accommodation, be it at Scampton, Wethersfield or anywhere else. The best way of closing down Wethersfield and not needing Scampton is to stop the boats—*[Interruption.]* We are relentlessly focused on doing so, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) understands, for all the reasons that I have set out.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): I welcome the Home Secretary to his position, and I welcome the court judgment this morning. I noticed in the Home Secretary's statement a complete lack of empathy as to why people seek asylum in the first place—why people risk all, risk their lives, risk everything, to try to cross a dangerous channel to get to what they hope will be a place of safety. He is right to confirm that there is a massive global rise in the number of refugees. Should all Governments not work together to address the causes of that—poverty, wars, human rights abuses and all of those issues? Will he confirm that this country will not walk away from the important—although not perfect—advances made over the past decades by the European Court of Human Rights in improving human rights across Europe, including in this country?

James Cleverly: The right hon. Gentleman tempts me to refer back to my previous role as Foreign Secretary. I can assure him and the House that a huge part of the work that is done by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is on exactly those issues: addressing climate change so that rural farmers in the developing world have crops that they can grow, sell and eat, and reducing the risk of conflict and persecution. We are addressing those drivers, but I have to say to the right hon. Gentleman that the idea that we can somehow uninvent illegal migration is naive beyond belief. We also have to address the fact that people are abused by criminals: they are used as a product to smuggle, and we have to break the business model of the people smugglers, as well as address the issues that drive people away from the countries from which they originate.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): I add my voice to the general welcome to my right hon. Friend. He has told the House that his Department had anticipated the decision of the Supreme Court that was announced

[Mr David Jones]

today. That being the case, can he tell the House whether he has made an assessment of whether legislation will be necessary to remedy the problems that have been identified? If so, when does he anticipate being in a position to introduce that legislation?

James Cleverly: I can assure my right hon. Friend that as a thoughtful and proactive Department, the Home Office looked seriously at the range of potential outcomes from the judgment. I cannot claim credit for that work, because much of it was done before my arrival. We have already set in place the work to turn the memorandum of understanding into a treaty, thereby addressing some of the concerns of their lordships, and the Prime Minister and I have both made it clear that if there needs to be domestic legislative work to ensure that we resolve this, we are unafraid of putting legislation forward.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I know from my recent visit to Colfe's School that they will welcome their former pupil to his new role, as I do. I urge him to resist calls from people on his own Benches to remove us from the European convention on human rights. If we were outside that convention, a serious criminal or someone who means us harm—such as a terrorist, or someone suspected of terrorism—who seeks to hide overseas could legitimately claim that their human rights could be violated if they were extradited back to the UK. How is that taking back control of our borders?

James Cleverly: I thank the hon. Gentleman. I will take the opportunity to go back to my old school and get their congratulations directly at some point. Of course, I will let the hon. Gentleman know that I will be treading on his hallowed turf.

The hon. Gentleman invites me to be distracted, but I refuse to be distracted: I will focus on what we need to do to achieve this policy. In their judgment, their lordships set out the route to operationalising the Rwanda plan, and I will focus on what they have told us will resolve the sticking points. There was much in the judgment to be welcomed, including all the elements about the fundamental soundness of the policy. We will focus on the thing that will unlock the operationalisation of the plan.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): How long will the Rwanda treaty take to get through? How long will it take to have the court case and the judgment, and have the whole thing crawled over again by human rights lawyers? Meanwhile, my right hon. Friend is a victim of our failure to stop the boats: he has Wethersfield in his constituency, as I have RAF Scampton in mine. He is a thoroughly nice chap, and I think that he feels my pain. Therefore, once the court case over Scampton is decided in the next week or two, whatever the result, will he meet me so that we can work together to get up to £300 million-worth of levelling up at Scampton?

James Cleverly: I am always delighted to meet my right hon. Friend. He will know, of course, that I am now in a position where I have to be careful about the commitments I make, certainly about RAF Wethersfield. I do not intend to abuse my position as Home Secretary, but I am absolutely committed to driving down the

need for RAF Scampton and RAF Wethersfield, just as we have driven down the need for hotel accommodation. I am absolutely committed to that, but of course I will meet my right hon. Friend.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): We need to speed up if we are to get everybody in.

Claire Hanna (Belfast South) (SDLP): I warmly welcome the Home Secretary to his new role. The UK is absolutely entitled to create bespoke policy, and he referred to his constructive work with Albania, but does he understand—unlike his predecessor—that policy must be compatible with facts and the law, and that it should focus on the chaotic processing he has inherited and on funding the public services that he says are under pressure? Can I confirm that he acknowledges that the ECHR is a fundamental cornerstone of the Good Friday agreement, and that abandoning it would not be compatible with the Government's commitment to Northern Ireland?

James Cleverly: Once again, the hon. Lady is asking me to comment on something in parallel to the things that I have set out. My commitment to her and the House is that we will focus on the things that will unlock this strand of our work. I cannot give her—or indeed anyone else in the House—guarantees about timescales, but we are already being effective on processing, on driving down the need for hotel accommodation and on speeding up decision making. All those things are part of the basket of activities that are helping us be a positive outlier compared with our European partners.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): There is a lot of tinkering going on here, but the real problem is parliamentary sovereignty. The rule of law, which my right hon. Friend referred to, is at the heart of this issue. If the law is clear and express, and uses a “notwithstanding” provision, as I proposed in an amendment a few years ago, it will deal with all these matters. If I may make a further point before the Attorney General jumps in, if we get the law right, we can then deal with what is effectively an international problem, while distinguishing between economic illegal migrants and proper refugees.

James Cleverly: I would caution the House against grasping for silver-bullet solutions. Sometimes, the most effective Government policy is just focus and graft. I assure the House that the Home Office, and the Ministers and officials within it, will be relentlessly focused on the daily work that needs to be done to address this issue. Of course we will look at what changes we need to make to operationalise the Rwanda scheme, but I urge people against grasping for silver-bullet solutions, which are rarely effective.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): The Rwanda scheme is callous, inhumane and ineffective; one might say the same about the former Home Secretary. That is why I welcome the new Home Secretary to his post, on the grounds that he could not possibly be any worse. I hope that he will consider the ethical dimension of this issue, since the Court has just ruled that Rwanda is not a safe country. Even if he does not, does he not agree that the scheme is simply not workable? It is not a good use of money, and it will take a huge amount of effort to get to a place where anyone is sent to Rwanda. Are there not much better ways of pursuing this issue and destroying the small boats model?

James Cleverly: Again, it is easy to criticise—it is easy to criticise ineffectually. Sadly, that is what I hear from Opposition Members far too often: no credible alternatives, just criticism. The point is that we are pursuing a number of workstreams that are already proving effective, which is why our numbers are going down at a time when all our European partners are seeing illegal arrivals go up. We will continue working on multiple strands and we will continue pursuing the Rwanda plan. When Labour Members finally decide to vote for something rather than against something, we will listen, but that day has not happened yet, and I do not expect it to happen any time soon.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): We must be briefer.

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): I warmly welcome the tone and content of my right hon. Friend's statement. Does he agree that in addition to the commitment to the ECHR, which is very much treasured by the settled refugee communities in my constituency, this is an opportunity to reinvigorate the work with France that has done so much to bear down on the number of small boat crossings in the way he has described?

James Cleverly: I assure my hon. Friend and the House that we are doing extensive work with France—I once again pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Immigration Minister—and it is working. This is the point: it is working, and therefore we will continue to pursue it.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Will the Home Secretary please answer the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss)? When are Glasgow MPs going to get a meeting with the Home Office to discuss those successful refugees who have been granted status? More widely, what discussions is he having with local authorities across the UK on rehousing successful refugees?

James Cleverly: My understanding is that officials from my Department meet regularly on these issues. If there are specific cases, the hon. Member should please bring them to my attention.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to his place, and I welcome his comments on the unfairness of illegal immigration for those who have come here legally. However, the Supreme Court's verdict this morning is extreme comprehensive, and it reveals not just one obstacle, but multiple obstacles to deporting people from this country. If we want to deter the small boats, we need to be able to remove significant numbers of people extremely quickly. Given the comprehensive nature of the judgment this morning, can I encourage my right hon. Friend against an incremental approach? It is clear from the ruling that we need to do something stronger now. We chose in the Illegal Migration Act not to include "notwithstanding" provisions, but I think we do need them now.

James Cleverly: I hear the point my hon. Friend makes about a powerful deterrent—we are absolutely committed to that—but I do say again that, in circumstances as challenging as this, there are rarely silver-bullet solutions. In my whole time in government and in politics, I have

never yet come across one. We have to pursue all our lines of effort, and I give him my assurance that we will continue to do so.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): Would the money wasted on the Rwanda plan not have been more usefully spent on massively improving the application process to reduce illegal immigration and on establishing safe and legal routes to reduce the number of small boats?

James Cleverly: I am wondering whether the microphones are working. There has been a tenfold increase in the pace of asylum processing this last year. We are increasing it. The things are not mutually exclusive; we are doing all of them.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): It is great to have the Home Secretary in his new role, and to hear his confirmation that small boat arrivals are down not just by a fifth, but now by a third, and that he will find a treaty to resolve the remaining legal issues on the Rwanda deal. Will my right hon. Friend also encourage his officials to share the data on asylum applications that are over a year old with Members of Parliament, so that with our local councils we can prepare housing solutions in advance?

James Cleverly: I will absolutely take that idea on board. We want to do everything we can to make sure that this process is as quick and as smooth as possible.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): The European convention on human rights was developed to ensure that Governments would never again dehumanise people and abuse their rights with impunity. So can the Secretary of State tell us: does the threat of revisiting international relationships really mean that his Government are ready to unpick our international relationships and treaties, including the ECHR, so that they can demonise with impunity those fleeing persecution and conflict? We say "never again".

James Cleverly: Members have asked me the same question over and over again. I hate doing this, but I will refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to his new role, and I agree with him that today we saw the Opposition mask slip. They have no wish to tackle this issue, and that is not surprising when their policy is to pass the numbers decision to the Leader of the Opposition's mothership in Brussels. My constituents are absolutely fed up. Will my right hon. Friend speak directly to them, and address their concerns by saying that nothing will be off the table to get this sorted quickly?

James Cleverly: The Opposition are devoid of ideas. They criticise, but they put nothing forward. Their best plan is to list things that we are already doing, but object to other things that we are going to add to that basket of tools. That is why I can reassure my hon. Friend and her constituents that we, unlike them, will remain focused on serving the British people and stopping the boats.

Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance): To go back to the European convention on human rights, because the Home Secretary has not been clear on this point, does he recognise that if the UK was to renounce the convention or tamper with it, that would undermine the Good Friday agreement, particularly around human rights and policing and justice; undermine the policing and justice co-operation aspect of the trade and co-operation agreement; and leave the UK in the company of Belarus and Russia?

James Cleverly: I am well aware of the implications of the European Court of Human Rights. I keep being invited to comment on something other than the text of my statement. I have made the Government's position clear: we are focusing our attention on what we believe will unlock this important strand of a multi-strand approach to illegal migration.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): The Home Secretary will agree that the control of our borders is a defining issue for millions of people, so when the Prime Minister says that

“if necessary I am prepared to revisit our domestic legal frameworks”, could we sharpen that up a bit to say that we will revisit our domestic legal framework, and will do so on multiple fronts in a timely way?

James Cleverly: We are focused on delivering for the British people and delivering quickly. As I say, we have always had a multi-strand approach, and we will make sure that the domestic legislative framework is fit for purpose and that we can deliver on our commitment to stopping the boats.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): When and how will the Home Secretary know that his treaties and legislative changes are giving the Court the certainty that it demands? Will he proactively go to the Court for a fresh ruling, or will he wait for third-party challenges and for the litigation merry-go-round to continue?

James Cleverly: I am not going to set out all the plans for how we will put this in place. We have already started the process for turning the MOU into a treaty. We are focused on addressing the specific issues raised by their lordships.

Nick Fletcher (Don Valley) (Con): In addition to voting against the Government 70 times on stopping the boats, the Opposition speak about natural dispersal when dealing with economic migrants. This means they often end up in Doncaster, where property is cheaper, rather than in the leafy suburbs of the liberal elites, but Doncaster is full. So will the Home Secretary do everything he can to put through the Rwanda treaty as soon as possible?

James Cleverly: I welcome the point raised by my hon. Friend. It is often the least well-off communities who feel the burden most heavily, and it is our duty to them to address these issues. I give him that commitment—on my recent trip to just outside his constituency, I got his name wrong, for which I apologise—and I will do exactly that.

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): This morning I met a British Palestinian woman called Wafia, who told me that 30 members of her family have died in the last month in Gaza. She told me about her cousins, who so far have survived but are utterly traumatised and completely terrified. Should those cousins and their children somehow make it to these shores, albeit on the only route given to them by this Government—in other words, the dangerous small boats crossings—is the Home Secretary seriously telling me that he could look them in the eye and tell them not only that they will they not be joining Wafia, but that they will be going to Rwanda, which is his eventual plan, and will never be reunited with what remains of their family?

James Cleverly: I am not going to be drawn into making comments on specific individuals without knowing the circumstances; it would be ridiculous for anyone in the House to try to do immigration processing across the Dispatch Box like that. Of course I recognise the pain and suffering that Palestinian people in Gaza are experiencing—I have seen it. We have family reconciliation schemes as part of our safe and legal routes, but I am not going to make specific comments on individual cases, and the reason will be obvious to anyone who gives it any thought.

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): The people of Stoke-on-Trent North, Kidsgrove and Talke want to know clearly and simply whether the Home Secretary, as well as looking at our legal framework here in the United Kingdom, will be willing to disapply international treaties and conventions such as the ECHR and the refugee convention in order to take back control of our borders—yes or no?

James Cleverly: I do not believe those things are necessary, but the point is that we remain focused on what we need to do. As I have said a number of times, there are no silver bullets. This requires constant work, constant vigilance and constant effort, and I give a commitment to my hon. Friend, and to the whole House, that that is exactly what we will continue to do.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): According to the Home Office's own figures, it will cost £63,000 more to transport a vulnerable human being to Rwanda than to let them stay in the UK. So if the Government wanted to scrap this unlawful, inhumane and cruel policy, how much money would it save taxpayers?

James Cleverly: I do not agree. I do not agree with those numbers because—[*Interruption.*] No, I do not agree with the hon. Member's interpretation of those numbers because, ultimately, that fails to take into consideration the cost to human lives of not deterring people, of putting their lives into the hands of criminals, and of putting their lives at risk on the open seas in small, dangerous dinghies. He should be conscious that deterring this evil trade is a human good and something we should pursue. I am amazed that he looks at it purely in pounds, shillings and pence, not in the cost to human life.

Mr Louie French (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is classic Labour double standards when Labour Members appear to

support the United Nations sending people to Rwanda but do not support the British Government doing the same?

James Cleverly: A friend of every country except their own, I think.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The Home Secretary is clearly under a lot of pressure from his Back Benchers on this, but may I remind him that the ECHR is entwined throughout many years of devolved Parliament legislation, and indeed Scottish case law? What assurances can he give that his Government will not attempt to weaken or change the ECHR without consent from the devolved Administrations?

James Cleverly: With regard to amendments, when I was Foreign Secretary I made the point that if we want to preserve institutions, they need to evolve. Nothing should be caught in aspic or frozen in amber. Ultimately, once again, the hon. Lady asks me to be distracted from our core effort, which is delivering on our multi-strand approach to tackling illegal migration, and I refuse to do so.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): I very much welcome my right hon. Friend to his new post, and the clear determination he has shown to stopping the boats. However, speed is the metric by which our constituents will judge us. Once the dust has settled on the judgment and it is clear whether we need a “notwithstanding” provision or other legislation, will he bring that to this House with the same speed that we brought through things such as the Coronavirus Act 2020, so that we can shut down the evil trade of people smuggling?

James Cleverly: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and my commitment, which is echoed by the Prime Minister, is that we will look at our domestic legislative framework and take action. We have passed one of the most ambitious pieces of legislation and we are unafraid to do so. This is core to the lives of the British people and their confidence in the security of their country, and it is core to our mission as a Government.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): What the Home Secretary is ultimately arguing for is a system whereby rich western countries get to pack off asylum seekers and refugees to poorer countries that already bear a vastly disproportionate share of responsibility for sheltering refugees around the world. There is zero evidence that that will work, and an abundance of evidence of the harm it does to the individuals caught up in it. Is it not the case that this is not just illegal, but immoral and impracticable?

James Cleverly: So what would the hon. Gentleman do? Would he say that every person in the world—*[Interruption.]* The world is a big place, and there are lots of people in it. Is he credibly saying that anybody choosing to come here by any means, including through the hands of evil criminals, should automatically have the right to stay? It is an untenable position. We are addressing poverty and conflict in the developing world. We are addressing climate change, which is affecting farmers in the developing world. We are doing all those things, but we are also discharging our duty to the

British people to protect their borders. If he does not feel that that is a function of Government, then he is wrong.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): I first raised this issue in this place on 18 May 2020. The Rwanda scheme was stuck in the courts for 18 months. Enough is enough. Does the Home Secretary agree that one of the tools in his basket needs to be a deterrent that is robust, and that timescales matter? I have had enough, and all of my constituents have had enough. This is a matter of critical importance. Does the Home Secretary agree?

James Cleverly: I remind my hon. Friend that we are already seeing success, and that success is accelerating because of the measures we have put in place. He is right to say that we need a deterrent for people making those dangerous crossings, and a deterrent for the illegal criminals. We are determined to deliver that, and we will do so in the face of the Opposition, who are desperately trying to prevent us from doing so.

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): I very much hope that the measures my right hon. Friend has set out will allow us to deliver the Rwanda plan as soon as possible. Will he also look—I have asked for this on a number of occasions—at other third countries that we could form partnerships with, to deliver more processing overseas in a number of those locations?

James Cleverly: I assure my hon. Friend that in addition to the conversations with Rwanda, which are well progressed, we are having similar conversations with a number of other countries. Indeed, our policy is now being adopted in large part by a number of other European countries whose circumstances are considerably worse than ours. We are absolutely leading the field on this issue.

Anna Firth (Southend West) (Con): I warmly welcome my fellow Essex colleague to his place and wish him every success. I welcome his commitment to a tough but fair policy on immigration. The people of Southend are particularly concerned that if we do not resolve the issue of illegal migration, we are preventing people who have served our country from coming here legally to safety. Does he agree?

James Cleverly: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and a number of people have mentioned the humanity of this. It should be the elected Government of a country who decide who can and cannot come to that country; it should not be criminals, smugglers or people who prey on the weak. That would be the by-product of a failure to address the issue, and that is what we see from the Opposition—a complete vacuum where policy should live. That vacuum encourages illegality and criminality, and that is what we are seeking to address.

Brendan Clarke-Smith (Bassetlaw) (Con): I welcome the Home Secretary to his place and thank him for the outstanding job he did in his previous brief. Rwanda is a country that we do business with, a country with a thriving economy, and a country that the Leader of the Opposition’s football team even promotes as a tourist destination. Bearing that in mind, will the Government consider whether it may be appropriate to add Rwanda to the list of safe countries?

James Cleverly: My hon. Friend makes a good point, and one of the few things that the former Leader of the Opposition and I share is a passion for Arsenal football club. Rwanda is a country that is developing fast, and it is a close partner. They listen carefully when we talk to and work with them, and I have no doubt that working closely with them we will bring this scheme into operation, and put forward the deterrent that will be a really important strand of our multi-strand approach to illegal migration.

Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Ind): Although I welcome the steady progress being made to close asylum hotels, I am extremely disappointed that the Metropole in Blackpool is yet to be vacated. That hotel is located in the poorest ward in the entire country bar none, and the pressure on my local community and public services is immense. Is the Home Secretary able to assure me that in the next batch of hotel closures, socio-economic conditions will be taken into account, and that the Metropole will finally be closed?

James Cleverly: I listened carefully to my hon. Friend's point, and he reinforces the issue that I think is key: it is very easy for people to be generous of spirit when someone else is bearing the burden. The people in his constituency and the immediate neighbourhood of the Metropole hotel are, as he said, not wealthy people, yet they are the ones disproportionately bearing the brunt of illegal migration. That is why we are committed to helping them, and other people like them across the country, by getting a grip of this evil trade and stopping the boats.

Point of Order

1.57 pm

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It has recently come to light that a Conservative donor's firm has been awarded an £11.5 million contract to supply schools affected by reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete with temporary classrooms. David Wernick of Wernick Buildings Ltd, a Tory councillor and previous chair of a Conservative association, has donated £71,000 to the Tories and won Government contracts with a combined total of £20 million. I wish I could say it shocks me, Madam Deputy Speaker, but given this Government's record, it does not.

On 5 September, I asked a written question to the Department for Education, asking specifically for details of the portacabin providers it had contracted to provide that temporary accommodation. I stated clearly that I wanted the names of the firms contracted. In his reply, the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Wantage (David Johnston), failed to provide a substantive and specific answer to my specific question. It is not acceptable for Ministers to reply with obfuscation and avoidance, and I am increasingly concerned that that is becoming the norm in response to parliamentary questions. I seek your advice, Madam Deputy Speaker, on how Members can ensure that in future we get clear, concise and correct responses from the Government.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving me notice of her point of order. As I am sure she knows, the Chair is not responsible for the content of answers to parliamentary questions. Mr Speaker has always made it clear that he wants as much transparency and accuracy as possible. The hon. Lady is fortunate, as I believe the Minister would like to make a point of order.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (David Johnston): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not know anything about the first point of the hon. Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler), but on her second point, I will ask the Schools Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds), to write to her and explain which companies are involved.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Minister said that the Government will provide some further information. I am sure that if the hon. Lady does not find that satisfactory, she will come back, but does she wish to make a further point of order?

Dawn Butler: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank the Minister for that response. If he could please provide information on whether any competition took place before the award of the contract, that would be useful.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I suggest that at this point we do not get into too many details about what will be in the response, but we have started the ball rolling. We await that information being supplied to the hon. Lady, and those on the Treasury Bench will have heard what I said about accuracy and transparency.

Deputy Speaker's Statement

2.1 pm

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have an announcement to make about the election of the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee. Nominations closed at 1 pm for the position of Chair of the Backbench Business Committee. Only one nomination has been received, so there will not be a ballot. I congratulate the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) on his re-election.

Debate on the Address

6TH DAY

Debate resumed (Order, 14 November).

Question again proposed.

That an humble Address be presented to His Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

Violence Reduction, Policing and Criminal Justice

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):

I inform the House that Mr Speaker has selected amendment (r) in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), which will be moved at the start of the debate, and amendment (h) in the name of Stephen Flynn, the Scottish National party leader, and amendment (k) in the name of Ed Davey, the leader of the Liberal Democrats, which will both be moved at the end of the debate.

Colleagues will know there is significant interest in the debate, so they should expect an early—if not immediate—time limit, which is likely to be five minutes. I want to give warning of that so that people can adjust their speeches accordingly. If they no longer wish to speak, they should let me know.

2.3 pm

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I beg to move amendment (r), at the end of the Question to add:

“and submit to Your Majesty that this House wishes to see an end to the violence in Israel and Palestine; unequivocally condemn the horrific terrorist attack and murder of civilians by Hamas, call for the immediate release of all hostages and reaffirm Israel's right to defend its citizens from terrorism; believe all human life is equal and that there has been too much suffering, including far too many deaths of innocent civilians and children, over the past month in Gaza; reaffirm the UK's commitment to the rules-based international order, international humanitarian law and the jurisdiction of the ICC to address the conduct of all parties in Gaza and Hamas's attacks in Israel; call on Israel to protect hospitals and lift the siege conditions allowing food, water, electricity, medicine and fuel into Gaza; request the Government continue to work with the international community to prevent a wider escalation of the conflict in the region, guarantee that people in Gaza who are forced to flee during this conflict can return to their homes and seek an end to the expansion of illegal settlements and settler violence in the West Bank; and, while acknowledging the daily humanitarian pauses to allow in aid and the movement of civilians, believe they must be longer to deliver humanitarian assistance on a scale that begins to meet the desperate needs of the people of Gaza, which is a necessary step to an enduring cessation of fighting as soon as possible and a credible, diplomatic and political process to deliver the lasting peace of a two-state solution.”

When the Prime Minister opened the King's Speech debate just eight days ago, we had all this briefing about how it was a “Rishi reset” moment. So much of a flop was it, that having made promises just eight days ago about the changes his Government would deliver, now

[Yvette Cooper]

he is talking about the changes to his Government instead. We have another reshuffle and another Rishi reset—not change, just more of the same chaos. We remember his conference claim that he was rejecting decades of failure, including the last 13 years of Tory Government. Just a month later, he has brought back one of the main Tory architects in the former Prime Minister, who cut 20,000 police officers, brought in the bedroom tax and austerity, and pushed working families and children into poverty. It is a sign of the state of the Tory party that the Prime Minister who did all that is now suddenly seen as a moderate.

Instead of a Government focused on the problems facing the country, whether the cost of living crisis, record NHS waiting lists or rising town centre crime and serious violence, what we have got is just more of the same Tory psychodrama and chaos. In the past seven and a half years, we have had five Prime Ministers, six Chancellors, seven Health Secretaries, seven Foreign Secretaries, eight Home Secretaries and 11—I think I counted right—Justice Secretaries.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Eight.

Yvette Cooper: Eight Justice Secretaries—it has been a struggle to keep count of their changing. We have had eight Home Secretaries in less than eight years and, even worse, two of them were the right hon. and learned Member for Fareham (Suella Braverman). She was so unsuited for the job of Home Secretary that she was sacked twice: once for breaching security rules in government, and the second time for undermining security on our streets, attacking the police, undermining respect for the decisions they took in the run-up to a difficult weekend, ramping up division around remembrance and making it harder for the police to do their job. No other Home Secretary would ever have done those things. It shows how little this Prime Minister cares about our security that he was prepared to reappoint her, to defend her and to follow her wherever she led, and now we know why.

The dodgy deal that the Prime Minister denied last year is now laid bare in the former Home Secretary's letter. She says:

“Despite you having been rejected by a majority of Party members...and thus having no personal mandate to be Prime Minister”.

Fair point there. She goes on:

“This was a document with clear terms to which you agreed in October 2022 during your second leadership campaign. I trusted you.”

Obviously that is another sign of her poor judgment. The deal made him Prime Minister and made him make her the most unsuitable Home Secretary this country has had.

The Conservatives published their latest Criminal Justice Bill yesterday. It has measures that Labour called for to tackle antisocial behaviour, and I was going to make the point that the Government have no ideas of their own and are just following Labour's lead, but I have to concede that they and the Tory party in general are definitely the experts on antisocial behaviour. The former Home Secretary is throwing rocks and stones. The New Conservative group is making dark

threats, going round the parliamentary Tory party nuisance-begging for no-confidence letters in the Prime Minister. The right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) is so desperate to find out how many letters have gone in to the chair of the 1922 committee, the right hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Sir Graham Brady) that he is now camped outside his office, but I guess they told us it was a lifestyle choice.

While the Tories fight culture wars with each other, the rest of us are worried about security on our streets. The new Home Secretary has briefed that he did not want to take over the job, but he has agreed to take one for the team. Let me just say to him and to all Government Front Benchers: if they do not want to run the Home Office or the Ministry of Justice and cannot see how to do the job, they should get out the way for those of us who can. Our country is crying out for a Government who care about tackling crime, restoring security to our streets and restoring confidence in the police, rather than a Tory Government chasing headlines and fighting among themselves.

The Government want to tell us that all is fine on the number of police and the level of crime, but they are badly out of touch, because that is not what it feels like across the country, and nothing in the King's Speech will touch the sides. We have 10,000 fewer neighbourhood police on our streets. Half the country say they never see a bobby on the beat. Knife crime is up by 70%, devastating young lives. We have persistent violence against women and girls across our country. That is the Conservatives' abysmal legacy on law and order.

Labour has set out a mission on crime to halve serious violence including knife crime and violence against women and girls, to reverse the catastrophic collapse in the proportion of crimes solved, and to rebuild confidence in the police and criminal justice system by getting 13,000 more neighbourhood police on the streets and tackling town centre crime. However, what do we have in the King's Speech? The Criminal Justice Bill includes measures that Labour called for long ago, but it does not tackle enough of the serious problems that our country faces or make up for the damage that has been done. We support making sure that the most serious and dangerous criminals properly serve their time, but, frankly, too few criminals are actually caught or charged in the first place. Under this Government, more than 90% of crimes go unsolved. For those who commit a crime, the chances of being caught and punished are less than half what they were under the last Labour Government. That is the scale of collapse in law and order under the Tories.

On knife crime, the measures go nowhere near far enough. On violence against women and girls, I am really concerned because there is nothing on spiking, nothing serious on stalking and nothing to turn around the woeful fact that 98% of rapists avoid charge. The Government's sentencing proposals may mean that thousands of domestic abusers whose violence is escalating will be let off jail.

There is nothing at all on town centre crime. Shoplifting is up a shocking 25% in a year. Assaults on shop workers tripled during the pandemic and have not gone down again. This is Freedom From Fear Week, and I thank the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers and the British Retail Consortium for the work

they are doing to stand up for staff safety and shine a light on the disgraceful way in which people are being treated just for doing their jobs. But why are the Government not listening to them? Labour is, and we will change the law. We will table amendments to the crime and justice Bill to ditch the ridiculous £200 rule that stops action from being taken against repeat shoplifting gangs and to bring in a proper new offence of assaulting shop workers, because everyone has the right to feel safe at work.

On national security and some of the core issues that affect the safety of our nation, in the past we had broad cross-party consensus and worked together in that spirit. Labour will always stand ready to do so. Security Ministers and shadow Security Ministers have done so before, and that is the spirit in which we will work on the national security Bill. That is also the spirit in which we would always have expected to approach the operational independence and impartiality of British policing. The last Home Secretary undermined that; I hope that the new Home Secretary will be able to restore it, because this is too important for us to disagree on.

It is likewise for the safety and cohesion of our communities. We have seen tensions increase as a result of the truly awful events in the middle east. There has been an appalling rise in antisemitism, including some disgraceful incidents this weekend, with Jewish communities feeling enormous anguish and distress. We have also seen an awful increase in Islamophobia and the rise of organised far-right thuggery about which the police raised concerns this weekend. Every one of us in this House must be clear that violence and hate crime have no place on Britain's streets and must face the full force of the law. We must all back the police in taking the action that is needed.

I thank the police for the reassurance work they are doing with synagogues, Jewish schools and mosques as well as their action against the hate crimes that devastate lives and corrode communities. I say to the Justice Secretary and the new Home Secretary that Labour has called for stronger action to tackle both antisemitism and Islamophobia and hateful extremism. Again, we stand ready to work with the Government and see what we can do to come together to address these serious issues, because there is a responsibility on all of us to bring our communities together.

The shadow Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), will speak later about Labour's amendment in more detail, but every one of us will have been deeply disturbed by the terrible events in the middle east. We want an end to the devastating violence and suffering. We have seen 11,000 Palestinians killed; two thirds of them women and children. Thousands of innocent children are dead. Families are bereaved and parents grieving. It is intolerable. Hundreds of hostages are still being held following the gravest attack on Jewish people on any day since the holocaust. Israeli families are still experiencing the horror and the trauma as the remains of their loved ones are still being identified. Families and communities are still reeling from the events.

We all condemn the truly barbaric attack by Hamas terrorists on 7 October. Under international law, we respect countries' right to defend their citizens from terrorist attacks and also countries' obligations to abide by international law. The conduct of war matters. As Antony Blinken said at the very start of the conflict,

"how Israel does this matters. We democracies distinguish ourselves from terrorists by striving for a different standard, even when it is difficult...Our humanity—the value that we place on human life and human dignity—that's what makes us who we are."

The rules-based order must not be abandoned.

That is why we must commit to recognising the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court to address the conduct of all parties in the conflict. But it is also why we need an urgent suspension of hostilities: not just a short pause, but, as my right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary has set out, the time and space to get in fuel, food and water, to rebuild vital humanitarian infrastructure, to protect aid workers, who are losing their lives on a scale we have never seen before in conflict, to put in place protection for civilians and negotiate hostage releases, and to work towards a full cessation of violence and enduring peace so that lives can be saved and the intolerable suffering can end.

We know that that requires immense and complex diplomatic work. It is not easy. We have words on a page that we will talk about voting on today, but we all know that it is not through words on a page that this will be achieved; it will be achieved through step-by-step intense diplomacy and pressure that recognises how difficult it is when Hamas refuse to agree to stop rocket attacks and pledge again to repeat the attacks of 7 October. We recognise, too, that hostages are still being held, but we still have to make urgent diplomatic progress. We still have to do what we can right now to save lives and make progress in getting hostilities suspended, especially so that humanitarian action can be taken.

We recognise, too, that the only way forward is a two-state solution with a secure and safe Israel alongside a secure and sovereign Palestine. My right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary was right to say yesterday that

"neither the long-term security of Israel nor long-term justice for Palestine can be delivered by bombs and bullets."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 2023; Vol. 740, c. 510.]

That is why there is a responsibility on all of us to urge the UK Government to do what they can—to strain every sinew—in the pursuit of peace.

2.18 pm

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Alex Chalk): The first duty of any Government—its most serious and solemn responsibility—is to keep its people safe. Since 2010, overall levels of crime are down by more than 50%. Domestic burglary is down by 57%, violent crime by 52%, vehicle-related theft by 39%, and the number of young people admitted to hospital following an assault with a knife or other bladed weapon has fallen by 26%. In fact, His Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary, Andy Cooke, has said that

"England and Wales are arguably safer than they have ever been."

That is because the Government have taken decisive measures, including recruiting 20,000 police officers so that we can cut crime and keep our communities safe. We have made robust punishments available for the worst criminals to keep the most serious offenders in custody for longer, and we have commissioned the biggest prison building programme since the Victorian era.

The Gracious Speech builds on that record with a range of long-term decisions that keep public protection at the heart of the Government's agenda for our country.

[Alex Chalk]

I want to start with tackling violence against women and girls, on a point made by the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper). That is a priority for the Government, and for me personally, but let us step back to reflect on some of the progress made in the last decade or so. The right hon. Lady referred to the offence of stalking and said that she wanted some progress. She will recall that in the 13 years that she was in Government, there was no offence or crime of stalking. We are the party that created it so that behaviour described as “murder in slow motion” could be properly addressed. Then we doubled the maximum sentence.

Yvette Cooper: Let me correct the Secretary of State. He may not recall, but I tabled one of the first amendments on reform to introduce a stalking law. That same amendment was eventually taken up in the other place by the Labour lords, and the Conservative Government agreed to it. I am very glad that they did, but he should not take credit for agreeing to a Labour proposal that I and others put forward.

Alex Chalk: I am delighted to debate this with the right hon. Lady. Thirteen years, and it was not on the statute book. When did it come on to the statute book? In 2012. She had 13 years, and she missed her opportunity. This is the party that put it on the statute book.

The right hon. Lady referred to other matters of violence against women and girls. This is the party that created the offence of coercive and controlling behaviour. We are the party that slayed the myth that abuse is perpetrated only with punches, kicks and other physical violence. We know that it is not, and we acted to outlaw it. We introduced the landmark Domestic Abuse Act 2021, creating a new domestic abuse commissioner and ending abuses such as the ability of DA perpetrators to cross-examine victims. We created a standalone offence of non-fatal strangulation, and made clear that the cowardly so-called “rough sex gone wrong” defence for murder does not exist.

We delivered radical improvements to the victims code to secure entitlements for victims, including the automatic right for eligible victims to be told when a perpetrator is due to leave prison. There is a 24/7 rape support helpline, more than 950 independent sexual violence advisers and independent domestic violence advisers. We have outlawed upskirting and revenge porn, and introduced the most wide-ranging modern slavery legislation probably anywhere in the world. Over the last year, we have built on that work by ensuring that violence against women and girls is now recognised as a national threat, just like terrorism and organised crime. It is also included in the strategic policing requirement.

When I began my career in the courts, violence behind closed doors was all too often passed off and trivialised as a “domestic”, with no action taken. Not any more. We see it for what it is: corrosive, cruel and devastating. Those responsible are no longer beyond the reach of the law.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the Secretary of State on his speech. He will know that the figures for Northern Ireland are the worst in the whole of Europe. A total of 27 women have been murdered in

Northern Ireland by an intimate partner, relative or family member since 2017. Those figures are shameful and discouraging for us all. Would he encourage the Department for Justice in Northern Ireland to follow suit on any legislation on tackling violence against women and girls, so that Northern Ireland is not left behind?

Alex Chalk: Yes, I would. I look forward to the restoration of the Assembly so that these important priorities can be pursued.

Let me turn to the issue of rape, which I heard mentioned sotto voce from the Opposition Benches. In 2021, we launched a rape review to drive up the criminal justice system’s response to this crime. We committed to total transparency on the data, publishing dashboards about reports, charges and receipts in the Crown court, so that any member of the public could see what was taking place at the touch of a button. We identified levers to drive forward the effectiveness and efficiency of the system, including rolling out technology to ensure that evidence from mobile phone devices could be harnessed rapidly, without victims being separated for long periods from what can be a lifeline. We set out ambitions that many commentators said were unachievable, and we brought Government Departments together, literally—sitting around the same table to prosecute our mission on behalf of victims. Of course, there is always further to go, but the progress made is significant. The volume of adult rape cases reaching court since 2019 has doubled.

Meanwhile, seeing as the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford wanted to put us under the microscope, let me make these points. The situation compared with 2010 is striking. More cases of rape are being prosecuted. The conviction rate is higher. Sentences are longer and, importantly, the proportion of those sentences spent in custody is significantly increased, too. To the political points that the right hon. Lady made, she was in Government and voted for the Criminal Justice Act 2003, section 244 of which, if she wants to remember, made sure that every single rapist was released at the halfway mark. If they were sentenced to 10 years, she voted to ensure that they were released after five. We have changed that. This Government say that that is not right, not fair on victims and not just. She needs to account for her actions. We have invested £24 million in Operation Soteria, which brings together the police, prosecutors and academics to develop a new approach to rape and sexual offences. There is now a clear expectation that investigations must focus on a suspect’s behaviour, not on the victim’s supposed credibility.

Let me turn to the police. Becoming a police officer is a noble calling. To sign up is to commit to running towards danger when others flee. It means engaging with the most threatening people in society, but also the most vulnerable. That demands judgment as well as skill and integrity. Given the power that officers necessarily wield, it is essential that those who wear the uniform are competent, decent and honest. A small minority of officers fall short of the required standard. In recent years, some have transgressed in the worst ways possible. That inevitably shook public confidence in the police.

Baroness Casey’s review of the Met made for deeply concerning reading, and the first part of the Angiolini inquiry is focused on the career of the serving officer who raped and murdered Sarah Everard. Part two will

look at broader issues in policing and the safety of women. Earlier this year, the Government launched a review into police officer dismissals, and the Home Office has recently announced a number of measures to strengthen the system as a result of that review. There will be a presumption of dismissal for those found to have committed gross misconduct. We are handing back responsibility for chairing misconduct hearings to senior police officers, while retaining independence in the system.

The College of Policing has strengthened the statutory code of practice for police vetting, making the obligations on police chiefs stricter and clear, as was published in July. His Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and fire and rescue services has found that forces have made progress on vetting. They must not let up. All police forces have cross-checked their workforce against the police national database to help to identify anyone not fit to serve and the National Police Chiefs' Council will provide an update on its findings in January. The Government will change the law to ensure that all officers who are unable to maintain vetting clearance can be sacked.

The Criminal Justice Bill includes a duty of candour, requiring police chiefs to ensure an ethical culture in their forces. In August, the previous Home Secretary wrote to policing leaders, asking them to outline their plans to increase visibility and confidence in local policing and to report back on progress by next March. Confidence in policing is not just about individual behaviour but about the performance of each force. There is no such thing as a trivial crime. The public expect the police to follow all reasonable lines of inquiry, and the Government have secured a pledge from all forces to do so. That pledge applies to all crimes, and the public expect to see improvements in the approach to phone theft, car theft, criminal damage and shoplifting.

At the heart of the Government's legislative programme for the forthcoming parliamentary Session are our plans to keep the British people safe. Our Sentencing Bill has public protection at its core. There are two elements to our approach. For people who commit the most horrific murders, such as murders with sexual or sadistic conduct, the public are protected by keeping them where they belong—out of circulation, behind bars for the rest of their life, unless the court finds exceptional circumstances. That is how they can be prevented from inflicting any more damage to individuals and to society. Our Bill also means that rapists and those convicted of the most serious sexual offences will serve every day of their custodial term behind bars. That is night and day compared with the regime we inherited in 2010. At that time, a rapist sentenced to 10 years was out in five. Now, a rapist sentenced to 10 years will serve the full term.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): My right hon. and learned Friend is making an excellent speech and doing excellent work. He has not mentioned the crime of terrorism, which is one of the most serious, and he has not had a chance to mention the amendment that we will vote on today. There is grave concern that the greater the loss of civilian life in the middle east is, the greater the likelihood of radicalisation and increased terror at home. Does he agree that those of us who believe that now is not the right time to call for a full ceasefire, because of the difficulty of giving it, are not

giving Israel a moral blank cheque to continue with operations in the way it has so far? Protecting civilian life is vital to prevent future terrorism here and elsewhere.

Alex Chalk: My right hon. Friend puts it well. Anyone who has observed what has taken place cannot fail but to be filled with anguish and distress, so of course it is the case that a nation's right to defend itself is a right to do so consistent with international law. The Government are very clear on that, as indeed I think are most people in the House, but she puts the point well.

Protecting the public, which is the theme I am seeking to stress, also demands that we follow the evidence about what works to prevent reoffending. If reoffending goes down, crime goes down. If crime goes down, the public are protected.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): I am very grateful to the Lord Chancellor, who was quite right earlier to reject the attempt at revisionist history on stalking by those on the Labour Benches. He and I worked very closely together on the initial change to the legislation. Does he agree with me that there is an opportunity in the next police, crime and sentencing Bill to also address something that would help to protect some of our young people, which is the issue of spiking? There is a real opportunity to update the 1861 law, give a clear definition of spiking and send a very clear message to all those who might be tempted to do so.

Alex Chalk: I thank my hon. Friend, who is absolutely right. He did extraordinarily important work on stalking. He understands, as I do, that it is a wicked crime that leaves women in particular feeling very vulnerable. We acted when others did not and revisionism is to be deprecated; I strongly agree with him. On spiking, my hon. Friend is a tremendous campaigner. He is right that the legislation that is apt to capture this offence is within the Offences against the Person Act 1861. It provides police with powers, but he makes a powerful point. He will continue to make such points and we will consider them with care.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): The right hon. and learned Gentleman is making an interesting speech. I expect he will share my disquiet that we presently have 600 vacancies for police in Scotland which are not going to be filled. An independent councillor in the highlands called Matthew Reiss, himself a senior retired police officer, has said that the thin blue line is going to get thinner. Without police, we cannot do the sort of things that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is talking about—in other words, catching the criminals and making people feel secure. Could he, in his capacity, share his best practice with the Scottish Government in the future?

Alex Chalk: What a very kind offer. I am sure that call will be echoed by those in the SNP Benches in front of the hon. Gentleman. We, of course, would be delighted to share any best practice. He makes a very serious point. To do all the things we want to do to protect vulnerable people requires boots on the ground—it requires police officers. That is why we are proud of the fact that in this jurisdiction the number of police officers stands at, or close to, an all-time high. We would be happy to commend that approach to our friends north of the border.

[Alex Chalk]

On public protection, taking the most serious offenders out of circulation is how we stop them committing crime. But we also want to follow the evidence about what works to prevent reoffending, because that is also how we keep the British people safe. The evidence—not sentiment, evidence—shows that those on immediate prison sentences of less than 12 months are significantly more likely to reoffend than similar offenders who get sentences in the community. They are over 50% likely to reoffend, as compared to less than 25% for those who are required to adhere to tough conditions, with a risk of going to prison if they fail to comply. Let me be clear about what that means. Those who are on suspended sentence orders are required to comply with onerous requirements—be they unpaid work orders, alcohol rehabilitation requirements or whatever—on pain of going straight to prison if they fail to comply. The evidence shows that people see that as a powerful deterrent.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): My right hon. and learned Friend will want to comment, in that context, on persistent offenders, because he will know that there are many offenders who persistently offend and commit crimes that would not attract a sentence of more than 12 months. The right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) spoke of shoplifting, for example. Criminal damage would be another example, as would antisocial behaviour. Some 30% of persistent offenders commit 80% of crimes. Is he really saying that none of them should go to prison?

Alex Chalk: On the contrary. I know that my right hon. Friend rightly, on behalf of his constituents, wants to ensure that those who destroy lives and have a corrosive impact on communities are brought to book. That is why the provisions have been carefully constructed and calibrated to ensure that those who are unable or unwilling to abide by an order of the court can expect to hear the clang of the prison gate. Not only will the proverbial sword of Damocles be hanging over them, but for those who commit an offence when they are subject to a court order—be it a supervision order, a community order or a non-molestation order—the presumption no longer applies. We send a clear message to criminals: obey the order of the court or expect to go to prison.

Judges will retain their discretion to impose immediate custody when an offender poses a significant risk of physical or psychological harm to an individual—this is to the direct point made by the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford—so that domestic abuse offences and other violent offences against women and girls can and will continue to be punished, with immediate custody protecting victims. Nothing changes, but for those whose sentence is suspended, the courts will be able to continue to use a range of requirements, including curfews, electronic tags, community payback and exclusion requirements. Those who do not comply or who commit further offences can be brought back to court and risk being sent to prison.

Alongside that, we want to ensure that we have the prison places to keep serious and dangerous offenders locked up for longer, while allowing lower risk offenders

to benefit from community-based restrictions to assist with their resettlement, get back into work and start contributing to society where that can be safely managed. For that reason, we are extending home detention curfew to offenders serving sentences of over four years and keeping our tough restrictions that prevent serious violent, sexual and domestic abuse offenders from accessing this facility.

The Criminal Justice Bill includes measures that deliver on three strategic objectives: first, protecting the public from violence and intimidation; secondly, enabling law enforcement agencies to respond to changing technology deployed by criminals, including by equipping them with sufficient powers to address emerging types and threats; and thirdly, strengthening public confidence in policing. We will protect the public from violence and intimidation by strengthening the law on the taking of intimate images without consent and expanding the offence of encouraging or assisting self-harm.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. We used to have happy times on the Justice Committee together when we were little striplings. What he is saying sounds good, but my question is this. Last year, the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin) and I amended the Public Order Act 2023 to stop intimidatory protests against women using abortion clinics. Although it was passed, that is the only section that has not been enacted. Ealing Council does not know whether to renew its temporary order, which is coming up again. If the law was passed and enacted, it should not have to. Can he tell Ealing Council and the whole country what to do when women every day face intimidation?

Alex Chalk: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. We did indeed have a productive and non-partisan time on the Justice Committee. On the specific important point she raises, the Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire, my right hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), will address that point in closing—but essentially, it will happen in due course.

We will protect the public from violence and intimidation by strengthening the law on the taking of intimate images, as I have indicated. We will increase the multi-agency management requirements on offenders convicted of coercive or controlling behaviour. As I say, that was not an offence in 2010. We are implementing a further recommendation in the domestic homicide sentencing review, giving judges the discretion at sentencing to add a statutory aggravating factor for a killing connected to the end of a relationship, many of which are committed where there has been a history of coercive or controlling behaviour. That man who says, “If I can’t have you, no one will” can expect a more serious penalty.

Finally, it is a further insult to families when perpetrators refuse to appear in the dock to face up to the consequences of their actions, so it is quite right that we will give judges the power to order offenders to court and punish those who refuse.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State has outlined some measures to protect women who face really horrific abuse. I have been campaigning on the key issue of girls who are associated with gangs.

The fact is that they are groomed and used by gang members for horrific crimes, and those girls are then victimised and imprisoned. Does he agree that we should have a statutory definition of child criminal exploitation, so that girls do not continue to face that horrific ordeal?

Alex Chalk: The hon. Lady has made a very important point. I will not bore the House with war stories, but I remember defending a young woman—17 years old. She had been abused by her boyfriend, who had put pressure on her to hold a MAC-10 firearm. The police, of course, then arrested her, and she was at risk of a mandatory minimum sentence of three years, although she had been put under all that pressure by her boyfriend. The courts do have discretion to take personal circumstances into account, and in that case, when the court found that there had been exceptional circumstances, it was not bound to impose the mandatory minimum sentence. It is always worth recalling that in a fair society, before independent courts, there is an opportunity for important points of mitigation to be advanced. The hon. Lady also made a point about grooming, and I now want to turn to the issue of protecting children in that regard.

In April, the Prime Minister and the former Home Secretary announced a package of measures to tackle child sexual exploitation, grooming and abuse, so that our law would keep pace with criminals' latest warped ingenuity. We are introducing a statutory aggravating factor at sentencing for grooming behaviour in connection with sexual offences committed against under-18s in order to tackle those involved in grooming gangs. There is also a new child sexual exploitation police taskforce—that means analysts in every police region—and a new complex and organised child abuse database. Tackling organised exploitation programmes have also been rolled out, bringing together force-level, regional and national data and intelligence.

The Criminal Justice Bill also takes the fight to criminals. Articles used in serious crime, such as templates for 3D-printed firearm components and pill presses, will be prohibited. The Government have secured from the police agreement to pursue all reasonable lines of inquiry, and the Bill creates a power to enter premises without a warrant to seize stolen goods such as mobile phones. The operation of serious crime prevention orders will be strengthened to make it easier for police and other law enforcement agencies to place restrictions on offenders or suspected offenders and prevent them from participating in further crime.

The Bill brings further action on the scourge that is knife crime: that includes creating a power to seize, retain and destroy bladed articles found on private property that are likely to be used in connection with unlawful violence, increasing the maximum penalty for the sale of prohibited weapons and for selling knives to those under 18, and the creation of a criminal offence of possessing a bladed article with the intent to use it in unlawful violence. To increase public confidence in policing, the Bill provides for a duty of candour for policing, and gives chief officers the right to appeal against the result of misconduct boards to police appeals tribunals.

Let me turn briefly to the Victims and Prisoners Bill, which will enshrine the principles of the victims code in law, and provide greater oversight and transparency in respect of how victims are treated, with criminal justice inspectorates undertaking joint inspections on victims

issues when directed to do so. As one who grappled with the old victims code under the Labour Government, when the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford was in power, I should point out that that was a pale imitation of what exists now. The code that was in place under Labour failed to give victims a right to review or the right to make a victim personal statement, it only applied to victims of particularly serious crime, and it failed to give any rights to close relatives.

Our victims code dramatically strengthens the rights of victims. It will be easier for victims of crime to make complaints against a public body by removing the need to go through an MP. It creates a duty for the police to ensure that requests for third-party personal records from complainants are proportionate and necessary. This measure will apply to victims only. There will be an independent public advocate for the victims of major incidents, who will help bereaved families and the injured in the immediate aftermath of a large-scale disaster.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab) *rose*—

Alex Chalk: I will give certainly way to the right hon. Lady in a moment, but not before paying tribute to her and, indeed, the Hillsborough families and others for campaigning for this measure.

Maria Eagle: I know that the Lord Chancellor has taken an interest in the public advocate proposals, but does he agree that they need to be strengthened in order to be effective, and that his proposals, as they currently stand, are nowhere near good enough to do the job that I, and others, hope they can do?

Alex Chalk: I have been very grateful to the right hon. Lady for the care and attention that she has given to this sensitive area over many months and years. We will continue to work with her so that this can be the best possible advocate. It is important to note, however, that whatever we provide will be a massive step forward. We do of course want to get it right, and I commit myself to working closely with the right hon. Lady in order to do so.

Finally, the Parole Board will be required to include members with a background in law enforcement in order to help parole panels make better decisions when assessing risk.

The legislation laid out in the Gracious Speech is an ambitious, long-term vision for our country. It builds on our record over the last 13 years to make our country safer than ever. It is a programme rooted in evidence; a programme that responds to the anger and distress that we all feel about crime, and that does so with measures that actually drive it down. We will ensure that the most dangerous offenders spend longer in prison to protect the British people from harm, and to protect women and girls in particular. We will equip the police with powers to fight the latest criminal trends that blight our communities, and we will ensure that law enforcement has the confidence of the public while pulling every lever to reduce offending, because that is what keeps the British people safe.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con) *rose*—

Alex Chalk: At the death, I will give way.

Sir Julian Lewis: I detected that my right hon. and learned Friend had reached the closing part of his peroration, so I wanted to ask him to address one concern that I have about the policing of demonstrations. As it happens, I think the police made the right call about 11 November, given the law as it stands. What concerns me is that three weeks earlier, on 21 October, a planned demonstration in Golders Green to pray for Israel and the Jewish people was called off after the police advised that it would be subject to intimidation or violence from people who were representing it as a threat against Muslims holding a demonstration for Palestine seven miles away. Does it not concern my right hon. and learned Friend that a peaceful demonstration should be called off in the face of intimidation, and is it not a matter of concern that the people who made the online threats that led the police to give that advice have not, as far as I have learned, been in any way questioned, sought or prosecuted?

Alex Chalk: As always, my right hon. Friend has made an extremely powerful point. On the basis of what he has said, that does seem troubling. I do not know all the details, of course, but the fundamental point is that anyone in our community, whether they are Jewish or otherwise, should be able to practise their faith without let or hindrance. I am grateful to him for raising that. If there are measures that need to be followed up to protect our vulnerable communities, they should be.

The Criminal Justice Bill focuses on the evidence—the evidence of what works and the evidence of what keeps the British people safe. Sometimes that will mean people being locked up for longer, and we make no apology for that. Sometimes it will mean ensuring that those who are capable of being redeemed are being redeemed. That is how we drive down reoffending, and that is how we protect the British people. I commend the Government's programme to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. As soon as the Scottish National party spokesperson has sat down, I will impose a time limit of six minutes on speeches. It may go down from that, but we will see how we get on.

2.48 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Friends of mine will know that I run an occasional series on my social media about “Westminster weirdness”. Given what has happened in the past week, I really do not know where to start, but I congratulate the Secretary of State on still being here to deliver his speech. That, I suppose, represents some progress for him, if not for his colleagues.

I tend not to speak too much about justice in this place, because that is largely for the Scottish Parliament to determine, but some aspects of the legislation proposed in the King's Speech bear some relation to what is happening in Scotland. I note in particular the draft Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill. I hope that the Government will engage closely not just with the Scottish

Government but with local authorities in Scotland, which may have an important role to play in the implementation of such a Bill. Given the way in which the existing licensing regime works for venues and premises in Scotland, they may have something to add that might work quite well in Scotland.

I am sure that Ministers will want to work closely with the Scottish Government on the Investigatory Powers (Amendment) Bill. I note that certain provisions of the Criminal Justice Bill will apply in Scotland, and I look forward to getting some clarity from Ministers on precisely which provisions will apply there. I will mention some of these things later on.

It was shocking at the weekend to see the attacks on the police happening outside this very building—attacks that were encouraged in many respects by the rhetoric coming from this Government. In many cases, the signal that Ministers and their colleagues have been putting out has not been a dog whistle but a foghorn. To see the far right out on the streets, bursting through the police, claiming police helmets as if it were some kind of war victory and taking those trophies home, was appalling. The further fallout from this of the Islamophobic attacks on women at stations in the city was appalling and shocking. I hope that those who perpetrated all those attacks will be identified and brought to justice. Likewise, those who have been making antisemitic attacks against our Jewish communities need to feel the full force of the law. The Scottish Government recently brought in hate crime legislation in Scotland, and I am sure that it will be used wherever it can be to hold those who perpetrate such hate crimes to account.

Recorded crime in Scotland remains extremely low. The most recent crime statistics show that recorded crime is at one of its lowest levels since 1974. The overall number of crimes recorded for the year ending June 2023 was 4% lower than the pre-pandemic level in June 2019, according to the latest statistics. Remarkably, Police Scotland has a 100% homicide detection rate, meaning that every one of the tragic murders that have been committed since the inception of the single service has been solved. Further to that, a significant number of cold cases committed many decades ago, prior to the inception of Police Scotland, have been detected using modern technologies and brought to trial, including the murders of Brenda Page in 1978 and Renee MacRae in 1976. There is a lot still to be done to ensure that those who have perpetrated crimes are brought to justice, however, and no one can rest until the loved ones of those victims see the justice that those they have lost deserve.

We need to do a good deal more on violence against women and girls. The Scottish Government have led in this area in many respects. The Equally Safe strategy has worked well, but there is always more that we need to do. The recently published “Vision for Justice” delivery plan includes actions to address long-standing challenges in the system faced by victims of sexual offences, as well as the continued modernisation of the prison estate. We are setting out an ambitious programme of reforms that goes up to March 2026. The plan puts a fresh focus on early prevention to prevent and reduce crime and to make communities safer. It can never be just about locking people up; prevention is incredibly important too.

The Criminal Justice Bill that the Secretary of State mentioned talks about cracking down on things, but cracking down on things just means locking more people up. For young people in particular, that will change their life chances dramatically and have an impact on the rest of their life and their family's lives. The work of the violence reduction unit in Scotland over many years has taken a preventive approach to violence in young people, and violent offending in young people has gone down significantly as a result. This work recognises that young people—particularly in this era, with the impact of the pandemic and the cost of living crisis—are really struggling with their lives and need intervention all the more.

Youth work can be powerful in changing young people's life chances. I pay tribute in particular to PEEK—Possibilities for Each and Every Kid—and the Youth Community Support Agency in Pollokshields, which have done a huge amount of work over many years to tackle the issues facing young people in our communities.

However, we cannot be complacent. We need continual work and investment in these services. The violence reduction unit also wishes to highlight the work that has been going on around the promise for care-experienced young people in Scotland, who we know from the statistics are sadly more likely to end up in the criminal justice system. We need to continue to work with this group, and to learn from them and their experiences to ensure that their life chances are improved and that the promise is delivered upon.

Another piece of work that has been going on in Scotland, further to the hate crime legislation that came before, is Baroness Helena Kennedy's work on the introduction of a misogyny Bill to create new offences relating to misogynistic conduct. Any woman in this place will tell you about the scourge of misogynistic conduct, whether it is the growing swell of hatred against women online, the challenges of social media and the attacks on women there, or the way in which young women are drawn into things that put them in harm's way, perhaps through sexual experiences online or through the way in which these things are dealt with in our society. A lot more work needs to be done to tackle misogyny in our society.

A national system will be rolled out in Scotland to digitally transform how evidence is managed across the justice sector, which will benefit victims and witnesses and support the quicker resolution of cases. We are also aiming to expand the availability of mediation services in civil disputes, because it will save people time, stress and money if these things can be resolved at an earlier stage.

I want to touch briefly on drug policy, because there has been significant progress in Scotland in recent years. Yes, we have our challenges and we acknowledge those challenges, but we are putting significant efforts into tackling them. I welcome the mention of pill presses in the Criminal Justice Bill, because street Valium has been a particular scourge on the streets of Scotland. It is being sold at very cheap prices and with indeterminate strength. It has been implicated in many deaths, so we need to tackle it at source. Again, this is a public health issue. We are not tackling the people who are taking those drugs; we are tackling those who are forcing them on to the streets.

On the UK's approach, I would continue to urge the UK Government to do something with the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. It is an entirely outdated piece of legislation that criminalises and harms people who have a health issue. It is disappointing that the King's Speech did not see fit to tackle that, and that the UK Government have responded so poorly to the strong, evidence-based report that the Home Affairs Committee produced on drug policy in the UK. We need to learn from these things, not continue to be guided by outdated and harmful ideology.

In Scotland, we have invested £141 million in drug and alcohol services and made huge strides in the increase of residential rehabilitation facilities, which are incredibly important. We have opened the first national family drugs treatment service in the new mother and child recovery house in Dundee. We have also made a huge amount of progress, as was acknowledged in the Home Affairs Committee report, on medication-assisted treatment standards, which will help people to get that treatment straightaway when they need it.

We are increasing the uptake of residential rehabilitation placements and the availability of lifesaving naloxone. I encourage all Members to go for naloxone training, as I and my office team have done. I had staff from the Scottish Drugs Forum come into my office and deliver training to me and my staff, and the staff teams of colleagues, on how to administer lifesaving naloxone. It is a simple thing to do, and it can save a life. As we are all aware in our communities, it seems sensible to be able to do this. If we are taught cardiopulmonary resuscitation, it makes sense to do something of this kind with naloxone. The Scottish Government have very much been a leader in that.

We have implemented an enhanced drug treatment service, which will deliver heroin-assisted treatment to a small group of people. It has been incredibly well received and successful for those who have been through the programme. Those who completed it have seen huge benefits, and I look forward very much to the opening of the safer drug consumption facility in my constituency next year. It is not yet open, but I very much believe that it will do an awful lot to reduce the antisocial behaviour of people taking drugs on the streets, in bin sheds, and on closes, back lanes and waste ground, and to bring those people inside where they can take drugs under medical supervision. Not one person has died in any of these facilities where they have operated in 100 cities around the world, and I hope that its introduction will lead to a harm reduction approach in Scotland and help people to get on the right track to staying safe and improving their lives.

Amendment (h), which was tabled by me and my honourable colleagues, calls for an immediate ceasefire in the middle east. I struggle to cope with the scenes of horror that are on our television screens every night. The horror of 7 October shocked us all, as has the devastation since for the people of Gaza. Both of these things are incredibly difficult to process. How can people behave in this way towards their fellow human beings? I do not think I have ever received as many emails, even on Brexit, as I have received these past four weeks. Overnight, I had 500 emails from constituents who are desperately worried about this situation and are demanding a ceasefire now.

[Alison Thewliss]

Both of these things are incredibly difficult to process. How can people behave in this way towards their fellow human beings? I do not think I have ever received as many emails, even on Brexit, as I have received these past four weeks. Overnight, I had 500 emails from constituents who are desperately worried about this situation and are demanding a ceasefire now.

I had to update the figures in my remarks, because the death toll has of course risen. At least 4,506 children in Gaza have been killed—that is one child every 10 minutes, and more than 100 children every single day. A further 1,500 children remain missing under the rubble of bombed-out buildings and are presumed dead. The number of children killed in a single month of conflict in Gaza is more than eight times the number of children killed in Ukraine during the entire first year of the current war with Russia.

Many of the children who have managed to survive so far are sick or at risk of falling ill due to the lack of clean food and water. Oxfam has reported five-hour queues at bakeries and a very real risk of starvation. Nowhere is safe from the airstrikes, not even medical facilities, which are protected under international law. Only one hospital in northern Gaza is still operational, with very minimal service. The Al-Ahli Hospital, where my hon. Friend the Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) has worked, is struggling to keep going. She awaits news of whether her colleagues and the people she knows have survived and of the current circumstances.

Riham Jafari of ActionAid has commented on the concept of a humanitarian pause:

“What use is a four-hour pause each day to hand communities bread in the morning before they are bombed in the afternoon? What use is a brief cessation in hostilities when hospital wards lie in ruins and when roads used to deliver medical supplies and food are destroyed?”

ActionAid has also talked about the situation facing pregnant women giving birth under bombardment. Giving birth does not fit into a neat four-hour humanitarian pause. Women are giving birth and having caesareans without anaesthetic, and babies are being born into chaos and death—they cannot be guaranteed a ventilator to keep them alive.

Waseem, an Oxfam staff member in Gaza, has said:

“Prices have trebled. The market is almost empty. There is a major shortage of essential foods and essential items. No bread, no dairy products, no salt, no milk, no canned food, no blankets or mattresses. Access to basic services is very limited. No electricity, no water, no gas, no health system and no education. We feel trapped.”

Civilians, who have done nothing wrong, ask us, “How long can this go on?”

Vivian Silver, the 74-year-old Canadian-Israeli peace activist who founded Women Wage Peace, was confirmed murdered in the 7 October attack on kibbutz Be’eri. She was identified by her DNA. She had worked her whole life for peace. When the attack happened, she was having a discussion on the radio from her safe room before the phone cut out. She was challenged on her views on peace in the middle east and, even when an attack was happening and she was in her safe room, she said, “We can talk more about this if I survive.” We should listen to her bravery and commitment to peace

this afternoon. Her sons, who have lost so much, are seeking a ceasefire, because they know that this cannot go on. We should commit to peace and understanding in her memory.

How does this end? All conflicts, at some point, end—there is an armistice, an agreement and papers are signed. The question for all of us in this place is how long this current phase of conflict continues. When does it end?

The UK is always keen to talk up its position as a P5 member of the United Nations Security Council, but what is that worth when we do not back the UN Secretary-General when he calls for a ceasefire? In what reasonable circumstances should António Guterres have to go to the Rafah crossing to plead for aid to get through? Why are we not standing behind the Secretary-General and the United Nations?

If we do not strive for peace, we condemn yet another generation in Palestine and Israel to a cycle of violence, to death and destruction beyond our imagination. We commit ourselves to a two-state solution, to justice and to peace. We will vote on the King’s Speech tonight, and we will vote on these amendments. It will not end the 70-year-old conflict, but it gives us a place to begin.

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

3.4 pm

Sir Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): It was a pleasure to listen to the Lord Chancellor open the debate with the characteristic moderation and eloquence that he brings to the Dispatch Box. I also welcome the two new Under-Secretaries of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Gareth Bacon)—my constituency neighbour—and my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Laura Farris), to the Treasury Bench. They are both great assets to the Government team.

I welcome what the Lord Chancellor said in his speech. I will concentrate on justice-related issues, given the pressure of time. The Justice Committee has, in fact, already worked on some of these policy areas, and I am grateful to him and his ministerial colleagues for taking on board some of the issues we have raised. We may want to press them a little further as we see the details of legislation, but I welcome the moves they have made. I appreciate their courtesy throughout our dealings.

I will start with our recent report, “Public opinion and understanding of sentencing”, which is important in the context of the Sentencing Bill and some provisions of the Criminal Justice Bill. The report shows that there is a real problem with the lack of a coherent approach to sentencing policy in the UK, as well as an issue with public understanding of the objectives of sentencing. In particular, there is insufficient analysis of the potential impact of sentencing changes.

This is not unique to the last few years; it has been systemic for all the time I have been involved in politics, and probably for all the 30-odd years I spent in practice at the Bar, specialising in criminal work, before coming to this place. No Government takes particular blame, but systemically we have perhaps not done enough to adequately collect and efficiently and fully use data to drive evidence-based policy. I know the Lord Chancellor and his colleagues understand that, and I know

the Department is making moves to improve it, which I welcome. These Bills are examples of where we can try to put some of that into practice. That is certainly what our report is looking to achieve.

Given the public's view that public protection is the top priority—we came to that conclusion after a very detailed sentencing exercise, I might add—I do not think people object to stronger sentences for the most dangerous offences but, equally, we need to be alert to identify any potential unintended consequences. That means we have to level with the public. If we repeatedly enact measures that increase sentencing, with the mantra of being tough on crime, we have to be honest with the public by saying it will cost money. Keeping an adult male in prison costs £47,000 a year. If they are a danger to the public of if they committed the worst types of crime, that is money well spent, but the Lord Chancellor is quite right to look at alternatives, where that money could be better used, for those who are not a danger and who are, in many respects, inadequate and have been failed much earlier in their lives, leading to a chaotic situation.

Tougher sentencing is sometimes part of the mix, and rightly so, but smarter sentencing is usually what is important. I think the Sentencing Bill recognises that and gives us an opportunity to build on it. That is also important because of the capacity crisis we have identified in prisons through our study of the prison workforce, where we have real difficulties in recruitment and retention. That is also important, as we cannot have rehabilitation without sufficient and adequate staffing.

As Winston Churchill said, "There is, in truth, a golden treasure in the heart of almost every man." Not everyone is redeemable, but very many are. Far more than people in politics sometimes think. It is a good thing if we can turn people's lives around through the prison system, because that means less reoffending. That is why the presumption against shorter sentences is right. There are certain areas, which have been mentioned, where we must carefully look at the detail but, overall, the evidence is overwhelming that short sentences do more harm than good. Sentencing policy should be about evidence and preventing reoffending, not about soundbites and grabbing headlines. I know the Lord Chancellor has adopted that approach.

Sir John Hayes *rose*—

Sir Robert Neill: I will give way once and once only, because time presses.

Sir John Hayes: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend. Those are the arguments that have been used for most of my lifetime: the idea that recidivism is caused not by punishment, or by retributive justice; that somehow this is less important than the fact that, as he said, the people who commit crimes have somehow been failed. For a long time this has been the prevailing view in criminal justice, yet it has brought no decline in recidivism—rather, the opposite.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Before the hon. Gentleman comes back on that, I must point out that if those who are trying to catch my eye later intervene before they have spoken, they will be moved down the list.

Sir Robert Neill: A lifetime of holding a particular mindset that is not supported by evidence is not something I would boast about. I have followed the evidence, which shows that short sentences do harm more than good. The Government have got the balance right and, with respect to my right hon. Friend, I do not think that those who take a contrary view have. Prison does not always work. It works for the worst cases but not for everybody, and let us be honest about that. That is exactly what the Lord Chancellor is trying to do.

Finally on sentencing, I hope that when we get the Sentencing Bill we will be given a proper impact analysis on prison places and demand—I am sure that we will.

As for the Criminal Justice Bill, we all recognise that when people thumb their noses at the victims of crime, people expect them to be seeing and hearing the court pass judgment, but I welcome the tone adopted in the Bill, whereby ultimately the discretion must rest with the judge. It is fair to give the judge a further tool in the toolbox to use, but there will be cases—the Lord Chancellor and I have seen this—where people try to hijack the proceedings in order to grandstand or behave disruptively. The use of reasonable force is a well-established concept. We do not want people being dragged up, at the risk to prison officers, who do dedicated work and put their health and lives on the line. We have to get a balance on this matter. The Bill achieves that and I commend the Lord Chancellor for dealing with a sensitive topic in that way.

I also hope that we will see in the Victims and Prisoners Bill the opportunity to take forward some of our Committee's suggestions on imprisonment for public protection sentences. We made a number of recommendations and the Lord Chancellor has taken forward some of them, but I believe there is scope for more. He knows my views on resentencing but I am also talking in particular about the way in which the life licence works. I am sure that there is an opportunity to improve that greatly, so that we do not have people being set up to fail from the start. There are good and sensible measures in this Bill, I welcome them and I hope the House will support it.

3.12 pm

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I am pleased to be called to speak in the King's Speech debate on policing and criminal justice. As Chair of the Select Committee on Home Affairs, I am pleased that policing is getting the attention it rightly deserves, but I say to the Government that far more needs to be done quickly, particularly on the vetting and dismissal of police officers who should not be serving in our police forces, and on specialist units for investigating rape and serious sexual offences. It is disappointing that not all police forces have those in place.

Our Committee, along with the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham), has also called for a spiking offence. In recent weeks the Committee has been concerned about whether we have the correct laws in place to deal with some of the protests we have seen and this issue of hateful extremism. We hope that the Government might address that as well. I totally agree with the calls for a statutory definition of "child criminal exploitation". The Committee has been calling for that for some time.

[*Dame Diana Johnson*]

After today's judgment on the Rwanda policy, may I again commend to the Government our report on small boats, published last year, which contains a range of policy options that the Government might want to look at again? We look forward to working with the Home Office and Ministers, and to scrutinising proposals and policies that are based on evidence and a fully-costed model.

I want specifically to address the Government's draft Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill, which is also known as Martyn's law. The Government are now planning to conduct a consultation before tabling the Bill in Parliament, and before responding to the pre-legislative scrutiny that the Committee conducted in the summer. However, it is worth remembering that the Bill is a response to the terrorist attack at the Manchester Arena in 2017 and the recommendations of the inquiry, and it is designed to help to prevent such an appalling crime from happening again. I pay tribute to Figen Murray, the driving force behind this legislation, whose son Martyn Hett was tragically killed in that attack. I hope that Ministers will be able to confirm the exact timetable for their consultation and when they plan to table the Bill in Parliament.

Sadly, we have learnt from the King's Speech that the Government's priorities for this Session do not include delivering justice to victims of the infected blood scandal, the biggest treatment disaster in the history of the NHS. That is, of course, despite the Government's accepting the moral case for compensation, despite repeatedly assuring us that they were working at pace, ready for the infected blood inquiry to report this month, and despite having received final recommendations seven months ago from Sir Brian Langstaff on compensation, not to mention Sir Robert Francis KC's framework document, which was given to them 20 months ago.

The Government did not even pledge to extend interim payments to bereaved parents, children and siblings, as was proposed by Sir Brian Langstaff and recommended clearly in his report. I am sure that Members from across the House whose constituents include those infected and affected by the contaminated blood scandal will join me in voicing our deep disappointment that after 50 years, and five years of a public inquiry, with one victim dying on average every four days, this King's Speech is yet another wasted opportunity. I therefore tabled amendment (q), with cross-party support, to try to put this matter right. Let us be clear: the Government have had all the information and time they could possibly need to set up a compensation scheme. It appears that the missing ingredient is political will, and that is not surprising. With the appointment this week of the right hon. Member for Salisbury (John Glen) as the latest Paymaster General, we have had nine holders of that post since the infected blood inquiry started in July 2017. Those receiving infected blood are not to blame for what happened to them and for the decades of delays in getting to where this issue now stands. They are certainly not responsible for the current state of public finances. I, along with colleagues on both sides of the House, will continue to push the Government every step of the way until they finally do what is right and deliver justice for this group.

Finally, I am really disappointed that the King's Speech contained nothing to deal with the bread-and-butter issues that my constituents care about, one of which is the inability to access NHS dentistry. That affects many parts of the country and there is nothing in the King's Speech to deal with it. Secondly, it contains nothing to deal with the coalition Government's having changed planning permission requirements so that companies wanting to erect telegraph poles outside people's houses to extend broadband connectivity can just do that. In Hull, three or four companies are doing that without local residents being able to have a say in it. I hope that the Government will look at this matter again, and I have tabled a private Member's Bill on that basis.

3.18 pm

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): I shall speak mainly about the various Bills that are designed to make our streets safer, almost all of which I fully support—with one detailed exception. I also want briefly to express regret about two absences from the Gracious Speech, the first of which is that of any changes to the social care system. That system has been creaking for years and the Government's solution has been to give it some more money as a sticking plaster every year. We need much more radical change than that. We need a proper workforce plan, a strategy to keep older and more frail people in their homes for longer, both by redesigning housing and by using technology. Underlying it all, we need a much more stable funding system, where we do not rely on council tax—that is a big problem.

The other absence is amendment (q), referred to by the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (*Dame Diana Johnson*), which I have signed. As she says, that scandal has been going on for a long time. She talked about when the issue came under the purview of the Cabinet Office; that is so long ago, I was the Minister responsible, and it is hugely regrettable that, six years later, we have not made enough progress.

Let me turn to the criminal justice aspects of the King's Speech. They are clearly necessary and central to restoring public confidence in the way we live in this country. Even in a relatively prosperous and peaceful constituency such as mine, people have significant worries about areas such as town centres feeling less safe. Legislation is required to address some of those issues, but obviously that is not the whole answer.

The welcome increase in police numbers that we have seen in recent years is equally important. I am delighted to congratulate Ministers and Kent's police and crime commissioner, Matthew Scott, on the fact that we now have a record number of police in Kent. That is a significant step forward, but there is always more to be done, some of which is addressed in the King's Speech.

The Sentencing Bill strikes the right balance. I am very happy to see the most dangerous criminals in prison for longer and I echo my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill), the Chair of the Justice Committee, in welcoming the provisions on shorter sentencing. My right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) rose to ask a legitimate question about recidivism. Looking at the facts, short sentences of less than 12 months have a reoffending rate of 55%, so people who have received such sentences are more likely than not to reoffend, but the reoffending rate for those who have

received a suspended sentence order with requirements is less than half that figure, at 24%, so the evidence is pretty stark that short sentences are not working to address the problem that my right hon. Friend legitimately raised.

I strongly support almost all the provisions in the Criminal Justice Bill. I am particularly keen on introducing a statutory aggravating factor at sentencing for those involved in grooming gangs. I am very much in favour of increasing the multi-agency management requirements on offenders convicted of coercive or controlling behaviour, because other agencies need to get involved as well as the police. I am particularly keen on measures to tackle violence against women and girls; many Members on both sides of this House, as well as those outside, including police and crime commissioners, have done good work on that issue.

For various reasons, I am less convinced by the proposal to give more powers to the police to enter homes without a warrant. The police have perfectly good powers under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, which gives them various powers to enter houses, and I am not convinced by Ministers' arguments for needing more powers. Indeed, I was even less convinced when I read the explanatory notes for the Bill, which say:

"The Law Commission report, published in 2020, found that the process for applying for search warrants was extremely inefficient and delays caused by this increased opportunities for evidence to be lost."

We have, therefore, an important safeguard in place—the need for a warrant—but we are "extremely inefficient" in using it. Instead of becoming efficient in using it, we will dispense with the safeguard altogether—I put it gently to colleagues on the Front Bench that that is completely disproportionate and frankly not the sort of thing a Conservative Government ought to be doing, so I hope my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor will think again about that part of the Bill.

In general, I am very supportive of the criminal justice and sentencing measures in the King's Speech. I think they are both necessary and timely, and can build on the successes we have seen in recent years, under many Home Secretaries, in enabling the police to prevent and fight crime more effectively. The Bills are a significant part of a good set of measures in the King's Speech. Despite my individual caveats on that one measure, I will be proud to support the Government in the Lobby at the end of the debate.

3.24 pm

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): I rise to speak to amendments (b) and (h). On Monday night, the Prime Minister made a speech setting out a vision for a foreign policy with morality and values at its heart. However, the absence of anything in the King's Speech that even comes close to promoting the UK as a positive and outward looking nation shows that this Government embody neither morality nor values.

A foreign policy with morality at its heart would not leave over 2 million Palestinians trapped in a humanitarian nightmare without food, water, medicine or power. A foreign policy that puts values first would not be following the direction set by Washington and the United States in addressing this conflict. A foreign policy that is built on morality would not stand by as over 11,000 Palestinians

are killed, more than 27,000 are wounded and 7,500 women and children have their lives taken from them, or as schools, hospitals, churches, mosques, refugee camps and homes are reduced to rubble. A foreign policy that is driven by values would not still be advocating the four-hour pauses that do nothing to alleviate the suffering of innocent men, women and children, and do nothing to end the violence that those living in the region have faced for decades. A foreign policy of morality and values would also not leave the Government unable to answer just how many Palestinian lives will be taken before they condemn the actions of the Israeli military in Gaza that continue to violate international law—acts of collective punishment that clearly fall within the definition of war crimes.

Instead, a foreign policy of morality and values would, front and centre, advocate a ceasefire that ends the bloodshed, allows desperately needed aid to reach those most in need and creates space following the safe return of hostages from meaningful negotiations on a lasting peace. With over 11,000 Palestinian civilians and 1,200 Israelis killed since 7 October, and tens of thousands more wounded, it is clear to me, the United Nations and every single aid agency operating on the ground in Gaza that a humanitarian pause does not do enough and does not go far enough. The innocent men, women and children of Gaza who are trapped in the never-ending nightmare of conflict, which they did not start and have no power to end, do not need a pause—they need it to stop. The only way we can achieve that is with a real and immediate ceasefire. I remain clear in my belief that that is the right thing to do and the right choice to make if we want to see both an end to the bloodshed and a lasting peace in the region, which no humanitarian pause will ever be able to achieve. That is why I stood down from the Opposition Front Bench.

I also advocate for a ceasefire rather than brief humanitarian pauses, because without a ceasefire—without a real break in the fighting—we will just see the unimaginable suffering, horror, death, destruction and devastation continue to unfold in Gaza. Without a ceasefire, the bloodshed that has already left thousands of innocent civilians dead and has wounded so many more—that has left children without parents, robbed parents of their children, and seen premature babies left to die outside their incubators—will tragically continue. Without a ceasefire, the desperately needed aid and assistance that Palestinians urgently need and cry out for—food, water, fuel and medicine—will not be able safely to enter Gaza. We will not be able to reach those who are most in need, and that will lead to the deaths of many hundreds and thousands more.

Without a ceasefire, the negotiations working towards a peaceful resolution and a real two-state solution, for which the region cannot wait any longer, will simply not have the space or the will to succeed. That is why I support the ceasefire amendments, and why I shall continue to advocate for a ceasefire to stop the bloodshed, to enable desperately needed aid to reach those most in need, and to create space for meaningful negotiations.

3.30 pm

Sir Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con): In a law and order context, there is a rich and sad irony in today's amendments on a ceasefire: the UK Parliament is soon to vote on a ceasefire in a conflict over which the

[*Sir Michael Ellis*]

UK has no control, and a ceasefire that neither side in the conflict wants. Hamas openly say that they will fight on to kill as many Jews as possible—not Israelis, but Jews—and that they would do what they did on 7 October all over again if they could. They openly say that. Israel will destroy Hamas, and will be doing the world and, indeed, the Palestinian people a great service by doing so. A ceasefire would play into the hands of terrorists and terrorism. The Scottish nationalists, among others, have engineered an amendment to this debate to incommode and undermine the Labour leadership, but what they actually undermine is community cohesion and the Jewish community in this country.

If I may, I want to address the Jewish community in the United Kingdom. There is a great deal of fear in the Jewish community, who feel decidedly unsafe and abandoned, vulnerable and isolated, and who have effectively been banned from central London for several weekends now by the risible failure of police actions and the one-sided prejudicial reporting of the BBC and others. Those factors have an adverse effect on law and order as well as on diplomatic moves internationally. We hear of deep hatred for Israel from multiple quarters.

Why do we not see mass demonstrations and similar responses when hundreds of thousands of Muslims and others are killed in conflicts elsewhere? Some 600,000 civilians, including children, have been killed in the past year in Sudan and 300,000 in Yemen. There are countless dead in Ethiopia-Tigray and in Azerbaijan-Armenia. Then there are China's hard-oppressed Uyghur Muslims, and the wonderful Kurds being attacked by Turkey, East Timor and so on. It is difficult not to come to the conclusion that the screaming about Israel is based on the ancient hatred of antisemitism. Why else ignore larger losses of life? We see hate. We see dissent and we see division.

I wish to appeal today, in the limited time available, to a different emotion, which is hope. I say to the Jewish community in the UK and to those of any faith or of none who yearn for peace and reconciliation to be of good hope. There is much to be hopeful about. Why? One of the prime reasons for the timing of the ISIS-style pogrom of 7 October was the blooming flower of a relationship between Israel and Saudi Arabia. It was apparently a few months away from fruition, and what a wonderful development that would have been. The Saudi position, as the keeper of the holy places, is such that perhaps a dozen Muslim majority countries would have soon followed suit and opened relations with Israel. However, all is not lost. The good news is that that will still happen, and the signs are that the Saudis will still pursue the project. For Jews and many others yearning for peace, it is something to look forward to. It would build on the historic Abraham accords of 2020, when Bahrain and the UAE bonded with Israel, and that arrangement has born rich fruit.

There are reasons to be hopeful even with Iran. Why there? The theocrats in Tehran are irredeemable; they support and fund terrorism in many areas and oppress and torture their own people, but, in due course, the evil designs of that clerical cabal will fail, just as the evil designs of so many others motivated by hatred have failed. The Iranian people are a wise and cultured people, and there is much to hope for there. Recently,

the people of Iran have been encouraged by their regime to chant slogans against Israel, to trample on large Israeli flags, placed deliberately for that purpose at the exit of football stadiums, and to carry out other stunts, but the Persian football masses pointedly declined to do so. What bravery and what nobility—a good sign of hope for the future.

What hope can we look to here in the United Kingdom? I think a lot. We have seen gangs of proto-fascists, frankly, crowd around Marks & Spencer branches, for example, including one in Glasgow. I wonder why the SNP does not wish to mention that in debates.

Alison Thewliss *rose*—

Sir Michael Ellis: The reality of the matter is that Marks & Spencer, which was once a Jewish-owned company but since 1926 has been owned by thousands of shareholders, is now subject to antisemitic attacks, 130 years after its foundation. Mr Marks first came to the UK escaping, ironically, another pogrom, this one in the 1880s, but there is hope even there because I can tell the House that Marks & Spencer thrives like never before: its shares are up 66% this year.

There is even more hope elsewhere. We have a Prime Minister who has supported Israel; a Leader of the Opposition who has withstood the brickbats and those who wish to divide, and is defending the Jewish people from insult and prejudice; and a sovereign, a King, who is a global leader and who will be a source for peace. There is no better hope than that.

3.36 pm

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): We cannot discuss confidence in the criminal justice system and policing without tackling the long and balefully negative influence of the aftermath of the Hillsborough disaster, which, although it was more than 34 years ago, has hugely impacted how the police and public authorities are seen across Merseyside and beyond. The impact is widespread and intergenerational, and more needs to be done to tackle it.

I had hoped that we would see a Hillsborough law in the legislative programme, to learn the lessons of the tragedy in which 97 people were unlawfully killed by the gross negligence of the police responsible for keeping them safe. To date, none of the South Yorkshire police responsible for the disaster, or for the subsequent cover-up and campaign of vilification, has been held to account, and now none probably ever will be, while the families of the dead and survivors have endured decades of wrongly being blamed for what happened and feeling that they have to defend the reputations of their loved ones from the ongoing ignorant attacks spawned by South Yorkshire police's deliberate campaign to shift the blame from themselves.

It is particularly difficult for families to feel frozen in time, forever being dragged back to their darkest days as they have to keep repeating to ignorant people what really happened: the findings of unlawful killing at the second inquests, and the findings of the Hillsborough independent panel—the truth of Hillsborough, in other words. Yet the police campaign, aided by some newspapers, was so powerful and has been so enduring that we still hear tragedy chanting at football matches, blaming Liverpool fans for what happened.

One of the biggest comforts that the families of those who died and survivors who still suffer to this day could have is the assurance that Parliament has taken steps to prevent such problems from occurring in the aftermath of such tragedies, yet we have not done so. That is why I have introduced my Public Advocate Bill, repeatedly blocked by the Government, since 2016. That is why I support the more general call for a Hillsborough law to try to prevent what happened after Hillsborough from ever again affecting victims and families who are caught up in public disasters through no fault of their own then find themselves treated with indifference or hostility by public authorities, and their feelings ignored.

There have been disasters since Hillsborough, and there will be more, although we must hope to keep them to a minimum. The Hillsborough law aims to rebalance the scales of justice towards families bereaved by public disasters and towards survivors. First, it would establish a public advocate, independent of Government and able to act at the behest of families affected after major incidents to give them a say, and to use the learning from the Hillsborough independent panel process on the huge power of transparency to stop things going wrong as they did after Hillsborough. Secondly, it would place a statutory duty of candour on public servants, not just the police, although I welcome the fact that the Government will legislate for a duty of candour on the police. That can only help to make things better, but by itself it will not be enough to prevent the recurrence of an event such as Hillsborough. Thirdly, the law would ensure proper participation of bereaved families at inquest through publicly funded legal representation, and ensure equality of arms by ending the limitless use of public authorities' budgets to defend their reputations on those occasions, no matter what the circumstances. Fourthly, it will make Bishop James Jones's charter for families bereaved through public tragedy, which has been voluntarily signed by some, legally binding on all public bodies.

The Government have recognised for years that there are things that need to be changed, but I am afraid they have been lamentably slow in doing anything about them. Bishop James Jones's report, which the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) asked for when she was Prime Minister, was published in 2017. More than six years later there has been no response to it. I find that quite shocking. I have been pressing the Government to respond for all that time and there is no conceivable reason for them not to have done so—at least since May 2021, when the last of the criminal trials collapsed. It is now two and a half years since then and there is still no response. I cannot understand what has held them up. The fact that the response has not been published is an insult to Bishop James and the work he did, and it is trying the patience of families and survivors who have already had to wait too long. I keep hearing that there will be a response soon, and I really hope that is true, but I am not holding my breath.

The Victims and Prisoner Bill carried over from the previous Session does contain a proposal for a public advocate, which I have welcomed. However, the Lord Chancellor knows my view is that his proposal is not sufficient to make the public advocate useful in preventing things from going wrong in future in the aftermath of disasters. It will simply be a signposting service for those families who are caught up. A signposting service is all well and good, and it is welcome, but unfortunately it is not going far enough. There is a real

opportunity to make sure that families caught up in future public disasters do not have to suffer the same experience as the Hillsborough families, but his public advocate has neither the independence nor the powers required to shift the dial in favour of families or to torpedo cover-ups, which is the whole point. Furthermore, it is to be directed solely by the Secretary of State, which will not give it proper independence.

When the Bill comes back for its remaining stages in this place, which I hope will be before Christmas, I will keep trying to make positive changes to improve it, because otherwise it will be an opportunity spurned. I hope that Government Ministers on the Front Bench will give thought to improving the current proposals because, if they are enacted as they stand, they simply will not be enough to make real use of the lessons to be learned from Hillsborough.

3.42 pm

Sir Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con): Let me start by saying that I have read the amendments on the Order Paper tonight, and if I could bring the hostages home and stop the fighting on the streets of Gaza, I would do it and I would do it now. But the truth is that I cannot; no one in this House can. I am a legislator in our domestic Parliament, so in this debate I want to speak out against the wickedness of antisemitism.

It is not acceptable that any community should be cowed or intimidated from displaying outward expressions of their faith through fear of violence. Let me be clear: whether it be Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism or any other faith, we allow people to express their faith visibly without fear of attack. That is fundamental to this debate. It is not right for any British citizen to be held accountable for the actions of a Government other than their own. My Jewish friends and neighbours are British citizens.

Last Friday I talked to a young Jewish doctor in the NHS who said, "Charles, being Jewish in this country right now is very, very difficult." Those are not the exact words she chose, but the words I think I should use in the Chamber. Worshippers leaving a synagogue in Maida Vale on Saturday were abused and suffered verbal threats. The synagogue is near where I grew up, near where I went to school; it is where many of my friends worshipped. This is not acceptable. A house in north London displaying a mezuzah was daubed in paint from top to bottom—not acceptable.

Without equivocation or qualification, I say this: I stand, with good and decent people of all faiths, by the Jewish community. And if any Jews face harm, I and those people will place ourselves in front of those Jews to defend them from that harm. That is a solemn commitment on my part. The Jewish community in this country is small—279,000 people—but it comprises my constituents, my family and my friends, and they are deserving of my support and the support of us all.

Let me get to the crux of the law and order parts of this debate. We have to deal with this as a Parliament, and future Parliaments will have to deal with it. Hate laws do not stop hate. We wish that they would, but they do not. Hate is one of the basest of human emotions. It is the consumption that consumes the soul in the way that cancer consumes our physical bodies. I am desperate to see peace—I really am; I want to see peace in so many parts of the world—but what history has taught us is

[*Sir Charles Walker*]

that peace is reached when the cost of hate is so great, when too many people have been killed, when scythes are exhausted, when nobody can take it anymore. That is the moment that great men and women of courage and enlightenment stand up, from both sides of that division, and set their hatreds and enmities aside, embrace each other, and hold out a hand.

The world is a complicated, complex place. If there were simple solutions, we would have found them by now; they do not exist. But there is always hope. There is always hope on both sides of this House. We settle our arguments through debate, and we are friends on either side of the House. There is a big lesson in there for many.

3.47 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to be called early in the debate. I usually wait a lot longer—

Emily Thornberry: So get on with it!

Chris Stephens: “Get on with it,” says the Labour Front Bencher.

On justice, I hope that the Minister heard my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) speak about the violence reduction unit work being done in Scotland. I was a member of the cross-party Youth Violence Commission. There is a lot of work being done on this issue in Scotland. It is a public health issue and, yes, education and lifelong learning have a role in tackling it, as I hope the Minister will take on board.

On the King’s Speech itself, this has been an extraordinary five days. It started off with a lot of the hard right-wing rhetoric, and now we see that the Government have moved, or are trying to move, to a centrist position—it is quite extraordinary. I listened to the right hon. and learned Member for Northampton North (Sir Michael Ellis), and I have heard others. I hope that he will condemn the far-right thuggery we saw at the weekend in London and elsewhere. Those were not counter-protesters—the phrase I have seen being used—but far-right thugs. Every single Member of this House should condemn those individuals, who wore a poppy on their jackets while showing a swastika tattoo at the same time. It was an absolute outrage. Those were despicable sights at the weekend.

Other measures were mentioned in the King’s Speech. After today’s Supreme Court judgment, it is obvious that there will be yet another immigration Bill—that has been an annual event in this place since I came here in 2015—to try to fix the broken asylum system in this country. I am concerned; at my surgery in Govan on Friday, I met a Palestinian constituent who has been denied asylum by the Home Office. He has not heard from his family in Gaza for 10 days, and has been denied refugee status in the United Kingdom. That tells me how broken the asylum system is, and I hope that Home Office representatives will meet me to discuss that particular case.

What was most surprising about the King’s Speech was that it contained very few measures to tackle the cost of living crisis—or, as I call it, the cost of greed

crisis—that is taking place across these islands. It is interesting that in America, President Joe Biden has launched a food poverty strategy to eliminate food poverty by the year 2030, but this Government will not match that ambition here. I certainly intend to table a Bill on that issue, because we need a strategy to eliminate food poverty. Far too many of our citizens across these islands are going hungry; it is a disgrace that that is happening in an economy like ours. It is being left to the rest of us to develop a community shop network, selling food at affordable rates or at cost, to help people move away from food banks—from emergency need.

We need that sort of system, and we need the Government to take food poverty in this country extremely seriously because, as I have said, far too many people are in food poverty, including far too many children. It makes me weep when I hear some of the stories reported to my office of people who do not have the basic essentials. We need essentials guarantees in the universal credit system. It is incredible that we have this ridiculous situation in which the universal credit system, which is there as a so-called safety net, is no longer a safety net for many reasons. Universal credit and the social security system are also broken; there were opportunities in the King’s Speech for the Government to fix them, but sadly they did not.

I associate myself with the remarks of the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson), the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, about the lack of action on infected blood in the King’s Speech. It is no longer good enough for the Government to sneak out statements just before recesses or prorogations, talking about the lack of action that is taking place for far too many people who have been caught up in that scandal. We will continue to call that out; there need to be debates and regular statements in this Chamber, so that Members from all sides of the House can call the Government to account for the snail’s pace of action. Lastly, I will be voting in the name of humanity and supporting a ceasefire in the Lobby tonight.

3.53 pm

Dehenna Davison (Bishop Auckland) (Con): It is a privilege to speak in today’s debate, on a theme that many of us, and certainly our constituents, care passionately about: reducing crime and restoring faith in our criminal justice system. I was very pleased to see the Victims and Prisoners Bill rolled over, as well as the introduction of the Criminal Justice Bill and the Sentencing Bill, both of which were announced in the King’s Speech. I will focus my remarks on the Sentencing Bill.

I have not been shy about outlining the key catalyst for my journey into politics, but I hope the House will forgive me for raising it once more, because it is very relevant to today’s debate. For Members who do not know, when I was 13 years old my dad was killed by a single punch: one blow to the head and he was gone in seconds. He was 35 when it happened; it’s funny but at the time I remember not thinking much about his age—he was my dad, so obviously he was just an old man—but now that I have reached the other side of 30, it kind of makes it all the more real and all the more stark. With no warning on a cold February Friday night, he was gone, leaving behind me and my mum, and his own mother, my amazing Nannan Sue, for whom my dad was her only child. I do not want to talk

about the perpetrator or go into detail about our specific case, but I want to outline the sheer devastation that this incident caused my family. The family are the indirect victims of crime; we may not have taken a physical blow, but the impacts of the psychological blow will be with us for life—a true life sentence.

Through a lengthy chain of events that followed, I had the privilege of being elected to this place, and I have made it my mission to raise awareness about the impact of single-punch assaults. In a few weeks' time, One Punch UK, an incredible charity, will be launching its annual "Punched Out Cold" campaign to show in quite grisly but necessary detail the impacts that violence can have. It is to remind people that, yes, it is fine to go out over Christmas, have a few drinks and get a bit merry, but it is never the right time to raise their fists. I hope Members across the House will support that campaign.

Why do I talk about my family's experience again today? One of the headlines in today's debate is raising confidence in the criminal justice system, and through my work with One Punch UK, I know all too well that many families who are the victims of single-punch assaults do not feel that the criminal justice system is on their side. Victim support is patchy and varied, and sentencing is felt to be far too low. Some would even say that it is insultingly low. People have lost loved ones through these violent acts and have seen the perpetrator released within a year. I know that no sentence will ever feel enough to make up for the loss of a loved one and the loss of all those future memories of what might have been, but we must do more to restore confidence in sentencing.

There has been concern in the past about overly lenient sentences. Indeed, in 2014 the Sentencing Council was asked by the then Lord Chancellor to develop a guideline for one-punch manslaughter, and a consultation was subsequently launched in 2017. In the seven years prior to that, the average sentence for such offences was just three years and 10 months—frankly, a kick in the teeth for the families of victims who were already going through so much. New guidelines eventually came into force on 1 November 2018, but in my view, sadly they still do not go far enough.

For single-punch assaults, the lowest possible sentence in the guidelines is just 12 months—12 months where a life has been taken, and where the families of victims do go through a life sentence. That is for those with the lowest culpability, and the guidelines state this is for cases where an unlawful act is committed, but where there was

"no intention to cause any harm and no obvious risk of anything more than minor harm",

but I think many across the House would agree with me that that in itself is deeply flawed, because when throwing a punch there is always an obvious risk of serious harm.

I and the many one-punch assault campaigners I work with believe that sentencing for such assaults should properly reflect that risk, so it is time for new thinking. That is why I would greatly welcome a discussion with the Justice Secretary—and the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for Orpington (Gareth Bacon), who I warmly welcome to his new role—about how the new Sentencing Bill could include a specific minimum sentence for one-punch manslaughter that

fully reflects the severity of the crime and the real devastating impacts on the families affected. That would be a concrete and tangible way that the Government could restore and raise confidence in the criminal justice system for the families of past victims and, heaven forbid, of future victims of single-punch assaults.

I have a little bit of time left, so, more broadly, I join the Chair of the Justice Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill), in welcoming the pragmatic approach taken by the Lord Chancellor on sentencing, with the most serious offenders rightly spending more of their sentence behind bars for the sake of public protection, while also focusing on the very real need for rehabilitation for lower level offenders to, frankly, prevent petty criminals losing their own lives to a vicious cycle of reoffending and incarceration. We know that criminal justice and social justice go hand in hand, so I am very pleased that the Ministry of Justice is taking such a pragmatic approach, and I look forward to supporting the Lord Chancellor and the entire Justice team on this legislative agenda.

3.59 pm

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): I rise to speak to amendments (h) and (r). As I have stated publicly, the attack against innocent Israelis on 7 October was an egregious crime against humanity. The families of those killed continue to mourn the loss of their loved ones, and the families of those taken hostage pray for their safe return. It would be a grave injustice not to recognise the acts of terror committed by Hamas for what they are. In the same way, it would be a grave injustice if the world turned a blind eye while innocent Palestinians are being murdered by the hour.

More civilians have been killed in six weeks in Gaza than were killed in 20 months in the Russia-Ukraine war. More children have been killed in Gaza than the annual number of children killed across all conflict zones since 2019. More United Nations workers have been killed in Gaza than in any comparable period in the UN's history, and more journalists have been killed in Gaza than in any conflict period since 1992. Hospitals have been bombed, refugee camps have been bombed and United Nations schools have been bombed. Ambulances, bombed; bakeries, bombed; mosques and churches, bombed; northern Gaza, bombed; Gaza City, bombed; Khan Yunis, bombed; the Rafah border, bombed. Almost every inch of the Gaza strip has been bombed.

More than 11,000 innocent civilians have been killed, and the hopes, dreams, and futures of nearly 5,000 Palestinian children have ended in mass graves. Some 2.3 million people are fleeing death and destruction, with babies dying in incubators, and pregnant women having caesareans without anaesthetic. There is no fuel to power hospitals, no food to feed the living, and when searching for clean water, it is as rare as when searching for gold. Make no mistake, this is a humanitarian catastrophe. That is why I urge Members to back an immediate ceasefire on all sides, and push for the release of hostages.

That call is backed by 120 members of the UN Security Council, 17 UN agencies, the UN Secretary-General, the World Health Organisation, the World Food Programme, Amnesty International, and more than 600 leading international non-governmental organisations, including

[Naz Shah]

Oxfam, Save the Children, Christian Aid, Medical Aid for Palestinians, the UN Refugee Agency, the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury. It is backed overwhelmingly by the British public, and now it is backed by President Macron of France. Almost every international aid agency in the world is saying that vital humanitarian aid cannot be delivered to people without a ceasefire. Those are the very agencies whose expertise we rely on in other conflicts and take their lead, so why not this time?

We need a political solution to an issue that leads to peace, not one that ends in a way so horrific that it emboldens more terror in the region. Injustice is the greatest barrier to peace, and we cannot expect peace unless we enable justice to be delivered. Nothing symbolises our British values better than the statue of Lady Justice towering over the Old Bailey. She is figuratively blinded because justice is unbiased, with the scales representing the impartiality of decisions, and the sword a symbol of power and justice. When Israel acts with impunity and attacks hospitals, UN schools and refugee camps, and the case for the Palestinians is vetoed by the US and UK at the International Criminal Court, the world asks whether our justice is really unbiased.

When we rightfully condemn extremist and genocidal statements by Hamas, but fail to utter a single word about the genocidal rhetoric being spouted by Netanyahu and his right-wing Government, the world asks whether our scales of justice are truly impartial. When we follow the path of justice and the rule of law in the face of Putin's aggression, yet Israel continues to defy UN resolutions with empty words and no action, the world wonders where is the sword of justice. When we fail to provide equal application of justice, in the eyes of the world, it is

“one rule for the allies of the US and another rule for the rest.”—[*Official Report*, 17 March 2003; Vol. 401, c. 728.]

Those are not my words, but those uttered by the former Labour Foreign Secretary, the late Robin Cook, in this very Chamber—words that sadly ring true 20 years on.

Our values push us to do better, which is why, despite all the risks to our personal positions, we must do what is right. While it may be a matter of convention to follow our

closest ally, the US, in the interest of foreign policy, it is a matter of conscience to step away from our closest ally in the interest of peace.

We know that eventually there will be a ceasefire in this current crisis—every war ends with a cessation of hostilities. The question is not if there will be a ceasefire, but when. For the people of Palestine, every minute, every hour and every day that we wait is another orphan, another grieving mother and another family wiped out. That is why, in standing to save the innocent lives of Palestinians and Israelis and in representing the people of Bradford West, I will be supporting the amendment that seeks an immediate ceasefire.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): It will be obvious to the whole House that a great many Members wish to catch my eye this afternoon, so after the next speech I will have to reduce the time limit to

five minutes. [*Interruption.*] There is no point in people complaining. You come to me and tell me which of these people you want not to speak. We are talking about fairness here. [*Interruption.*] It was a rhetorical question—I will stop digging.

4.5 pm

David Mundell (Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale) (Con): A number of Members have referenced the appalling practice of spiking, so I will begin by commending my constituents Mandy and Colin Mackie, who founded Spike Aware UK following the tragic death of their son, Greg, who had his drink spiked. I support their campaign to have a law criminalising spiking introduced in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

There was much to welcome in the Gracious Speech, particularly the strong focus on tackling crime and keeping communities safe from crime and antisocial behaviour. The proposed measures for ensuring tougher sentencing for the most serious offences and increasing the confidence of victims will, I am sure, receive strong support not just from Members on the Government Benches, but across the country.

The devolved nature of policing and justice in Scotland means that my constituents and everyone living in Scotland will not automatically get the benefit of those changes. That would require equivalent action from the Scottish Government, who have responsibility for policing, tackling crime and the justice system. The experience of my constituents and of communities across Scotland is that when it comes to these matters, SNP Ministers promise big but deliver small.

On police numbers, for example, the SNP Government came to power in 2007 on a commitment to recruit and maintain 1,000 extra police officers over and above the 16,234 full-time equivalent officers who were then in place. Sixteen years later, the number of police officers in Scotland is a little over 16,000—right back to where we started from. In the words of David Kennedy, the general secretary of the Scottish Police Federation:

“The state of affairs in Scotland for policing at the moment is pretty bleak.”

There are fewer cops on the street. When we ask around, people no longer see the police on the streets. From my own contact with constituents, I know just how much they value and respect the work of officers working in their communities, but time and again concerns have been raised with me that there is simply not an adequate number of police officers working within local communities to provide them with the reassurance they need and deserve.

I have been given that clear message most recently by local people in Peebles and Gretna in my constituency, where concerns have been put to me over the increased disorder and other types of antisocial behaviour. Continuing reports from those communities and others of antisocial behaviour, drug dealing and vandalism are worrying, and they are clearly making life miserable for the law-abiding majority. There is no doubt that the Scottish Government have not been providing Police Scotland with the resources it needs to properly respond to crime or to be as visible as local people expect.

The truth is that the SNP knows that is the case. Speaking in the Scottish Parliament just a month ago, Emma Harper, the SNP MSP for South Scotland, said:

“I understand that V division in Dumfries and Galloway is struggling to meet the demands of its large rural region with the current number of officers... What specific action is being taken”—by the Scottish Government—

“to recruit police officers to rural areas such as Dumfries and Galloway as a priority?”—[*Scottish Parliament Official Report*, 25 October 2023; c. 22.]

Ms Harper is entirely right to be asking why the Scottish Government have not taken the urgent action needed to recruit and maintain police officers in communities such as the one I represent.

My constituency is covered by three police divisions. In Dumfries and Galloway, there was a total resource complement of 392 officers in 2019. Three years on, that has dropped to just 354. In Lanarkshire, three years ago there was a total complement of 1,404; it is now 1,366. In Lothian and Borders, in 2019 there was a local complement of 946 officers, which has now fallen to 907. It is the same picture right across Scotland.

I will therefore use this occasion to urge the Scottish Government to take a page from the King’s Speech and give a proper focus to keeping communities safe from crime and antisocial behaviour, ensure tougher sentencing for the most serious offenders, rebalance the justice system to put the rights of victims over those of criminals, and restore the proud tradition of community policing, which has served constituencies such as mine so well over the years, by giving our police the resources and increased manpower they need to do their job and keep local people safe.

Mr Speaker: I call Michael Shanks to make his maiden speech.

4.11 pm

Michael Shanks (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab): Mr Speaker, may I start by thanking you and all the staff of the House for the very warm welcome that I have received—and for all their help when I have so obviously become lost while moving around the building?

I am glad that I chose a quiet political day on which to give my maiden speech. It is a pleasure to speak in this King’s Speech debate, and in a debate focused on improving our justice system. There is much that we can do not just to talk about being tough on crime, but to understand its root causes and tackle the underlying issues, not least the poverty of opportunity that leads so many into criminal activity.

Before I qualified as a teacher, I spent several years working with young people involved in gangs and offending. They were not bad people; they were not born bad. They were people often without hope that their lives could be anything more than what they currently experienced. When you lose hope, when your aspirations are limited by your experience, when you are unemployed or excluded from school, is it any wonder that a gang starts to seem like a reasonable option?

I am glad that the police in England are learning from wonderful projects in Scotland, as mentioned by my friend the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), such as the violence reduction unit, which I did a lot of work with. The key to such preventative projects is to continue investing, not to cut

and run when crime stats go down. Prevention absolutely works, but in order for it to work we have to keep on preventing.

It is an absolute honour to stand here as the Member of Parliament for Rutherglen and Hamilton West. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Selby and Ainsty (Keir Mather), who gave his maiden speech a few weeks ago, that he set the bar very high and somehow also managed to make me feel very old for having been born before the 1997 general election. I should say that I am not too old, as I was still aged in single digits when Tony Blair became Prime Minister—something I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Alistair Strathern), who gave an outstanding maiden speech yesterday. I also welcome to the Labour Benches my hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth (Sarah Edwards), who is similarly new to this place. It is getting to the point where we will have a maiden speech every week—perhaps a general election will not be necessary after all for Labour to form the next Government.

It is customary in a maiden speech to praise one’s predecessor, and I hope that the House will permit me to praise my predecessors. The cause of the by-election will not have escaped many hon. Members, but I met countless people across my constituency who praised Margaret Ferrier’s attention on matters of casework and local issues. Credit is due to her for that. Towards the end of her time in this place, she also started to give the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)—he is not in his place, for a change—a run for his money on participation in debates. I hope that I can match at least some of her parliamentary energy. I also pay tribute to my predecessors Ged Killen, Tom Greatrex and Lord McAvoy for their dedication to the constituency over many years.

Rutherglen and Hamilton West is steeped in industrial and political history. Rutherglen itself is one of the oldest royal burghs in the land, granted its royal charter by King David in 1126. That means that in 2026 Rutherglen will celebrate its 900th anniversary, which the community is looking forward to marking. Blantyre was the home of David Livingstone, and the museum that stands where he grew up is not just a thriving monument to his life, but a reflection on his complex past as both an abolitionist and a fervent supporter of colonialism. Across the constituency there is a legacy of coalmining, iron and steelmaking, such as the Clydebridge steelworks in Cambuslang, which stands as a sad reminder of the industrial decline of communities such as mine across the west of Scotland.

As a Labour MP, the roots of our founder Keir Hardie are in Lanarkshire. It was in Rutherglen, then called Mid Lanarkshire, in 1888—just a short century before I was born—that he first stood for election. For SNP Members, the area also saw one of their most famous by-elections in 1967: the election of Winnie Ewing, whom we sadly lost just a few months ago. The seat also holds electoral history for another reason, which I thank the House of Commons Library for double checking: until my by-election result, the only time that Labour took a seat in a Scottish by-election was in 1964, in Rutherglen. Then, the seat was taken from the Tories. This time around, it was the deposit that was taken from the Tories, and not returned. [*Laughter.*] I thank everyone who supported the by-election and our volunteers. I am proud to say that, unlike some

[Michael Shanks]

other parties in this place, our campaign did not rely on zero-hour-contract leafleteers to deliver our election material.

Enough of history. Rutherglen and Hamilton West's past is not all that it should be proud of. It is a patchwork of vibrant communities, from Burnhill and Rutherglen in the west on the border with Glasgow, to Fernhill and Whitlawburn in the south, stretching through Burnside, Cambuslang, Newton, Halfway, Blantyre and the western edges of Hamilton, which sadly will leave the constituency following the boundary changes. Some Members may know of my somewhat irrational running challenge during lockdown, when I set out to run every single street in Glasgow, achieving it some two years and 2,300 km later. I have set myself the challenge now of running every street in my constituency—something I encourage all hon. Members to do in their own path, though that suggestion was dismissed in horror by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) when I suggested we take it on together.

On my way around the streets in a by-election that took six months, I met so many incredible people doing so much in their community. It is a constituency with a fantastic sense of pride, from the various gardening groups that brighten up the streets to the charities and organisations such as Leap, Healthy n Happy, the Fernhill bingo, the bowling clubs or even Mo's famous shop in Blantyre, which operates more as a community centre than a shop. They do so much to bring the community together and reduce the social isolation that so many people feel, especially after the pandemic.

It is a community full of hard-working, decent people who are not shy of telling anyone what they think, as any journalist who camped out on the main streets of my constituency will remember during the recall petition and the by-election. They want the absolute best for their community and their family. But they are rightly angry, politically scunnered at being let down time and again by Governments distracted and divided at the very moment they need them most. Devolution promised us the chance to make decisions unique to Scotland in Scotland, but so often of late it has become a place not of high ideals of public policy but of manufactured grievance and division. Donald Dewar spoke of the Scottish Parliament as a means to revitalise "our place in this our United Kingdom".

It feels to most Scots today that neither the SNP nor the Conservatives are revitalising anything. Our much too slow march towards social justice continues to elude far too many.

My first contribution in this House was to ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to make work capability reflect the complexity of people with neurological conditions. It is a cause close to my heart, as is disability more generally. Far too many people's potential is still limited by factors outwith their control. Systems that we put in place so often hold people back. Complexity in the benefits system forces people into poverty and destitution. A fundamental lack of compassion and understanding stalls people's ambitions right at the moment it should be unlocking them. Another Lanarkshire Labour MP and a political hero of mine, John Smith, put it well in 1993: "a choice between Labour's opportunity society which invests, which educates and which cares, and the sad reality of neglect, division, and rising crime that is Tory Britain today; a choice

between Labour's commitment to democratic renewal, rights, and citizenship, and John Major's centralised, secretive and shabby Government".

Fast forward 30 years and he could be talking about where we are today: a Government who are incapable of delivering the change my constituents need.

It has become fashionable of late—perhaps it always was fashionable—to denigrate politics. It is not hard to see why people see our deliberations here as foreign to their daily lives. But I have also seen, in the few short weeks I have been here, MPs from across this House championing causes that may only affect a few people, but affect them greatly. As I used to tell my pupils when I was encouraging them to vote, politics changes our lives for better or ill and it is our responsibility to engage with it meaningfully. Having been elected, I was amazed to discover my former pupils took to TikTok to speak positively about me, which I have to say, working with teenagers, is not necessarily guaranteed. But I would also say on reflection, Mr Speaker, that since I arrived in this place I am discovering that the behaviour I sometimes used to complain about in the classroom might have been more impressive than I thought. [Laughter.]

I have no doubt that over the coming weeks and months I will wrestle with complicated issues and seek to further my understanding of topics I will openly admit I need to know a lot more about. None of us has all the answers—although I suspect that may come as a surprise to some hon. Members—but complexity should not be something we shy away from. Nuance, which seems so lacking in our political discourse today, no doubt in part because of the role of social media, is an essential part of coming up with the common-sense solutions that work for people. Being able to disagree without being disagreeable should not only be possible, but something we strive for.

With a general election on the horizon, who knows how long I might be sitting on these Benches—at least on this side of the House. The "opportunity to serve," as John Smith put it, is about putting our values into practice. I do not want to be here just opposing the Tories, but on the other side replacing them.

For every day I am here, I hope I can serve the people of my constituency well. I hope I have the confidence to stand up for those who are too often voiceless in our society, and at least try to change some of what holds back so many people in my community. This place is full of people with a wonderful calling, and I hope I can do the people who sent me here proud in the time that I have.

4.22 pm

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): What a pleasure to follow the thoughtful eloquence of the new hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Michael Shanks). One of his predecessors, Tom Greatrex, shadowed me when I was the energy Minister and became a great friend. I hope that he, too, might become a good friend over time.

When I was a boy, still younger than the hon. Member for Selby and Ainsty (Keir Mather), I attended my first Conservative party conference in 1975. Margaret Thatcher, the new Conservative leader, declared then that

"The first duty of Government is to uphold the law. If it tries to bob and weave and duck around that duty...then so will the governed, and...nothing is safe—not home, not liberty, not life itself."

For a civilised society is an ordered society, and because it is the most vulnerable—the old, the frail and the less well-off—who live on the frontline of disorder, they must be protected from it. The hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West spoke about the hopelessness that can lead to when people feel they are exactly that: on the frontline of crime. For that reason, a prerequisite of social solidarity is a civil order where law is enforced, justice prevails for all and the guilty are punished. We in this place must stand in defence of the gentle.

Yet too often in my lifetime, those who shape criminal justice have been impervious to the harm their doctrines do. Detached from the concerns of hard-working people, those with power are too often influenced by guilt-ridden, bourgeois liberals. Too many members of this opinion-forming elite have lost any sense of proportion about what matters and what does not. They are unable to gauge the significance of trivialities which waste time and resources; unable to tell the difference between the petty and the pertinent. Many people often believe, rightly, that the criminal justice system is more interested in hurt feelings than in the hurt that crime causes. They cannot understand why elements in the police appear to care more about silly social media than they do about burglaries and theft. It is preposterous that half the calls passed on to frontline police in recent years have been about social media.

Figures released in June revealed that the proportion of crimes resulting in a charge or summons was just 5.7%—a slight increase on last year's figures, by the way—which means that 95% of crimes in England and Wales go unpunished, and that is leaving aside those that are not even reported. Meanwhile, in the five years to 2023, an incredible 120,000 people were recorded for “non-crime hate incidents”. Causing offence may be rude, but is it really worthy of police time? The liberal elite who offer a multitude of platitudes about equality are none the less content to see a two-tier justice system in which cultural relativism determines what is investigated and what is not. The law must be applied equally to all, whether they are eco-fanatics or Islamic extremists. For such characters, in the absence of a sense of proportion, anything can be legitimised in the cause of self-righteous purity, and that includes, when they glue themselves to roads, stopping ambulances taking the sick to hospital.

We must end the culture of excusing and rewarding deviant and wicked behaviour. I recall from when I studied criminology at university in the 1980s a seminal book, “Rehabilitation and deviance”, which showed that a rehabilitative ideal had become so institutionalised that the criminal justice system had become disconnected from the core concept of justice. Crime is not an illness to be treated. It is a malevolent option chosen by those who carelessly harm and damage people, largely out of greed or spite or malice, yet too many heinous and hardened criminals receive risibly lenient sentences.

We should not be letting people out of prison early, nor should we be suspending custodial sentences for persistent prolific offenders. That is not what the public expect, it is not what our constituents want, and it is not fair because it is not just. Crime must be punished, and punishment matters because the public want to see law-abiding, decent, patriotic people protected from the minority who seek to do them harm. Is that too much to ask? No authentic Conservative should vote for early

release, and no authentic Conservative should vote for the end of custodial sentences. If any do, they must answer to their constituents.

4.28 pm

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Let me begin by making three points. First, I must congratulate the new hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Michael Shanks) on a sparkling maiden speech. It is worrying for an old chap like me to see such talent in one so young—but I have every confidence that we will see great things from a colleague in the years to come.

Secondly, I strongly endorse the remarks made by my good friend the right hon. Member for—let me get this right—Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell). What he said about the police reflected my own earlier intervention. It is true, and it is as true of the highlands of Scotland as it is of the south of Scotland. It is too bad that we are losing so many cops in the way we are.

Thirdly, I want to put on record my pride in amendment (o), which stands in my name and those of my colleagues. It will not be taken today, but I am proud to have been part of it. The amendment makes three fundamental points. We heard from the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), who is no longer in the Chamber, some figures showing how many innocent people are being killed. It is absolutely abhorrent and appalling. My party and, I believe, many others believe that a two-state solution is fundamental to the future of that part of the world: it is the foundation, the rock, on which we can build peace in the longer term.

Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP): I have been to Gaza. It was a hell on earth before this latest bombardment and it has been absolutely flattened over the last few weeks. The hon. Member will know that one of the lessons from our peace process was that the only way to bring about a political settlement is to stop the killing first. When 1,400 Israelis and over 11,000 Palestinians lie dead, surely now is the time to stop the killing and call for an immediate ceasefire.

Jamie Stone: That is precisely why the second main point in my party's amendment is a call for a bipartisan ceasefire right now. I also want to emphasise that the future of Gaza must not be about Hamas. We have to be very clear about that.

Leaving those introductory remarks aside, I was surprised that the King's Speech did not refer to global warming or climate change. As some right hon. and hon. Members know, the extreme far north of Scotland has seen some very severe weather. Wick harbour was damaged in the recent storms, and if that is not dealt with speedily it will undermine or threaten the future of the harbour. Offshore wind developments such as the Beatrice wind farm depend on Wick harbour, as does the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. In that same weather, the protective wall for the railway line leading from Inverness to Wick and Thurso in the far north fell away, and for a period of time we had no trains whatsoever. That prompts the question of whether Network Rail was inspecting the sea defences in the way that it should have been. I await answers on that.

[*Jamie Stone*]

This weather is real; it is happening. When I was younger, we did not have weather like this. We now have flooding, landslips and all sorts of damage. I have spoken many times in this place about pregnant mothers having to travel 200 miles back and forth to give birth in Inverness. Now that the road and rail transport links could be dodgy, it makes the ludicrous decision to downgrade the maternity services based in Caithness even more dangerous to pregnant mothers. I am glad that nothing bad has happened, but we have had a near miss with one of two twins being born in Golspie and the other in Inverness. It is just too bad, and I hope and pray that one day this issue will be revisited.

Besides the weather, it is hugely important that everything that the Government do—be it the Scottish Government or the national Government—has to be about addressing and preparing for climate change. I hope that much work will be done on this, and that much will be said in the future, but we have to get it going now before there is more damage and before my constituency's infrastructure is further undermined. It is very much in the best interests of my constituents that this work be carried out as soon as possible. I shall conclude my remarks by again congratulating our young colleague, the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West, on an excellent speech and I look forward to hearing his contributions in the years to come.

4.33 pm

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): It is a great pleasure to join today's debate. I would like to remind my constituents that this debate is about the policing and criminal justice elements of the King's Speech, followed by a vote on a simple vote of thanks for that King's Speech. That King's Speech laid out our King's Government's legislative programme, which in this context is about laws to reduce serious violence and violence against women and girls, and about raising confidence in policing and criminal justice.

I wholly support my constituency neighbour, the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), and his commitments to toughen sentences for the worst crimes, such as rape, while using community sentences more creatively for much smaller crimes. I hope that he will continue to listen to my belief that defining spiking, updating the Offences against the Person Act 1861 and using new language to have a strong nudging impact on young people will form a crucial part of protecting our constituents better. It was particularly good to hear my right hon. Friend the Member for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale (David Mundell) saying similar things earlier, not least on behalf and in support of Mandy and Colin Mackie's Spike Aware UK cause, which they established on behalf of their son Greg. I hope my right hon. Friend's constituents will join Dawn Dines and her Stamp Out Spiking cause. With many supporters on both sides, the Lord Chancellor would be working with the grain of feeling in this House, and I hope the new Home Secretary will work closely with him.

I now turn to the amendments to the Humble Address. My Muslim constituents make an enormous contribution to communities across Gloucester, and they make a huge

contribution to the multicultural diversity for which our city is such a success, not least at Widden Primary School, which comprises more than 50 different nationalities. I am very conscious that many of my Muslim constituents feel that today's debate is about Israel, Palestine and Gaza, and perhaps do not know that this is effectively a vote of confidence on the Government's legislative agenda and the specific policing and justice issues covered in today's debate.

The Government's approach to Israel, Palestine and Gaza has been laid out several times, not least in two statements in the last week. Frankly, the SNP tabled its amendment to try to embarrass and divide the Labour party. And Labour's amendment, which summarises the Government's position well, was tabled to give any embarrassed Labour Members something to vote for, in the absence of calling for a ceasefire—something over which none of us has any control.

I have been to Gaza twice, and I saw the horrors of Operation Cast Lead in 2010. What is happening today is many times worse. It is a humanitarian disaster, but neither side—neither Hamas nor Israel—is calling for a ceasefire. There are still large numbers of hostages and British citizens in Gaza who need to be released, and who need to get out.

It is not remotely my task to try to defend what Israel has done over many years in the occupied territories, but today is not the moment to call for a ceasefire when neither side has any intention to observe one and when Hamas have made it clear that they will continue with 7 October-like attacks and massacres for as long as possible. I will therefore not be supporting the SNP and Labour amendments. I will abstain on them and strongly support the Humble Address in response to the King's Speech. Our legislative programme, particularly on policing and criminal justice, is one that we should all strongly support.

4.37 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): In the time between the King's Speech last Tuesday and today's debate, we have had not only a former Prime Minister parachuted into a new Cabinet job, but yet another Housing Minister. That is 15 Housing Ministers in the last 10 years, four more than the number of Chelsea managers over the same period. It is simply not possible to build the houses we need with that level of chop and change, and when the average life expectancy of a Housing Minister is less than nine months. What can our new Housing Minister look forward to in the next parliamentary Session? We have finally had sight of the Renters (Reform) Bill, but whether it means we will see an end to section 21 no-fault evictions is anybody's guess, as that depends on reforming the courts.

After 13 years of Tory governance, we heard a King's Speech that ignored the real problems that many of my constituents face every day. The problem I hear about more than any other in my weekly advice surgery is the chronic lack of social housing. I see numbers of constituents evicted and placed in temporary accommodation outside London, hundreds of miles from their home. Merton may have the lowest number of families in temporary accommodation, standing at between 400 and 500 families, but that is 400% more than the norm. It is small in comparison with the neighbouring boroughs of Croydon, which has 4,000 families in temporary accommodation,

and Wandsworth, which has more than 3,500. Councils across the country are threatened with bankruptcy because they simply cannot afford the temporary accommodation bill.

The quality of temporary accommodation is almost universally poor and, shockingly, there is not even a requirement that families with children under two should have access to a cot. That is important because, after reading the data from the national child mortality database, we know that 34 homeless children died between 2019 and 2021 as a result of the temporary accommodation they were housed in—most of them were under one. The most likely cause of death is sudden infant death syndrome because of a lack of safe sleeping provision, such as cots. In the fifth largest economy in the world, children are dying due to a lack of access to a cot. Surely there was room in the King's Speech for a commitment to ending that shameful statistic. The all-party group on households in temporary accommodation will be leading a campaign in the coming Session to provide a cot to every family with a child under two living in temporary accommodation.

Whether or not the Government provide desperate families with a cot, we will still need the plans and the policies to build more houses. That is why I was delighted to hear my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition raise in his conference speech the issue that I and many others have worked on in the past few years with Professor Paul Cheshire of the London School of Economics: building on the grey belt. Within London's green belt alone there are enough non-green sites surrounding train stations for more than 1 million new homes. My frustration here is not about parks, hills or areas of environmental protection, but the scrappy plots of land in towns and cities, surrounding railway stations, that no one in their right mind would see as attractive. I am talking about the car wash in Tottenham Hale, the scrubland in Ealing, the waste plant in Hillingdon and the concrete airfield in Wisley—sites that no one in their right mind would recognise as green belt if it were not for their designation. I issue a plea to the Government: build on the grey belt to give my constituents the homes they deserve and give children a cot, because they desperately need one.

4.42 pm

Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), against whom I had the privilege of standing in 2015, when I was resoundingly defeated. That shows the quality of her work and the way in which she goes about things in this place, and I pay tribute to her.

It is a privilege to speak in this debate on the King's Speech, because I genuinely believe that crime and sentencing is one of this Government's key successes in the past 13 years. This Government have delivered on reducing crime and making sure that we back our police on the streets of our country. Crime is down by 50%, from 9.5 million recorded cases in 2010 to 4.3 million today. That is a real success story, and I welcome the Lord Chancellor's approach to offering rehabilitation to the offenders who would genuinely benefit from it, while making sure that we have tougher sentences for those who deserve to be behind bars for longer. We have more police on our streets now, with 584 in Hampshire alone, which means more crimes being solved in my constituency.

Before I talk about the impact on Eastleigh, let me say gently that this afternoon we have had the same old Labour party, with Labour Members constantly carping about what we have not done but offering no alternative vision for this country. Members opposite can criticise me, but, when I was a Parliamentary Private Secretary at the Home Office, the shadow Home Secretary would constantly stand up to say that we had not gone far enough but would never say what she would do. The only thing that Opposition Members have done is vote consistently against this Government's plans for tougher sentences, more police and sorting out our immigration system. The British public will see that when Opposition Members have to put themselves up at the ballot box in a year's time and they will be found wanting.

I want to talk about this King's Speech and what the Government's record on crime and sentencing has done for my constituents. As well as the focus on rehabilitation and tougher sentences, we have, through the work of this Government and our excellent Conservative police and crime commissioner, Donna Jones, recruited 582 more police. She has plans for more because, through devolution, the Government have given her the ability to channel funds into recruiting even more police. That has been enabled by a clear commitment by this Government and Prime Minister—and the last two Prime Ministers, actually—to ensure we have more police on the streets than we had when we took over in 2010.

After a three-year campaign, I am delighted that Donna Jones has listened to me and secured a new police station in Eastleigh town centre to tackle antisocial behaviour and crime—with a focus on local crime, which is blighting many of our town centres—that is fully accessible to my constituents, with a front desk, and CID and investigatory facilities in the building. That shows this Government's action to give people and PCCs the accountability and services they want, and giving PCCs that power delivers for the people we represent.

Although there are a lot of good things in the King's Speech and there is much to celebrate, I want to tackle the Minister on an issue that has been a consistent driver for many colleagues in Hampshire and for me in Eastleigh: a fairer funding formula for Hampshire police. Many hon. Members think Hampshire is a leafy county, as it is in many parts, but Eastleigh town centre is not leafy; it is a working-class, ex-railway town that has specific issues with crime. Southampton and Portsmouth, two ex-industrial cities, also suffer with specific issues of crime.

We simply do not get funded enough to deliver on the number of police we need in certain localities, such as Southampton and Eastleigh. We have had promises from various policing Ministers that they would look into this, but they have not done so. When the responsibilities are handed out to the new Ministers in the Department, I ask the Minister responsible for policing to look at that again and meet me to discuss how we increase that funding.

I fundamentally believe that this is a good King's Speech, and that the Government have a proud record to defend on tackling crime for our constituents. As I said earlier—[*Interruption.*] The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham), can shout at me, but I say to him again: the people of this country have seen a Government who have tackled

[Paul Holmes]

and reduced crime and delivered more police on the streets, while the Labour party has done what it always does, which is to offer no alternative plan and to vote against the strong actions we have taken. It is the same old Labour party—that is what it always does.

4.47 pm

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate. If we needed further proof that this Government are out of ideas and time—I was not going to mention the speech made by the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Paul Holmes)—the King’s Speech provides that evidence, because it takes no action on the issues my constituents face on a daily basis. It does not even come close. It does nothing to deal with the cost of living crisis, the housing crisis or the climate crisis.

Let me start with the cost of living crisis, if only to remind those on the Government Benches who seem to have forgotten the impact it is having on millions across the country. The cost of a loaf of bread is 20% higher than it was this time last year. How are families able to purchase basic essentials at a time of rising prices? Inflation may be falling, but that does not mean that prices are falling.

How are families to afford housing when there is a chasm between housing allowance and the lowest rents, and when mortgage rates are soaring? How are families meant to save for the future amid the longest squeeze on wages for generations? Real average weekly earnings have increased by £5 since 2010, in stark contrast to the 14% increase experienced between 2000 and 2010 under a Labour Government.

The Government simply do not see the housing crisis as a priority. We are now on our 16th Housing Minister in 13 years. Promised in 2019, the Renters (Reform) Bill is subject again to indefinite delay because of the need for legal reforms, but every week I receive emails from constituents who have been given a section 21 notice. They tell me about the exhausting experience of being evicted from the place they call home and having to live in a state of limbo, to pack up belongings and to leave support networks and employment at immense personal, mental and financial cost. There is nothing in the King’s Speech to protect renters, just further delay and inaction. The Government promised to end rough sleeping by 2024, but—again—look at their record: rough sleeping has risen by 74% since 2010.

On the climate crisis, the Government have taken this opportunity to legislate for annual oil and gas licensing rounds, deepening our dependence on dirty, expensive, volatile fossil fuels that will not only torch the climate commitments they have made, but undermine energy security. This will not bring down energy bills at home—not my words, but the words of the current Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero. Energy bills are double what they were two years ago.

By comparison, Labour would make the UK a clean energy superpower, go much faster on renewables and cut bills for struggling families. In his conference speech, the Prime Minister promised change. He did so because everywhere he looked there was a record of failure. The country knows that it is not the Conservative party that will deliver change. It is only a Labour Government who can lead us to an era of national renewal.

I want to use my final minutes to express my disappointment that my own Care Supporters Bill, which I was putting through Parliament, was ignored during the King’s Speech. It included the important principle that the care of a loved one is not an optional extra when a person is in a hospital or a care home. I ask Ministers once again to consider passing this legislation in the little time that they have left.

4.51 pm

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): It is a pleasure to contribute to this debate on the King’s Speech. Much of the work on crime and policing, I of course welcome: tougher sentencing for the most serious criminals; action on grooming gangs; and action on criminal gangs facilitating illegal migration. It is incredibly important, too, that we think about lower-level crime, such as shop theft, that is blighting many of our communities. In Ipswich town, which I represent, we have seen an increase in shop theft. It is almost at the point where it is outstripping pre-covid levels. Data is often not collected on a number of crimes, so we must have a deterrent in place. We have reached a stage where some businesses in Ipswich town centre are locking their doors and people must ring a bell to be allowed in, which is having a significant effect on footfall.

There are also groups of men hanging around and behaving in an intimidating way, and this is putting a number of my constituents off of going into the town centre. I lose count of the number of times that, when I knock on doors in my constituency, I am told by people that they go shopping elsewhere—that they are shunning their own town centre. That is utterly depressing for people who care passionately about the future of their town.

I have just done a survey on the town centre. I asked people which two options out of eight were the most important to get them back into the town centre; the first was the police adopting a new zero-tolerance approach to antisocial behaviour and crime. I will be working on with Suffolk Constabulary and the Home Office to make sure that that happens.

On the protests that we have been seeing recently, I and a number of my constituents were absolutely appalled and shocked by some of the activity that took place in our nation’s capital last weekend. There were antisemitic posters displaying a hatred that we hope has no place in our society. We saw the police posting pictures of individuals spreading hate—the worst form of hate and racism. Those individuals were not challenged at that moment; it is not enough to post pictures of these individuals after the event, saying, “Who are they? Can you help us?” The police should get in there straightaway, hold these people to account and punish them for the hate they are spreading.

To be perfectly honest, however strongly someone may feel about any cause, whether it is what is happening in Palestine or anything else, if they cannot put their posters and banners aside for two days to remember our war heroes, they should take a serious look in the mirror. People can protest on a Monday, on a Thursday or on a Friday, but that weekend is dedicated to remembering the best of us—the people who have died fighting for this country and its values.

I resented the fact that the marches went ahead at the weekend. I do not think that they should have happened at all, and I made my views incredibly clear on that. I find it utterly depressing that hundreds of thousands of people seem to be prepared, and think it is okay, to go on that kind of protest instead of respecting the people who fought for this country, for what it is, and for its values and institutions.

Florence Eshalomi: Will the hon. Member give way?

Tom Hunt: No, I am not going to give way in this speech.

I have great respect for the police of this country, but that does not mean that they do not sometimes get it wrong, or that as Members of Parliament we cannot, from time to time, criticise their approach to an issue. It is completely legitimate to do so. When activists in the streets are aggressively calling for jihad, I do not think it is okay to engage in semantics about what they may or may not have meant. Virtually everyone in this country knew what that person meant when they called for jihad on our streets, and it is despicable that action has not been taken against that individual; it absolutely should be.

With regard to the broader issue of Israel-Palestine, I mourn the loss of life on both sides, as everyone in this House does. I am utterly depressed about the situation, as are most of my constituents. I want a two-state solution, just like everybody else does, but I am not convinced that an immediate ceasefire right now would work or be appropriate, when one side would not respect it and has made that abundantly clear. Hamas must be destroyed. Over four years ago, I went to a kibbutz on the border with Gaza. My understanding is that a good number of those people have now been killed in a massacre. We must never forget the evil that happened that day. The enemy of the people of Gaza is Hamas, and we must work cross-party to support Hamas being destroyed. At the same time, every step must be taken to minimise the loss of life, but it is incredibly hard when Hamas are using innocent people as human shields. That is something we must acknowledge.

4.56 pm

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): I will focus on a few key issues as we debate the first Gracious Speech of His Majesty's reign. First, I agree wholeheartedly with the Government on one issue: the country needs change. However, I disagree that the solution is a fifth Tory term. My constituents in Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney have been hit hard by the Tory failures of the past 13 years, and they want and need the change that only a Labour Government can bring.

In the past two years, British households were the worst hit in western Europe by the energy crisis, due to our high dependency on gas. It is shocking to note that during the worst energy bills crisis in generations, we have an energy policy in the King's Speech that will not even take a penny off energy bills. It begs the question: have the Conservatives given up on bringing down energy bills for British families? The King's Speech is more notable, unfortunately, for what is not included than what is.

Focusing on today's theme, Labour will rebuild public confidence in policing and the criminal justice system, and restore the rule of law on Britain's streets. Thirteen years of Tory Government have seen over 90% of

crimes going unsolved, meaning that criminals are less than half as likely to be caught now compared with under the last Labour Government. In our town centres, police patrols have been reduced, and there are still 10,000 fewer neighbourhood police than in 2015. There was nothing in the King's Speech to turn that around.

Near-record numbers of victims are dropping out of criminal proceedings—1.6 million last year alone. Record numbers of crimes have been dropped—2.3 million last year—due to no suspect having been identified. The proportion of crimes charged has dropped by 60% since 2015, and the average time it takes for a crime to be charged has trebled since 2016 from 14 days to 42. Many of us receive feedback from our constituents that they never see a bobby on the beat. Labour will restore neighbourhood policing, putting 13,000 more officers and police community support officers on our streets, and introducing a new community policing guarantee to make Britain's streets safer.

Labour is already leading the way in Wales. Despite not having responsibility for policing, the Welsh Labour Government have provided funding for more than 500 PCSOs across Wales. Labour's plan will bring back proper neighbourhood policing by ensuring that every part of the country has more local officers and PCSOs, with guaranteed town centre patrols giving every community a named officer they can get in touch with, so that policing gets back to doing what it is supposed to do. I know that many in my constituency and across the country will welcome that. There will also be a dedicated lead focus specifically on tackling antisocial behaviour in local areas. In south Wales, under the leadership of our police and crime commissioner Alun Michael, we are already seeing a greater focus on tackling antisocial behaviour, despite strained resources. It is important that that focus provides an opportunity to work alongside partners in local authorities, the voluntary sector and elsewhere. That work is all the more important against a backdrop of significant financial pressures.

Another issue I want to focus on is the huge variance in fuel costs. Despite words from Ministers, motorists in Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney continue to be ripped off at the petrol pumps. Just on Monday this week, petrol was 10p per litre more expensive in Merthyr Tydfil than in neighbouring areas. In Merthyr Tydfil drivers paid 155.9p per litre, while motorists filling up in neighbouring towns paid just 145.7p. National retailer Asda charged drivers at their Merthyr Tydfil store 8p per litre more than in the neighbouring Aberdare store. The Government should be looking at regulation to ensure that drivers right across the country get a better deal when filling up.

It is hard to understand why, after countless promises, there is no legislation to ban conversion therapy in this Parliament. That is an absolute betrayal of the LGBT+ community and people at risk of such abhorrent treatment. We know that conversion practices are abuse and should be outlawed, but the Conservatives have failed on that, as they have on so many other issues. Countless Conservative MPs and Ministers have promised to bring in a ban, and they should apologise for yet another failure. To be clear, Labour would bring in a full, no-loopholes ban on such practices.

No one could fail to be moved by the harrowing scenes on our TV screens coming from the middle east, and I am sure that everyone wants this horror to end. I am

[Gerald Jones]

supporting the amendment from my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition and will be voting for it later this evening.

Finally, despite all the Government's talk on creating good secure jobs, it is very disappointing yet again this year not to hear any measures to outlaw "fire and rehire" practices in the Gracious Speech, especially since those tactics were used by companies throughout the covid pandemic and the Prime Minister himself said that they were unacceptable. On that issue, as on so many others, we hear rhetoric where we need action—not just weak words from a Government on their last legs.

5.1 pm

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): His Majesty's Gracious Speech to both Houses of Parliament was most illuminating, in my view, and serves as an excellent statement of intent from His Majesty's Government.

I remind the House that since 2010 there has been much progress in the area of policing and law and order. The rate of reoffending then stood at 32%, but I am proud to say that in the year 2020-21 it had fallen to 25%. Since 2010, violent crime is down by 52%, domestic burglary by 57%, and vehicle death by 39%. The measures put forward by the Government in this Gracious Speech will, I am sure, be welcomed by people across the country, particularly those who live in fear of crime and antisocial behaviour.

The Criminal Justice Bill contains some excellent proposals. We all saw the terrible Lucy Letby case play out in the courts, and indeed in the press, earlier this year. The Bill will mandate defendants' attendance at sentencing hearings, ensuring that victims have the right to air their grievances with the defendant present and see justice done at first hand. In addition to giving greater satisfaction to victims through the trial and sentencing process, the Bill will better protect children and young people by increasing maximum penalties for those who have sold weapons to minors, and by strengthening laws tackling individuals in possession of blades with the intent to cause harm.

If we can take knives off our streets and at the same time increase the deterrence, I hope we can continue towards dramatically reducing knife crime and, in particular, the horror of children killing other children. That issue has been a priority for local police and crime commissioners, including my very good friend and colleague Commissioner Mark Shelford in Avon and Somerset.

However, even with all the progress we have made so far, it is still the case that in some of our communities, vulnerable and older residents are afraid to venture outside their homes, especially after dark, and some younger people may also feel intimidated by groups of other young people. The situation has got better since 2010, but there is much more to do and the Criminal Justice Bill is a massive part of the plan to improve our law and order and the safety of our communities.

At the launch of the police and crime commissioner election campaign last week in County Durham, with my colleague Councillor Robert Potts—the Conservative candidate and a former soldier and police officer—I outlined how the Bill empowers our policemen and

women to enforce the law better and to stand up for the victims of crime. The Bill will give officers greater access to Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency records and databases in order to identify criminals and bring them to justice. Officers will also be able to enter private premises without a warrant if stolen technology, tracked by GPS, is proven to be at the corresponding location.

The Sentencing Bill will mean that life means life for the most serious and sadistic of offenders who have taken the lives of others. In addition, it will ensure that the most serious sex offenders will serve the whole of their sentence and will not have the opportunity for parole. However, when other prisoners are released on parole, home detention curfews will be extended, and Ministers will have greater oversight of parole boards to ensure that they are accountable to the public. Those measures will ensure that we can keep our streets and communities safer and protect the most vulnerable in our society—that must be the priority for any Government and any police force—while not diminishing the opportunity for rehabilitation, so that people can become better educated when serving their sentences, emerging as better citizens in our society.

The protection and safety of children, the vulnerable and the innocent must be our first priority. Indeed, in the Gracious Speech the Government announced legislation to empower police forces and the criminal justice system to prevent new or complex crime such as digitally enabled crime and child sexual exploitation, including grooming. In addition, the Victims and Prisoners Bill will implement Jade's law, automatically suspending legal parental responsibility for a parent who commits murder or voluntary manslaughter of their child's other parent. To further protect women in particular, the Government will bar prisoners convicted of the most serious crimes from marrying or entering civil partnerships in prison in England and Wales.

To sum up, the measures in the King's Speech encapsulate the values of the Conservative Government. Some on the Opposition Benches have paid lip service to law and order over the years, but we Conservatives have recruited 20,000 police officers and tackled reoffending, and we are deterring crime and making our communities safer.

5.6 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I will address two issues in my response to the King's Speech, both of which relate to violence.

In my constituency, we have lost far too many young lives to serious violence, including, since the start of September, Ronaldo Scott and Keelen Morris Wong. Both were brutally murdered in broad daylight with huge knives of the kind known as "Rambo knives" or "zombie knives." They both leave a community of family, friends and neighbours utterly devastated.

Our communities are playing their part, with support from our local councils and the Mayor of London, in tackling the complex problem of serious violence, but the Government have not been playing their part. A ban on Rambo and zombie knives was promised in 2016, but in response to my recent written question, the Minister said that it would be done "when parliamentary time allows." The King's Speech is the moment in our calendar when the Government set out how they will allocate parliamentary time, so I am dismayed that it

contains no specific mention of a ban on the largest and most brutal of knives. No one has a legitimate need for a hunting knife in London. By failing to bring forward the ban, the Government are signalling that they simply do not care about the violence being perpetrated in constituencies such as mine.

The second issue I will address is the horror that we are witnessing in Israel and Gaza. The terror attack perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October was an unspeakable violation, the largest slaughter of Jewish people since the holocaust, and the largest terror attack since 9/11. We stand in solidarity with all those affected: the injured, the hostages and the families who are bereaved or desperately worried about loved ones held captive in Gaza. Israel has the right to defend itself—as would any country in the face of such a horrific attack—but that right is not without limit. It is constrained by international law, which protects civilians, critical infrastructure such as hospitals, and critical supplies such as food, water, medicines and energy.

We have witnessed a month of unrelenting bombardment of Gaza. More than 11,000 people have been killed, homes and whole neighbourhoods have been destroyed, hospitals have been left unable to function, and a whole population is being denied access to food, water, energy and medicines. We cannot look at the horror and suffering on our TV screens and conclude that the scale of destruction we are witnessing is proportionate, or that denying aid from entering Gaza is within international law. Again, we must stand in solidarity with all those affected: the injured, the families who are bereaved and those desperately worried about their loved ones in Gaza.

I have heard from thousands of my constituents who have been in contact with me over the past month to share their views. They, too, are completely horrified by what they are seeing, and they want every possible effort to be made to stop the conflict. They understand that that is what is signalled by the word “ceasefire.”

In calling for a ceasefire, no one is suggesting that the cessation should be unilateral or without conditions: Hamas must release the hostages. In war, ceasefires do not always hold, and we must all be realistic about the intensity of this conflict, but a bilateral humanitarian cessation of the violence—a ceasefire—is surely the minimum we should be demanding in the face of such horrific suffering. This is not a minority view, but the view of Oxfam, Medical Aid for Palestinians, Islamic Relief, the Red Crescent, Christian Aid, and all of the major aid agencies with a presence in the region. It is the view of the United Nations and all of its aid agencies. It is the view of our former colleague in this place, David Miliband, as well as of President Macron, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Pope.

On this issue, the overwhelming, prevailing view of my constituents is that where we have an opportunity to call for an end to the horrific suffering in Gaza, we must do so. “Ceasefire” is the word that they understand to mean an end to that horrific suffering.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an incredibly powerful speech, and I am sure my constituents feel very similarly to hers. I think we all want to see a ceasefire—a cessation of hostilities—and we need to have the steps to bring that about. However, does my hon. Friend agree that we

need to see not only the release of hostages, but an agreement between these two warring factions and the release of prisoners from the other side?

Helen Hayes: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, and he is right. This process is not easy—nobody is saying that it is—but my conscience tells me that calling for a ceasefire is the right thing to do. That is not a unilateral laying-down of arms, but a bilateral humanitarian ceasefire predicated on the release of hostages and leading to an internationally brokered peace process and a two-state solution, with a secure Israel living alongside a sovereign, viable Palestine.

I fully understand that colleagues will have different views from those of their constituents, and there is no easy response to this appalling conflict. We must all treat each other with respect at this time, but we must all be able to stand in front of our own constituents with integrity, and at peace with our own consciences on the issues that matter most to them. My conscience tells me that I must call for a ceasefire today—a halt to this dreadful destruction and conflict. Far too many have already died on both sides, and more will continue to die if the violence does not cease. We must call for a ceasefire.

5.12 pm

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): I am very supportive of the policing and criminal justice aspects of the King’s Speech, but being very aware of the time limit on Members, for the benefit of Ministers—from my point of view, at least—I will just touch on one aspect of the Sentencing Bill. The Government press release for that Bill states:

“The Bill will also make sure vile criminals who commit rape and other serious sexual offences face the full consequences of their actions and spend every day of their sentence behind bars”.

To me, and to most people in the street, that is common sense. If a judge says that someone’s sentence is 10 years, that is what is expected, not five years just because that person has behaved quite well in prison.

However, I would like to file that quote down a little more. It refers to

“vile criminals who commit rape and other serious sexual offences”.

Having some experience of the legislation around child sex offences, I rank very many of those convicted of child sexual abuse as criminals so vile that they should be included in that category. Legislation in this country took a big step to protect children against those criminals in 2003, and since then this country’s child protection legislation has been world leading. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 and subsequent developments and improvements have been agreed on a cross-party basis, including the grooming aspects of that Act.

The Act introduced for the first time the biggest step in child protection: the innovation of making child grooming a crime. Even today, few members of the public and probably very few MPs have any real knowledge of just how vile the actions of many paedophiles towards children often are. In Committee on the Sex Offenders Bill in 2003, I became aware that some Members, on both sides of the House, were oblivious to the vile actions that many paedophiles apply to children. Consequently, I arranged an informal cross-party meeting of the Committee with some of the top police from the Met paedophile unit. One MPs asked the superintendent to

[*Sir Paul Beresford*]

describe the worst he had come across. He did, and it shattered the Committee members—they were aghast and shocked—and that part of the Bill then went through seamlessly. I will not repeat what the policeman described, suffice it to say that to call it vile is a gross understatement. Those and virtually all other child sex offenders, male or female, can only be described as vile—or worse.

Some years ago, I was saddened to read a short article in a quality UK weekly by a journalist who partially absolved people who collect child sex abuse material. The article's reasoning was that viewing the photos did not involve their actually touching children. It was appalling. Individuals who collect such photos create a market that induces others to produce them by abusing children. At the other end of the camera is a child being abused.

I hope the Secretary of State for Justice and his Ministers will consider including convicted child abusers among those who should spend every day of their sentence in prison without early release. That includes those who may not have touched a child but who, by collecting what are not infrequently thousands or tens of thousands of images of child abuse pornography, are also culpable, and should hence spend every day of their sentence behind bars, as the judge may decide is appropriate when they are convicted.

5.16 pm

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): For the last five weeks, I have been watching in utter despair as Hamas killed hundreds of innocent Israelis and took over 200 hostages, and as the Israeli military killed over 11,000 Palestinians. The overwhelming majority of Palestinians who have been killed are women and children, not Hamas fighters. They have been killed in their homes, schools and refugee camps, in churches and mosques, while delivering aid and in hospitals as patients, staff and those taking shelter.

At Al-Shifa Hospital, premature babies lie starving, are wrapped in foil to stay warm and are waiting to die. There is no oxygen, no food and no fuel to run generators. As we speak, Israeli troops have entered the hospital, putting patients and staff at grave risk. Over at the Al-Quds Hospital, Israel has fired live ammunition directly at the intensive care unit, with most of the victims being children. There are no longer any working hospitals in northern Gaza due to the depletion of fuel, lack of power and constant attacks. I have seen pictures of parents carrying pieces of their babies—their children—in a carrier bag. There are still thousands of people missing, buried alive under the rubble of the half of Gaza's houses that have been destroyed.

Across this country, we have seen hundreds of thousands of people peacefully marching on the streets and urging the Government to call for a ceasefire, despite the former Home Secretary's branding them hate marches. The people of Britain have continued to turn out week after week to demand justice for Palestinians, and contrary to what she claimed, the violence at this weekend's protests was by the far right during the two-minute silence to mark Remembrance Day. Emboldened by the former Home Secretary's extreme hate-filled rhetoric, they attacked the police and chanted Islamophobic slogans. Today's debate

is about raising confidence in policing. As a former Greater Manchester Police officer, I believe it is shameful that the Tories are the biggest driver undermining that.

I have visited Israel and Palestine and seen the discrimination and suffering of Palestinians in the west bank and occupied territories. I have championed the need for a two-state solution whereby Israelis and Palestinians can both live peacefully. It is extremely painful to watch the sheer scale of Palestinians being displaced—more than one and a half million already. That reminds me of my visit to a UN refugee camp in Iraq, where I met three generations of Palestinian women living in a tent. The grandmother had been displaced in 1948. Her daughter had been born into a refugee camp, and that daughter had just given birth in a different refugee camp—three generations born in three different refugee camps. That is the reality for so many Palestinians, but it does not need to be like that.

If we had had a ceasefire yesterday, 144 Gazan children would still be alive today. Israel has already crossed every red line imaginable and broken international humanitarian laws. History has shown us that military actions alone do not resolve conflicts, and Israel's use of force will not resolve this one. We need a full and immediate ceasefire now. My constituents have demanded that, and I will not refuse them. Supporting a ceasefire is the very least we can do.

5.21 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is a joy to participate in this debate on the King's Speech from the Back Benches again, following my year of exile in the Government Whips Office. If I had more time I would have commented on some of the amendments calling for a ceasefire and addressing the situation in Israel and Gaza, and on some of the scenes we have seen on our streets in this country over a few weeks. However, due to lack of time, I can say no better than that I agree with every word that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Northampton North (Sir Michael Ellis) said earlier in what I thought was an excellent speech.

On the other aspect of today's debate, criminal justice and policing, I welcome the measures that the Government are bringing forward, because they build on the positive progress that we have made over the past 13 years to bring down crime and improve our criminal justice system. Clearly there is more to do, and I welcome the measures to ensure that those who commit the most serious crimes and are convicted serve the whole of their sentence in prison. That is absolutely right.

I also welcome the measures to address drug and knife crime and antisocial behaviour. We are lucky enough in Cornwall to live in one of the lowest crime areas of the country, but we have a significant problem with antisocial behaviour. The two main towns that I represent, Newquay and St Austell, both have significant issues with antisocial behaviour. That issue is raised with me frequently by local residents, and I look forward to working with the Government to see what more we can do to address it.

Labour Members have mentioned raising confidence in policing. For the sake of transparency, I declare that a member of my immediate family is a serving police officer, and as a family we are very proud of them and the work they do. It is incredibly welcome that we have

delivered on our manifesto promise to recruit an additional 20,000 police officers. In Devon and Cornwall we now have 3,715 serving police officers, which is 600 more than in December 2019 and a record number. We must ensure that those additional police officers are seen and felt on the front line. The public need to see and feel that we have those additional police officers on the front line, and that is not always the case. I encourage the Government to look at the reasons why that is not seen to be the case, and to see what more can be done.

We must ensure that police officers spend their time doing police work. One thing I have observed from going out on patrol with police officers in my constituency is just how much of their time is spent filling the gaps left by other parts of the public sector, whether that is the NHS, the local authority or, in particular, social services. It is not right that police officers are expected to spend so much of their time doing work they are not trained to do and that should be the responsibility of other parts of the public sector. I encourage the Government and, in particular, Home Office Ministers to look at what more can be done to ensure police officers spend their time preventing and fighting crime, rather than filling the gaps left by other parts of the public sector.

We also need to recognise that our expectation of policing has changed massively in recent years, and to understand the greater scrutiny that our police officers are under. Many of them welcome that, but some of the recent coverage in the media is having an impact on the morale of police officers on the frontline. We need to be aware of that. Many are concerned that, just for doing what they believe is the right thing to deliver the job, they may be held up and possibly even lose their job. While it is right that we hold them to account and that we remove those rogue bad apples that are inevitably in any organisation of that size, we need to recognise that the vast majority of police officers are decent, honest and professional, and they simply want to do a good job to serve the public and keep us all safe.

5.26 pm

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab): I rise to support the amendments in my name and amendment (h), and to highlight the failures of this King's Speech to ensure that the Government uphold international humanitarian law.

Yusof and his two older siblings counted themselves lucky. Their dad, a radiographer at the local hospital in Khan Yunis, had installed solar panels at their house, so even when their neighbourhood lost power, they could still watch their favourite cartoons. That is what they were doing when an airstrike hit from Israel. Miraculously, Yusof's brother Hamed was unharmed. His sister Jury was found in the rubble. She was injured, but alive. Yusof's mother searched in vain for her youngest son. She went to the hospital, asking if anyone had seen her "handsome and curly-haired" boy. It was Yusof's dad who found him. His body had been taken to the morgue. Yusof was seven years old when he was killed. His dream was to be a doctor when he grew up. On his final day, he ran and hugged his dad before he left for work. His dad recalled:

"Yusof kissed me and said goodbye".

Yusof is one of the more than 4,600 children and more than 11,000 Palestinians of all ages who have been killed in Israel's assault on Gaza. The World Health Organisation says that a Palestinian child is being killed

every 10 minutes; Yusof was one of those. Behind every number we read and behind every horrifying statistic we hear, there were hopes and dreams just as real and just as valuable as yours and mine. I cannot believe that it has to be said, but it clearly does: Palestinian lives matter just as much as anyone else's.

Israel's assault on Gaza has now killed one in every 200 Palestinians in the besieged enclave. Hospitals, ambulances and refugee camps have been targeted. Premature babies in incubators—let me repeat that: premature babies in incubators—are dying because hospitals have run out of fuel. In the illegally occupied west bank, where Hamas are not in power, around 200 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces or armed settlers. We could spend all day listing the horrors that the likes of the United Nations Secretary-General, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have said amount to clear violations of international humanitarian law and war crimes.

The truth is that Israeli officials have been open about their intent. At the beginning of the assault, an Israeli military spokesperson said that the emphasis in bombing was on "damage...not accuracy." A former head of the National Security Council said that the aim was to make Gaza

"a place where no human being can exist."

This weekend an Israeli Government Minister said that the war would be "Gaza's Nakba", a reference to the 1948 catastrophe where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forcibly expelled from their homelands and never allowed to return.

None of that is to downplay Hamas's appalling killing of Israeli civilians. I have condemned that already and do so again today. I repeat the calls for the release of all hostages, but, as the UN Secretary General said, none of those crimes excuses what we have seen since. Unlike those crimes, Israel's assault on Gaza has been done with the Government's unequivocal support and complicity, and almost certainly with British-made arms—*[Interruption.]* I see smirking on the Government Front Bench; personally, I do not think it is a laughing matter. When the Government refuse to support a ceasefire, they give Israel the green light to continue its slaughter of innocent Palestinians. When they refuse to support a ceasefire, they are refusing to push back against Israeli politicians and policies that aim to ethnically cleanse Palestinians from their lands.

I am utterly horrified that, after all that, Members of this House are still willing to give Israel the green light, proposing nothing more than humanitarian pauses. There is nothing humanitarian about letting children eat a little today only to bomb them tomorrow. The only humanitarian way forward is an immediate ceasefire, as has been recognised by everyone from the Pope to the President of France, as well as 76% of the British public, according to polling. To hon. Members across the House, I say this: the children killed in Gaza today could have been saved by a ceasefire agreed yesterday, so I urge and implore you on this. We will be remembered for this vote, so let us be on the right side of history and vote for a ceasefire.

5.31 pm

Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con): It is an honour to speak in this debate on the first King's Speech of His Majesty's reign. I pay tribute to him for

[Dr Neil Hudson]

his unstinting service to our country and the Commonwealth, carrying on the truly humbling legacy of his mother, Her Majesty our late Queen.

It is important that those who commit crime must feel the full force of the law and serve the penalty for the crime they have committed. I very much welcome the Government's clear commitment to that in the King's Speech. The Sentencing Bill will introduce steps to ensure tougher sentences for criminals and increase the confidence of victims. It is heartening that the Government have also announced a Criminal Justice Bill to let our police tackle the developing crimes of our age.

It is important that we heard a commitment to ensuring that the treatment of victims will be a key feature of the Government's approach to crime. I believe that at the heart of the desire for a firm and effective criminal justice system is the shared belief that everyone deserves safe and secure communities in which to thrive, and our amazing police forces are key to that. I pay tribute to our police, the security services and our military, who do so much to keep us safe.

The Government have delivered an extra 20,000 police officers nationally, and I welcome that. In Cumbria, we have seen a more visible police presence on our streets and more police stations opening up. As a local illustration, since PC Stewart Green started as the community beat officer in Penrith in July, there has been a 15.7% reduction in antisocial behaviour compared with in the same period last year. My constituents, who live in rural areas, are often affected very different types of crime. Rural communities face issues such as theft of farm equipment and machinery, fly-tipping, hare coursing, poaching, wildlife crime, and the theft of pets, farm livestock and indeed horses. I welcome how, over the course of the Parliament, the Government have taken important steps to tackle that. Those crimes also affect the mental health and wellbeing of our rural communities, which I am passionate about. The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee recently published a report on rural mental health and has noted the impact of such incidents on our communities.

I am proud that the Government have a strong record of action on animal welfare in this Parliament. In the King's Speech, their commitment to banning live exports for fattening and slaughter is a clear sign that they support our high animal welfare standards. I look forward to them continuing that in this new Session on issues such as puppy smuggling, the smuggling of heavily pregnant dogs, banning the importation of dogs with horrifically cropped ears and tackling pet theft.

Biosecurity is pivotal to national security, and it is so important that the Animal and Plant Health Agency is supported in tackling infectious diseases such as avian influenza. At the EFRA Committee, when we had the Secretary of State and permanent secretary before us, we reaffirmed how important it is that APHA's Weybridge site is redeveloped.

On the safety of our communities, I am fully behind the Prime Minister in bringing forward the necessary ban on the American XL Bully dog to keep both people and other animals safe.

I would like to give my wholehearted support to the Government's timely commitment to the Holocaust Memorial Bill. In a deeply troubling time for the Jewish community, it is only right that we make sure the holocaust is never forgotten.

I strongly support many Bills in the King's Speech, including on improving transport connectivity. It is important that they go ahead. The Renters (Reform) Bill will give renters and landlords important rights and is to be welcomed. The tobacco and vapes Bill has my full support and is a landmark step to eradicate the threat of vaping for our under-18s. I hope that the Bill will be wide-ranging and that we truly get a grip on a potential ticking time bomb for public health. I welcome the football governance Bill and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) for her strong work leading the fan-led review.

I very much welcome the Government's legislative agenda in the new Session, which is strong on criminal justice and on empowering our communities and keeping them safe and prosperous.

5.35 pm

Ashley Dalton (West Lancashire) (Lab): Let me begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Michael Shanks), who is no longer in his place, on his excellent maiden speech.

I was excited to witness, for the first time as a Member of this place, His Majesty deliver his first Gracious Speech. I turned up last week eager to hear the Government's comprehensive and ambitious plans for the parliamentary Session, but what the Government had to offer was nothing short of threadbare. Perhaps if the Prime Minister had spent less time on the phone to his predecessors trying to get them to come and save his skin, he could have drawn up a plan to get our country building again and to help working people get on the housing ladder.

Sadly, there is a complete absence of home building in the Government's legislative programme. The aspiration to own one's own home sits strongly in the British people. It is not just an aspiration to own property but an aspiration for security—a roof over their head and those of their family, and a solid foundation on which to build their future. But far too many are locked out of that ambition, watching as the dream of owning their own home is eroded by soaring inflation, record high energy bills and the highest tax burden on the British people since the post-war period. The British people do not lack ambition. They know the potential in their communities. But we must take the decisions here that meet their ambition out there.

Getting the balance right between green space and building what we need is vital, and it can be done. The agricultural industry is so important to my constituents. Our farmland does not just contribute to the local and national economy but keeps the country fed. We can protect our farmers and their land while finding space to build the homes we need for the future. A green belt policy that protects disused car parks while green spaces are handed over to developers simply does not work. The grey belt space is there, often adding nothing and in some cases blighting our communities. We must have the ambition to use it.

I say to the Prime Minister that in West Lancashire we are open for business. Skelmersdale is the most populated area in my constituency, with around 40,000 people making Skem their home. When the spades first entered the ground in Skelmersdale in the 1960s, the new town was intended to provide homes to over 80,000 people, but 60 years later, we have not reached that number. We have the potential to deliver the homes we need to realise the aspirations of a modern Britain, but we cannot do that without the critical infrastructure that sits alongside it and has too often been ignored in recent developments. Human beings need more than just a roof over our heads. We need connectivity, services and community. Skelmersdale has been without a train station since 1958—three years before it was designated a new town. It is one of the largest towns in the entire country without a station, and is the perfect candidate for levelling-up funds, but it has received none. Projects such as a new railway station in Skem would constitute a genuinely new offer for transport regeneration in the north-west.

Claims that the Government are levelling up through investment in the Network North project are also, frankly, laughable. Despite fanfare and promises, there is little on offer for communities like mine. The now Prime Minister once boasted about changing the public funding formulas to divert funding away from deprived urban communities to more prosperous towns. Since then, communities crying out for investment have seen more of the same. Take a cursory glance at some of the projects referenced in the Government's Network North proposals and you will find that many of them already exist.

It is not just our trains that are not working. Devoid of ideas and vision for this country, the Government sent their own MPs home early on half the parliamentary sitting days in the last Session. There are no signs of that changing with the King's Speech, which contains the fewest new Bills in almost a decade. The sad reality of the situation is that the Prime Minister has no confidence in his Government to get legislation through Parliament. He does not even trust his own MPs enough to make one of them the Foreign Secretary. Even worse than that, the Prime Minister seemingly has no confidence in himself. Like King Midas on opposite day, everything he touches turns to disaster. It is clear that the Government have given up on governing, so why not let the British people decide at a general election?

5.40 pm

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): It is a privilege to represent the constituents of Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner, which is characterised by a very strong community spirit in the eight villages that make up the constituency. Thankfully, today our Metropolitan police figures show that from Harefield to Hatch End we continue to experience low levels of crime overall and that it is a safe place to work, live and raise a family. However, many constituents remain concerned about matters relating to law and order. As part of the Greater London area comprising our capital, issues from disorder associated with recent marches in the centre of London through to the rising impact of online and digital crime are at the forefront of our minds. Even in an area which looks and feels safe to most residents, there are examples of particular individuals and groups

feeling vulnerable. They deserve our attention to ensure that this is a place where all our people are able to feel, and be, safe.

That is why I welcome the measures contained in the King's Speech that aim to update our laws to take account of changing circumstances in the world and in our society, to keep people safe in the face of the emerging challenges. The Victims and Prisoners Bill represents a suite of measures intended to improve the way in which we deal with crime and the victims of crime. Engaging with constituents, I have been struck on a number of occasions by the need to ensure effective and appropriate support for women and girls who have been victims of crimes targeted against them, particularly, in our local area, harassment on public transport. I welcome Transport for London's response to our lobbying, seeking to make public transport a safer space for women and girls. The move to place the victims code on a statutory footing and the minimum service levels set out for victims are a great opportunity to ensure that our response after a crime is of a higher and more consistent standard than has been the case in the past. On the whole, our police do an excellent job in always challenging circumstances, but ensuring that all victims benefit from a consistent standard of treatment will further build public confidence in our police.

The Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill represents a significant step forward in helping constituents to feel confident online. Robbery has become a vanishingly rare occurrence in my constituency and across the capital, but scams, online fraud and targeted crimes such as push-payment frauds are becoming a significant and growing concern to many. For those who, for whatever reason, may feel less confident going online, they are a barrier to engaging in our increasingly digital society. As we have seen that growth, it is welcome that the Government are responding with effective measures to deal with digital crime. As that has paralleled a consistent fall in in-person crime, our legal framework needs to be updated through the Bill to take account of the changing world and its new risks.

Finally, I wish to touch briefly on the ceasefire amendments. Like all Members, I have received many representations about the events following the Hamas terror attack of 7 October and the targeted massacre of civilians. I represent a very diverse constituency and have engaged with constituents who have been personally affected both by the events in Israel, and the attacks and issues for family members in Gaza. Each have presented incredibly distressing issues, which I know have moved many in the whole country and have been expressed in this House tonight.

I particularly welcome the work done by the Government—as well as the regular updates on it that we have been receiving in the House—to support humanitarian efforts for the residents of Gaza, who are themselves, of course, victims of Hamas in their own right. The humanitarian pauses that have been agreed represent progress. Ours is a country that upholds international law and remains committed to the leading example of international human rights law—the European convention on human rights, based on our own domestic law—as well as the wider international laws of war and humanitarian law. I therefore welcome the Government's clear and unambiguous commitment to press all parties to ensure that those laws are respected in Israel and Gaza.

[David Simmonds]

The note of realism that was struck by the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden)—he is not in the Chamber this evening—on the BBC this morning very much reflects my view that there has been a long-term cycle of violence that is costing many lives on both sides, especially since Hamas took over the governance of Gaza in 2006. Their absolute refusal to countenance a ceasefire, now or on any previous occasion, tends to nullify the humanitarian purpose of ceasefire calls from many quarters. If we are to break that long-term cycle of violence, we need to ensure that we do not vote for a ceasefire that would undermine that.

5.45 pm

Sarah Dyke (Somerton and Frome) (LD): My constituents know that I stand in solidarity with those affected by the atrocities in the middle east. As Liberal Democrats, we call for an immediate ceasefire and a two-state solution, and a path to peace in the long term.

It is a privilege to speak in a debate on the King's Speech—the King's first Speech. May I begin by passing my condolences to the family of Lord Cotter? Brian Cotter was a Somerset man, and a tireless advocate for both small businesses and mental health.

The Home Secretary may have changed, but it is still "same old" with this Government. Charge rates are the lowest they have been for years, especially those for burglary. One of my constituents had £55,000-worth of equipment stolen in September, and has still not met an officer. While I welcome the success of Operation Soteria Bluestone, pioneered by the Avon and Somerset force, it is not enough for the Government to rest on the laurels of the academics and the officers who created it. We need to create a pipeline of trust by committing ourselves to educating all boys and men about violent crimes against women and girls. We also need more officers from diverse backgrounds, and a policing culture that welcomes and values them. Simple numbers in uniforms are simply not enough without thorough vetting and training. We need trusted, visible and local community police officers who are much more effective in their communities than police and crime commissioners. The Liberal Democrats have already committed themselves to all those changes.

Delay is the mantra of this Government, and nowhere do we feel that more than in Somerset. We are missing out on 18,000 new homes because they are in the levels and moors catchment area—a designated site of special scientific interest endangered by the high levels of phosphates in our water systems. I have 600 constituents on the waiting list for affordable housing. In Frome the average rent is nearly £1,500 a month, making up 50% of the average salary. One family of six are currently living in a two-bedroom apartment.

At this point, I must declare an interest as a proudly active Somerset councillor. Without new houses, the council cannot enforce section 106 agreements that make developers provide funds for the benefit of local communities, or claim the community infrastructure levy. A recent no-cost trial in the west country, led by Somerset Council, showed that modular water treatment units removed more than 98% of phosphates and 88% of nitrates. I want to see the Somerset partnership's bid to the nutrient mitigation fund granted, and adopted across

those affected areas. We do not need to be stuck in an archaic binary of either not building anything or scrapping environmental safeguards. The Liberal Democrats will use a new blue flag standard to protect our water, including wild swimming areas such as the site in Farleigh Hungerford in my constituency. We will also build 150,000 new social homes a year. Those aims do not need to be mutually exclusive.

As a farmer, I could see that the only potential Brexit benefit was common agricultural policy reform, but the Government have botched that, leaving many farmers on the brink. Farmers need the security of clearly communicated long-term planning, not being left in the dark over de-linked payments and betrayed on pompous flag-waving trade deals. In the meantime, Somerset high streets are emptying fast. Local shops, banks, post offices, pharmacies, GP surgeries and NHS dentists are all being priced out by the Tory business rates, forcing residents to travel further to access their needs. We will reform high street business rates and work hard to ensure that nobody is out of reach of banking services and affordable food. The Liberal Democrats listen, plan and act. Please, let's move forward. Let's call a general election now.

5.51 pm

Darren Henry (Broxtowe) (Con): I would like to start by thanking His Majesty King Charles III for his speech and echoing the comments of many of my hon. Friends and colleagues regarding how special it is to be speaking in the first King's Speech debate for 70 years. Today's debate on policing and the criminal justice system is of particular significance, as these are issues I am often contacted about as the Member of Parliament for Broxtowe. The safety of our families and loved ones must be of the highest priority.

It was reassuring to see the Sentencing Bill announced in the King's Speech. Tougher sentences for the worst offenders will ensure that dangerous individuals are off our streets and not endangering the public. I would like to put on record my personal thanks to all those police officers in the UK who serve our country, especially those within Nottinghamshire, and also to thank all those who work for the police in supporting roles. I will single out one individual in particular: neighbourhood policing inspector, Inspector Mike Ebbins, who I regularly meet to discuss the specific crimes affecting people in Broxtowe. It is essential that we are keeping our communities safe. This will also be achieved through the Criminal Justice Bill, which seeks to empower our police forces and justice system to prevent crimes such as digitally enabled crime.

I am glad to see a focus on the welfare of victims. Keeping victims at the centre of our criminal justice system and ensuring that as much support as possible is in place for them is essential. I welcome these new measures, especially the proposals in the Victims and Prisoners Bill to monitor how criminal justice bodies comply with the victims code. The Bill also sets out plans to improve support for victims, including a statutory duty for partner agencies to collaborate. The Bill will have a hugely positive impact on those most needing our support.

I would like to put on record my deep disappointment that a mental health Bill was left out of the King's Speech. Since first being elected, I have been campaigning

for mental health reform and the increased support that is desperately needed across the UK. I was encouraged recently when the Government published the suicide prevention strategy, but it does not go far enough. I stood in this Chamber in 2020 and debated the huge merits of the Mental Health Act White Paper. Having a person-centred approach to in-patient facilities, and removing autism and learning disabilities from being categorised in the Act as mental health disorders, are changes that are missing today, and that is of course a detriment to many throughout the UK. I implore the Government to start prioritising mental health reform as soon as possible.

The King's Speech also discussed the importance of looking after veterans. As a veteran myself, I am passionate that the UK should become the best country in the world for a veteran to live. The Government have made huge strides in veteran care in recent years, and we have the first ever Minister for Veterans' Affairs attending Cabinet in order to prioritise that care. We have had many successes in improving services for veterans since establishing the Office for Veterans' Affairs, such as the dedicated referral pathways for mental health, physical health and homelessness established by Operation Courage, Operation Restore and Operation Fortitude.

I recently had the pleasure of opening the first ever military service leavers pathway into policing, which I am proud to champion. The course is the first of its kind, and I look forward to seeing service leavers take up their place in Nottinghamshire police.

Sir Gavin Williamson (South Staffordshire) (Con): My hon. Friend makes a very interesting point on the value that veterans can contribute not just to public sector employers such as the police but to so many private sector employers. Military service is a driver in raising skill levels. Does he have any thoughts on how these skills could be better used in future?

Darren Henry: I completely agree with my right hon. Friend about the value of veterans' transferable skills, teambuilding and sense of duty. Those things are important and can be transferred to many forms of employment, particularly policing.

The military-to-policing scheme gives veterans a direct pathway into the police via the police constable degree apprenticeship, ensuring that skills gained in the military are transferred to a new career following a shortened training scheme.

It would be remiss of me not to mention my disappointment at seeing incredibly important areas, such as mental health, not addressed in the King's Speech, as they should have been. However, I welcome the proposed Bills and believe that many will have a directly positive impact on my constituents in Broxtowe.

5.56 pm

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): In speaking to amendments (h) and (r), the House will be aware that I have openly called for a negotiated ceasefire on both sides, along with the release of all hostages. However, neither the Israeli Government nor Hamas have agreed to an immediate ceasefire. Hamas have stated that they will continue with their strikes against Israel, and they have not heeded repeated calls by the UN and others for

an unconditional release of all hostages. Likewise, the Israeli Government have rejected growing international calls for a ceasefire and have continued with their relentless bombing. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has stated that a ceasefire would be possible only if all 239 hostages were released.

Who is suffering intolerably in the meanwhile? The Palestinian people. After the Hamas terror strikes that tragically resulted in the killing of well over 1,000 Israelis, I told the Prime Minister on the Floor of the House that, while Israel has a right to defend its citizens and rescue its hostages, its response must be proportionate and submit to international law. However, over 11,000 Palestinians—and rising—have been killed.

Shockingly, in just 40 days, one in every 200 people living in Gaza is no more. I have been particularly horrified by the killing of more than 4,600 innocent children. That is one child dying every 12 minutes. The number of children killed in just over four weeks of Israeli bombardment has surpassed the number killed in conflict zones across the globe every year since 2019. As a parent of two children, I cannot imagine what their parents are going through, if indeed they are still alive.

Whether or not the Israeli Government and Hamas listen to our pleas, I believe we must call for an end to the violence to save lives. The Netanyahu Government must be made to realise that razing Gaza to the ground and indiscriminately killing Palestinians will not lead to safety and security for people living in the region. It will merely fuel more anger and resentment, taking us further away from peace and prosperity for all and from a viable two-state solution. I have always spoken up for human rights, and in the past six years I have often spoken up for innocent Palestinians, who have suffered decades of injustice, occupation and forceful removal from their homes. They are now facing an atrocious siege and further bloodshed.

Matt Western: My hon. Friend is making some important points. Does he agree that we need a ceasefire or a cessation of hostilities—we can use whichever words we choose? I sense he does agree with that or certainly with the sentiment. Does he also have a frustration that the Scottish National party amendment before us tonight is designed as a political ploy, and therefore we will not be voting for it and will vote instead for the Labour amendment?

Mr Dhesi: I thank my hon. Friend, who is correct in what he says. A lot of our constituents will not be aware of the procedures and protocols of Parliament, and how Labour Members hardly, if ever, vote for any SNP amendments. This raises another important point that my constituents have been emailing me about: signing early-day motions. I have been trying to explain to constituents, on the doorstep and elsewhere, that hundreds of early-day motions are in circulation at any given time and that shadow Ministers, such as myself, and Ministers never sign them and they do not have the requisite power. Those are some of the protocols that my constituents and others will not be aware of.

I wish to thank the Labour Front-Bench team, who have listened patiently to the passionate arguments of Members such as myself and tabled a comprehensive amendment last night addressing our concerns. First, it calls for

“an end to the violence in Israel and Palestine.”

[Mr Dhesi]

That is what we all want to see. Secondly, it reaffirms “the jurisdiction of the ICC to address the conduct of all parties”, so that we can ascertain what war crimes have occurred. Thirdly, it calls on Israel to

“lift the siege conditions allowing food, water, electricity, medicine and fuel into Gaza”.

Fourthly, it calls on us to

“guarantee that people in Gaza who are forced to flee during this conflict can return to their homes and seek an end to the expansion of illegal settlements and settler violence in the West Bank”.

Fifthly, it addresses the road map and how we can get

“an enduring cessation of fighting—

basically, a ceasefire—

“as soon as possible and a credible, diplomatic and political process to deliver the lasting peace of a two-state solution.”

6.2 pm

Mr Louie French (Old Bexley and Sidcup) (Con): As the Member of Parliament for what was recently voted the most royalist constituency in the country, Old Bexley and Sidcup, it is an honour to speak in this historic debate and to thank His Majesty for his first Gracious Speech as King, which set out the Government’s priority to make the difficult but necessary long-term decisions to change this country for the better.

I am proud of not only our royal family and the pageantry of this country, which was clearly on display at last week’s state opening, but of our police officers throughout the country, including our brilliant police officers in Old Bexley and Sidcup, and their dedication to our local community. That is the driving force of our raising confidence in policing, which is of course a key part of today’s debate. I would also like to place on the record my thanks to Sergeant Dave Catlow and all the team for their ongoing work in tackling vehicle crime, and to congratulate police community support officer Steve Graves on his 20 years of service to our community.

I welcome the fact that the King’s Speech reaffirmed the Government’s commitment to keeping communities safe from crime, antisocial behaviour, terrorism and illegal migration. At a time when threats to national security are changing rapidly due to new technology, it is welcome that the Government will give the security and intelligence services the powers they need, and will strengthen independent judicial oversight through the Investigatory Powers (Amendment) Bill. I also welcome the fact that the King’s Speech announced that legislation will be introduced to better protect public premises from terrorism in the light of the Manchester Arena attack, through the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill. That was an issue my predecessor and friend the late James Brokenshire worked so diligently on during his time as Security Minister.

One of the best ways to raise confidence in policing in London is to ensure that the thousands of decent, hard-working police officers can continue to focus on fighting crime in the communities they serve. However, under the Labour Mayor of London, as the police and crime commissioner for London, that is difficult for communities such as Bexley because his tri-borough policing policy negatively impacts community policing in Bexley, as well as the ability of police to connect with

communities and respond to crimes in a timely manner. It is also extremely inefficient to merge police resources in boroughs with so little in common, often leaving safer boroughs, such as Bexley, with few resources, as we have seen in recent weeks when there were protests in central London.

Having more police officers is central to having a visible police and law enforcement presence, so I welcome the successful recruitment of an extra 20,000 police officers by the end of March this year, bringing the total number to nearly 150,000 officers across the country and reflecting the Government’s determination to ensure that people feel safe in their communities. Notably, this year’s £16.9 billion police settlement includes specific funding for PCCs to drive the recruitment of those officers.

Sadly, it is frustrating and concerning that despite being given that extra money by the Government to hire more police officers, the Mayor of London has failed to spend it and the Metropolitan Police Service was the only force in the country to fail to hit its recruitment target, missing out on over 1,000 extra officers who could be helping to keep Londoners safe. Despite his ongoing claims to have no money, and despite blaming everyone else for his many failures over the past seven and a half years as Mayor, he has had to pay some of that money back to the Government for failing to hit that target. Sadiq Khan has also closed many police front counters, such as the one at Sidcup station. Quite clearly, the Mayor of London needs to be put into special measures right now.

It is of paramount importance that the police are equipped with the powers and tools they need to protect the public. I welcome Government measures to tighten the law around zombie knives and I recognise that stop and search is an important tool to keep our streets safe, when used properly. About 400 knives and weapons are taken off the streets every month using stop and search in London alone. I also welcome that the Government—my right hon. Friend the Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire is in his place—are looking closely at scan and search to help detect knives. I will continue to lobby for that, given its potential to help improve community safety and end that awful crime.

Restoring confidence in our criminal justice system goes hand in hand with restoring confidence in policing. That is vital in our action to tackle violence against women and girls, and I wholeheartedly support the steps that the Government are taking. It is right that the most serious offenders, including those who have committed violent and sexual offences, should spend more time in prison to help keep the public safe.

6.7 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Every day since 7 October, news from Gaza and Israel becomes yet more painful to watch, even for those of us who can choose to look away. While the horrific attack on Israeli citizens by Hamas was appalling, the response by Israel’s military is devastating the lives of ordinary people in Gaza. My party has heard the testimony of several Welsh-Palestinian families who have lost relatives in Gaza. Aymen Aladham, an IT consultant in Swansea, has told us how in three separate air strikes in Gaza last

month he lost 18 members of his family. The pain and anguish people such as Aymen must be experiencing now is beyond imagining.

Those who survive must seek shelter in a diminishing number of places. Half of all Gaza's homes are damaged or destroyed. Universities and schools are under frequent attack. We are witnessing in real time the complete collapse of vital infrastructure to support human life, include power lines and water desalination plants. One doctor describes how hospitals in Gaza are now practising medieval-style medicine, with premature babies huddled together to keep warm because their incubators no longer work, and doctors operating on patients without electricity or anaesthetic. In what perversion of international law can anyone justify turning a hospital into a battlefield? That must end. The UN Secretary General has said that "in the name of humanity" there needs to be a ceasefire now.

It is clear that humanitarian pauses alone are not enough. First, the facts on the ground render them invalid. The UN agency for Palestine has said that communications in Gaza will start to fail as of tomorrow when telecommunications companies run out of fuel to operate their data centres and major connection sites. Without reliable communications, people will not know when the current four-hour pauses in the bombing begin, or indeed when they can begin to undertake the perilous journey across Gaza without access to fuel.

Secondly, a pause as opposed to a ceasefire presumes and makes accommodation for the resumption of violence, which means more children dying, more homes destroyed, and more lives ruined. A pause is a tacit endorsement of the position that more bombs and bullets are the answer to this crisis. Rather, we should be reaching for a political solution using diplomacy and dialogue. That can happen only with a full and immediate ceasefire. Not only would this stop needless deaths of Palestinians, but it would of course allow for the safe release of the hostages captured by Hamas.

Last week, Plaid Cymru tabled a motion in the Senedd calling for an immediate ceasefire. I am pleased to say that the motion passed with 11 Labour MSs and one Liberal Democrat MS joining our calls for peace. Some people here may doubt the strength of the Senedd's call for a ceasefire but, together, nation after nation can make a powerful statement for peace, and Westminster now has the opportunity to join Wales. We can show the innocent civilians in Gaza and the families of Israeli hostages who are desperate for their safe return that we stand with them. We can tell the world that antisemitism is intolerable and that Islamophobia is intolerable. These are the voices that need to be heard when we use the ability of this place, which is great, to amplify a call. It is in that spirit of unity and peace that I urge colleagues from across the House to support the amendment today.

Finally, to those who say that this amendment has been tabled for political reasons, I say that they are doing that thing that belittles us in the eyes of many of our constituents: we are talking about party political interests. We all have constituents who believe firmly that a ceasefire is the only and the right way forward. It is our duty in this place to enable their voice to be heard, and I shall be supporting amendment (h).

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I apologise, but in order to get the last seven Members in, we will have to drop the time limit to four minutes.

6.12 pm

Mrs Paulette Hamilton (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate on His Majesty's first King's Speech, especially on the vital issue of crime and confidence in our police and criminal justice system.

Under the Conservative Government, crime and antisocial behaviour are having a massive impact on communities in Erdington, Kingstanding and Castle Vale. Last year, my constituency had the highest rate of knife crime in Birmingham. In one area, covering Stockland Green and Kingstanding, the West Midlands Ambulance Service was called out to treat, on average, three victims of knife crime every month.

A constituent contacted me last month. He said, "My friend recently had his skull cracked on the high street. Four guys tried to rob him and then stamped on him. I haven't seen a police officer up there in months."

I hosted a meeting last month of all the local traders on our high street in Erdington. One woman told me that she works alone all day. She said that, from 8am to 11pm, there are constantly people dealing drugs outside her shop—when she arrives, while she is working, and when she closes up. But unfortunately, even though she constantly rings the police, she never sees anybody.

The Conservative Government have cut the police force by 15% since Labour left office, leaving us with the lowest number of officers since the early 1980s. That was reckless and short-sighted. It is no wonder that our local community does not trust the Government's action on antisocial behaviour; there is not any.

On the impact that the King's Speech could have had, it could have pledged to restore neighbourhood policing, as Labour has, and put 13,000 more officers and PCSOs on our streets. It could have guaranteed town centre patrols, as Labour has pledged to, so that people could walk down high streets such as mine after 5 pm and at night without worrying about violence. Unfortunately, that has not happened. The Government are wrong to think that our constituents will give up. We need to stop the decline and start fighting for a better future.

Finally, I want to talk about the struggle I have had with the SNP amendment. I have been contacted by hundreds of constituents who, like many across the UK, have been witnessing horrifying scenes in Israel and Gaza since 7 October. I am a nurse and I cannot sit idly by while I know that people are facing the worse suffering imaginable, especially elderly women and babies in hospitals across Gaza. It is clear to me that we need increased humanitarian aid. That is why I am calling for a temporary bilateral ceasefire to ensure that innocent civilians leave Gaza and access the aid that they desperately want. I ask this House to think twice about the SNP amendment, because it has been tabled to cause division, and together we stand, divided we fall.

6.16 pm

Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab): It is with great sadness and frustration that I must speak again in this House about the failure of the Government to uphold the responsibilities that they have to the 97 people unlawfully killed at Hillsborough, to their families and friends, and to survivors. After 27 years of the fight by families for truth and justice, the 2016 inquests—the longest jury hearings in British history—ended with

[*Ian Byrne*]

jurors ruling that the fans who died at the FA cup semi-final were unlawfully killed, and that the catalogue of failings by police and public officials contributed to their deaths. Shamefully, nobody has been held accountable for the needless deaths, injuries and enduring trauma suffered at Hillsborough, despite the 2016 inquest verdicts. We need changes in law to ensure that the pain and suffering of the Hillsborough families is not repeated, and that there is a legacy from the tragedy.

In 2017, the then Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), asked the then Bishop of Liverpool, Reverend James Jones, to conduct a review into the lessons to be learned from Hillsborough. The recommendations of that review, called “The patronising disposition of unaccountable power”, were published in November 2017. Six years later, on 7 November, in a letter sent out by the former Home Secretary, the Government promised to publish their full response to Bishop James Jones’s report on Wednesday 6 December. Will the Minister confirm, either at the Dispatch Box now or in writing, that that commitment will be honoured? There can be no more delays.

In the time we have waited for the Government to respond, Parliament could have passed the Public Authority (Accountability) Bill, initially presented to the House by the then Member for Leigh, now Mayor Andy Burnham. Those laws could be in force today but the Government chose not to introduce them. After six years, we instead have the Government’s draft Criminal Justice Bill, published this week. It mentions a duty of candour in clause 73, but only in the context of a code of conduct. That is an insult to all those who have been affected by state cover-ups and to the memory of the 97. It does not establish or define the duty in law. It provides no mechanism for compliance or enforcement.

Crucially, the Government do not appear to be introducing a statutory duty of candour on all public officials, as Hillsborough Law Now campaigners demand and as my party thankfully supports. We need a legal duty of candour on all public authorities and officials to tell the truth and proactively co-operate with official investigations and inquiries, bringing to an end the depressingly familiar pattern of cover-ups and concealment. Nothing less will do.

In the six years that we have waited, Parliament could also have passed the Public Advocate Bill introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle). Instead, the Government have proposed legislation, in the form of the Victims and Prisoners Bill, that is a pale imitation of what the Hillsborough families and survivors have spent years campaigning for. The Bill does not make the public advocate independent, has no powers or statutory duties and will only report on what the Secretary of State directs it to report on. What the Government have put forward in the King’s Speech is certainly not a Hillsborough law.

Amendment (c), which I have tabled to the Humble Address, calls for the right to food to be enshrined in law, and I thank the 35 hon. Members who have signed it. Hunger is a political choice made by this Government. At the moment in my great city, one in three people live in food insecurity, and there was nothing in the King’s Speech from the Government that would address the

crisis my West Derby constituents face. We need systemic change. We need a right to food enshrined in UK law so that everyone, including all children, is legally protected from the scourge of hunger.

6.20 pm

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): I associate myself completely with the remarks of my good and hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Ian Byrne). I had not originally intended to speak in this debate, but given the appalling slaughter and suffering in the middle east and the ongoing tragedy in Gaza, I have to do so. As the Member of Parliament who brought forward the motion to recognise the state of Palestine, which was approved in the House on 13 October 2014, I am often a target for those who do not believe in peace or a two-state solution.

In the context of the then Home Secretary’s sowing of division and hate, it is interesting that hon. Members have referred to Remembrance Sunday, when I was moved and overwhelmed by the words, some of which I would like to share, of the Roman Catholic priest Father Marc Lyden-Smith. He said that although Remembrance Sunday is a time when people wear red poppies—a well-established tradition—he had for the first time seen someone wearing both a red and a white poppy. When he asked why, their reply was, “Red is for remembrance and white is for peace.” I found that very thought-provoking. Our hope in remembrance is grounded in peace, a peace that so many have given their lives for. We must remember that peace looks forward to what we are trying to build: justice, harmony, wellbeing and the opportunity for all to flourish.

The most powerful part of Father Lyden-Smith’s sermon was towards the end, when he reminded us that “Jesus said: ‘Blessed are the peacemakers’. He did not say: ‘Blessed are those who won the war, those who had sufficient resources and advanced weaponry to crush their enemies’. He said: ‘Blessed are the peacemakers’—those who work to build a world of peace. We can all be peacemakers.”

We can all work towards bringing about peace internationally. We should let today be a wake-up call for us all, on both sides of the House, to work for peace and, when we pray every morning before the session starts, to work for reconciliation, understanding and harmony. That begins in this House, in our communities, in our homes, in our families, in our friendship groups and especially in our hearts.

Today, I will vote for a ceasefire. I will vote for peace. I will vote for a state of Israel and a state of Palestine to live side by side in peaceful coexistence. The horrors, death and destruction that we witness daily on our TV screens are a breeding ground for hate; but if we are ever to secure peace, and a lasting peace, we cannot be driven by hate. I vote for a ceasefire and I call on all hon. Members, but particularly the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, to use their platforms and positions of authority not only to secure humanitarian aid amid the horrors we see in Gaza and have witnessed in Israel, but to work every day towards a lasting peace and the safety and the security that all people in Israel and Palestine deserve.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I will call the Front Benchers for the wind-ups no later than 6.40 pm.

6.24 pm

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): With a sense of camaraderie, I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Michael Shanks) on his maiden speech. Maybe I can go further in extending the hand of friendship by helping him through the Aye Lobby this evening if he wishes to join us in voting for a ceasefire—as the Scottish Labour party in Holyrood appears to be saying it will do next week.

I was not going to get into this, but the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) has prompted me to do so. He seemed to suggest that the SNP's tabling an amendment on the principled position that we have taken at every stage, every step of the way, since the attack in Gaza on 7 October is somehow a political game. That is an utterly bizarre suggestion. We have been absolutely open. Our amendment was tabled last Wednesday—a week ago—and published last Thursday. You will forgive me, Mr Deputy Speaker, for suggesting that if anyone were playing political games, it would be those who lodged an amendment 12 minutes before the deadline last night.

I also thank the hon. Member for Slough for confirming what many of us have suspected: the reason the Labour party often does not vote for SNP motions is simply that they are SNP motions. That is deeply unfortunate. I invited Labour Members to look in *Hansard* at the countless times the SNP has voted with Labour on Opposition day motions. We will go through the Lobby and vote for positions that we agree with. If that is what he feels he needs to say and do to justify the position to himself, that is matter for him, but we put forward a principled position tonight in our amendment (h), which I am delighted to sponsor and support, particularly given that countless people in Midlothian have emailed to ask me to do so.

Let me touch a little on today's topic. I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, as I am trustee of White Ribbon Scotland. When we—particularly us men—get the chance in debates to stand up and call on all men to do what we can to tackle the growing misogyny across society, it is important that we take that chance, using our positions and platform to call it out where we see it. Misogyny is entirely unacceptable and more of us need to say so, because it is happening far too much. Far too often people stand by and say, "But he's a good guy, really." That is simply not good enough. More needs to be done, so I welcome the fact that the Government are introducing legislation, which I will watch closely as it progresses.

The King's Speech could have done much more, it could have offered much more to help constituents in Midlothian and across our nations. However, for all the challenges we face, they are nothing compared with that faced by those in Gaza tonight, so I call on everyone who wants to see an end to that conflict to join us in voting for a ceasefire.

6.28 pm

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): After 13 years of Tory austerity, what a thin King's Speech it was from a Government who are out of touch and out of ideas, and hopefully soon out of office. They promise change by wheeling out the Prime Minister who ran off after he accidentally bequeathed us Brexit. Then there is the ex-Home Secretary, who is so fixated

by the next Tory leadership race that she forgot her function of keeping the streets safe. She made them less safe by stoking unrest and fear, and encouraging a right-wing mob on to our streets—kudos to Sir Mark Rowley and the Met for standing up to the meddling.

Crime and antisocial behaviour need neighbourhood policing, but this gimmicky Government still have not restored to 2010 levels the officers they cut. Hate crime should not be on our streets, but sadly, events far off have triggered Islamophobic and antisemitic events nationally and even locally in the past month. I was alarmed by reprehensible individuals hooting horns and provocatively waving flags in Acton on 7 October, the day of the worst atrocity in Israel's history. Since then, we have shockingly also seen red paint daubed on two mosques, three times between them, and on a Syrian café. That is disgraceful.

With winter approaching, there should not be street homelessness and rough sleeping in one of the richest countries on earth in 2023. That is also disgraceful, as is the ex-Home Secretary calling it a "lifestyle choice". Reclaiming the streets also means an end to the grisly roll-call: Sarah Everard, Sabina Nessa and Zara Aleena, who were only walking home. However, my last example is from the streets of Gaza, which have dominated MPs' inboxes and filled our TV screens with desperation, death and destruction. I have heard it at first hand from a man who came to see me, whose brother had lived in Ealing and trained as a surgeon at Guy's before returning to Gaza with his expertise. He has not moved from Al-Shifa Hospital since the start of the war. That hospital is now a household name, surrounded by tanks and with no food, water or power.

Long before Hamas's despicable slaughter on 7 October started this cycle of violence, the new Foreign Secretary called Gaza an open-air "prison camp" that is unsustainable. Those words are now truer than ever, so I back Labour's amendment tonight demanding both the end of violence and a two-state solution, stressing the importance of international law, and condemning Hamas, illegal settlements and west bank violence. I have also put my name to amendment (b), which asks for some of the same stuff, including the release of hostages—who themselves are at risk from 20 hours a day of incessant bombardment—but also calls for the end of the siege of Gaza, condemns collective punishment, and urges the Government to press for a negotiated ceasefire that is binding on all sides, not a surrender. All wars end in ceasefire eventually. We cannot continue at the rate we are seeing, with lost lives and 50% of buildings in Gaza demolished; it is only a month in.

Even *The Sun* called this a "damp squib" of a King's Speech, from a party for whom it truly feels like the end of days. To paraphrase the Spice Girls, what we want—what we really, really want—and what this country needs is a general election now. Bring it on!

6.31 pm

Keir Mather (Selby and Ainsty) (Lab): It would be remiss of me not to begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Michael Shanks) on a fantastic maiden speech. I remember saying in mine, which feels like 1,000 years ago, that I admired his integrity and intelligence. I think those values shone through in his speech, and will shine through in his conduct in this place.

[Keir Mather]

It is a pleasure to rise to speak in this debate on the King's Speech for the first time as the Member of Parliament for Selby and Ainsty, but I must say that I am a little disappointed. I was sent to this place to hold this Government to account—to scrutinise their agenda and their concrete plans for government—but this King's Speech has revealed that there is scarcely a plan at all. Instead, the Conservative party has resigned itself to drift rudderless toward the next election, shuffling the deckchairs on the Titanic while working people in communities such as mine suffer the consequences of 13 years of decline. Nowhere is that more apparent than on crime: the so-called party of law and order has sleepwalked into a crisis where 90% of crimes go unsolved and a criminal on the street is half as likely to be caught today than under the last Labour Government. The Conservative legacy on crime is one of damaging decline and collapsing confidence, and communities such as Sherburn in Elmet in my constituency are paying the price.

Sherburn is a bustling and dynamic place with a bright future. It has grown from a village to a town, with its population expanding by around 2,000 people in the past 10 years, but with that growth comes worry about crime and a fear that the hard-working staff at North Yorkshire police do not have sufficient resources to address these issues. In my recent election campaign, the Conservatives had the gall to celebrate how 251 more police officers were now on the streets of North Yorkshire, asking us to be grateful while seemingly oblivious to the fact that those officers were merely replacing the ones we have lost from our streets since the Conservatives took power in 2010, as well as those who have been forced to leave the profession they love due to overwork, anxiety and stress.

It is plain to those local residents in Sherburn who feel threatened by burglary and whose streets are made unsafe by antisocial behaviour that this Government are dangerously out of their depth, and are unwilling to use opportunities such as the King's Speech to get a grip on spiralling crime. His Majesty's speech could have provided what everyone in my constituency knows we need, and what my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mrs Hamilton) outlined so ably: a fundamental reset for our police services and criminal justice system. Under Labour's plans to tackle crime, we would see 13,000 more officers and PCSOs on our streets, fast-tracked detective recruitment and a return to proper neighbourhood policing with guaranteed neighbourhood patrols, as well as new powers to tackle antisocial behaviour in our town centres. Instead, it is all too clear that this Government are unprepared to take the important decisions necessary to solve the crisis in which they have placed us. My hon. Friends and I will do all we can to push them to go further until a general election allows us to deliver the fresh start that communities such as mine so desperately need.

6.34 pm

Claudia Webbe (Leicester East) (Ind): Some 1,400 Israelis have been killed and more than 11,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, around half of them children killed by the Israeli bombs and missiles targeting homes, schools, hospitals, refugee camps, mosques and churches,

while almost 3,000 are missing presumed dead under the rubble. Those totals will be higher now than they were when we started this King's Speech debate.

The World Health Organisation has noted that the brunt of the horrific assault is being borne by women and children, with well over 400 children killed every day and countless more maimed, suffering lifelong psychological trauma or trapped under rubble. More children have been killed in Gaza during the last three weeks than the total killed in conflicts around the world in every year since 2019. Of those killed, two thirds are women and children. Women and children are disproportionately impacted by this violence. Densely populated refugee camps in Gaza are being bombed, leaving dead and wounded children with no surviving family. I am left comforting too many of my own constituents in Leicester East who have lost a huge number of family members, with their in-laws wiped out entirely.

As we speak, Gaza's largest hospital, Al-Shifa, has been surrounded, stormed and occupied by Israeli forces, trapping hundreds of medics, patients and civilians inside without access to vital supplies, with even food and water running out. Gaza's hospitals are out of anaesthetic and many are out of fuel. Children and others are undergoing surgery for horrific trauma with no pain relief. Premature babies in neonatal care are dying without access to oxygen, and more generally, there are now reports of civilians dying from hunger and starvation, with a lack of food, water and hygiene.

Collective punishment is a war crime and so is forcible transfer, yet the people of Gaza are being driven from their land into the Sinai Egyptian desert. These are war crimes, and the urgency of the situation, the gravity of the crimes and basic human decency demand that plain language is used. To our shame, the Government, the Prime Minister and the Leader of His Majesty's official Opposition are refusing to acknowledge this. Do they not see Palestinians as humans? Do they not see the burnt out ashes of a barely recognisable human body or the tiny hand of a baby covered in debris reaching out from the rubble? Do Palestinian lives not matter?

We are seeing death by war crimes in plain sight. Every day of delay means more lives are lost, and more women and children are killed by the indiscriminate massacre and barbarism of Israeli bombs. The international human rights community and international non-governmental organisations are united in their demand for a full and immediate ceasefire. The United Nations and its children's and relief agencies, the World Health Organisation, international and Israeli human rights groups, and the millions of ordinary citizens of the UK and other countries who have taken to the streets each week are all demanding a ceasefire. Our humanity in this House demands that we call for a ceasefire.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. As you will know, this has been an extraordinarily difficult day for many Members in this House, but for me this is the most difficult day I have had to endure in my parliamentary career. We are now over a month on from the atrocious attacks by Hamas on 7 October, and we were all right to utterly condemn those attacks. But ahead of the votes that we are going to take in a moment, I wanted to let the House know that today I lost my first family member.

The reason why this is important is that I have spoken about how they are in a church in Gaza City, and they did not, I am afraid, die from a bomb; instead they died perhaps from lack of food, perhaps from dehydration. Their health deteriorated in the last week, and they could not get to the hospital they needed.

Today I wanted to vote for peace. I wanted to vote for a two-state solution, because that is the only way that these horrors will never be seen again. I wanted to vote for getting Hamas out of Gaza, and for those reasons I wanted to vote for an immediate bilateral ceasefire, so that families like mine, but also families in Israel, do not have to endure this anymore. I urge colleagues from all sides to bear in mind that this is more than just party politics right now. I have been so disappointed by language I have heard today, and the Prime Minister earlier suggesting that we were not on the side of Israel—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. Deepest condolences from the House, but this is clearly not a matter for the Chair. We will let the comments that you have made stand. Thank you—*[Interruption.]* No, please, resume your seat. This is not a matter for the Chair—*[Interruption.]* No, please resume your seat. We have expressed our deepest condolences, but this is not a matter for the Chair, and therefore not a legitimate point of order during this debate.

It is time for the Front Bench contributions. I call Mr David Lammy.

6.41 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): The whole House will want to send their deepest condolences to the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) after what we have just heard.

This has been a strong and powerful debate on the King's Speech, and all hon. Members, despite the most challenging and difficult circumstances in the middle east, feel very grateful for the depth and quality of the contributions. We also heard the most outstanding maiden speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Michael Shanks). It was thoughtful, humorous and full of lived experience and fantastic Scottish history. I am sure that his career in this House will be very successful.

We had a lot of contributions about crime of course, given the nature of the debate, and it was good to hear from the Chair of the Justice Committee, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Sir Robert Neill). He was right to remind us about the cost of imprisonment and that every prisoner costs £47,000, and about the importance of the Government adopting a Labour position on shorter sentences. I was grateful to hear the Secretary of State moving in a Labour direction and disagreeing on this occasion with his colleague, the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes) who is not in his place at the moment—*[Interruption.]* Forgive me, he is.

We also heard from the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Dame Diana Johnson), who raised spiking as a growing issue in our country, along with sexual exploitation, as well as the need to move forward with a statutory description. We heard from my right

hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) and my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Ian Byrne) about the long campaign for justice and a Hillsborough law, and about how painful it was, and will be for many people, that, despite the report of Bishop Jones, that measure did not find its way into the King's Speech two and a half years later. My hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones) raised policing in Wales, and my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) spoke about the horrible scourge of knife crime, and the failure to ban Rambo and zombie knives. We are still waiting.

Let me turn to the amendments and the horrors of war that I know every Member of this House and so many of our constituents are all focused on tonight. I will start with a meeting I held two weeks ago in Cairo with the Egyptian Foreign Minister. He reminded me that it has been almost exactly half a century since Egypt and Israel were at the height of the Yom Kippur war—a 25-year pattern of conflict that some feared would never end. There were devastating losses in the Sinai and whole armies facing encirclement by the Suez canal. Few expected the narrow diplomatic openings to lead to lasting peace, but diplomats seized those narrow openings.

Then, in 1977, Sadat came to Jerusalem, setting the two countries on a path to a peace that has held ever since. Minister Shoukry reminded me of that. Although it may seem impossible in the toxic fog of war, peace is always possible in the end, so 39 days since the start of the war between Israel and Hamas, I ask the House to remember that peace is never simple, and never won easily.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Much of the language is about a ceasefire. The Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Save the Children, UNICEF, the World Health Organisation, the UN Secretary General and several EU Prime Ministers have all called for a proper ceasefire. Is it not time that Labour moved its position and actually used that word “ceasefire”—a proper one to let humanitarian aid in?

Mr Lammy: I will turn to those issues shortly. Everyone in this House wants the fighting to end. The central debate is about the steps to bring that about, and there is a discussion across this place among Members, all of whom want peace and all of whom want to see the loss of life come to an end. *[Interruption.]* I respect the hon. Member's position, and I will come to that in a moment.

Peace is never won easily; peace is possible because of diplomacy, because of compromise and because of negotiation. It is our duty in this House to support all the necessary and practical steps to get us there.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I think we all understand that there have to be steps towards an eventual conclusion, and we all want to see the fighting stop. The Labour amendment calls for a “cessation of fighting”, which presumably means a cessation of firing. What is the difference between a cessation of firing and a ceasefire?

Mr Lammy *rose*—

Margaret Beckett (Derby South) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Lammy: I have to answer the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts). I direct him to the statement from the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which clearly sets out five or six steps and five or six different types of occasion where arms are laid down. Some are purely for humanitarian reasons. Others are because some negotiation has begun or some political dialogue is possible. The debate is about how we get to the end, which is that arms are laid down for a lasting reason and the political process—in the end, this will surely end with a political process—can properly begin.

Florence Eshalomi: My right hon. Friend is right to highlight the fact that getting to peace is the ultimate goal for all of us. Like many hon. and right hon. Members, I have received so much communication from my constituents. There is a clear consensus from the general public that a ceasefire is one of the key ways we can get this peace. Does he not agree that we should be working towards that urgently?

Mr Lammy *rose*—

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Ind): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Lammy: I will just respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Florence Eshalomi). She is of course right that all of us want to see a ceasefire and the laying down of arms. She will have seen also the statement from Hamas just a few days ago that they intend to continue and continue and continue. It is hard to see how a ceasefire can come about if Hamas are not prepared to stop the firing of rockets into Israel, and if they are not prepared to lay down their arms and set those hostages free. That, I think, is at the heart of the nature of the discussion.

Margaret Beckett *rose*—

Mr Lammy: I give way to my right hon. Friend.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I would like to advise David Lammy that I will be calling Chris Philp at 6.51 pm.

Margaret Beckett: With apologies, may I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), who raised the question of what the difference is between use of the word “ceasefire” and an end to violence, that I fear there is a most unfortunate difference, and that is why I never use the word “ceasefire” and will not be voting for a motion that includes it? That is because, tragically, to some people, calling for a ceasefire means that Israel should stop fighting but not that anybody else should—and that is not a point of view that I could support. I wholeheartedly support the excellent amendment (r) tabled by Labour Front Benchers.

Mr Lammy: Few of us in this House have the experience of my right hon. Friend. She knows that it is quiet, hard diplomacy that will bring about an end to the loss of

life. She knows that we need to rapidly get to a longer pause, and she knows that there is a legitimate debate in this House but that the Labour motion deals with the issues at hand today, not next week or the week afterwards. Let us see where we get to.

6.51 pm

The Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire (Chris Philp): Let me join the shadow Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), in expressing the whole House’s condolences to the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) for the tragedy that her family have suffered today.

It is a huge pleasure to close the final debate on the first King’s Speech. I join others in congratulating the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Michael Shanks) on his excellent maiden speech. Anyone who takes a seat off the SNP has my fervent good wishes. [HON. MEMBERS: “Oh!”] That is clearly not a universally popular view.

It is the first duty of the state to secure the safety and security of its citizens. That is why the Government have delivered record ever police numbers across England and Wales, as my hon. Friends the Members for Penrith and The Border (Dr Hudson), for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr French) and for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) referenced. We have 3,500 more police officers than we have ever had before at any time in history, and those record numbers are delivering results. According to the crime survey, overall crime, measured like for like, is 54% lower now than it was in 2010. That is to say that the Labour Government in which the shadow Foreign Secretary and the shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), sat presided over crime levels that were double those that prevail today. Violence is down by 52%, burglary is down by 57% and vehicle crime is down by 39%.

The subject of the debate includes fighting violence against women and girls: a topic that I am sure the whole House can get behind. I am proud that in the last 13 years the Government have: legislated to criminalise stalking in 2012; passed the Domestic Abuse Act 2021; criminalised coercive and controlling behaviour; created a non-fatal strangulation offence; and outlawed upskirting and revenge porn. The previous Labour Government failed to do all those things during their 13 years in office.

There is more to do. The conviction rates for rape and serious sexual offences need to be higher. I am glad that the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Sarah Dyke) acknowledged that Operation Soteria is making progress, with police referrals in the quarter to June up by 206% compared with 2019, Crown Prosecution Service charges up by 145% and Crown court receipts up by 171%. There is a lot more to do, but that is all heading rapidly in the right direction.

Some specific questions arose, which, for the sake of clarity, I would like to answer. The hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), who is in her place, asked about measures to ban zombie knives and machetes. Those require secondary legislation, and I can confirm that the Government will bring forward the relevant statutory instruments in the very near future, in addition to the measures announced in the

King's Speech to double the sentence for supplying a knife to an under-18 and to double the sentence for possessing a knife with intent to cause harm.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Tom Hunt) mentioned antisocial behaviour; come next April, every single police force in England and Wales will have funding for antisocial behaviour hotspot patrols. Where they have been trialled, they have almost immediately reduced antisocial behaviour by around 30%. The hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Ian Byrne) and the right hon. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) asked about the Government's response to Hillsborough, which they and many Members of Parliament take very seriously. I can confirm that the Government are planning to offer their full reply to Bishop James Jones's report on 6 December. The right hon. Member for Garston and Halewood and others will be briefed in advance if they wish to be. The duty of candour in policing will be introduced in clause 73 of the Criminal Justice Bill.

On Gaza, which many Members have spoken about, let us keep in mind that 1,400 innocent civilians were deliberately targeted and slaughtered by terrorists, and over 200 people remain held hostage. As the Prime Minister has set out repeatedly, this Government support humanitarian pauses to ensure that aid can get to civilians in Gaza, given the difficult circumstances. This Government have dramatically increased humanitarian aid, having provided £30 million-worth, and 51 tonnes have been sent in already. Of course, much more is required.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Will the Minister give way?

Chris Philp: I am afraid that I must finish up.

We are also working actively with international partners, including President Sisi of Egypt, to make sure the Rafah border crossing, which I have visited, is opened more to allow critical aid in. In order to ensure that civilians in Gaza are protected, our Government are actively engaging with the Government of Israel to ensure that they obey international law and redouble their efforts to protect civilians in Gaza. That is the humane and civilised thing to do, and this Government will continue to call for that.

However, a ceasefire with Hamas in place cannot be just. Hamas have said that they intend to destroy Israel, and that they would once again perpetrate atrocities like those committed on 7 October. They continue to hold hostages, including children and British citizens, and they continue to fire rockets into Israel. To ask Israel to cease firing unilaterally would not be fair or just. In order to have a just peace and a lasting, permanent ceasefire, we need a two-state solution with a sovereign and recognised Palestinian state on the west bank and in Gaza, guaranteeing their security and the security of Israel alike. All of us in this House and beyond should redouble our efforts to bring about that two-state solution, and to bring about the peace we saw in the aftermath of the Oslo accords, passed in 1993. That shows there is a path—it is difficult but it can be trodden. Only with a just and lasting peace can we see a just and lasting ceasefire.

I commend the King's Speech and the Government's legislative programme to the House. It will take this country forward and it deserves the support of the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 183, Noes 290.

Division No. 2]

[6.59 pm

AYES

Ali, Rushanara	Gill, Preet Kaur
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Green, Sarah
Amesbury, Mike	Greenwood, Lillian
Anderson, Fleur	Greenwood, Margaret
Ashworth, rh Jonathan	Griffith, Dame Nia
Barker, Paula	Haigh, Louise
Beckett, rh Margaret	Hamilton, Fabian
Benn, rh Hilary	Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
Betts, Mr Clive	Hanna, Claire
Blomfield, Paul	Hardy, Emma
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Brennan, Kevin	Hayes, Helen
Bridgen, Andrew	Healey, rh John
Bryant, Sir Chris	Hendrick, Sir Mark
Buck, Ms Karen	Hillier, Dame Meg
Butler, Dawn	Hobhouse, Wera
Byrne, rh Liam	Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Cadbury, Ruth	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Campbell, rh Sir Alan	Hopkins, Rachel
Carden, Dan	Howarth, rh Sir George
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Huq, Dr Rupa
Chamberlain, Wendy	Jardine, Christine
Champion, Sarah	Jarvis, Dan
Cooper, Daisy	Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Cooper, rh Yvette	Jones, Darren
Coyle, Neil	Jones, Gerald
Creasy, Stella	Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Cruddas, Jon	Jones, Ruth
Cryer, John	Jones, Sarah
Cummins, Judith	Kane, Mike
Cunningham, Alex	Keeley, Barbara
Daby, Janet	Kendall, Liz
Dalton, Ashley	Khan, Afzal
Davey, rh Ed	Kinnock, Stephen
David, Wayne	Kyle, Peter
De Cordova, Marsha	Lammy, rh Mr David
Debbonaire, Thangam	Leadbeater, Kim
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Dodds, Anneliese	Lewis, Clive
Dowd, Peter	Lightwood, Simon
Duffield, Rosie	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Dyke, Sarah	Lynch, Holly
Eagle, Dame Angela	MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Eagle, rh Maria	Madders, Justin
Eastwood, Colum	Mahmood, Shabana
Edwards, Jonathan	Malhotra, Seema
Edwards, Sarah	Maskell, Rachael
Efford, Clive	Mather, Keir
Elliott, Julie	McCabe, Steve
Elmore, Chris	McCarthy, Kerry
Eshalomi, Florence	McDonagh, Siobhain
Esterson, Bill	McDonald, Andy
Farron, Tim	McFadden, rh Mr Pat
Farry, Stephen	McGinn, Conor
Fletcher, Colleen	McGovern, Alison
Foord, Richard	McKinnell, Catherine
Fovargue, Yvonne	McMahon, Jim
Foxcroft, Vicky	McMorris, Anna
Foy, Mary Kelly	Mearns, Ian
Furniss, Gill	Miliband, rh Edward
Gardiner, Barry	Mishra, Navendu

Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 Olney, Sarah
 Onwurah, Chi
 Opong-Asare, Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Owen, Sarah
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Mr Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pollard, Luke
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reed, Steve
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, rh Rachel
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rodda, Matt
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shanks, Michael
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Siddiq, Tulip

Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Sobel, Alex
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Strathern, Alistair
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Wakeford, Christian
 West, Catherine
 Western, Andrew
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whittome, Nadia
 Wilson, Munira
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Mary Glindon and
 Samantha Dixon**

NOES

Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy (*Proxy vote cast
 by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, rh Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Benton, Scott
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Brady, rh Sir Graham
 Browne, Anthony
 Bruce, Fiona
 Burghart, Alex
 Butler, Rob
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Carter, Andy

Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Chalk, rh Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Sir Simon
 Clarke, Theo
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Cleverly, rh James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, rh Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Dinanage, Dame Caroline
 Dines, Miss Sarah
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, rh Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie

Drax, Richard
 Duddridge, Sir James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Sir Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David (*Proxy
 vote cast by Mr Marcus
 Jones*)
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, rh Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Grant, Mrs Helen (*Proxy vote
 cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, rh James
 Henderson, Gordon
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie

Hunt, Jane (*Proxy vote cast
 by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Dame Andrea
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Sir Brandon
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Longhi, Marco
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig (*Proxy vote
 cast by John Redwood*)
 Mackrory, Cherylyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, rh Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Milling, rh Dame Amanda
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran (*Proxy vote
 cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew

Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Sir Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 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
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trott, Laura
 Tuckwell, Steve
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, rh Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, rh Craig
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:

**Robert Largan and
 Mike Wood**

Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cooper, Daisy
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cummins, Judith
 Davey, rh Ed
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Dowd, Peter
 Dyke, Sarah
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Elliott, Julie
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foord, Richard
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanna, Claire
 Hanvey, Neale
 Hendry, Drew
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Khan, Afzal
 Lake, Ben
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive

Linden, David
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 MacAskill, Kenny
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mc Nally, John
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McGinn, Conor
 McLaughlin, Anne
 Mearns, Ian
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moran, Layla
 Morgan, Helen
 Morris, Grahame
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Olney, Sarah
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Sarah
 Phillips, Jess
 Qaisar, Ms Anum
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Sobel, Alex
 Stephens, Chris
 Stone, Jamie
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 Whitford, Dr Philippa (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, Hywel
 Wilson, Munira
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad

**Tellers for the Ayes:
 Kirsty Blackman and
 Gavin Newlands**

Question accordingly negated.

Amendment proposed: (h), at the end of the Question to add:

“but respectfully regret that the Gracious Speech fails to include measures that would require the Government to uphold international law and protect all civilians in Israel and Palestine; unequivocally condemn the horrific killings by Hamas and the taking of hostages; reaffirm that there must be an end to the collective punishment of the Palestinian people; call for the urgent release of all hostages and an end to the siege of Gaza to allow vital supplies of food, fuel, medicine and water to reach the civilian population; note the growing calls for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire from the United Nations and its aid agencies; and therefore call on the Government to join with the international community in urgently pressing all parties to agree to an immediate ceasefire.”—(*Stephen Flynn.*)

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 33), That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 125, Noes 293.

Division No. 3]

[7.14 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barker, Paula
 Begum, Apsana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven

Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart

NOES

Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atherton, Sarah
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard

Bailey, Shaun	Evans, Dr Luke	Johnson, Gareth	Prentis, rh Victoria
Baillie, Siobhan	Evennett, rh Sir David (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones</i>)	Johnston, David	Pritchard, rh Mark
Baker, Duncan		Jones, Andrew	Pursglove, Tom
Baker, rh Mr Steve	Everitt, Ben	Jones, rh Mr David	Quin, rh Jeremy
Baldwin, Harriett	Fabricant, Michael	Jones, Fay	Randall, Tom
Barclay, rh Steve	Farris, Laura	Jones, rh Mr Marcus	Redwood, rh John
Baron, Mr John	Firth, Anna	Jupp, Simon	Rees-Mogg, rh Sir Jacob
Baynes, Simon	Fletcher, Katherine	Kawczynski, Daniel	Richards, Nicola
Bell, Aaron	Fletcher, Mark	Keegan, rh Gillian	Richardson, Angela
Benton, Scott	Fletcher, Nick	Knight, rh Sir Greg	Robertson, Mr Laurence
Beresford, Sir Paul	Ford, rh Vicky	Kruger, Danny	Robinson, Mary
Bhatti, Saqib	Foster, Kevin	Lamont, John	Rowley, Lee
Blackman, Bob	Fox, rh Dr Liam	Latham, Mrs Pauline	Russell, Dean
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Francois, rh Mr Mark	Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea	Rutley, David
Bowie, Andrew	Frazer, rh Lucy	Leigh, rh Sir Edward	Sambrook, Gary
Bradley, Ben	Freeman, George	Levy, Ian	Saxby, Selaine
Browne, Anthony	Freer, Mike	Lewer, Andrew	Scully, Paul
Bruce, Fiona	French, Mr Louie	Lewis, rh Sir Brandon	Seely, Bob
Burghart, Alex	Fuller, Richard	Lewis, rh Sir Julian	Selous, Andrew
Butler, Rob	Fysh, Mr Marcus	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian	Shannon, Jim
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Garnier, Mark	Loder, Chris	Shapps, rh Grant
Carter, Andy	Gibb, rh Nick	Longhi, Marco	Simmonds, David
Cartledge, James	Gibson, Peter	Lopresti, Jack	Smith, rh Chloe
Cash, Sir William	Gideon, Jo	Loughton, Tim	Smith, Greg
Cates, Miriam	Girvan, Paul	Mackinlay, Craig (<i>Proxy vote cast by John Redwood</i>)	Smith, Henry
Chalk, rh Alex	Glen, rh John	Mackrory, Cherilyn	Smith, rh Julian
Chishiti, Rehman	Goodwill, rh Sir Robert	Macleane, Rachel	Smith, Royston
Chope, Sir Christopher	Gove, rh Michael	Mak, Alan	Solloway, Amanda
Churchill, Jo	Grant, Mrs Helen (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones</i>)	Mangnall, Anthony	Spencer, Dr Ben
Clark, rh Greg	Gray, James	Mann, Scott	Spencer, rh Mark
Clarke, rh Sir Simon	Grayling, rh Chris	May, rh Mrs Theresa	Stafford, Alexander
Clarke, Theo	Green, Chris	Mayhew, Jerome	Stevenson, Jane
Clarke-Smith, Brendan	Green, rh Damian	Maynard, Paul	Stevenson, John
Clarkson, Chris	Griffith, Andrew	McCartney, Karl	Stewart, rh Bob
Cleverly, rh James	Grundy, James	McPartland, rh Stephen	Stewart, Iain
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Gullis, Jonathan	McVey, rh Esther	Streeter, Sir Gary
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse	Halfon, rh Robert	Menzies, Mark	Stride, rh Mel
Colburn, Elliot	Hall, Luke	Merriman, Huw	Stuart, rh Graham
Collins, Damian	Hammond, Stephen	Metcalfe, Stephen	Sturdy, Julian
Costa, Alberto	Hands, rh Greg	Millar, Robin	Sunak, rh Rishi
Courts, Robert	Harper, rh Mr Mark	Milling, rh Dame Amanda	Sunderland, James
Coutinho, rh Claire	Harris, Rebecca	Mills, Nigel	Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey	Harrison, Trudy	Mohindra, Mr Gagan	Syms, Sir Robert
Crabb, rh Stephen	Hart, Sally-Ann	Moore, Damien	Thomas, Derek
Crouch, Tracey	Hart, rh Simon	Moore, Robbie	Throup, Maggie
Davies, rh David T. C.	Hayes, rh Sir John	Mordaunt, rh Penny	Timpson, Edward
Davies, Gareth	Heald, rh Sir Oliver	Morris, Anne Marie	Tolhurst, rh Kelly
Davies, Dr James	Heapey, rh James	Morris, David	Tomlinson, Justin
Davies, Mims	Henderson, Gordon	Morris, James	Tomlinson, Michael
Davies, Philip	Henry, Darren	Morrissey, Joy	Tracey, Craig
Davis, rh Mr David	Higginbotham, Antony	Mortimer, Jill	Trott, Laura
Davison, Dehenna	Hinds, rh Damian	Morton, rh Wendy	Tuckwell, Steve
Dinenage, Dame Caroline	Hoare, Simon	Mullan, Dr Kieran (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones</i>)	Tugendhat, rh Tom
Dines, Miss Sarah	Holden, Mr Richard	Mumby-Croft, Holly	Vara, rh Shailesh
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Hollinrake, Kevin	Mundell, rh David	Vickers, Martin
Docherty, Leo	Hollobone, Mr Philip	Murray, Mrs Sheryll	Villiers, rh Theresa
Double, Steve	Holmes, Paul	Murrison, rh Dr Andrew	Walker, Sir Charles
Dowden, rh Oliver	Howell, Paul	Neill, Sir Robert	Walker, Mr Robin
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Huddleston, Nigel	Nokes, rh Caroline	Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Drax, Richard	Hudson, Dr Neil	Norman, rh Jesse	Warman, Matt
Duddridge, Sir James	Hughes, Eddie	O'Brien, Neil	Watling, Giles
Duguid, David	Hunt, Jane (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones</i>)	Offord, Dr Matthew	Webb, Suzanne
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain	Hunt, Tom	Opperman, Guy	Whately, Helen (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones</i>)
Dunne, rh Philip	Jack, rh Mr Alister	Paisley, Ian	Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Edwards, Ruth	Javid, rh Sajid	Pawsey, Mark	Whittaker, rh Craig
Ellis, rh Sir Michael	Jenkin, Sir Bernard	Penning, rh Sir Mike	Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	Jenkinson, Mark	Penrose, John	Wiggin, Sir Bill
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie	Jenkyns, Dame Andrea	Philp, rh Chris	Wild, James
Eustice, rh George	Johnson, Dr Caroline	Poulter, Dr Dan	Williams, rh Craig
		Pow, Rebecca	Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
			Wilson, rh Sammy

Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
Young, Jacob
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Robert Largan and
Mike Wood

Question accordingly negated.

Amendment proposed: (k), at the end of the Question to add:

“but respectfully regret that the Gracious Speech does not include measures to tackle the cost of living crisis, address food price inflation, reach net zero or support households with mortgage payments and energy bills, fails to establish an industrial strategy to facilitate economic certainty and boost growth, does not include measures to address the crises in the NHS and social care, does not include provision for 40 new hospitals, fails to include a two month cancer treatment guarantee or commitment to improve ambulance, dentist and GP waiting times, fails to introduce measures to stop the pumping of sewage into waterways or introduce a new tougher water regulator to hold water companies to account, provides no extra support to farmers transitioning to nature-friendly farming, neglects backlogs in the overwhelmed asylum and court systems, fails to restore community policing to protect neighbourhoods, fails to tackle the education attainment gap which has grown since the pandemic or issues including crumbling schools, mental health support, improving teacher recruitment, retention, and SEND provision, fails to include steps to fix the UK’s broken relationship with Europe, which is harming businesses, farmers and fishers, and ignores standards in public life, which have been eroded under this Government.”—
(*Ed Davey.*)

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 33), That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 25, Noes 303.

Division No. 4]

[7.27pm

AYES

Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Lake, Ben
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Lucas, Caroline
Davey, rh Ed	MacAskill, Kenny
Dyke, Sarah	Moran, Layla
Eastwood, Colum	Morgan, Helen
Edwards, Jonathan	Olney, Sarah
Farron, Tim	Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Farry, Stephen	Webbe, Claudia
Foord, Richard	Williams, Hywel
Green, Sarah	Wilson, Munira
Hanna, Claire	
Hanvey, Neale	
Hobhouse, Wera	
Jardine, Christine	

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jamie Stone and
Daisy Cooper

NOES

Afolami, Bim	Barclay, rh Steve
Afriyie, Adam	Baron, Mr John
Aldous, Peter	Baynes, Simon
Allan, Lucy (<i>Proxy vote cast</i> <i>by Marcus Jones</i>)	Bell, Aaron
Anderson, Lee	Benton, Scott
Anderson, Stuart	Beresford, Sir Paul
Andrew, rh Stuart	Bhatti, Saqib
Ansell, Caroline	Blackman, Bob
Argar, rh Edward	Bottomley, Sir Peter
Atkins, Victoria	Bowie, Andrew
Bacon, Gareth	Bradley, Ben
Bacon, Mr Richard	Brereton, Jack
Bailey, Shaun	Browne, Anthony
Baillie, Siobhan	Bruce, Fiona
Baker, Duncan	Buchan, Felicity
Baker, rh Mr Steve	Buckland, rh Sir Robert
Baldwin, Harriett	Burghart, Alex
	Butler, Rob

Cameron, Dr Lisa	Gideon, Jo
Carter, Andy	Girvan, Paul
Cartlidge, James	Glen, rh John
Cash, Sir William	Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
Cates, Miriam	Gove, rh Michael
Chalk, rh Alex	Graham, Richard
Chishti, Rehman	Grant, Mrs Helen (<i>Proxy vote</i> <i>cast by Marcus Jones</i>)
Chope, Sir Christopher	Gray, James
Churchill, Jo	Grayling, rh Chris
Clark, rh Greg	Green, Chris
Clarke, rh Sir Simon	Green, rh Damian
Clarke, Theo	Griffith, Andrew
Clarke-Smith, Brendan	Grundy, James
Clarkson, Chris	Gullis, Jonathan
Cleverly, rh James	Halfon, rh Robert
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Hall, Luke
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse	Hammond, Stephen
Colburn, Elliot	Hands, rh Greg
Collins, Damian	Harper, rh Mr Mark
Costa, Alberto	Harris, Rebecca
Coutinho, rh Claire	Harrison, Trudy
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey	Hart, Sally-Ann
Crabb, rh Stephen	Hart, rh Simon
Crouch, Tracey	Hayes, rh Sir John
Davies, rh David T. C.	Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Davies, Gareth	Heapey, rh James
Davies, Dr James	Henderson, Gordon
Davies, Mims	Henry, Darren
Davies, Philip	Higginbotham, Antony
Davis, rh Mr David	Hinds, rh Damian
Davison, Dehenna	Hoare, Simon
Dinagen, Dame Caroline	Holden, Mr Richard
Dines, Miss Sarah	Hollinrake, Kevin
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan	Hollobone, Mr Philip
Docherty, Leo	Holmes, Paul
Double, Steve	Howell, Paul
Dowden, rh Oliver	Huddleston, Nigel
Doyle-Price, Jackie	Hudson, Dr Neil
Drax, Richard	Hughes, Eddie
Duddridge, Sir James	Hunt, Jane (<i>Proxy vote cast</i> <i>by Marcus Jones</i>)
Duguid, David	Hunt, Tom
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain	Jack, rh Mr Alister
Dunne, rh Philip	Javid, rh Sajid
Eastwood, Mark	Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Edwards, Ruth	Jenkinson, Mark
Ellis, rh Sir Michael	Jenkyens, Dame Andrea
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	Johnson, Dr Caroline
Elphicke, Mrs Natalie	Johnson, Gareth
Eustice, rh George	Johnston, David
Evans, Dr Luke	Jones, Andrew
Evennett, rh Sir David (<i>Proxy</i> <i>vote cast by Marcus Jones</i>)	Jones, rh Mr David
Everitt, Ben	Jones, Fay
Fabricant, Michael	Jones, rh Mr Marcus
Farris, Laura	Jupp, Simon
Firth, Anna	Kawczynski, Daniel
Fletcher, Katherine	Kearns, Alicia
Fletcher, Mark	Keegan, rh Gillian
Fletcher, Nick	Knight, rh Sir Greg
Ford, rh Vicky	Kniveton, Kate
Foster, Kevin	Kruger, Danny
Fox, rh Dr Liam	Lamont, John
Francois, rh Mr Mark	Latham, Mrs Pauline
Frazer, rh Lucy	Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Freeman, George	Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Freer, Mike	Levy, Ian
French, Mr Louie	Lewer, Andrew
Fuller, Richard	Lewis, rh Sir Brandon
Fysh, Mr Marcus	Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Garnier, Mark	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Gibb, rh Nick	Loder, Chris
Gibson, Peter	

Longhi, Marco
 Lopresti, Jack
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig (*Proxy vote cast by John Redwood*)
 Mackrory, Cherylyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, rh Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Milling, rh Dame Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Damien
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran (*Proxy vote cast by Marcus Jones*)
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Jeremy
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Sir Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David

Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 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
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tuckwell, Steve
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen (*Proxy vote cast by Marcus Jones*)
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, rh Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, rh Craig
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Robert Largan and
Mike Wood

That an humble Address be presented to His Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

Address to be presented to His Majesty by Members of the House who are Privy Counsellors or Members of His Majesty's Household.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

PREVENTION AND SUPPRESSION OF TERRORISM

That the draft Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (Risk of Being Drawn into Terrorism) (Revised Guidance) Regulations 2023, which were laid before this House on 7 September, in the last session of Parliament, be approved.—(*Joy Morrissey.*)

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (16 NOVEMBER)

Ordered,

That at the sitting on Thursday 16 November, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on—

(1) the Motion in the name of Sir Charles Walker relating to the Speaker's Conference not later than one hour after the commencement of proceedings on that Motion; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; and

(2) the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to COP28 not later than two hours after the commencement of proceedings on that Motion or at 5.00pm, whichever is the later; proceedings on those Motions may continue, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Joy Morrissey.*)

PETITION

Energy bills support

7.41 pm

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): Thousands of people desperately worried about paying their energy bills will not get the support from this Government that they got last year. I am on the record as being critical of that, and of energy suppliers for profiting from human misery. However, whether because I believe in credit where it is due or simply because I want to give people the best possible chance of surviving financially, I want to highlight that many energy suppliers can and do help. To give one example, profits from Scottish Gas are used to fund grants of up to £1,500 to help to pay off energy bill debts, and that is not limited to its customers. The trouble is that people do not know what support is out there, and that information has to get to those who need it the most.

The petitioners request

“that the House of Commons urge the Government to publish accessible information on support available from all energy companies so that those who are struggling financially maximise their chances of surviving the cost of living crisis.”

Question accordingly negated.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that whilst the Energy Cap has decreased, many people are still experiencing extreme difficulty paying energy bills for a number of reasons including the lack of a UK Government Energy Bill Support Scheme and the increased financial pressure from the cost of living generally; notes that whilst there is widespread, legitimate criticism of energy companies many are providing some financial support to consumers in such circumstances but this is not widely known.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to publish accessible information on support available from all energy companies so that those who are struggling financially maximise their chances of surviving the cost of living crisis.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002875]

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, That this House do now adjourn.—(Joy Morrissey.)

7.43 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 15 November 2023

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

Review of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (David Rutley):

The Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, Commonwealth and United Nations, my noble Friend Lord Ahmad, has today made the following statement:

I am today announcing a review of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), an Executive non-departmental public body of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

The WFD was established in 1992 and is dedicated to strengthening democracy around the world by delivering programmes, expertise and research. WFD mobilises UK and international expertise and works with parliaments, political parties, electoral bodies, civil society and local leaders, currently working in more than 30 countries and territories, to help them make their democracies fairer, more inclusive and more accountable, so they can respond to the problems that matter to people.

This review is part of the public bodies review programme, which delivers against the commitments made in the Declaration on Government Reform to increase the effectiveness of public bodies and departmental sponsorship. In 2022, all Departments were asked to prioritise their arm's length bodies for review. The then Foreign Secretary decided that the WFD, which had last been reviewed in 2018, should undergo a review before the end of 2023-24.

This review will follow the Cabinet Office guidance on the undertaking of reviews of public bodies. It will assess the WFD's efficacy, governance arrangements, accountability and efficiency. It will consider whether and how the WFD's mandate could be delivered more effectively and efficiently, and provide robust and well-evidenced recommendations to the departmental sponsor team.

In conducting this review, officials will engage with a broad range of stakeholders, including parliamentarians; political parties; staff, management and the board of governors at the WFD; FCDO teams in the UK and overseas; cross-Whitehall Departments; donors; and those engaged in WFD programmes. I shall inform the House of the outcome of the review when it is completed.

[HCWS36]

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

Energy Infrastructure Planning Projects

The Minister for Energy Security and Net Zero (Graham Stuart): My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Lord Callanan) has today made the following statement:

This statement concerns an application for development consent made under the Planning Act 2008 by North Lincolnshire Green Energy Park Ltd for development consent for the North Lincolnshire Green Energy Park project, located in Flixborough, Scunthorpe.

Under section 107(1)(b) of the Planning Act 2008, the Secretary of State must make a decision on an application within three months of the receipt of the Examining Authority's report, unless exercising the power under section 107(3) of the Act to set a new deadline. Where a new deadline is set, the Secretary of State must make a statement to Parliament to announce it. The current statutory deadline for the decision on the North Lincolnshire Green Energy Park project is 15 November 2023.

The Secretary of State has decided to set a new deadline of no later than 15 March 2024 for deciding this application to enable my Department to seek further information from interested parties and to ensure there is sufficient time to allow for consideration of that information.

The decision to set the new deadline for this application is without prejudice to any decision on whether to grant or refuse development consent.

[HCWS35]

TRANSPORT

HS2 Six-monthly Report to Parliament: November 2023

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Huw Merriman): Review of High Speed 2 (HS2) including programme update, benefits, local community impact and engagement, land and property, programme governance and a forward look.

Overview

The Government announced a new plan, via the Network North Command Paper, to improve transport across Great Britain on 4 October. This directs spending away from future phases of HS2 towards local and regional transport schemes, while committing to the improved delivery of HS2 phase 1.

This is because the facts around HS2 have changed since its inception: costs have increased, delivery has been delayed and the pandemic has changed the travel patterns HS2 was originally designed to serve. Cumulatively, these factors have weakened the economic case. The Government have, therefore, made the difficult decision to not extend HS2 beyond Birmingham, while taking a radical new approach to Euston station.

Instead, the Government have announced a new plan for transport spending, as outlined in the Network North Command Paper. Through this, the Government intend to reallocate £36 billion (2023 prices) of funding earmarked for the HS2 programme to a range of other high priority transport schemes across the north, the midlands and Great Britain, investing in hundreds of projects in towns, cities and rural areas.

We will complete phase 1 of HS2 between London and the west midlands. There will be two branches: one to central Birmingham; and one to Handsacre, near Lichfield, meaning passengers will be able to travel on HS2 trains through to Manchester, Liverpool and Scotland, joining the west coast main line for the rest of their journeys. No decisions have been made on the train service that will run when HS2 is operational.

As is set out by the Network North Command Paper:

The Government's view is that the best interests of our country are not served by progressing with further phases of the project, in the face of diminishing relative benefits and more pressing transport priorities elsewhere. So we will not proceed with phase 2a, 2b or HS2 East.

HS2 phase 2b western leg is now cancelled but some sections of the route are the same as those anticipated to be part of Northern Powerhouse Rail. As set out in the Network North Command Paper, the Government will take the time to consider next steps for the phase 2b legislation that has been reintroduced into Parliament and whether there is a way to repurpose that to deliver Northern Powerhouse Rail. A further £12 billion (2023 prices), additional to the £36 billion, has been earmarked to better connect Manchester and Liverpool. This would allow the delivery of Northern Powerhouse Rail as previously planned, including high-speed lines. But we are working with local leaders to agree whether they wish to suggest other uses of this money to achieve the objective with that £12 billion.

We are going to scale back the project at Euston and adopt a new development-led approach to the Euston quarter which will deliver a station that works, is affordable and can be open and running trains as soon as possible. We will not provide design features we do not need and will instead deliver a six-platform station which can accommodate the trains we will run to Birmingham and onwards and which best supports regeneration of the local area. In this way we will attract private funding and unlock the wider land development opportunities the new station offers, while radically reducing its costs to the taxpayer.

The scope of phase 1 will now be reviewed to guarantee delivery of only that required for updating the reduced HS2 programme.

Delivery remains on track for the initial high-speed services between Old Oak Common in west London and Birmingham Curzon Street by 2029-2033.

Work on HS2 in Lichfield and the surrounding villages, including the connection to the west coast main line at Handsacre junction, will continue.

In the Department's (DfT) accounting officer assessment of 4 October, the accounting officer concluded that continuing to build phase 1 resulted in an estimated benefit-cost ratio (BCR) above 1 in a range of scenarios taking into account sunk costs to date and the estimated remediation costs of not continuing, and based on an indicative timetable of eight trains per hour between Euston, Birmingham Curzon Street and the north-west. Work has begun on an updated business case for the revised programme. This will update the strategic case for HS2 in light of Network North and provide a full economic assessment following decisions being made on the HS2 train services running to and from Euston. These will be made in due course, taking advice from West Coast Partnership Development, HS2 Ltd and Network Rail, and will be subject to consultation. An updated phase 1 business case will be published in due course.

This report uses data provided by HS2 Ltd and covers the period between March 2023 and September 2023 inclusive. Unless stated, all figures are presented in 2019 prices. Data on benefits is taken from September 2023.

Programme update

Schedule

The forecast date for initial HS2 services between Birmingham Curzon Street and Old Oak Common remains within the range of 2029 to 2033.

An updated delivery-into-service range for services to Euston will be provided in due course.

Affordability

In my last report, I highlighted the cost pressures faced by HS2 and the work HS2 Ltd was undertaking to review the phase 1 estimate at completion (EAC). The HS2 Ltd board has now advised me that its updated

EAC for phase 1 is £49 billion to £57 billion (2019 prices), the scope of which was the route from Euston to Birmingham and works north to Fradley and the Handsacre junction. This is a very significant upwards revision compared with HS2 Ltd's previous projections and is a wide range in comparison to the scope of the remaining work.

HS2 Ltd has advised that cost increases on phase 1 since baseline 7.1¹ stem from a wide range of compounding issues including design performance, delivery productivity, consenting delays, and a difficult operating environment with covid and the Ukraine war affecting the supply chain. In particular, the cost of main work civils (MWCC) work has increased since notice to proceed, due to an interplay of these factors. The latest projection HS2 Ltd provided for MWCC is £21.8 billion to £23.4 billion (in 2019 prices), which represents a cost increase of £6.1 billion from baseline 7.1.

¹ Aggregated costs as set out in the full business case which was approved at notice to proceed in 2020.

The Government disagree with the £49 billion to £57 billion figure for two reasons. First, it was drawn up by HS2 Ltd before it was notified of the decision to cancel phase 2. It reflects HS2 Ltd's understanding of the project in September—that it would be proceeding to Manchester and the east midlands, and with more expansive plans for Euston. The scope and costs of phase 1 will now be reassessed following the decision not to proceed beyond the midlands, including the decision to adopt a development-led approach to Euston.

Secondly, DfT makes different assumptions on how much cost risk remains addressable, including different assessments of: how future risks could be actively mitigated; how revised incentives could change the trajectory on the costs of completing the civils and systems work; and the size and composition of HS2 Ltd's own operating costs. As set out in the Network North Command Paper, for the historic phase 1 scope, DfT officials have, therefore, estimated a provisional range of £45 billion to £54 billion on the basis of the same data used by HS2 Ltd, but using different assumptions on how much remaining cost risk remains addressable.

I have asked the HS2 Ltd executive chair, Sir Jon Thompson, to update HS2 Ltd's estimate to consider the revised scope of phase 1 and the cancellation of the wider scheme, reflecting reduced scope and the costs of any changes; to explain and evidence why the upwards revisions have been so significant and their causes; and to agree an EAC with Government by providing an action plan on how HS2 Ltd will deliver the revised scope at the lowest reasonable cost, detailing actions needed to support HS2 Ltd and its supply chain from the Government.

I will update Parliament once that revised estimate has been provided and new cost targets have been provided to HS2 Ltd, including clarity on any changes to the scope or the funding envelope. I propose to state this in both 2019 values (for comparison to the historic position) and in 2023 values (to show the cost in current terms and to reflect the recent period of high inflation).

As stated in the Network North Command Paper, the Government have increased their ambitions for the Euston redevelopment and have begun work to create a transformed "Euston Quarter" led by a new development

corporation, or equivalent, and using private funding to deliver a station that works. Euston sits in an internationally significant commercial district close to a world-leading cluster of scientific, research and development institutions, providing a significant opportunity to leverage private sector investment and minimise up-front cost to the taxpayer. Government Ministers have undertaken substantial engagement with Euston stakeholders since the announcement, including through a meeting with the Euston Partnership board chaired by Peter, Lord Hendy of Richmond Hill, which brings together HS2 Ltd, Network Rail, Lendlease, Transport for London (TfL), the Greater London Authority (GLA), Camden Borough Council (CBC) and the West Coast Partnership. Going forward, the Department will consider a range of delivery models, financing mechanisms and the optimal scope, risk allocation and phasing of the comprehensive scheme. I will provide further updates to Parliament as this work progresses.

Delivery

Phase 1 is already well under way, with the project three years into its construction phase. There are currently 350 active construction sites between the west midlands and London.

Tunnel drives are making good progress across the route. In the Chilterns, the tunnel boring machines (TBMs) Florence and Cecilia have successfully reached the Little Missenden ventilation shaft; more than three quarters of their 10-mile drive beneath the Chilterns is now complete. Sushila and Caroline, the two TBMs creating the first section of tunnel that will make up the 8.4 mile Northolt tunnels between West Ruislip and Old Oak Common station, have completed the first mile of twin-bored tunnel in the capital. Since their launch in November 2022, the 2,000-tonne TBMs have each installed over 847 tunnel rings, made up of 5,929 concrete segments in total.

Overall, half the tunnel boring machines for the route have launched, one in six tunnel journeys—comprising more than 14 miles of new tunnels—have been completed, and 16,897 rings have been installed.

Stage 1 of the design and build contract for Birmingham Curzon Street was awarded to Mace Dragados Joint Venture in May 2021. An update on stage 2 is expected in the coming weeks.

At Old Oak Common, the excavation of the underground box that will house the HS2 station platforms is now over 50% complete. In line with the programme, groundworks for the conventional rail station which will accommodate eight platforms on the realigned Great Western main line and relief lines, commenced in October 2022.

A contract between HS2 Ltd and Network Rail has been confirmed for the delivery of the rail systems element of the GWML platforms. Both the Secretary of State and I visited Old Oak Common in August. I hosted the Deputy Mayor, TfL commissioner and rail industry representatives to discuss progress across the site. The progress made at Old Oak Common is crucial for realising the potential for the creation of jobs and provision of housing enabled by the station through the new transport connections provided, which the Government are working hard to achieve, together with the Mayor of London. To that end, I have created a taskforce including Transport for London and the Old Oak and Park Royal

Development Corporation (OPDC) to consider and take forward action on this critical part of the programme. The first meeting of the Old Oak Taskforce took place on 31 October 2023.

The Department and HS2 Ltd have started working to bring the work on phase 2a to a stop in a safe and efficient way while ensuring value for money. There are a wide range of tasks, including wrapping up contracts and not progressing the design and delivery partner and main works civil framework contracts. Land will be remediated where early/enabling works had commenced, and where new habitats have been completed, a suitable long term management plan will be established to support our “no net loss of biodiversity” commitment.

On the HS2 Crewe-Manchester scheme, the Hybrid Bill Select Committee continued its work hearing petitions from people and communities affected by the Bill up until Parliament went into recess in September. The Committee produced its first report on 19 July setting out its views and responses to the issues raised by petitioners to that point, to which the Government responded in September. A second additional provision was also deposited in July 2023.

The Select Committee adjourned in October, pending further instruction from the House following the cancellation of the HS2 phase 2b western leg. The Bill has been carried over into the next parliamentary Session and we are currently considering its future as we look to deliver Northern Powerhouse Rail, or any alternative that local leaders may agree, as quickly as possible, as outlined in the Network North Command Paper.

The Network North Command Paper set out the Government’s policy to pivot away from high-speed rail interventions and focus spending on the transport infrastructure benefiting the local journeys that matter most to communities. While Network North cancelled the HS2 schemes north and east of Birmingham, it maintained and added to the other commitments in the integrated rail plan, including broadening the scope of Northern Powerhouse Rail. The existing Northern Powerhouse Rail commitments in the integrated rail plan continue to stand. The King’s Speech set out the Government’s intention to repurpose the HS2 phase 2b Bill to provide options to progress the delivery of Northern Powerhouse Rail. Work continues to deliver the other integrated rail plan schemes, and to develop the new schemes brought forward by the Network North Command Paper.

The Department is working with HS2 Ltd to stop development work on the phase 2b western leg that is no longer required in a safe and efficient way, while ensuring value for money. The Department is also considering repurposing the development work that is required to deliver Northern Powerhouse Rail as outlined in the Network North Command Paper. The Network North Command Paper committed £12 billion to better connect Manchester to Liverpool. This would allow the delivery of Northern Powerhouse Rail as previously planned, including high-speed lines. As promised in Network North, we will work with local leaders to agree whether they wish to suggest other uses of this money to achieve the objectives within that cost envelope.

Following the cancellation of phase 2, a study will be established to consider connectivity in the midlands and connecting areas.

HS2 Ltd continues tendering for phase 1 rail systems packages, including track installation, overhead catenary and high-voltage power. HS2 Ltd has provided suppliers with scope clarifications to support them in submitting competitive bids. Bids previously submitted by the supply chain showed higher indirect costs and fees than estimated and are currently unaffordable. These pressures are recognised in the revised EAC range advised by HS2 Ltd. HS2 Ltd continues to develop its management capability for the rail systems alliance, which is responsible for delivering these systems packages in a collaborative model.

Benefits

Growth and opportunities for local communities

HS2 between London and Birmingham will continue to act as a catalyst for local investment and regeneration, unlocking growth around new and existing station sites and in the wider area. Local places are best placed to develop strategies and delivery plans aimed at making the most of the arrival of HS2.

DfT and HS2 Ltd are working closely with partners across both central and local government to ensure places along the HS2 route take full advantage of the opportunities for economic growth, investment, regeneration and placemaking.

At Euston, we will appoint a development company, separate from HS2 Ltd, to manage the delivery of this project. We will also take on the lessons of success stories such as Battersea Power Station and Nine Elms, which secured £9 billion of private sector investment and thousands of homes. We will harness the future growth that the station will unleash to support its development, to ensure we get the best possible value for the British taxpayer—and ensure that funding is underpinned by contributions from those people and businesses its development supports. At the same time, we are considerably upping the ambition of the Euston redevelopment, where we will be looking to establish a development corporation to create a transformed “Euston Quarter”.

Green transport for a net-zero future

HS2 Ltd continues to make progress on its ambition of reducing the carbon emissions associated with building the railway. The company exceeded its carbon reduction target for 2022-23, achieving a cumulative forecast reduction of 29.6% against the phase 1 baseline. This exceeds the forecast 28% reduction previously expected by March 2023.

The programme remains committed to supporting projects that create and restore woodland along the HS2 route. The HS2 woodland fund was relaunched in June, with £3.25 million available to support landowners near the route to create new native broadleaved woodlands and restore existing ancient woodland sites.

HS2 Ltd is continuing to work on several active travel outcomes. This includes continuing the design and delivery of active travel interfaces across phase 1, exploring opportunities for linear active travel corridors along phase 1 through the repurposing of maintenance access tracks or use of construction roads for walking, wheeling and cycling. HS2 Ltd also continues to work with Sustrans to enhance sections of the national cycle network.

HS2's stations are being designed to be sustainable. At Old Oak Common, innovative and lower carbon approaches in designing and constructing the station

have been used. The station needs minimal energy and net zero emissions while in operation, and there are extensive public transport and active travel choices included in the design.

Skilled workers for an innovative industry

The HS2 programme continues to support tens of thousands of jobs and thousands of UK businesses have already worked on the project. There are over 3,000 UK businesses in the supply chain across the United Kingdom. It is helping train a skilled workforce for the UK's wider rail and construction industries. The programme has created over 1,300 apprenticeships since phase 1 Royal Assent in 2017 and currently supports over 30,000 jobs, the majority of which are currently working on delivering phase 1.

As the largest infrastructure project in the country, HS2 will also continue to be at the forefront of innovation within the construction industry, using its buying power to ensure innovation is embraced and driven throughout the supply chain, and using the HS2 accelerator programme to support SMEs and pilot new ways of scaling digital technology and innovative delivery.

Local community impact and engagement

HS2 Ltd and its contractors are committed to minimising the impacts of construction on communities. I receive regular updates from the independent construction commissioner and the HS2 residents' commissioner who proactively assure the considerate delivery of HS2 works along with the Department for Transport's independent construction inspectors.

In his 25th report, the construction commissioner highlighted the area around Euston station as a particular challenge for communities since the decision to pause works at the station was implemented earlier this year.

In response to the pause in construction activity at Euston, we have commenced work on so called “meanwhile uses” to determine what can be done to reduce the impact of the pause on the local community. We have an opportunity to use parts of the HS2 construction site to provide meaningful and active uses in order to maximise community benefits and generate social and economic value at Euston. This work is being undertaken in close co-operation with the London Borough of Camden, with a strong focus on local engagement to deliver community priorities. So far, we have delivered new green space for communities to enjoy, and we are looking to bring commercial operators and community organisations on board to boost economic and social activity in the area.

For the former 2a and 2b western leg sections, HS2 Ltd's community engagement operation will focus on resolving any local uncertainty around works that are no longer required, or any restoration works that now need to take place.

HS2 Ltd's community and business funds exist to support communities affected by construction. These funds are intended to leave a positive legacy long after construction is completed and to go beyond statutory compensation and committed mitigation schemes. So far, over £16.6 million of funding has been awarded across 293 local projects along the line of route. Recent awards have supported village hall refurbishments, new equipment for community groups, and the restoration of outdoor areas for nature and recreation.

The volume of anti-HS2 protestor activity continues to be low. There are currently no protestor sites that directly threaten delivery of HS2. An injunction prohibiting trespass on, and obstruction of access to, land acquired by HS2 Ltd was granted by the High Court in September 2022 and remains active along the route. Illegal protest has cost the project an estimated £38 million in direct costs and around £114 million in consequential costs, such as delays, to date. Of this, only £4 million has been added since HS2's route-wide injunction was granted.

Land and property

The Government recognise that the changes set out in the Network North Command Paper will mean some people and communities will have had land and property purchased that is no longer needed for the revised scheme. We are committed to acting in good faith and for fair treatment for all affected—particularly those with transactions in progress—while protecting taxpayers appropriately.

Officials are working to formally lift phase 2a safeguarding within weeks and phase 2b safeguarding will be amended by summer 2024, to allow for any safeguarding needed for Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR). There will be no further compulsory purchase notices on phase 2a, or the non-NPR sections of phase 2b, and HS2 Ltd is not accepting new applications under the existing schemes from property owners in the areas where safeguarding is going to be lifted. Applications that are in progress will be handled on a case-by-case basis after consultation with the claimant. We are currently developing the programme for selling land acquired for HS2 that is no longer needed and will set out more details in due course. We will take time to develop this programme carefully to ensure it delivers value for money for taxpayers and does not disrupt local property markets. We will engage with the communities and individuals who are affected throughout this process.

Programme governance and controls

The Network North Command Paper set out the Government's intention to provide strengthened governance and control while the changes to HS2 were implemented. In line with this, the Government are progressing work to:

- support the HS2 Ltd executive chair, Sir Jon Thompson, and the HS2 Ltd board in strengthening accountabilities, governance and control within HS2 Ltd through a comprehensive change programme that he is leading;

- re-emphasise the primary focus on delivering HS2 cost effectively and affordably as HS2 Ltd's primary objective after safety;

- support Sir Jon Thompson in appointing a highly capable chief executive focused on delivering HS2 to schedule and the revised budget;

- review HS2 Ltd's advice on its revised EAC once this has been adjusted for the changes required by Network North and to then set a revised funding envelope and target cost;

- require HS2 Ltd to provide a detailed action plan setting out how it intends to work with the Government and its supply chain to deliver the remainder of HS2 at the lowest reasonable cost including shared assumptions and metrics to assess progress;

- require HS2 Ltd to secure ministerial approval for any contract award decisions and contract changes that are above its agreed affordable budget; and

- strengthen scrutiny of delivery, cost and schedule performance through a revised sponsor board with full participation from officials from HM Treasury (HMT) and the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA).

Alongside these immediate interventions, the Department is commissioning an independently led review of the control and assurance of the delivery of its major infrastructure projects. This will report to the Department for Transport, HMT and the IPA and consider how to improve the Government's confidence on estimation, scope control, and adherence to schedule and budget of major schemes delivered by their arm's length bodies, including how obstacles to cost-effective delivery can be reduced.

The ministerial taskforce provides strategic oversight, support and challenge for the successful delivery of HS2 and met on 1 November to discuss the latest performance management information, the cost estimate range for phase 1 and HS2 Ltd's response to changes to the HS2 programme. It will meet again in December to consider improved management information and obstacles to delivering better value for money construction in the UK context.

The former HS2 Ltd chief executive, Mark Thurston left HS2 Ltd at the end of September. I am grateful to Sir Jon Thompson for taking on additional responsibilities in an executive chair capacity until a successor is in post. Sir Jon will continue to be supported at board level by deputy chair Elaine Holt. Recruiting a new chief executive is a priority for HS2 Ltd and the Department and we expect to be able to announce an appointment early in the new year.

Since my last report, the Secretary of State has also reappointed Ian King as a non-executive director for a further term on the HS2 Ltd board, and Joanna Davinson, Keith Smithson and Nelson Ogunshakin as new non-executive directors.

Forward look

In light of the Network North Command Paper, we will now proceed with the steps necessary to take these decisions forward.

We will continue to focus on the cost-effective delivery of HS2 phase 1 and redirect funding from the cancellation of later phases to the Network North programme. My Department will also begin developing a revised business case for the revised HS2 scheme.

I will provide further updates to Parliament on the development-led Euston project as it progresses.

On phase 2a, the Department will continue to work with HS2 Ltd to bring early/enabling site activities to a safe stop and conclude any land remediation activities for the handing back of sites.

On the phase 2b western leg, further work will consider legislative options for delivering Northern Powerhouse Rail, including whether elements of the High Speed Rail Bill can be repurposed to support delivery of this.

On HS2 east, a study (to be conducted as part of Network North) is being established to holistically consider connectivity in the midlands and connecting areas.

I will update Parliament once HS2 Ltd has revised estimates and new cost targets including any changes to the scope or the budget. Subject to the agreement across Government, I also intend to state this in both 2019 values (for comparison to the historic position) and in 2023 values (to show the cost in current terms and to reflect the recent period of high inflation).

*Financial Annex*¹

This annex reflects the current spend to date against the funding envelope agreed at notice to proceed in 2020. The phase 1 EAC work has identified challenges within the forward projections which still have uncertainty and are yet to be captured in these tables.

It should be noted that HMG conducted an efficiencies and savings review (ESR) earlier this year, with savings found across the Department, due to significant inflation and non-inflationary pressures on HS2. Following this, the 2023-24 budget was updated at main estimates to £6.5 billion. However, as was noted at main estimates,

there remain substantial inflationary pressures on the programme, with full-year costs currently forecast by DfT and HS2 Ltd to be £8 billion, that will need to be resolved at supplementary estimates. As is standard, the mains budget and 2023-24 forecast are both presented in 2019 prices in this report, rather than cash prices, and therefore do not fully account for those remaining pressures. The Government will provide further details of the 2023-24 budget and forecast in cash terms as part of the standard supplementary estimates reporting to Parliament, which will also reflect the Network North announcement.

*Historic and forecast expenditure (2019 prices, including land and property)*²

Phase	Overall spend to date (£ billion)	2023 to 2024 budget (£ billion)	2023 to 2024 forecast (£ billion)	Variance (£ billion)
1 ³	24.6	5.8	6	-0.2
2a	1	0.2	0.1	0.1
2b Western Leg	0.7	0.2	0.1	0.1
HS2 East (West to East Midlands) and East Midlands to Leeds	0.7	0	0	0
HS2 Eastern Leg (West Midlands to Leeds)				
Total	27	6.2	6.3	0.0

¹ The figures set out relate to the historic scope of the programme and have not been amended to reflect the Network North announcement.

² The numbers set out in the tables have been rounded to aid legibility. Due to this, they do not always tally. All figures stated below are given in 2019 prices

³ Spend to date includes a £0.9 billion liability (provision) representing the Department's obligation to purchase land and property.

Evolution of phase 1 HS2 Ltd. contingency (2019 prices) drawdown over last six parliamentary reports

	Oct 2020 report (£ billion)	Mar 2021 report (£ billion)	Oct 2021 report (£ billion)	Mar 2022 report (£ billion)	Oct 2022 report (£ billion)	June 2023 report (rounded to billions)	September 2023 report (rounded to billions)
Total HS2 Ltd contingency drawdown and % used	0.3 (5%)	0.4 (7%)	0.8 (14%)	1.3 (23%)	1.5 (28%)	1.8 (33%)	2.6 (46%)
Total HS2 Ltd contingency remaining	5.3 (95%)	5.2 (93%)	4.8 (86%)	4.3 (77%)	4.0 (72%)	3.7 (67%)	3.0 (54%)

Evolution of phase 1 Government-retained contingency (2019 prices) drawdown over last six parliamentary reports

	Oct 2020 Report (£ billion)	Mar 2021 Report (£ billion)	Oct 2021 Report (£ billion)	Mar 2022 Report (£ billion)	Oct 2022 Report (£ billion)	June 2023 Report (£ billion)	September 2023 Report (rounded to billions)
Total Government-retained contingency drawdown and % used	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%) ⁴	0 (0%)
Total Government-retained contingency remaining	4.3 (100%)	4.3 (100%)	4.3 (100%)	4.3 (100%)	4.3 (100%)	4.3 (100%)	4.3 (100%)

⁴ As highlighted in the October 2021 report, £0.015 billion has been allocated to enable Old Oak Common to increase the number of trains it serves before opening services to Euston station from 3 to 6 trains per hour but has not yet been drawn down from Government-retained contingency.

ORAL ANSWERS

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**not later than
Wednesday 22 November 2023**

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