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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Tuesday 30 January 2024

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

The Minister of State was asked—

Gaza

1. **Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): What recent diplomatic steps he has taken to help secure a sustainable ceasefire in Gaza. [901233]

14. **Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): What diplomatic steps he is taking to help end the conflict in Israel and Gaza. [901246]

21. **Yasmin Qureshi** (Bolton South East) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with his counterpart in Israel on the number of civilian deaths in Gaza. [901254]

24. **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): What recent diplomatic steps he has taken to help secure a sustainable ceasefire in Gaza. [901257]

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): We are calling for an immediate humanitarian pause, in order to get aid in and hostages out as a vital step towards a sustainable, permanent ceasefire.

Mr Betts: That is all very well, but the problem is that Netanyahu and the Israeli Government are simply ignoring all the pleas for restraint—those pleas have become empty words. What will the Government do to put real pressure on the Israelis to stop the unacceptable killings, enter into negotiations for a permanent ceasefire and stop the threats to permanently annex and occupy Gaza? Has the time come to stop selling to Israel arms that are being used to raze Gaza to the ground?

Mr Mitchell: As I told the House yesterday, the Foreign Secretary is in the region today and will pursue the vital policies that the hon. Gentleman has set out. The hon. Gentleman will know that it is an absolute priority for Britain to ensure that more aid gets in, but the Israeli Government have the right of self-defence and, as the UK Government continually make clear, they must exercise that right within international humanitarian law.

Jamie Stone: Like many other Members, I am sure, I have received an extraordinary number of emails from constituents who are deeply concerned about what is going on—these are people who would never normally get in touch with their MP. We must stop the killing. My party and I believe that an immediate bilateral ceasefire is the way forward. What steps are the Government taking with partners in the region and around the world to achieve that end?

Mr Mitchell: All of us want a ceasefire, but it must be sustainable. That is why the British Government are bent on ensuring that we get a humanitarian pause so that we can get far more supplies into Gaza, and, on the back of that, a sustainable ceasefire. As I said in answer to the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), we need a pause in order to get aid and support in and the hostages out.

Yasmin Qureshi: According to the UN World Food Programme, over half a million Palestinians in Gaza are starving. A famine is imminent. Allegations against 12 United Nations Relief and Works Agency staff are rightly being investigated, but cutting aid to UNRWA entirely is disproportionate and punitive. Has the Minister even considered the consequences of those cuts on women, babies and the seriously injured, and does he understand that they would breach the measures issued by the International Court of Justice to ensure that aid flows into Gaza?

Mr Mitchell: As I have set out to the House repeatedly, we are doing everything we can, along with others, to ensure that vital supplies get into Gaza, for the very reasons that the hon. Lady sets out. On UNRWA, it would be impossible for any of us to continue business as usual, given the appalling events outlined over the weekend. That is why we have made it clear that we will not produce further finance until we are satisfied that those matters have been addressed. With regard to what we are seeking to do through UNRWA now, we have provided additional funding in the past, and that will ensure that aid and vital supplies get into Gaza.

Paul Blomfield: The Government have consistently repeated their commitment to a two-state solution, and that is right, but for 30 years Israel has deliberately undermined that through the settlement of the west bank, in contravention of international law. Now Netanyahu has come clean and ruled out a two-state solution, so does the Minister agree that, if the UK's policy is to be seen as anything more than empty words, we need to demonstrate our commitment to a viable Palestinian state by recognising it and by upgrading current Government advice against trade with the illegal settlements to a full embargo?

Mr Mitchell: The Government's position on the issue of illegal settlements is absolutely clear. In respect of the two-state solution, I would point out to the hon. Gentleman that progress has been made previously, in particular after grievous acts of terrible conflict and terrorism; that is when the big leaps forward towards a resolution of this desperate problem have been made. We hope that on the back of the horrendous events that have taken place on 7 October and since, additional progress can be made as soon as the political track can be restarted.

Sir Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con): The Palestinian Authority's grip on security control across the west bank has been pushed out by the malevolent forces of Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and local terror groups funded by Iran. Is it not the case that unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state now would risk equipping those dangerous actors with the trimmings and capabilities of a state?

Mr Mitchell: The British Government have always been clear that we intend to recognise a Palestinian state when the timing is right. My right hon. and learned Friend will have heard the comments that the Foreign Secretary made last night, which in no way deviate from that policy; the Foreign Secretary is pointing out how important it is to ensure that people can see that when a political track gets going, real progress can be made.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): If we cannot have a ceasefire, a humanitarian pause would of course be very welcome, but it will only be of any use if we can get the aid that is so urgently required into Gaza. What are the Government doing to overcome what the Foreign Secretary has described as the "ludicrous" checking regime put in place by the Israelis, and what more can we do to stop or avoid crowds of Israelis from gathering at crossings into Gaza, aiming to prevent aid from entering, and so obviate a famine?

Mr Mitchell: On my right hon. Friend's second point, I can assure him that we are in regular touch with all the relevant authorities to try to ensure that does not hinder the entry of aid. On his first point, we should all be aware that the issue is not that there is not enough aid in the region, but that it is not getting in. That is why the Government, under the Prime Minister's specific instruction, have been investigating how to get aid in through all means, including from the sea and from a naval corridor.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): It is really disturbing that BBC Online is reporting that the Foreign Secretary has changed the UK Government's approach on recognition of a Palestinian state. Does the Minister agree that bringing forward and accelerating unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state would be to reward Hamas's atrocity?

Mr Mitchell: My right hon. Friend will be aware that there is no question of rewarding Hamas for the appalling acts they perpetrated in a pogrom on 7 October. The point that the Foreign Secretary has been making is that we must give the people of the west bank and Gaza a credible route to a Palestinian state and a new future, but we must do so when the time is right.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): The Minister will know that there is rising anger in the region about the desperate situation in Gaza, which makes a ceasefire much harder to achieve. More people are now dying of hunger and thirst than from bombs and bullets. He said yesterday that the UK is pausing funding to UNRWA, not cutting it, but given its critical role, will he reassure us that nothing will disrupt the supply of aid—not just into Gaza, but through Gaza—now and in the months ahead? He is right that these are serious allegations and we should be robust about how UK aid money is spent, but it would be unconscionable if we allowed anything to

stand in the way of UK aid reaching those children right now. Will he promise that the UK will move heaven and earth to get that aid to them?

Mr Mitchell: The shadow Minister for development is absolutely right about the balance that has to be struck. Of course, we need to investigate rapidly the very serious allegations that have been made against UNRWA, but the assets we use for getting aid and support into Gaza depend on the assets that UNRWA owns—warehouses, vehicles and the other distribution mechanisms. As such, we need that inquiry to be completed as rapidly as possible. In the meanwhile, Britain was not intending to give any further support to UNRWA in this financial year; in the next financial year we will consider the position in precisely the way the shadow Minister sets out.

West Philippine Sea

2. **Mr Rob Roberts** (Delyn) (Ind): Whether he is taking diplomatic steps to help reduce the risk of conflict in the West Philippine sea. [R] [901234]

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): The UK is committed to the primacy of the United Nations convention on the law of the sea, and to freedom of navigation and overflight. We oppose any action that raises tensions, or the risk of miscalculation, in the South China sea. The Foreign Secretary spoke to his Philippino counterpart in December, and the FCDO issued a statement on 11 December, condemning Chinese unsafe and escalatory actions against the Philippines.

Mr Roberts: I declare an interest, as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for the Philippines. The Minister is no doubt aware of a large number of videos posted on YouTube and other outlets, showing Chinese gunboats ramming and victimising Philippine fishermen in the West Philippine sea. This is a vital industry for the economy of the Philippines, which, as she knows, is one of our key strategic partners in the region. What discussions has she had with her Chinese counterpart to stop those unprovoked attacks and allow those peaceful fishermen simply to go about earning a livelihood to support their families?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: I was in Vietnam in October, speaking at the South China sea conference, and I set out very clearly the UK's position and raised the serious risks, which my hon. Friend highlights, posed by these instances of unsafe conduct against Philippino fishing vessels. The UK has provided £6.5 million in funding to support regional partners through an enhanced programme of maritime security capacity building in south-east Asia, which includes training on the law of the sea, and we continue to provide that support to help maintain that free and open Pacific.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for that response. China is quite clearly a thuggish country; a bully country that thinks it can step upon anybody. They have an insatiable demand and appetite for everybody else's resources. When will the time come that China will understand that they cannot bully the wee person—that we will stand with that wee person against them?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The hon. Gentleman sets out a really important position, and we want to continue to support and work closely with the Philippines. I was able to co-chair the first UK-Philippines strategic dialogue in November, where we are continuing to work with the Philippines across a number of fronts on how we can support them to ensure that they can sustain their agency and present themselves the positions, as he highlights, of wanting to be able to use their waterways freely and unencumbered.

Palestinian State: Recognition

3. **Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with his Israeli counterpart on Israel's political objectives in Gaza. [901235]

6. **Naz Shah** (Bradford West) (Lab): What plans the Government have to recognise a Palestinian state. [901238]

11. **David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): What recent assessment he has made of the potential merits of the recognition of a Palestinian state. [901243]

13. **Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): What recent assessment he has made of the potential merits of the recognition of a Palestinian state. [901245]

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): We are clear that for a peaceful solution to this conflict there must be a political horizon towards a two-state solution. Britain will recognise a Palestinian state at a time when it best serves the objective of peace. Bilateral recognition alone cannot end the occupation.

Hannah Bardell: Given the evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Israel, and now recognition by the International Court of Justice of the risk of genocide being committed by Israel, have the UK Government sought to ascertain what the Israeli military objective is in Gaza, and does the Minister agree with the motion tabled by the Scottish National party at the Council of Europe last week, supported by nine nations and 20 members, that an immediate ceasefire and a resettlement scheme for those bombed out of Gaza by Israel are absolutely essential?

Mr Mitchell: I have not seen the motion tabled by the SNP—and I probably would not agree with it if I had. We are always focused on addressing the points that the hon. Lady has made. When it comes to the International Court of Justice, and indeed international humanitarian law, the Government's view is not the same as hers, but she may rest assured that we keep these things under very close review.

David Linden: There is now a live ongoing investigation by the ICJ into genocide in Gaza. Given the British Government's reluctance thus far to recognise the state of Palestine, does the Minister not understand that failure to do so will soon result in the UK Government just recognising a cemetery?

Mr Mitchell: The Government's position—and indeed, I believe, the position of those on the Opposition Front Bench—has always been clear: we should recognise the

state of Palestine when the time is right. The Foreign Secretary last night added some further words to that commitment, but that is the commitment of the British Government.

Chris Law: Last night the Foreign Secretary indicated that the UK Government will consider recognising the Palestinian state in order

“to give the Palestinian people a political horizon so that they can see that there is going to be irreversible progress to a two-state solution”.

Can the Minister explain how that is possible when both the Israeli National Security Minister and the Finance Minister have advocated using the ongoing war as an opportunity to permanently resettle Palestinians from Gaza and establish Israeli settlements there, and the Israeli Prime Minister has openly said he is proud to have prevented the establishment of a Palestinian state?

Mr Mitchell: The Foreign Secretary was making it clear that we need a credible route to a Palestinian state and the offer of a new future. It is very important to lift people's eyes to the possibilities once a political track is established. I point out to the hon. Gentleman that progress has been made. Progress that was made at Oslo took place on the back of appalling events when people reached for a political solution. The same is true of what followed the second intifada. The aim of the British Government is to get a sustainable ceasefire and move to that political track.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): My right hon. Friend's comments about a big leap forward are noble—I recognise that—but as long as Hamas, who believe not in a two-state solution but in killing and raping Jews, cling on in Gaza; as Fatah is barely able to control the west bank; and as Israel is still in trauma, still trying to get 130 hostages, including babies, back from Gaza, what does he think that talk about early recognition of Palestinian statehood can achieve?

Mr Mitchell: I recognise the voracity of what my right hon. Friend says, but there is no change in the policy. He is right that Hamas must agree to the release of all hostages, that Hamas can no longer be in charge of Gaza, and that we need an agreement to provide governance, service and security there, which will involve the Palestinian Authority. The Foreign Secretary, in his meetings with President Abbas last week, sought to advance that agenda.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con): On Sunday, a third of Knesset Members attended a conference calling for the return of settlements to Gaza and to the north of the occupied west bank. Some of those Members have also asked for a voluntary migration of Palestinians from Gaza, with Israel taking over control. Does the Minister agree that that is not in the best interests of Israel and that there should be a return to the pre-1967 borders, with both countries working together to maintain peace in the interests of their citizens?

Mr Mitchell: Yes, I do. The only viable long-term pathway is a two-state solution based on 1967 lines, with Jerusalem as a shared capital, that guarantees security and stability for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): Surely the only political objective in Gaza is inextricably linked to the security objectives, because the grim reality is that Hamas do not seek a ceasefire, and Israel cannot be reasonably expected to pursue one with a group who actively seek its destruction, not least the commitment made by a senior Hamas official, Ghazi Hamad, who recently said:

“We must teach Israel a lesson, and we will do this again and again”,

and that the 7 October massacre was

“just the first time, and there will be a second, a third, a fourth.”

The only political solution must be the elimination of Hamas and the release of the hostages.

Mr Mitchell: That is why the Government have made it clear that calls for a ceasefire on its own will simply not work. First, Israel absolutely has the right of self-defence, to address and deal with the cause of the terrible events of 7 October. Secondly, Hamas have made it absolutely clear that they do not want a ceasefire; they want to replicate the events that took place on 7 October.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Foreign Secretary.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): For a decade now, the Labour party has supported Palestinian recognition. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) has said,

“statehood is not in the gift of a neighbour. It is the inalienable right of the Palestinian people.”

I welcome the Foreign Secretary adopting that position and rejecting the notion that recognition can only follow the conclusion of negotiations. After the unacceptable comments by Prime Minister Netanyahu, does the Prime Minister agree that no country has a veto over the UK’s decision to recognise Palestine?

Mr Mitchell: I can tell the shadow Foreign Secretary that we will pursue the policy that we think is right. The Foreign Secretary set out clearly in his remarks last night the importance of a credible route to a Palestinian state and a new future. In respect of the conversations that the Foreign Secretary will have had last week with Prime Minister Netanyahu, I cannot trade the details across the House, but I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that the Foreign Secretary will have represented the British position with Prime Minister Netanyahu, whom he knows very well, with great accuracy.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Brendan O’Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Palestinian recognition is an inalienable right, not a privilege to be conferred by others. Although I was pleased to hear the Foreign Secretary say last night that the UK,

“with allies, will look at the issue of recognising a Palestinian state”,

I feel we have been here before, most notably in 2014. Given Netanyahu’s categorical rejection of a Palestinian state, what are the next steps? When will we hear about them, and how confident can we be that we will not be sitting here in another 10 years, wishing we had acted to prevent a genocide?

Mr Mitchell: It is not easy to sustain the view that we have been here before—at least not to this extent. The British Government’s policy has been clear on the recognition of the state of Palestine. We are working extremely hard in the region and more widely internationally to secure a political track. The hon. Gentleman will recognise that that will be in the mix once that political track is able to start.

Climate Change Adaptation

4. **Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): What steps his Department is taking to support developing countries with climate change adaptation. [901236]

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): We are committed to spending £1.5 billion on climate adaptation by 2025.

Wera Hobhouse: Extreme weather is already causing huge devastation, especially in the poorest communities across the world, who are also the least likely to find investors or to borrow from global financial institutions. At COP28 there was a breakthrough, and a loss and damage fund has finally been established. However, the money for the UK’s contribution will come from pre-existing climate finance commitments and the development budget. Should the Government, in the spirit of what the loss and damage fund represents, not establish a new, ringfenced loss and damage budget that is not taken from other budgets?

Mr Mitchell: We did support setting up the loss and damage fund at COP28 and we contributed specifically towards it. However, it is important that loss and damage does not draw from the same donors and the same official development assistance budgets as other development. It has to be different. It was because the UAE, as a non-traditional donor, put in \$100 million to that fund that Britain was willing to support it, but we need new and different donors and new and different sources of funds.

James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I welcome the extremely important work the Government are doing in protecting vulnerable communities around the world. Will the Minister confirm to me that the £3 billion that the Government have committed for saving nature will be used on some of the very vulnerable habitat sites and animals around the world, such as those Environmental Audit Committee saw on a recent visit to Antarctica? Will he particularly think about whales, fur seals and of course the emperor penguin?

Mr Mitchell: I will think about all the mammals my hon. Friend has mentioned. I can assure him that our commitment is to biodiversity and to nature. We recognise the great importance of the work being done in the Antarctic, and indeed the contribution that he makes to that.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Foreign Secretary.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): From the floods to the fires, from melting ice sheets to ocean heat, the climate crisis is reaching a tipping point. Labour has a plan at home: doubling onshore wind, trebling solar and ending new oil and gas licences in the North sea. Labour has a plan internationally: a clean power alliance

of developed and developing countries to drive forward the transition. Is it not the truth that the Government have no plan and have squandered Britain's climate reputation to wage culture wars at home?

Mr Mitchell: The reason the Government were able to reduce the size of electricity bills for hard-working families was precisely because we are meeting our targets and will meet our international commitments. Britain's international targets and commitments are enshrined in law as a result of the activities of this House. Internationally we are committed, as the right hon. Gentleman knows and as was set out to the House towards the end of last year, to spending £11.6 billion on ensuring that we meet our climate targets and produce climate finance. I would argue that that figure will be nearer £16 billion by 2026.

Debt Reduction in the Developing World

5. Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): Whether he has had recent discussions with his international counterparts on a strategy to reduce debt in the developing world. [901237]

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): The Government recently set out our commitments on developing country debt in our international development White Paper.

Preet Kaur Gill: The main mechanism to tackle the debt crisis, the common framework for debt treatment, is failing due to the low level of participation by private creditors who own around 40% of low-income country debt. Does the Minister agree that there is strategic need for the United Kingdom to take debt reduction seriously and change its approach, given the crisis in Africa and the growing role of China and Russia in the developing world?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Lady is right to point to the considerable difficulties that countries are finding. Some 15% of low-income countries are in debt distress, and 45% are at higher risk of that. The African Development Bank says that debt repayments in 2024 are likely to be six times the level of 2021. That is why Britain is working with other creditors to secure debt restructurings, most often through the G20 common framework, but also through the Paris Club.

Middle East: Conflict Prevention

7. Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): What recent steps he has taken to help prevent an escalation of conflict in the middle east. [901239]

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): The Government are engaging extensively to prevent an escalation of conflict in the middle east. The Prime Minister spoke to President Biden last week about that specific issue.

Alex Cunningham: I think we can all understand the anger towards Israel for the way it is systematically demolishing Gaza and needlessly killing so many of the people, as well as the need for it to be properly held to account. Does the Minister recognise that we must do everything to protect against others joining the conflict,

and that activities such as those against the Houthis must also be proportionate and accompanied by more diplomatic work across the region to stop wholesale killing?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is right to make clear that all of us seek that there should not be an escalation of this conflict in the middle east. That is why right at the start Britain moved military assets to the eastern end of the Mediterranean. More recently, as he alluded to, we are expressing strong support for freedom of navigation on the high seas, stopping attacks by the Houthis. We are degrading their capacity to carry out their attacks, and have made clear that we will not accept that challenge to international freedom of the sea.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): One problem with the middle east is the sense of hopelessness among the Palestinian people, which is fuelling terrorist outrages. What steps can the Government take with our American friends to try to put pressure on the Israeli state to stop the imposition of new settlements in the west bank, so that we can gradually reduce tensions in the whole region? Is that not the way forward?

Mr Mitchell: We have made it clear that the settlements are illegal and should not have gone ahead and should not go ahead. On the wider point, we are working closely with our American friends and others through the superb diplomatic network that Britain possesses, to try to lift people's eyes and move to the day after, when a political track can start. That is the answer to my right hon. Friend's question—the political track, which can then start to offer hope in resolving this dreadful and long-standing problem.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): Today the middle east is in danger of seeing a major escalation of conflict, and whether it is in Gaza, the Red sea, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria or Jordan, we are seeing aggression. If there is a common denominator in those conflicts, it is the malign influence of Iran, usually through its proxies. What are the Government doing to disrupt and stop the disruptive activities of Iran?

Mr Mitchell: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary had a meeting recently with the Iranian Foreign Minister to set out Britain's view of and requirements from the relationship with Iran, and I think that was a most useful contact to have. The Foreign Secretary is in the region today, trying to ensure that the very points behind this question are accepted and honoured. We are working extensively with Jordan, Egypt, Qatar, Israel, Saudi Arabia and America. Those discussions are ongoing, and will address the point that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

Ukraine

8. Mark Eastwood (Dewsbury) (Con): What assessment he has made of the impact of the UK's non-military support to Ukraine over winter 2023-24 on the humanitarian situation in that country. [901240]

12. Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): What recent diplomatic support he has provided to Ukraine. [901244]

18. **Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): What discussions he has had with his international counterparts on maintaining support for Ukraine. [901250]

19. **Richard Foord** (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): What recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on the war in Ukraine. [901252]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Leo Docherty): Since February 2020 the UK has committed £357 million of humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. In response to winter we scaled up humanitarian support with additional funding to provide cash assistance, insulation, and support for energy and heating. The Foreign Secretary's first overseas visit was to Ukraine. He continues to set out the UK ambition to international partners and did so in November during NATO and OSCE gatherings, and most recently at Davos, where he met Foreign Minister Kuleba.

Mark Eastwood: Tim Bamford, our local councillor for Denby Dale, has devoted his own time and expense to making several potentially dangerous excursions, driving a truck to deliver essential humanitarian aid to war-torn Ukraine alongside volunteers from the Yorkshire Aid Convoy. Will the Minister join me in thanking Tim—who is sitting in the Public Gallery—and all the fantastic team at the Yorkshire Aid Convoy for everything that they are doing to help the Ukrainian people, and wish them a safe journey for their next trip in March?

Leo Docherty: I am delighted to join my hon. Friend in thanking Tim and Tina Bamford, both of whom are in the Public Gallery. The response of the British people to the tragedy in Ukraine has been remarkable and hugely generous, and we salute the courage and generosity of spirit shown by the commendable actions of the Yorkshire Aid Convoy.

Mrs Sheryll Murray: There are many billions of Russian assets frozen by western nations, and there is a strong moral case for Ukraine to use those assets to repel Russia's aggression and rebuild its own economy. What progress has the Department made in talking to other nations to make that a reality?

Leo Docherty: I agree that there is a strong moral case for using Russian assets to repair the damage that Russia has wrought on Ukraine. We are clear about the fact that Russia should pay, and we continue to assess what legal path there might be to achieving that end.

Judith Cummins: The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees recently said:

"I think the big difference from last year to this year is that this year... There is somehow a trend towards getting used to Ukrainian suffering."

It is more than 200 days since the Opposition tabled a motion necessitating Government legislation to bring about the full seizure and repurposing of Russian state assets within 90 days, but no plan has yet been forthcoming. Why are the Government so out of step with our allies and partners in this regard?

Leo Docherty: We are not out of step; we are leading the pack, and have been doing so for the last two years. Our resolve is shown by our own financial commitment but also by our permanent commitment to the UK-Ukraine

relationship, which was demonstrated when the Prime Minister signed the UK-Ukraine agreement on security co-operation at the start of the year. We are in it for the long haul.

Richard Foord: Tomorrow Jens Stoltenberg, the Secretary-General of NATO, will meet representatives of the Heritage Foundation, a Republican-leaning think-tank. He will meet allies of former President Trump in an effort to unlock \$60 billion of funding for Ukraine. What efforts are the Government making to persuade Trump's allies, and what contingency planning are they doing with our European allies for a scenario in which Trump and his allies are not persuaded?

Leo Docherty: Ministers engage constantly with counterparts around the world, including those in the US. When it comes to the NATO response, we have seen NATO expand and grow in the last two years. Putin thought it was weak, but it is now bigger and stronger than it was in 2022.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): The International Monetary Fund estimates that Ukraine needs \$37 billion this year just to manage the books. There is a special European Council meeting on Thursday to sign off a package of €50 billion in aid to Ukraine. The UK Government have been part of that coalition, so can the Minister assure us that Ukraine fatigue will not set in here? There is backing across the House for the continuation of these supportive efforts, and surely the most effective way to get aid to Ukraine is to transfer the seized Russian assets to finance for Ukraine's reconstruction.

Leo Docherty: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we feel no fatigue when it comes to our Ukraine policy. We have exceeded last year's commitment in terms of lethal aid, and we will be contributing a huge amount of other aid and economic support. Since 2022, our total humanitarian, economic and military support has risen to more than £12 billion, which I think demonstrates that our resolve is unflagging.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I share the concern of the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Richard Foord) about the attitude towards the Ukraine fight, and indeed towards NATO, of certain elements on the American political scene. Will our Foreign Office team do everything in their power to impress on our American allies that the peace of Europe depends on unquestionable American support for the NATO alliance in the future, just as it did in the past?

Leo Docherty: We continue to make that point to all our interlocutors. I should also say that we continue to make the point to all NATO member states that investing 2% of GDP in defence expenditure is a condition of membership.

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): I met the Leeds Ukrainian community in my constituency this weekend to hear about the desperate needs of war-torn Ukrainian citizens. With the Hungarian leader Viktor Orbán continuing to veto the EU's £50 billion aid package to Ukraine, what diplomatic steps is the Minister taking to encourage Hungary to play its part in supporting Ukraine's fight for freedom?

Leo Docherty: We are very active in our diplomacy with Hungary and neighbouring states. I was actually in Slovakia last week, talking about a similar set of issues. Diplomacy does matter and our judgment is that, in the end, Mr Orbán will do the right thing.

Iran and Pakistan

9. Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): What recent discussions he has had with his international counterparts on the state of relations between Iran and Pakistan. [901241]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (David Rutley): The Foreign Secretary has made it clear to his Iranian counterpart that Iran must stop using regional instability as cover to act recklessly. He and Lord Ahmad have also underlined to Pakistan's Foreign Minister the importance of avoiding further escalation. We welcome Iran and Pakistan's subsequent commitment to dialogue in a joint statement released on 22 January, confirming that ambassadors will return to post, and we continue to monitor the situation.

Jonathan Edwards: As the Minister said, diplomatic efforts have eased tensions following the exchange of missiles earlier this month. However, the Minister will be aware that, over the weekend, Iranian gunmen murdered nine Pakistanis in the Iranian city of Saravan. The fact that both countries have launched air strikes against each other indicates how fragile the situation is in the middle east, and how interconnected acts of war and violence are across the whole region. How will the British Government ensure that their own actions do not escalate tensions?

David Rutley: As I said, Iran must stop using regional instability as cover to carry out its reckless acts. We recognise that it bears responsibility for any further escalation, and we are looking at all the tools that we have to bear down on the Iranian regime, including sanctions.

Eritrea: Human Rights

10. Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): What recent assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the human rights situation in Eritrea. [901242]

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): We continue to press Eritrea bilaterally and at the UN Human Rights Council to end human rights violations. It may come as a surprise to the House to hear that Eritrea is an elected member of the UN Human Rights Council.

Patrick Grady: As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Eritrea, I often hear the country described as the North Korea of Africa. Young people are conscripted indefinitely, and critics of the regime are arbitrarily detained and disappeared. Does the Minister agree that that perhaps explains why over 90% of asylum claims from Eritreans in the UK are granted by the Home Office? What more can the Government do to take steps to ensure an end to human rights abuses in Eritrea and elsewhere in the horn of Africa, which are push factors behind irregular arrivals in the UK?

Mr Mitchell: I think the hon. Gentleman pulls his punches; it is worse than he said. Eritrea ranks towards the bottom of the world press freedom index. We urge Eritrea to allow the UN special rapporteur for human rights access to the country, and we also seek the full withdrawal of Eritrean troops from northern Ethiopia, in accordance with the Pretoria peace agreement.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): We must not forget the abuses that are happening in neighbouring Sudan. Over 7 million people have been internally displaced, with 20 million in desperate need of humanitarian aid. Last night, the International Criminal Court prosecutor told the UN Security Council that there are reasonable grounds to believe that both the Sudan armed forces and the rapid support forces are committing atrocious crimes in Darfur. What hope does the Minister have that we can end the impunity, stop the rapes, murder and pillage, and bring peace to the people of Sudan?

Mr Mitchell: We are calling for an immediate ceasefire. There were talks in Addis before Christmas. We seek progress through the United Nations, where we hold the pen on Sudan, and also through the Troika, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the African Union. We are doing everything we can to end the appalling situation in Sudan, which my right hon. Friend has just described with great eloquence.

Afghanistan: Hazara Community

15. Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab): What discussions he has had with his international counterparts on the situation of the Hazara community in Afghanistan. [901247]

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): The UK works closely with the international community including the G7 and G20 and through the UN to protect the human rights of all of Afghanistan's people and to co-ordinate a consistent international response. In December my colleague the Minister for South Asia in the other place raised the recent attacks on Hazaras with the UN assistance mission in Afghanistan.

Rosie Duffield: Last week the hon. Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) and I met members of our respective Hazara communities. They also regularly attend the all-party parliamentary group on Hazaras, which is chaired by the hon. Member for Peterborough (Paul Bristow). My concern is that the kidnaps, rapes and persecution that the Taliban regularly use against the Hazara women and girls largely go unreported due to a lack of diplomacy or to journalists being unable to access the region. Would the Minister or a member of her team be prepared to meet those whose families are still stranded in the region and are subject to what is essentially the ethnic cleansing of the Hazara people?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The hon. Lady sets out some of the shocking issues that we know about. Indeed, Daesh claimed responsibility for the November attacks and we are continuing to see these challenges. I will happily take back her question to my colleague, and I am sure that he will be happy to meet them.

Mr Speaker: I call shadow Minister Catherine West.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Since the summer of 2021, when the hopes and dreams of so many women and girls in Afghanistan were snuffed out, we have been struggling to get a strategy together. For 20 years the UK, international partners and Afghans themselves fought for a more hopeful future for women and girls. Will the Minister outline what steps are being taken with international partners to develop a sustained strategy for working in the region so that we can regain a sense of hope for the 40 million Afghans left behind to a future devoid of opportunity?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The hon. Lady highlights the frustration that we all feel. We are working closely with international partners at a number of levels to ensure credible monitoring not only of the violence and threats against religious minorities but of the challenges for women and girls across the piece. We co-sponsored a Human Rights Council resolution extending the mandate of the UN special rapporteur to monitor and report on the human rights situation, to try to make decisions together on how to tackle it.

China: Diplomatic Relationship

16. **Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): What recent assessment he has made of the strength of the UK's diplomatic relationship with China. [901248]

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): The Government set out their approach to China in the integrated review refresh last year. We must continue to engage with China to work towards open, constructive and stable relations to manage disagreements, defend our freedoms and co-operate where our interests align. The Foreign Secretary spoke with China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi on 5 December in pursuit of those objectives.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: The results of economic modelling from the Rhodium Group, the RAND Corporation and, earlier this month, Bloomberg on the impact on global GDP of either an economic blockade by China on Taiwan or a full-scale invasion, are horrifying. Am I right that the Government have done their own economic modelling for both those scenarios? If so, will the Minister publish it?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: The hon. Gentleman highlights the importance of understanding and planning for such economic coercion. This is an area of policy that sits within my portfolio in the FCDO. Across Government, we currently have a lot of focus on thinking about how we can build resilience in UK interests and support partners.

Topical Questions

T1. [901258] **Ian Byrne** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Mr Andrew Mitchell): The Government are pursuing vital British national interest priorities. We are supporting Ukraine, and the Prime Minister has announced a further package of military support. We support Israel's right to self-defence and are working towards a sustainable ceasefire and tackling the

humanitarian crisis in Gaza. We continue strongly to support freedom of navigation on the high seas and to seek to make progress on Sudan. We are implementing the international development White Paper, which has been well received around the world. I continue to deputise for the Foreign Secretary in this House and regularly seek to keep the House updated.

Ian Byrne: The United Nations special rapporteur on the right to food, Michael Fakhri, said at the weekend that more than 2 million people in Gaza were facing "inevitable famine". Now that the Government have opted to halt funding to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, how do they intend to ensure that the urgently needed humanitarian aid—as called for in the International Court of Justice ruling last week and which was central to the ruling—will continue to be delivered to the innocent men, women and children in Gaza, who must have a right to food?

Mr Mitchell: As I set out, the Government's highest immediate priority is to ensure that aid and humanitarian support get into Gaza. We are relentlessly pursuing that objective. I have set out where we are on UNRWA, but there is no immediate effect on the food that it seeks to deliver in Gaza today.

T2. [901259] **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): I understand that my noble Friend the Foreign Secretary will shortly be visiting India, our friend and key ally in the region. Will the Minister set out what the Foreign Secretary will be aiming to achieve, particularly at a time when we are negotiating a free trade deal and building on the co-operation we already have?

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Anne-Marie Trevelyan): Although I cannot comment in detail on future ministerial plans, I assure my hon. Friend that the UK Government have a broad and deep partnership with the Government of India. The Foreign Secretary has ambitions to further strengthen that relationship through trade and wider people-to-people relationships in defence, science and technology. On 13 November, in his first bilateral meeting, the Foreign Secretary discussed some of these issues with External Affairs Minister Jaishankar.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab): Access to critical minerals is vital as we face a climate and energy crisis, but this Government have repeatedly disregarded Latin America and ignored its potential. Will the Minister commit to working with countries such as Chile, Brazil, Peru and Mexico to deliver these essential supplies for a green energy transition?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (David Rutley): Both sides of the House agree that this is an important issue, and I can assure the hon. Lady that we are working very hard. I have raised the importance of critical minerals on my visits to all those countries, and not least on my recent visit to Bolivia.

T6. [901264] **Mr Tobias Ellwood** (Bournemouth East) (Con): By any measure our world is becoming more dangerous, not less. I very much welcome Britain's leadership and rekindled engagement on the international

stage, not least in Ukraine and the middle east. Does the Minister agree that our foreign policy, our economy and, indeed, our security are interdependently related? Given the deteriorating threat picture, would he like to see an increase in our defence posture?

Mr Mitchell: My right hon. Friend, the former Chairman of the Defence Committee, is absolutely right to focus on these threats. The Foreign Secretary recently said that all the lights on the global dashboard are flashing red. The Government know that the first duty of the state is to defend and protect its citizens from external aggression, and my right hon. Friend may rest assured that that will continue to be our highest priority.

T3. [901261] **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): Tensions are soaring across the middle east after Washington vowed to respond to the drone attack by Iran-backed militants that killed three American soldiers. Does the Minister share my concern that we may be dragged into another regional war at the Americans' demand?

Mr Mitchell: The American Government and the British Government have made it absolutely clear that they do not wish to see this conflict escalate more widely. Equally, the hon. Gentleman will accept that no country can accept with equanimity the appalling deaths of those American soldiers.

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

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con): British citizen Vladimir Kara-Murza has been moved from a Siberian prison to an unknown location, having endured four months of isolation. Why? Because his voice of freedom is such a threat to Putin. Vladimir has been poisoned twice and, under Russian law, should not even be in prison. What progress has been made on locating Vladimir and getting him released, so that we do not see him die in prison? What have we done to appoint a lead director for arbitrary detention?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Leo Docherty): As the Foreign Secretary has said, we are deeply concerned about the reports that Mr Kara-Murza has been moved from the penal colony in Omsk to an unknown location. We are urgently following up to ascertain his whereabouts. Of course, Ministers have consistently condemned his politically motivated conviction and have called for his release, both publicly and privately. We will continue to do that at every opportunity. We have sanctioned 13 individuals in response to this case. I have met Mrs Kara-Murza and, of course, the Foreign Secretary has offered to meet her to discuss the case with officials in due course.

T4. [901262] **Sarah Green** (Chesham and Amersham) (LD): Yesterday, as the right hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) alluded to, an ICC prosecutor said that there are "grounds to believe" that both the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces are committing war crimes in Darfur. Will the Minister outline what diplomatic steps the Department is taking to help to stop the violence?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Lady is absolutely right in her analysis of what is happening in Sudan—throughout Sudan, and in particular in Darfur—where there is clear evidence of crimes against humanity being committed. Britain holds the pen at the United Nations, as I said earlier to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford). We work through regional and international alliances. We are clear that Sudan needs a comprehensive ceasefire and then movement back on to a political track, where former Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok will play an increasingly important role.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): Today is World Neglected Tropical Diseases Day and as I am sure the Minister is well aware, malaria affects more than 250 million people every year and causes the death of a child every minute. Given the news that the British-backed R21 vaccination has gained pre-qualification at the World Health Organisation, what commitment will my right hon. Friend give towards further support, including through the next replenishment of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance?

Mr Mitchell: Last week, I had the opportunity to visit the Jenner Institute at Oxford to see the remarkable people who made that progress. Every day, malaria kills entirely unnecessarily more than 1,000 children under five and pregnant women. Thanks to that brilliant British invention and technology, I hope very much that we will be able to make malaria history within the foreseeable future.

T5. [901263] **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The decision to pull funding from UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, the day after the International Court of Justice called for increased aid to get into Gaza has been branded reckless by 21 aid agencies, including Oxfam. What assessment have the Government made of the number of additional Palestinians now at risk of death from disease or starvation as a result of pulling that funding?

Mr Mitchell: The Government have been very clear about the position with UNRWA. We cannot overlook the appalling events that have been reported, but we are seeking to ensure that they are properly investigated. Britain has no additional funding plans for this financial year. We have already funded UNRWA, as have others, so I have no doubt that UNRWA's support, getting food to those who desperately need it, will continue, but we cannot ignore the information that was brought to our attention.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): I spent yesterday with NATO. One significant concern expressed to me was the acute need for the US to fulfil its commitment to Ukraine in 2024. Ahead of the Washington summit, will the Minister assure me that every effort will be taken to leverage political pressure on our allies and to secure the necessary support, for which we are very grateful?

Leo Docherty: On the road to Washington, we continue to make that point. The US will continue to be an integral part of European security, as will other European member states of NATO, which should ensure that they commit to their equal and required expenditure of 2%.

T7. [901265] **Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The Minister has been clear about the extremely dangerous situation in Sudan. I have a number of constituents still waiting for the UK Government to process their applications for their family members to come to safety here, and hampered by the inability to travel over international borders. What conversations has he had with his counterparts in neighbouring countries such as Egypt to allow facilitation of the movement of people through there out of the dangers in Sudan to safety in the UK?

Mr Mitchell: We talk continually to the surrounding countries and have given specific support to Chad in dealing with people coming over the border. The situation in Sudan that the hon. Lady describes is absolutely appalling, with nearly 18 million people urgently needing food. If she wishes to discuss her specific cases with me and the Foreign Office, we should do so straight after Question Time.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): This year marks the 120th anniversary of the signing of the entente cordiale with France, 80 years since D-day and 30 years since the opening of the Channel tunnel. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is an incredibly important moment to reinvigorate that important bilateral relationship?

Mr Mitchell: My right hon. Friend will have seen the stratospheric improvement in relations with France and its President that have taken place under our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. He and I were celebrating 120 years of the entente cordiale at the French residence last week. I have no doubt that that relationship, especially now, is in excellent condition.

T8. [901266] **Sarah Dyke** (Somerton and Frome) (LD): Women are unequally affected in conflict. We have heard accounts of horrific rapes perpetrated by Hamas, of women assuming heavy care responsibilities due to failing medical infrastructure in Gaza, and of women being trafficked out of Nigeria, to name three recent examples. Will the Minister comment on the Department's work to provide a better future for women in conflict zones?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Lady has raised a most important matter. Women bear the brunt of poverty, conflict and starvation. That is why the British Government have made it clear, particularly in the White Paper, that this matter remains a top priority. The White Paper announced £38 million of additional spending to support women's rights organisations. As we know, women's rights are under threat all around the world, and we are doing everything we can to support girls and women.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): As new heartbreaking testimonies of Hamas's use of sexual violence and rape come to light from survivors of the 7 October attack, what assessment has my right hon. Friend made of the silence of many international organisations, such as the International Red Cross, on that appalling issue?

Mr Mitchell: I hope that my hon. Friend will draw strength and satisfaction from the fact that the British Government are not silent on that very important matter.

T9. [901267] **Janet Daby** (Lewisham East) (Lab): I am sure that the Minister was as shocked as I was by Venezuela's actions towards Guyana last year. Will he update the House, and me—I have Guyanese heritage—on what steps the Government are taking to uphold Guyana's sovereignty?

David Rutley: I thank the hon. Member for that question on an important subject close to the heart of several people in the Chamber. I assure her that there is ongoing engagement with, of course, President Ali in Guyana, but also all the regional players. I have personally had conversations with Brazil, Colombia, the Commonwealth and the United States to keep the focus on that area, and Maduro's plans at bay.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): What assessment have the Government made of the threat to the future of the Baltic states if Putin is seen to succeed in seizing territory permanently from Ukraine?

Leo Docherty: The Baltic states are on the frontline, and we therefore take great pride in the enhanced forward presence in the Baltic states, which includes our magnificent men and women in Tapa. That is part of our enduring physical presence to ensure that NATO has security on the ground. The matter is sharply in focus.

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab): As the death toll rises in Gaza, so does the misery of women and girls in the occupied territories. I am increasingly concerned that aid is not getting to them. The United Nations says that there is a chronic aid access problem, and that women are having caesarean sections without anaesthetic. What is going on? Is the aid not getting to them? What steps is the Department taking to ensure that it does?

Mr Mitchell: Tackling this is Britain's central aim; the aim is to get humanitarian aid into Gaza, but also to ensure that there is a plan on the west bank to take forward a political initiative. Everything that we are doing is bent on trying to get the aid that is in the region through the narrow entrances into Gaza. We will continue to do that.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): The Minister has said several times in the last few days that the Government's decision to suspend funding for UNRWA should not affect that agency's ability to deliver immediate aid in the region. If it transpires in the days and weeks ahead that the opposite is the case and the agency is being compromised, will the Government immediately review their decision?

Mr Mitchell: Yesterday, I spoke to the head of UNRWA, Philippe Lazzarini. I made the point that it is essential that his review—which of course he is not conducting; the UN is conducting it—is completed as fast as possible for the reasons the hon. Gentleman set out. I am reasonably confident that it can be conducted within the next two months, and the British Government are watching this carefully.

Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): Will the Minister confirm whether the Government have undertaken any further military action in Yemen since 11 January? If so, will he clarify whether the Government's long-term plan includes committing to sustained military action in one of the poorest countries of the world?

Mr Mitchell: We are careful to ensure that our response to the Houthis in Yemen is proportionate and right. We are conscious of the importance of getting food into Yemen to feed people who are starving. That process is hindered by the grossly irresponsible acts of the Houthi terrorists.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Yasin Malik, a political leader of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front, was given a life sentence in 2022. The Indian authorities appealed that sentence last year, seeking the death penalty, and the judgment is due on 14 February. Given the UK's long-standing opposition to the death penalty, what discussions has the Minister had with the Indian authorities about this important case?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: We always continue to make it clear that we disagree with the death penalty. My colleague the Minister for South Asia raised this issue most recently on 10 January, and we continue to highlight it. I know that he would be happy to discuss the case with the hon. Lady, if she wishes.

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP): The Foreign Office recorded over 500 deaths of UK nationals in Thailand in 2022, some 135 of which were of undetermined

cause. In 2022 and the 10 years before then, no murders were recorded of UK nationals in Thailand. My constituent's son was murdered in Thailand in 2019. Does the Minister still maintain that UK nationals do not get murdered in Thailand?

Anne-Marie Trevelyan: We work closely with Thailand, and our officials in the country, led by our ambassador, do a great deal of work around these difficult issues when they arise. I have picked up some of the consular cases myself. If there are specific issues that the hon. Gentleman wishes to raise, I am happy to meet him to discuss them.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I have 10 and 11-year-old constituents—British citizens—who are stuck in the Israeli fire zone in southern Lebanon. The Foreign Office is urging them to return to the UK, but as their mother is not a British citizen, the Home Office is preventing that. Will the Minister help me to persuade the Home Office to relent on this issue?

Mr Mitchell: I am happy to look at the case that the hon. Gentleman raises immediately after Question Time, if that is convenient to him. The Foreign Secretary is in the region today, not far away from the country that the hon. Gentleman mentions, and I am sure that we will be able to advance the talks that are going on.

Telegraph Media Group: Proposed Sale to RedBird IMI

12.36 pm

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Melton) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the proposed sale of the Telegraph Media Group to RedBird IMI.

The Minister for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries (Julia Lopez): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for tabling the urgent question for the second time in as many days. This is a media-focused day for me, as I will take the Media Bill through its remaining stages straight after the urgent question, so forgive me if one has made me insufficiently prepared for the other, or vice versa.

I am in the frustrating circumstance that I can say only what is publicly known and nothing of the specifics in answer to questions about the ownership of the Telegraph Media Group, which contains two of the world's greatest newspapers—*The Sunday Telegraph* and *The Daily Telegraph*—and, in *The Spectator*, the oldest surviving weekly magazine in the world.

As hon. Members will be aware, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has issued a public interest intervention notice in respect of the anticipated acquisition of the group by RB Investco Ltd, further to the notice issued in November in respect of the RedBird IMI media joint venture, which remains in force. She is leading this process and examining it in great detail and with great care, but it is a quasi-judicial process, involving the Competition and Markets Authority, which looks at jurisdictional and competition matters, and Ofcom, which will be reporting to her on public interest considerations in relation to the media, expressly accurate presentation of the news and free expression of opinion. Both reports will be returned on 11 March.

My right hon. and learned Friend, as a very assiduous and diligent KC, is making sure that I, as Media Minister, am absolutely excluded from the process, because that is what it demands. I am not permitted to know about the scrutiny that is under way, or to interfere with it. She is also not permitted to take into account any political or presentational concerns in her deliberations, and we would not wish to cause there to be any chink of light here that would leave the process open to judicial review. That leaves me in an unenviable position: I face understandable expert probing by hon. Members, to whom I can offer no answer beyond what is in the public domain. However, this urgent question is as much an opportunity for hon. Members to make their concerns clear and their views known, as it is an opportunity for me to answer them. So I say: be heard, loud and clear.

Straight after this urgent question, I will take the Media Bill through its remaining stages and make the case for that legislation in broad terms. I will argue that a free media, not interfered with by Government or indeed Governments, able to articulate and reflect a broad range of views, free to speak and create, and able to project to the world what democracy, a plurality of views and debate truly mean, is something important that we should value. In many respects, it underpins

what we mean by a free society. Of course, we all know that; it is something that we repeat, automaton-like, in a way that risks giving rise to complacency. However, as I watch the actions of authoritarian states in these times of turbulence; as I see western democracies in a knot of angst over our values; and as I see our populations question, from the safety of these shores, whether our values still matter, I am reminded of the need to make that case again and again.

I cannot speak to the specific media ownership question—I know hon. Members will understand that, and will help me keep within the tramlines—but I can speak about media freedom; the need for media to be separate from political and Government interference; the importance of a British voice, domestically and internationally; and the pride we can feel in media institutions, such as those in the Telegraph Media Group, some of which date back two centuries and drove changes in this nation as profound as the Great Reform Act. To this day, those who write for those institutions ask questions of us all with a rare inquisitiveness and preoccupation with truth. [*Interruption.*] I shall finish shortly. I will be hearing—

Mr Speaker: Order. Please do not tell me what you are going to do. I am in charge of the time. You are way over, and I expect you now to finish quickly.

Julia Lopez: I apologise, Mr Speaker, for over-speaking. I will listen to the points made, in the broadest of terms, and I suspect that I may agree with many of them.

Alicia Kearns: Thank you for granting this important urgent question, Mr Speaker. The Minister hits the nail on the head when she says that this is about freedom from Government interference, although it is quite something for us to start this urgent question knowing that we will get no answer to any of our questions. We have a proud tradition of a fiercely independent press in our country—a press who hold us to account in this place, and shine a light on misbehaviour and misdoings here and abroad. Yet a paper of record, *The Daily Telegraph*, and *The Spectator*, the longest-running magazine in the world and my personal podcast of choice, will be purchased by a foreign state. The concern here is about not foreign ownership, but foreign state ownership; in this situation, we cannot separate sheikh and state. Those are our concerns.

More broadly, I worry that we have allowed our media—critical national infrastructure for our democracy—to fall between the cracks. Our Defending Democracy Taskforce looks only at electoral concerns, and the National Security and Investment Act 2021 deals with 17 sectors, none of which is the media. We therefore have no protections against this sort of situation.

I have four questions that I hope the Minister will at least attempt to answer—I appreciate the restrictions that are in place. First, are there any examples from around the world of a nation with differing media values, to put it politely, acquiring the newspaper of another country? Secondly, will the Government commit to a national security investigation of these purchases? Thirdly, do the Government not recognise that their intervention in the United Arab Emirates' purchase of Vodafone sets a precedent allowing them to intervene in this case? Finally, will they look either to extend the

Defending Democracy Taskforce or those 17 sectors, to ensure that we can protect our media? We are dealing with something that will make us vulnerable not for five or 10 years, but for the rest of our lives, and we cannot afford for our media to be undermined.

Julia Lopez: I thank my hon. Friend for her questions. As she is aware, a public interest intervention notice has been issued in this case, which means that I am not able to speak to a number of the points that will likely be raised. However, powers under the Enterprise Act 2002 allow us to look into acquisitions of this nature and to examine issues of media freedom of expression. We also have powers under the National Security Act 2023; the Cabinet Office has a role there. That will allow the Culture Secretary to look at some of the questions that my hon. Friend raises.

There will now be an investigation by not only the Competition and Markets Authority, but Ofcom, which will look into all these questions in great detail. That will allow the Secretary of State to make a judgment on what action she takes next. There may potentially be a longer investigation, after which she could be offered particular remedies, or could prevent a transaction. However, at this stage, I cannot speculate on what action she is likely to take.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I am frustrated with the Minister. I want to thank her for her answer, but frankly, it was not an answer. The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns), the Chair of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, asked perfectly reasonable questions, which did not go into the specifics and zoomed out to the general, yet we still have no answers. A strong and independent free press is a cornerstone of democracy. We have a long history of that in the UK; *The Spectator* is the oldest magazine in the world. It is the responsibility of Government, regardless of their political persuasion or the newspaper under discussion, to safeguard the freedom to scrutinise, to expose wrongdoing and to speak truth to power.

We on these Benches recognise the legitimate public interest concerns raised over the proposed acquisition of the Telegraph Media Group, including about the accurate presentation of news, free expression of opinion in newspapers and the competition issues. I welcome the fact that the Government have asked further questions, and I await the conclusions of the investigations by the Competition and Markets Authority and Ofcom in full. But *The Telegraph* has been up for sale for months—the Secretary of State issued her first public interest intervention notice on 30 November. This process is ongoing. Employees at *The Telegraph* and *The Spectator* have been left in limbo, and senior journalists have expressed significant concerns.

Can the Minister tell the House why the Secretary of State has granted an extension to the deadline by which she expects to receive reports from Ofcom and the CMA in relation to the PIIN? I am sure she cannot, but I am just going to ask anyway. Can the Minister tell the House—this is a general one, so maybe she can—whether, in the light of the proposed sale, she has any plans to review the existing rules on media ownership? Has she or the Secretary of State considered that or had any conversations with colleagues about it?

With a general election approaching, in a significant year for democracy across the world and with record numbers of people going to the polls, the freedom of the press has never been more important. Now is not the time for the Government to have no answers or to be asleep at the wheel.

Julia Lopez: I thank the hon. Lady for her rather hyperbolic intervention. We are having a debate because two public interest intervention notices have been issued. The Government take their powers in this respect seriously, and the Competition and Markets Authority and Ofcom will be given the space and time to look into all these issues in detail. Those notices were issued because the Secretary of State takes the issues of media freedom and the ownership of important British media institutions extremely seriously.

I therefore ask the hon. Lady to help us. Those investigations are under way; we must not prejudice them and must ensure they are watertight. The important question of media ownership is something that all Members of this House care about. It would be regrettable if I were to say anything in this Chamber that should prejudice that process, so I say again to the hon. Lady that action has been taken, it is something the Government take seriously, and I ask her to let the process take its course.

Sir Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): It is hugely new for us to be told that we will not get our questions answered at the Dispatch Box. We are used to that happening anyway, but it is good to be told that it is a waste of our time being here in the first place.

To press on with not being answered, I say to the Minister that I and 28 others, across all parties, wrote a letter to her Department specifying that we were all opposed to this potential takeover. We made it clear that we are not opposed to it because we dislike that particular Government—although I have to say that that may well be a feature. Rather, we would oppose it if the French Government wished to buy the newspapers, or even if this Government decided they would control them. We would oppose that on the basis that it would trample right across the idea of freedom of the press.

Following the notice that has gone to the CMA, I simply ask the Minister whether she would ask the Secretary of State to create a new PIIN on the basis that RedBird IMI has twice disrupted the Government's efforts to properly scrutinise the purchase. Particularly with the idea of debt being loaded into the purchase, we need a further detailed investigation. I would be grateful if the Minister did that, because this could easily turn into a disaster for this Government.

Julia Lopez: I did not say I would give no answers; I said I would be able to give general answers, and my right hon. Friend will understand why. These are very precise processes that must be kept watertight, and I would not want to do anything to prejudice them or the Secretary of State's ability to act in a way that is in the interests of this country and the media. This is not a waste of time. It is an opportunity for this House to make its voice and opinions known on what is a controversial issue of great public interest—an issue that we as a Government are very interested in.

[Julia Lopez]

My right hon. Friend also makes the important point that his concern is not about the Government in this particular case, but about Government ownership in principle. It is something I appreciate and understand, and I am sure it will be in the Secretary of State's mind.

John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): When hosting COP28, Sultan al-Jaber said that there was “no science” behind the climate change emergency. The Sultan is head of the UAE media council, and influential in the *Telegraph* takeover. I worked for many years as a journalist; I understand that democracy requires plurality in the media landscape. Sadly, in the UK the vast majority of titles are already skewed to the right—in Scotland, as we know, half the population support independence, but only one title supports that position. We do not want the situation worsening. I am in favour of a free, diverse and vibrant press ecosystem, and not in favour of a newspaper being owned as a loss-making public relations arm of a foreign state through access to our daily news cycle. Does the Minister agree that allowing the UAE to take over *The Telegraph* would be unhealthy in principle for our democracy?

Julia Lopez: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising an issue of principle, which I perfectly understand, as something that I speak about in relation to the BBC, and how it must have editorial independence from the Government. As a principle, I would be concerned about Government ownership of any media institution, but as he will be aware, I can speak only of principles.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): When the wonderful Taylor Swift discovered that her back catalogue had been bought by a purchaser of whom she disapproved, she began to render it worthless by re-recording all her previous hits. Is that an example that journalists at *The Spectator* and *The Telegraph* might do well to follow?

Julia Lopez: I thank my right hon. Friend for his mischievous suggestion. I could not possibly comment on it, but I am sure that it has been heard.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I am reeling from the comparison of *Telegraph* hacks with Taylor Swift. If the Minister cannot answer questions, maybe we could use this as an exercise in issuing some concerns. The National Union of Journalists' concerns are obviously about jobs, but they are also about future editorial independence. It behoves the Minister and the Government to look at what sanctions could be used in future if agreements are reached but not kept to—Murdoch is the best example of that. In addition, I wonder whether it is time, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) said, for a proper review of media ownership.

Julia Lopez: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for speaking on behalf of the NUJ and for raising what this means for media plurality and the ability of journalists to hold us here to account. I agree on those generalities, but I am afraid I cannot say anything more about the specifics of this case, as he will be aware. Once the process is over, I am sure there will be questions to go back to about how we best look into how our media is owned.

Sir Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con): For what it is worth, the proposal is said to enhance the competitive landscape, not diminish it. Does the Minister agree that this sort of decision must be made according to legal principles, not politics? It is not appropriate to consider political posturing from the left or right when deciding this important matter, which is part of the Secretary of State's quasi-judicial functions.

Julia Lopez: My right hon. and learned Friend is right to say that the Secretary of State will be under specific obligations to consider this matter without politics. Both the CMA and Ofcom will look at this carefully from a regulatory point of view. We as politicians should also have a right to some broad views about media ownership as we consider those questions. The Secretary of State is the departmental owner of culture, media and sport, and will have some considerations about how to ensure a dynamic media landscape. I am sure that she will carefully apply her legal brain to the application of those principles.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I think the House sees me for what I am, which is a shy and retiring Member. For years I have been teased in *The Telegraph* at the hands of Mr Alan Cochrane, and more recently in *The Spectator*. But that is democracy; it is the nature of the beast, and it is free speech. I agree with the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Alicia Kearns) that there is a national security implication. I think that the mood of the House is that this is simply not on—we all agree on that. The message should be passed back to the Secretary of State and to the Government that we will not wear this.

Julia Lopez: I hope the hon. Gentleman does not mind me saying so, but I believe that when I last saw him, he was on his way to a *Spectator* Burns night party, so I hope the relationship is warm and cordial now, with no unkindness towards him from that magazine. As I said at the outset, this is a useful exercise in making the views of this House known on this matter. It is an important opportunity for Members to have their say, and I hope that they will be heard.

Sir David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): I must say I was amused by the Minister's opening remarks, because I cannot recall any judicial review ever being triggered by statements in Parliament—not once. However, given that she wants a statement, not a question, in the event that the CMA and Ofcom report finds conditionally in favour in any way, she must not take the Murdoch ownership of *The Times* as an example, because since the sacking of its editor, that has been a failure, not a success.

Julia Lopez: As my right hon. Friend will be aware, the decision-making process is not mine. I will not be the person to make a judgment call on this matter. The CMA and Ofcom have until 11 March to issue their initial report. At that stage, undertakings can be accepted or a second stage can be opened. I am sure that all these questions will be in the Secretary of State's mind as she makes that judgment.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister very much for her answers, which are always very helpful, and we appreciate that. Can she outline if measures can

and will be put in place to secure editorial freedom in the long term? We look to a nation with completely different ideals, but which has capacity to shape the media narrative and public information. How can we make sure that we retain trust?

Julia Lopez: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, a public notice has been issued on this matter. Ofcom will look expressly at accurate presentation of the news and free expression of opinion when it makes its reports and judgments known. I hope that will give him some assurance about how the media considerations will be looked at, not just the competition aspects.

Sir John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): I fully understand the limitations on what my hon. Friend can say. Having covered for her until a few weeks ago as media Minister, I was given no inside information about this matter, either. However, she will be aware that it is now over five years since the Ofcom report to the Secretary of State that said that the internet has transformed the way that news is provided and consumed, and that there will need to be a fundamental review of the media ownership regime. Does she agree with that, and can she say whether the Government will undertake that review?

Julia Lopez: I thank my right hon. Friend for his expert cover for me. We discussed that subject in our handover, when he told me that there was no information that he could share because he was assiduous in his role and made sure that he was not involved in areas that he should not be. He asked about future ownership questions. He will be aware that we are debating the Media Bill after this urgent question. We have looked at some issues in relation to media, in particular the changing media landscape and how the internet has changed it. That has not covered all the issues that will be raised by this acquisition, but I am sure that once that the Media Bill has completed all its stages, we will be able to look afresh at the other holes in the landscape.

Richard Foord (Tiverton and Honiton) (LD): I appreciate that there is a limit to what the Minister can say about the potential sale of *The Daily Telegraph* to owners backed by the UAE, but are there any lessons for media freedom that the Government might learn from the creation of university branch campuses in the UAE, and what that has meant for freedom of speech?

Julia Lopez: I am afraid that is not a subject about which I know a great deal. I shall happily look into it and see whether there are any implications for our media landscape, but I cannot comment in relation to this specific acquisition.

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the fact that we are in this position shows that clarity is needed about media ownership rules? We need a presumption against sovereign foreign states acquiring strategic UK media assets to further their influence, just as there should one be against acquisition by a foreign oligarch who might not have a commitment to the media. We need some certainty about how and where such an intervention can be made, and not purely on competition grounds.

Julia Lopez: That point has been raised by a number of hon. Members. We have tools for these kinds of acquisitions, as can be seen in the public interest intervention

notices that we have imposed in this case. I reassure Members that we are not totally naked on this question; there are tools, under the Enterprise Act, that allow us to look into it. I am sure that once the process is over, we will be able to look back and say whether any further action or intervention is required.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): As owners expect to have influence over editors and the editorial line, why do we not have a policy of ruling out all Government ownership of such organisations, which would make it much simpler?

Julia Lopez: I thank my right hon. Friend for making that simple point. It is one that I am sure will be considered once this case has passed.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Were a media outlet in an authoritarian state, or indeed any other state, to be threatened with foreign ownership, would the Minister responsible be as scrupulous in her answers as my hon. Friend has so properly been with us today?

Julia Lopez: Perhaps not.

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): I am sure that many Members are, like me, concerned about foreign ownership of our institutions and businesses. Our national resilience, strategic independence and critical infrastructure, as well as our media, are vital. To quote the well-known album, how do we ensure that we do not end up selling England by the pound?

Julia Lopez: As I have said in answers to similar questions, we have powers to look into some of those investment and ownership questions, and they do not relate just to the media. We now have much broader national security and investment powers in relation to questions such as these and to other areas in which there is a critical national interest in the ownership of a particular asset. It would be wrong for Members to leave the Chamber with the belief that there are no such powers and that all these acquisitions can go ahead regardless of security and other implications.

Andy Carter (Warrington South) (Con): The Minister is absolutely right: Ofcom can apply a test, which it already applies, to broadcast licences. Does she agree that, given the changes in the media landscape, that should be rolled over to news websites and publishers that have significant scale?

Julia Lopez: We are looking at how we regulate online content alongside standard broadcasting and other media output. One outcome of the mid-term review is that some of the BBC's online material will be considered in the same way as its other output. Those are all questions that the Department is looking into to ensure that media regulation and legislation are fit for what is a rapidly changing media landscape.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): It is clear that paying off the debt means that RedBird IMI has control over the titles. Indeed, it has already transferred the ownership of that debt to a new UK entity. Should not the Secretary of State also issue a PIIN on the debt to ensure that she retains control of the situation?

Julia Lopez: My hon. Friend will be aware that this is the second such notice to have been issued. I am not able to speculate on or speak about any other action that the Secretary of State might be minded to take. I know that he will understand that. He will know that the broad principles of concern to him, about which he has written so eloquently and powerfully in recent weeks and months, are also close to my heart.

Autism (Early Identification)

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

1.3 pm

Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about the training of teachers in relation to the early identification of autism; and for connected purposes.

For those with autism, the stats are stark. Fewer than half of autistic children say that they are happy in school; 73% of young autistic people say that their teachers do not understand their needs; only 20% achieve grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSEs, compared with 52% for all pupils; and, on top of that, autistic children are twice as likely to be excluded from school than their peers.

It does not get better in adulthood. Just 29% of autistic people are in full or part-time employment, and those in work are paid a third less than their peers. That is not right, especially when the potential of autistic children with proper support should not be underestimated. Autistic people have stronger attention to detail, creative talents, mathematical and technical abilities, and expertise in niche areas. Those of us who know autistic children know that they are honest and loyal.

We all know that an early diagnosis helps to identify what an individual child needs and what adjustments need to be put in place so that their strengths can be maximised. It provides a positive pathway instead of a negative one. It means that those with autism are more likely to find work. It helps to combat mental health issues, which affect 54% of those with special educational needs and disabilities and cost the UK economy £582 million.

However, 92% of children wait longer than the NHS 13-week deadline, and 46% wait more than 18 months—that backlog means that a quarter of children with autism will not be diagnosed while in school. In Norfolk between 2021 and October 2023, 1,141 under-18s were diagnosed with autism. Many wait longer than 18 months for their diagnosis—some even wait three years, and one waited 10 years. How many more of the 187,000 children in Norfolk will not be assessed at all?

The question is, why does a diagnosis not happen until much later? Unfortunately, there is often a “wait and see” attitude. However, not only is a delay in diagnosis extremely damaging for a child who is autistic, but it is unnecessary. Conditions such as autism have markers from six months old, as it becomes obvious through the way children learn, move or pay attention. Existing weaknesses in the SEND system, which were magnified by the pandemic, also make it difficult for people with autism to get a diagnosis. There are inconsistencies in how SEND is identified, a lack of joined-up thinking on care, and a lack of clarity regarding accountability and responsibility in organisations. That leads to delays in an already weak system, making the fight that many parents undertake to have their child assessed even harder.

Over a year ago in this Chamber, I mentioned Hayley Turner, a constituent who came to me as she was having difficulty getting the right support for her son, Rocky. I was asking about early years psychologists in Education

questions, but it was partly through conversations with Hayley that the inspiration for this Bill took flight, so I would briefly like to share her story.

Rocky was two years old when his parents noticed that he was developing a little differently. It was when he started school aged four that it became clear that mainstream education was not the right fit and that those teaching him were not trained to teach children with neurodiverse conditions. That situation was very distressing for him and for Hayley, who had to fight to be heard. She went to tribunal and spent many hours putting together all the necessary paperwork to show that Rocky needed to be placed in specialist education. It was an unnecessary distraction that took Hayley away from being the mum she needed to be for both her children, which made everyday family life harder. Rocky is just one of thousands of children whose parents are fighting today for their children to have an adequate education. Indeed, the Government's own SEND statistics show that 98% of parents win on appeal once they get to tribunal.

Those children are not difficult or troublesome. Hayley said something very poignant:

"Autistic children, whilst in mainstream schools, are easily misunderstood. They are just innocent children trying to survive in an environment that isn't designed for them. They have to fail first before they are adequately supported and that's not how a child should start their education."

Rocky's story was eventually a success story, but it is his story, along with other conversations I have had, that led me to introduce the Bill today. It is important to impress on all Members of the House that autistic children will not grow out of it: they will need extra help and targeted treatment to reduce the chance of negative consequences and financial burdens in later life. However, as it stands, just 39% of primary school teachers have more than half a day's training in autism—such a small number. For secondary school, that figure drops to just 14%. SEND is seen as a specialist area—a bolt-on, not a built-in—with teacher training not including how to ensure that teachers can identify SEND markers. That needs to change. Autistic pupils routinely identify autism training for teachers as the single biggest change that would improve their experience of school. That can only happen if all teachers are trained in SEND.

It is for those reasons that I introduce my ten-minute rule Bill, the Autism (Early Identification) Bill, which will deliver support to increase autism assessment, reduce diagnosis waiting times and introduce mandatory autism training for all teachers. The Bill will provide a solid base through which all teachers will learn about early identification, the special educational needs code of practice, the pattern and sequence of child development, what needs to be done if a child has communication difficulties, and understanding and dealing with difficult behaviour. It will mean that if milestones are not met, help can be put in place; that fewer children will struggle in school; and that they will no longer be labelled difficult or disruptive. Through a Bill that ensures that

all teaching staff can support autistic pupils well, schools will in turn become more inclusive places, where everyone—staff, pupils and parents—is truly valued and feels a sense of belonging.

I am encouraged by the openness of this Government to changes in the system. It is positive that the Government announced as far back as the last Queen's Speech that every child will get the education they deserve, and that there is vision, ethos and strategic direction in our education system. I am also encouraged by the publication of the SEND and alternative provision improvement plan, in which the Government stated that they

"will explore opportunities to build teacher expertise through a review of the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Core Content Framework and Early Career Framework."

I was encouraged by the Secretary of State's comments at the Dispatch Box yesterday, and by a letter from the Minister last July that said that

"all initial teacher training courses must be designed so that trainee teachers can demonstrate a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils, including those with SEND"

and that

"all teachers are teachers of SEND".

All those objectives are encapsulated in the Bill, but it would go further. Having a special educational needs co-ordinator in school is not enough, and only having a few providers of training is not enough. The Bill will ensure that all autistic children receive the support they need so that they can flourish, and that autistic and SEND pupils are not a forgotten piece of the puzzle, but an integral part of the education system. It will help the Government achieve their objectives in this area. The Bill is supported by the sector, which is keen to work with the Government on the finer detail regarding what training is needed and how it should be rolled out, as well as to work on technologies to make the system around education, health and care plans a lot easier and ensure that support can be easily reviewed so that it continues to suit the young person's needs.

As I wrap up, I ask the Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (David Johnston) to please be bold in this area. Please support us, and use the essence of my Bill to make sure that the reforms really do make autistic children's lives better. I thank FullSpektrum, Keystone Consulting and Ambitious about Autism, as well as my constituent Hayley Turner and everyone else who has supported me so much in introducing this Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Duncan Baker, Sir Robert Buckland, Dame Caroline Dinenage, Sir Liam Fox, Mr Robin Walker, Edward Timpson, Jim Shannon, Marion Fellows, Peter Gibson, James Sunderland, Elliot Colburn and Steve Tuckwell present the Bill.

Duncan Baker accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 19 April, and to be printed (Bill 154).

Media Bill

Consideration of Bill, as amended in Public Bill Committee
[Relevant documents: Thirteenth Report of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee of Session 2022-23, Draft Media Bill: Final Report, HC 1807, and the Government response, Session 2023-24, HC 115; Twelfth Report of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee of Session 2022-23, Draft Media Bill: Radio Measures, HC 1287, and the Government response, Session 2023-24, HC 115; Fifth Report of the Welsh Affairs Committee of Session 2022-23, Broadcasting in Wales, HC 620, and the Government response, Session 2023-24, HC 489.]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): We were going to begin with new clause 1, but Hywel Williams is not here, so I instead call George Eustice to move new clause 3.

New Clause 3

CONSULTATION ON SECTION 50

“(1) Within six months of the passage of this Act, the Secretary of State must publish a call for evidence seeking views on alternative incentives to encourage publishers or regulators to seek recognition under the terms of the Royal Charter for the Self-Regulation of the Press.

(2) The Secretary of State must lay before both Houses of Parliament a report setting out the Government’s formal response to evidence submitted in response to the call for evidence required by subsection (1).

(3) The Secretary of State may not make an order under section 55(3)(ga) bringing any part of section 50 into force until the report specified in subsection (2) has been laid before both Houses of Parliament.”—(*George Eustice.*)

See explanatory statement to Amendment 3.

Brought up, and read the First time.

1.15 pm

George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

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

New clause 1—*Evaluation of nations-based production*—

“(1) The Communications Act 2003 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 286 (regional programme-making for Channels 3 and 5)—

(a) in subsection (1)(d), at end insert “except where the company is a new start-up and has registered itself as being primarily based in that nation”;

(b) after subsection (1)(d) insert—

“(e) Ofcom must require a broadcaster listing a production as being based in Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales to demonstrate prior to production that a production company has—

(i) a substantial base (consisting of a specified number of staff) within the nation;

(ii) a commitment to remain within the nation for a specified amount of time;

(iii) had a presence within the nation for at least 36 months.”;

(c) in subsection (3)(d), at end insert “except where the company is a new start-up and has registered itself as being primarily based in that nation.”;

(d) after subsection (3)(d) insert—

“(e) Ofcom must require a broadcaster listing a production as being based in Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales to demonstrate prior to production that a production company has—

(i) a substantial base (consisting of a specified number of staff) within the nation;

(ii) a commitment to remain within the nation for a specified amount of time;

(iii) had a presence within the nation for at least 36 months.”

(3) In section 288 (Regional programme-making for Channel 4)—

(a) in subsection (1)(d), at end insert “except where the company is a new start-up and has registered itself as being primarily based in that nation.”;

(b) after subsection (1)(d) insert—

“(e) Ofcom must require a broadcaster listing a production as being based in Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales to demonstrate prior to production that a production company has—

(i) a substantial base (consisting of a specified number of staff) within the nation;

(ii) a commitment to remain within the nation for a specified amount of time;

(iii) had a presence within the nation specified for at least 36 months.”.

New clause 4—*OFCOM review of on-demand programme service regulation measures*—

“(1) As soon as practicable after Chapter 2 of this Act comes into force, OFCOM must carry out a review of its on-demand programme service regulation measures.

(2) This review must take account of—

(a) the size, and

(b) the turnover

of the services to which these regulations apply and assess whether the current application of the regulations is the most effective means to achieve the policy goals of this Chapter.

(3) In conducting the review described in subsection (2), OFCOM must consult with relevant stakeholders, including public service broadcasters, on-demand programme service providers and any other stakeholders as appropriate.”

This would require OFCOM to conduct a review of the Bill’s new on-demand regulatory code. The review must take account of the sizes and turnovers of the regulated services, and assess whether the current regulatory approach is effective in achieving the policy goals of the Bill. The review would have to be conducted in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

New clause 6—*Age rating standards*—

“Where Tier 1 providers use an age rating or other classification system to comply with the duties imposed on them by or under this Act for the protection of audiences from harm, they must—

(a) apply the age rating or classification system used by the video works authority based on their classification guidelines; or

(b) apply an age rating or classification system that is judged by OFCOM to be—

(i) based on a transparent set of appropriate standards;

(ii) applied consistently across content; and

(iii) informed by regular consultation with the UK public.”

This new clause ensures that, where age ratings are used by Video on Demand platforms, those ratings are the same as the ones used by the British Board of Film Classification or meet equivalent standards of rigour, transparency, and objectivity.

New clause 7—*Adequate on-demand coverage to be available*—

“After section 101 of the Broadcasting Act 1996, insert—

“101ZA Provision of adequate on-demand coverage

(1) The purpose of this section is to secure, in relation to a listed event, that if any person makes available on-demand coverage of the whole or any part of that event, adequate

on-demand coverage is made available widely and free of charge to members of the public in the United Kingdom, whether by that person or another person.

(2) In this Part, in relation to a listed event or part of such an event, “on-demand coverage” means audiovisual content consisting of coverage of, or excerpts from, that event (or a combination of those), where—

- (a) a person makes a range of such content available to members of the public, whether through a relevant service or otherwise;
- (b) selections from that range can be made by the user and viewed at a time chosen by the user (even if it may be viewed only within a period specified by the person making it available);
- (c) the selected content is received by the user by means of the internet; and
- (d) the content otherwise meets any criteria or requirements specified (either generally or in relation to particular listed events) by regulations under section 104ZA;

and “on-demand rights” means rights to make on-demand coverage available for access by members of the public in the United Kingdom.

(3) Any contract entered into on or after the day on which section [Adequate on-demand coverage to be available] of the Media Act 2024 comes into force under which a person acquires on-demand rights is void so far as it purports—

- (a) in relation to the whole or any part of the event, or
- (b) in relation to access by means of the internet, in the United Kingdom,

to grant those rights exclusively.

(4) For the purposes of this section, on-demand rights are granted exclusively if the person granting them—

- (a) has not granted any such right in respect of the whole or, as the case may be, that part of the event to more than one person, and
- (b) is precluded by the terms of the contract from doing so.

(5) For the purposes of subsection (4)(a), rights are not to be treated as having been granted to more than one person where the only persons to whom such rights have been granted are connected with each other.

(6) No person may provide on-demand coverage of a listed event unless authorised to do so under subsection (7), (8) or (9), even if that person is authorised to include live coverage of that event in a relevant service by subsection (2), (3) or (4) of section 101.

(7) The provision of on-demand coverage of a listed event is authorised by this subsection if—

- (a) on-demand rights have been acquired by the provider of a relevant service falling within section 98(1)(a);
- (b) that relevant service includes live coverage of that event; and
- (c) the on-demand coverage provided that provider—
 - (i) constitutes adequate on-demand coverage of the event, and
 - (ii) may be accessed free of charge.

(8) The provision of on-demand coverage of a listed event is authorised by this subsection if—

- (a) on-demand rights have been acquired by one or more persons;
- (b) those persons are not connected with each other;
- (c) the on-demand coverage provided by at least one of those persons—
 - (i) constitutes adequate on-demand coverage of the event, and
 - (ii) may be accessed free of charge;

and

- (d) the person or persons who have acquired rights to provide the adequate on-demand coverage satisfy the requirements in relation to that coverage of any regulations made under section 104ZA for the purposes of this paragraph.

(9) The provision of on-demand coverage of a listed event is authorised by this subsection if OFCOM have consented in advance to such provision.

(10) OFCOM may revoke any consent given by them under subsection (9).

(11) The code drawn up by OFCOM under section 104 shall include guidance on the matters which they will take into account in determining whether to give or revoke their consent for the purposes of subsection (9).

(12) Regulations under section 104ZA (regulations about coverage of listed events) may include provision—

- (a) specifying (either generally or in relation to particular listed events) any criteria or requirements that content must meet in order to be regarded as on-demand coverage for the purposes of subsection (2)(d);
- (b) for determining for the purposes of this section what (whether generally or in relation to particular circumstances) is to be taken to represent the provision of adequate on-demand coverage of an event for the purposes of subsection (8)(d).

(13) Failure to comply with subsection (6) shall not affect the validity of any contract.

(14) Subsection (6) shall not have effect where the person providing the on-demand coverage is exercising on-demand rights acquired before the commencement of this section.

(15) In this section, “on-demand coverage” and “adequate on-demand coverage” are to be construed in accordance with regulations under section 104ZA.

(16) For the purposes of sections 104A (provision of information) and 104B (penalties for failure to provide information), any person making available, or wishing to make available, on-demand coverage of the whole or any part of any listed event shall be treated as a person who is within subsection (5) of section 104A.””

This new clause would secure that, where possible, adequate on-demand coverage of listed events, such as clips and excerpts, is made available free of charge to audiences in the United Kingdom.

New clause 8—Protection of digital terrestrial television—

“(1) The Secretary of State shall ensure that—

- (a) the licensed public service channels continue to be broadcast via digital terrestrial television to as many of their intended audience as is reasonably practicable; and
- (b) a sufficient number of digital terrestrial television multiplex licences are issued to deliver the licensed public service channels via digital terrestrial television and support a diverse range of commercial digital terrestrial television channels.

(2) OFCOM shall reserve sufficient frequencies for television broadcasting services accordingly.”

This new clause would place a responsibility on the Secretary of State to ensure that public service television channels continue to be broadcast via digital terrestrial television (DTT) and that sufficient licences are issued to keep the platform viable. It would also require Ofcom to make spectrum available accordingly.

New clause 9—Review of children’s access to public service broadcast content—

“Within six months of the passage of this Act, the Secretary of State must prepare and publish a report on how to ensure that children have access to public service broadcast content.”

This new clause would require a review of how to ensure children have access to public service content, given their viewing habits.

New clause 10—*Digital rights to listed events*—

“(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations amend the Broadcasting Act 1996 to make provision for coverage of listed events which is not live coverage.

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

New clause 11—*Delivery of public service content on relevant television services*—

“After section 264A of the Communications Act 2003, insert—

“264B Delivery of public service content on relevant television services

- (1) OFCOM must monitor the extent to which the public service remit for television in the United Kingdom is met in respect of relevant television services.
- (2) If OFCOM considers that the public service remit for television in the United Kingdom is not being met in respect of such services, it may set whatever programming quotas it considers necessary to ensure that the remit is met.
- (3) For the purposes of this section, “relevant television services” means—
 - (a) the television broadcasting services provided by the BBC;
 - (b) the television programme services that are public services of the Welsh Authority (within the meaning of section 207);
 - (c) every Channel 3 service;
 - (d) Channel 4;
 - (e) Channel 5.”

This new clause would give OFCOM powers to measure the delivery of public service content on the linear services of the public service broadcasters, and set quotas if it considered the current level to be unsatisfactory.

New clause 12—*Regulation of selection services for on demand and online-only content*—

“(1) Within three months of the passage of this Act, the Secretary of State must by regulations provide for the regulation of selection services for on demand and online-only content equivalent to the regulation of radio selection services provided for by section 48 and Schedule 9 of this Act.

(2) Regulations under subsection (1) may amend primary legislation.”

New clause 13—*Gaelic language service*—

“The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passage of this Act, review whether a Gaelic language service should be given a public service broadcast remit.”

New clause 14—*Age Classifications*—

“When considering the adequacy of age ratings, OFCOM must assess whether any age ratings used by providers are—

- (a) widely recognised by the UK public;
- (b) underpinned by a transparent set of standards;
- (c) informed by regular consultation with the UK public.”

New clause 15—*Establishing a Broadcasting and Communications Authority for Wales*—

“(1) A Broadcasting and Communications Authority for Wales (“the Authority”) is established.

- (2) The Authority must perform the following functions—
 - (a) support for the broadcasting and media sectors serving audiences in Wales;
 - (b) oversight and accountability for public service broadcasting in Wales;
 - (c) facilitation and development of the production of content by broadcaster and media outlets in Wales;

- (d) promotion and preservation of the Welsh language, identity and culture in broadcasting and media output;
- (e) support for and development of English language content made in Wales and ensuring that it is relevant to Welsh audiences; and
- (f) any functions the Secretary of State considers necessary to support further devolution of broadcasting policy to the Welsh Government.

(3) In performing the functions under subsection 2 the Authority must have regard to—

- (a) public interest journalism;
- (b) content for children and young people; and
- (c) sport content and national events.

(4) In performing the duties under subsection (2) in relation to broadcasting and media matters in Wales, the Authority must consult—

- (a) relevant Ministers in the Welsh Government;
- (b) Members of the Senedd; and
- (c) members of the public living in Wales.

(5) Section 1 comes into force at the end of the period of 12 months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.

(6) In preparation for the establishment of the Authority a shadow authority may be established in line with the functions set out in subsection 2 after the passing of this Act.

(7) The Secretary of State must by regulations make provision for the appointment of officers to the Authority.”

This new clause creates a new independent Welsh Broadcasting and Communications Authority with responsibility and oversight for broadcasting and media matters in Wales to help reflect and meet the needs of Welsh audiences.

New clause 16—*Listed Events*—

“(1) The Broadcasting Act 1996 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 97 (as amended by section 299 of the Communications Act 2003), after subsection (1B) insert—

- “(1A) The following events must be included in Group A of the list drawn up under subsection (1)—
- (a) the Olympic Games;
 - (b) the Paralympic Games;
 - (c) the FIFA World Cup Finals Tournament;
 - (d) the FIFA Women’s World Cup Finals Tournament;
 - (e) the European Football Championship Finals Tournament;
 - (f) the European Women’s Football Championship Finals Tournament;
 - (g) the FA Cup Final;
 - (h) the Scottish FA Cup Final;
 - (i) the Grand National;
 - (j) the Wimbledon Tennis Finals;
 - (k) the Rugby Union World Cup Final;
 - (l) Six Nations Rugby Tournament Matches Involving Home Countries;
 - (m) the Derby;
 - (n) the Rugby League Challenge Cup Final;
 - (o) any match involving the national teams of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland or England pertaining to qualification for the events listed in paragraphs (c), (d), (e) and (f).”

This new clause would make it compulsory for the Secretary of State to place the list of sporting events in Group A of listed sporting events, ensuring they are available on free to air television in their entirety. The events consist of all current Group A events plus the home nations World Cup and Euro qualifiers.

New clause 17—*Consultation on listing of events*—

“(1) The Broadcasting Act 1996 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 97(2), after paragraph (b), insert—

- “(ba) Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig (the Gaelic Media Service),”

(3) In section 104(4), after paragraph (b), insert—

“(ba) Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig (the Gaelic Media Service),”

This new clause would add Seirbheis nam Meadhanan Gàidhlig (the Gaelic Media Service) to the list of organisations which must be consulted when the Secretary of State is drafting or amending listed events and Ofcom is drawing up its related code of guidance.

New clause 18—Listed Events Fund—

“(1) The Broadcasting Act 1996 is amended as follows.

(2) After section 104ZA insert—

“104ZB Financial matters arising from the listing of events: the Listed Events Fund

- (1) The Secretary of State shall establish a fund (the “Listed Events Fund”) with the purpose of minimising the consequential financial impact of the listing of events on sporting governing bodies who would otherwise suffer egregious financial distress.
- (2) Payments from the fund shall be limited to governing bodies and other sporting rights holders who maintain their registered office in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland or England and whose primary geographic area of responsibility lies within one of these territories.
- (3) The Secretary of State, following the revision of the listing of events in Group A, shall invite governing bodies and other organisations who could reasonably assess their turnover or income as dropping as a result of an event being listed in Group A (and who qualify under the provisions of subsection (2) of this section) to apply to him for payment from the fund.
- (4) No organisation with a reported turnover of greater than £50 million per annum for the financial year in which any subvention may be paid shall be entitled to payment from the fund.
- (5) The amount laid down in subsection (4) may be varied by the Secretary of State on an annual basis, but may not increase by a rate greater than that of the Retail Price Index as measured at any point in the three months previous to any proposed variation.”

This new clause would provide a fund under the auspices of the Secretary of State to be paid to governing bodies or other broadcasting rights holders who may experience financial detriment as a result of listing under Group A.

New clause 19—Diversity in the workforce of the public service broadcasters—

“(1) OFCOM must produce a report each year detailing diversity in the workforce of the public sector broadcasters (“PSBs”).

(2) The report under subsection (1) must include—

- (a) a breakdown by protected characteristic of the numbers of people in the workforce of each PSB;
- (b) the percentage of the workforce on and offscreen who have various protected characteristics as deemed relevant by OFCOM;
- (c) if the percentages reported under paragraph (b) are not reflective of the population as a whole or on a regional basis, a statement from each broadcaster on how they intend to increase diversity in their organisation.

(3) OFCOM may request any information they require from the PSBs in order to compile the report under subsection (1).

(4) Provision of data to enable OFCOM to produce the report under subsection (1) is to be considered by OFCOM when it assesses the extent to which a PSB has fulfilled its public service broadcasting remit.”

This new clause would require OFCOM to produce an annual report on workforce diversity within the PSBs.

New clause 20—On-demand programme services—

“(1) OFCOM must report to the Secretary of State each year on the percentage of people who are watching on-demand services that do not fall under the definition of on-demand programme services in section 368A of the Communications Act.

(2) If OFCOM reports concern that the definition is not providing protection for public service broadcasters on on-demand services that are being widely accessed by the public—

(a) OFCOM must write to the Secretary of State, and

(b) the Secretary of State must make a written statement to Parliament on how the Secretary of State intends to remedy this matter.”

This new clause would require OFCOM and the Secretary of State to keep under review the adequacy of the definition of on-demand programme services in section 368A of the Communications Act 2003.

New clause 21—Delivery of public service content on relevant television services—

“After section 264A of the Communications Act 2003, insert—

“264B Delivery of public service content on relevant television services

- (1) Ofcom must monitor the extent to which the public service remit for television in the United Kingdom is met in respect of relevant television services, including level of programming from a diverse range of genres including, among others, education, entertainment, music, arts science, sports matters of international significance, religion and specialist interests.
- (2) If Ofcom considers that the public service remit for television in the United Kingdom is not being met in respect of such services, it may set whatever programming quotas it considers necessary to ensure that the remit is met.
- (3) It is the duty of relevant television broadcasting services to prepare and publish a statement annually on their performance in the provision of public service content.
- (4) For the purposes of this section, “relevant television services” means—
 - (a) the television broadcasting services provided by the BBC;
 - (b) the television programme services that are public services of the Welsh Authority (within the meaning of section 207);
 - (c) every Channel 3 service;
 - (d) Channel 4;
 - (e) Channel 5.”

This new clause would give Ofcom powers to measure the delivery of public service content on the linear services of the public service broadcasters, and set quotas if it considered the current level to be unsatisfactory.

New clause 22—Duty to report on workforce diversity and equality requirement—

“(1) Public service broadcasters (“PSBs”) must prepare and publish a statement on a workforce diversity and equality strategy within the period of one year beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.

(2) A workforce diversity and equality strategy must comprise a plan setting out how PSBs are taking appropriate steps towards improving diversity and equality within the workforce in the period covered by the plan, which must cover not more than three years.

(3) In particular, a workforce diversity and equality strategy must state a PSB’s objectives and priorities for the period it covers.

(4) A workforce diversity and equality strategy must include a summary and an evaluation of the activities and initiatives pursued or commissioned by a PSB in the exercise of its functions under subsection (1) in the period to which the strategy relates.

(5) Before the end of the period covered by a workforce diversity and equality strategy, PSBs must prepare and publish a strategy for a further period, ensuring that each successive strategy covers a period beginning immediately after the end of the last one.

(6) In preparing or revising a workforce diversity and equality strategy, a PSB must consult such persons as they consider appropriate.

(7) OFCOM must prepare and publish a report on workforce diversity and equality strategy statements produced by PSBs set out in subsection (1), in particular—

- (a) summarising what actions a PSB is planning and taking in the exercise of its strategy under subsections (1) to (3);
- (b) assessing what progress has been made towards achieving the objectives and priorities set out in a strategy in the relevant period.

(8) The first annual report by OFCOM on workforce diversity and equality is required to be published within a period of 18 months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.

(9) OFCOM must prepare and publish subsequent reports on PSBs' strategies and progress against them every three years thereafter."

This new clause introduces a requirement for PSBs to publish objectives on the promotion of diversity and equality among the workforce and for Ofcom to monitor and report on PSB performance on meeting this requirement.

New clause 23—Duty to report on media literacy requirement—

"(1) Public service broadcasters ("PSBs") must prepare and publish a statement on a media literacy strategy within the period of one year beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.

(2) A media literacy strategy is a plan setting out how PSBs are taking appropriate steps towards improving levels of media literacy among audiences in the period covered by the plan, which must be not more than three years.

(3) In particular, a media literacy strategy must state a PSB's objectives and priorities for the period it covers.

(4) A media literacy statement must include a summary and an evaluation of the activities and initiatives pursued or commissioned by the PSB in the exercise of their functions under section (1) in the period to which the report relates.

(5) Before the end of the period covered by a media literacy strategy, PSBs must prepare and publish a strategy for a further period, ensuring that each successive strategy covers a period beginning immediately after the end of the last one.

(6) In preparing or revising a media literacy strategy, a PSB must consult such persons as they consider appropriate.

(7) OFCOM must prepare and publish a report of the media literacy strategy statements set out in subsection (1), in particular—

- (a) summarising what actions a PSB is planning and taking in the exercise of its strategy under subsections (1) to (3);
- (b) assessing what progress has been made towards achieving the objectives and priorities set out in a strategy in the relevant period.

(8) The first annual report by OFCOM on media literacy is required to be published within a period of 18 months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.

(9) OFCOM must prepare and publish subsequent report on PSBs' strategies and progress against them every three years thereafter."

This new clause introduces a requirement for PSBs to take appropriate steps in relation to improving levels of media literacy among their audiences and for Ofcom to monitor and report on PSB performance on meeting this requirement.

New clause 24—Duty to report on viewer and listener consultation requirements—

"(1) Public service broadcasters ("PSBs") must prepare and publish a viewer and listener consultation strategy ("consultation strategy") within the period of one year beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.

(2) A consultation strategy is a plan setting out how PSBs are taking appropriate steps towards improving levels of engagement with audiences in the period covered by the plan, which must be not more than three years.

(3) In particular, a consultation strategy must state a PSB's objectives and priorities for the period it covers.

(4) A consultation strategy must include a summary and an evaluation of the activities and initiatives pursued or commissioned by the PSB in the exercise of their functions under section (1) in the period to which the report relates.

(5) Before the end of the period covered by an audience consultation strategy, PSBs must prepare and publish a strategy for a further period, ensuring that each successive strategy covers a period beginning immediately after the end of the last one.

(6) In preparing or revising a media literacy consultation strategy, PSBs must consult such persons as they consider appropriate.

(7) OFCOM must prepare and publish a report assessing PSBs' consultation strategies, in particular—

- (a) summarising what actions a PSB is planning and taking in the exercise of its strategy, and
- (b) assessing what progress has been made towards achieving the objectives and priorities set out in a strategy in the relevant period.

(8) The first annual report by OFCOM on PSBs' consultation strategies must be published within a period of 18 months beginning with the day on which this Act is passed.

(9) OFCOM must prepare and publish subsequent reports on PSBs' strategies and progress against them every three years thereafter."

This new clause introduces a requirement for PSBs to produce a strategy and objectives for increasing levels of consultation with user listeners and for Ofcom to monitor and report on PSB performance on meeting this requirement.

Amendment 81, in clause 1, page 2, line 38, at end insert—

- "(iii) a sufficient quantity of audiovisual content so as to permit fulfilment of the public service remit for television in the Gaelic language as spoken in Scotland".

This amendment would require OFCOM to report on whether a sufficient quantity of audiovisual content in Gaelic is televised to meet the public service remit for television.

Amendment 1, page 3, line 10, at end insert—

- "(5A) In assessing the extent to which the requirements of subsection (5)(b)(i) have been met OFCOM must have particular regard to the importance of content recognising the culture and heritage of those parts of the United Kingdom recognised under the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities."

This amendment requires OFCOM to have regard to the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities when reporting on the fulfilment of the public service remit through audiovisual content by the public service broadcasters.

Amendment 86, page 3, line 13, leave out from “appropriate” to end and insert—

“level of programming from a diverse range of genres including, among others, education, entertainment, music, arts science, sports matters of international significance, religion and specialist interests.”

This amendment would add detailed description of the range of genres which Ofcom must report on whether the public service broadcasters have made available.

Government amendment 19.

Amendment 79, in clause 3, page 7, line 15, at end insert—

“(c) which is broadcast via UHF frequencies that can be received by a minimum of 98.5% of the population of the United Kingdom.”

This amendment amends the definition of public service for Channel 3 and Channel 5 to include an obligation to broadcast via digital terrestrial television, on the basis of the already existing licence requirements applying to PSB DTT multiplexes.

Amendment 80, page 7, line 32, at end insert—

“(d) which is broadcast via UHF frequencies that can be received by a minimum of 98.5% of the population of the United Kingdom.”

This amendment amends the definition of public service for Channel 4 to include an obligation to broadcast via digital terrestrial television, on the basis of the already existing licence requirements applying to PSB DTT multiplexes.

Amendment 82, in clause 8, page 9, line 29, at end insert—

“(c) a duration such as OFCOM considers appropriate of those independent productions are commissioned from smaller studios”.

This amendment would require OFCOM to require licensed public service channel regulatory conditions to include commissioning from smaller studios.

Amendment 83, page 9, line 29, at end insert—

“(1A) The regulatory regime for Channel 4 includes the conditions that OFCOM consider appropriate for securing that, in each year, not less than 35% per cent of Channel 4’s total expenditure on qualifying audiovisual content is allocated to independent productions made by independent production companies with annual turnover not exceeding £25,000,000.

(1B) The Secretary of State may by regulations amend subsection (1A) by substituting a different figure for the annual turnover specified in that section.

(1C) Before making regulations under subsection (1B), the Secretary of State must consult—

- (a) OFCOM,
- (b) Channel 4, and
- (c) independent production companies that are likely to be affected by the regulations.”

This amendment would require that at least 35% of Channel 4’s annual expenditure on qualifying audiovisual content be allocated to productions made by independent producers with annual revenues smaller than £25m. It also provides the Secretary of State the power to amend, following consultation, the revenue figure defining the production companies to which the requirement applies.

Amendment 84, page 10, line 15, before “commissioning” insert

““annual revenue” means the reported revenues published in the annual accounts of the respective independent production company, covering the most recently available period of 12 months;”.

This amendment would insert a definition for the purposes of Amendment 83.

Amendment 85, page 10, line 17, at end insert—

““independent production companies” has the same meaning as in the Broadcasting (Independent Productions) Order 1991;”.

This amendment would insert a definition for the purposes of Amendment 83.

Government amendments 20 to 40.

Amendment 88, in clause 25, page 30, line 30, at end insert—

“(4) On the date on which section 21 comes into force, the Secretary of State must revise the list maintained for the purposes of Part 4 of the Broadcasting Act 1996 so that it includes—

- (a) at least one cricket test match each year between the months of May and September;
 - (b) at least one cricket One Day International match each year between the months of May and September;
 - (c) all other currently listed Group A events.
- (5) The events listed under subsection (4) must be allocated to Group A.”

Amendment 5, in clause 28, page 41, line 10, leave out “an appropriate” and insert “a significant”.

This would require that designated internet programme services are given significant prominence within regulated television selection services.

Amendment 78, page 42, line 3, at end insert—

“(f) any local digital television programme service that OFCOM determines is willing and able to offer an internet programme service.”

This amendment includes local digital television services within the prominence framework for designated internet programme services where OFCOM determines a service is willing and able to offer such a service.

Amendment 87, page 42, line 21, leave out “an appropriate” and insert “a significant”.

This amendment would require a provider of regulated television selection to give significant prominence to designated internet programme services.

Government amendments 41 to 49.

Amendment 6, page 69, line 1, leave out clause 31.

This would retain section 295 of the Communications Act 2003, which restricts C4C’s involvement in programme-making.

Government amendments 50 and 51.

Amendment 18, in clause 38, page 79, line 25, at end insert—

- “(4A) When considering the adequacy of age ratings, OFCOM must report on the extent to which any age ratings used by providers are—
- (a) clear and well understood by consumers;
 - (b) underpinned by a published and transparent set of standards; and
 - (c) informed by regular and substantive consultation with the UK public.”

This amendment sets conditions to be used by OFCOM when reporting on the adequacy of the age ratings classification systems used by providers.

Government amendment 52.

Amendment 7, in clause 44, page 83, line 36, leave out subsection (3).

This amendment and Amendments 8 to 13 would broaden the scope of the requirements placed by the Bill on local radio broadcasting licences, so that the current scope of local material as news, information and other spoken material is retained.

Amendment 8, page 84, line 6, leave out “news and information” and insert

“news, information and other spoken material and music”.

See explanatory statement to Amendment 7.

Amendment 9, page 84, line 23, leave out “news and information” and insert

“news, information and other spoken material and music”.

See explanatory statement to Amendment 7.

Amendment 10, page 84, line 24, leave out “news and information” and insert

“news, information and other spoken material and music”.

See explanatory statement to Amendment 7.

Amendment 11, in page 84, line 26, after “news” insert

“, information and other spoken material and music”.

See explanatory statement to Amendment 7.

Amendment 12, page 84, line 34, after “news” insert

“, information and other spoken material and music”.

See explanatory statement to Amendment 7.

Amendment 13, page 84, line 36, after “news” insert

“, information and other spoken material and music”.

See explanatory statement to Amendment 7.

Government amendments 53 to 59.

Amendment 2, in clause 50, page 114, line 7, leave out subsections (2) and (3) and insert—

“(2) Section 40(3) of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 is omitted.”

This amendment would allow the Secretary of State the option in future of commencing subsection 2 of Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Acts 2013.

Amendment 3, in clause 55, page 115, line 25, leave out “50” and insert “(Consultation on section 50)”.

This amendment, together with Amendment 4 and NC3, would require the Secretary of State to consult on alternative incentives to encourage publishers or regulators to seek recognition under the terms of the Royal Charter for the Self-Regulation of the Press, and to lay a report on the consultation before Parliament, before section 50 could be commenced.

Amendment 4, page 115, line 35, at end insert—

“(ga) section 50 (but see section (Consultation on section 50));”.

See explanatory statement to Amendment 3.

Government amendments 60 to 74.

Amendment 17, in schedule 5, page 145, line 4, at end insert—

“(aa) persons designated by the Secretary of State as the responsible authority under Section 4(1) of the Video Recordings Act 1984;”.

This amendment ensures that the British Board of Film Classification is consulted by OFCOM when drawing up the Video on Demand codes.

Government amendment 75.

Amendment 14, page 146, line 34, leave out “40 per cent” and insert “80 per cent”.

This would require Tier 1 on-demand services to provide subtitles for 80% of their on-demand TV content from the second anniversary of the publication of the accessibility code.

Amendment 15, page 146, line 36, leave out “5 per cent” and insert “10 per cent”.

This would require Tier 1 on-demand services to provide audio-description for 10 per cent of their on-demand TV content from the second anniversary of the publication of the accessibility code.

Amendment 16, page 147, line 1, leave out “2.5 per cent” and insert “5 per cent”.

This would require Tier 1 on-demand services to provide sign language presentation or translation for 5 per cent of their on-demand TV content from the second anniversary of the publication of the accessibility code.

Government amendments 76 and 77.

George Eustice: There are a number of new clauses and amendments in my name that I wish to speak to, but principally among them I will speak to amendment 2, which relates to the repeal of section 40 of the Crime and Courts Acts 2013. With the will of the House, I will press the amendment to a Division later today, but first I will briefly address some of the other amendments.

Amendment 1 is not actually linked to the debate about section 40, or indeed the Leveson inquiry; it is about something very different. It simply states that Ofcom, when considering and assessing the public service remit, should also have regard to the framework convention on national minorities. That is because the current framework acknowledges the importance of languages in this country and their recognition under the framework convention on minority languages, but it omits the framework convention on national minorities. That is of particular importance to places such as Cornwall, Scotland and Wales, where the culture and identity goes beyond just language. I hope the Government will consider addressing this matter in the other place as the Bill progresses.

New clause 3 addresses the simple reality that although the Government have said that they intend to repeal section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act, Ministers have confirmed to me that the Government remain committed to the continued existence of the royal charter on self-regulation of the press. That royal charter was established by David Cameron when he was Prime Minister, in response to the recommendations of the Leveson inquiry. Conservative Members voted to put in place section 40 in order to create an incentive to join the royal charter. Given that the Government have said that they want to repeal section 40, which created that incentive, but that they remain absolutely committed to keeping the royal charter, surely they should at the very least have a call for evidence to examine what other possible incentives might encourage publishers to join that royal charter.

If the Government did not believe in the royal charter on self-regulation of the press, they would simply bring forward Orders in Council to disband the royal charter, as is provided for under article 10 of the charter. The Government do not want to do that, so if they remain committed to the royal charter, let us at least explore those options. They could include giving publishers access to arbitration so that they can get a fairer share of the advertising revenue for the news content they produce. That remains an open problem; some Government legislation seeks to address it, but it could go further.

I wish to focus principally on amendment 2, since that is the one I intend to press to a Division. The amendment would simply put in place a more precise cut to deliver the Government’s objectives. Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 had two parts. The first part—subsection (2)—created an incentive for publishers to join because it gave them protection against those with deep pockets. There was a carrot and a stick in section 40. The carrot was that if, for the sake of

argument, a Russian oligarch threatened a publisher and said, “We’re going to get Carter-Ruck to write expensive letters to you. We will see you in court if you publish this,” that publisher would have had protection because they would have been able to say to the rich and powerful, “We have confidence in our story and are going to run it, and if you don’t like the story, we will see you in arbitration; we won’t see you in court. If you insist on taking us to court and bypassing that arbitration, you will pay the publisher’s costs as well as your own.”

That was the carrot—the bit that the press never objected to. No one ever raised an objection to that. But there was also a stick—subsection (3) of section 40. The stick basically said that publishers who do not join a recognised regulator have more cost exposure to ordinary citizens who have had their lives and privacy violated and have no redress other than to bring legal action. The press never objected to the carrot; they only ever objected to the stick. Because they are a glass-half-empty type of industry, they of course tended to focus on the bit they did not like rather than the bit they did like, and they lobbied furiously to have that part of section 40 removed.

Then we come to the 2017 Conservative manifesto—let us be honest: it was not the best manifesto the party has ever drafted. Probably due to a drafting error, that manifesto pledged not just to remove subsection (3) of subsection 40, which was all that was required and which would have delivered the spirit of that manifesto commitment, but committed to remove the entirety of section 40, which was completely unnecessary.

Amendment 2 would remove the stick but retain the carrot. It would remove subsection (3) of section 40. In that, it would deliver everything the press have ever wanted, and therefore also satisfy the Government’s intentions.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): This is a point that I have often made. The hon. Gentleman’s “carrot”, as he calls it, seems very similar to anti-SLAPP legislation, which has been welcomed generally on both sides of the House, and I cannot see why anyone who supports anti-SLAPP legislation would not also support amendment 2. I certainly will support it and I hope that it gets support across the House.

George Eustice: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Anyone who truly believes in a free press, as he and I do, would want to ensure that we can protect genuine investigative journalism, and that the rich and powerful would not be able to intimidate and bully publishers with limited financial resources—many of them losing money—into not running a story that was essentially true.

Were amendment 2 to be agreed to, those publishers that chose not to sign up to a recognised regulator would have nothing to lose; they would be no worse off than they are today. Fraser Nelson, editor of *The Spectator*, has had a very strong position that he would never join a recognised regulator. It would be open to him not to; he would be no better and no worse off than he is today, as if something ended up in litigation he would not be paying both sides’ costs.

A publication such as *Private Eye*, which famously has never joined anything, would also be free to stand aloof from any kind of regulator, and it would be no

better or worse off than it is today. Publications such as *The Daily Mail*, which have wealthy benefactors standing behind them—people with deep pockets who are willing to pay for litigation and backfill the losses that such companies make—would be no better or worse off than they are today, in that they could decide not to join a regulator.

However, those small, plucky publishers that do not have wealthy benefactors standing behind them, and that seek to do genuine investigative journalism that might attract the attention of those threatening legal action, would have the option of joining a recognised regulator, so that they could get protection against that type of strategic litigation brought by the rich and powerful—people with deep pockets—against them.

So I say to the Minister that I can deliver everything that the Government seek, in a way that is fitting with the spirit of the Conservative manifesto but that keeps open the option of small publishers being able to gain some protection.

Let me remind the House why we ended up with section 40 in the first place. There was a public outcry about what was called the phone-hacking scandal—the widespread recognition that a culture had developed that enabled publishers to hack into people’s phones. It was David Cameron, the Conservative Prime Minister, who established the Leveson inquiry. It was David Cameron who chose Lord Justice Leveson to chair it, because Lord Justice Leveson was known as somebody who was not hostile to the press. Lord Justice Leveson invested huge amounts of his time in coming up with a very sensible set of proposals. It was David Cameron who then said we would implement those proposals, with cross-party support from all parties in this House, and it was the Conservative Whips Office that actually whipped the Conservative side of the House to implement section 40, as David Cameron wished to happen.

Let us remember that in that Leveson inquiry, dozens of victims of phone hacking came forward to give evidence, and they did so because the Prime Minister had set up an inquiry and they felt that it was sincere and genuine, and that they could contribute. We all have had constituency cases in which people have been through extraordinary tragedy, and it is painful for them; but often people who have been through such tragedy want to know that something good has come from it. Many of those witnesses who gave evidence to the Leveson inquiry were the parents of children who had been murdered, who had had their life rifled through by the media, and they wanted something good to come out of that; so they went through the trauma and the painful experience of sharing those experiences, to try to help Parliament wrestle its way to a sensible compromise.

So let us have no nonsense from the Government Front Bench, trying to create some sort of wedge issue. This is a provision that the Conservative Government put in place, and the royal charter on self-regulation was a very Conservative approach to dealing with the challenge.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): My right hon. Friend will forgive me if I have got hold of the wrong end of the stick. He is making a strong case for his amendment, but I have one nagging doubt in my mind. I understand that he believes that if his amendment is agreed to and we remove the stick, newspapers will be

[Kit Malthouse]

protected from the rich and powerful, but what protection would remain for those who are not of means; those who do not have the money that they can risk in litigation to take on those publishers who may have defamed or libelled them, but who are not members of a regulatory body? This is not just about the rich and powerful. There could be people who do not have any money who are affected by newspapers, and I am not clear how, in his new landscape, they would be affected.

George Eustice: My right hon. Friend makes a powerful point, but I am seeking to reach a compromise. His argument is for keeping section 40 in its entirety, so that those who do not have financial means and who face a publisher who refuses to act within any kind of reputable regulator would have some redress in the courts. Of course, in section 40 there was only a weighted presumption in favour of a particular approach to costs. It was never a hard and fast rule.

My right hon. Friend makes a strong case, but I am seeking to form a compromise with the House and with those on the Government Front Bench, and if it is their intention to do what the press want, they can accept my amendment and still look the press in the eye and say, “We gave you everything you wanted, which is the removal of the stick.” Maybe they hope they will get some positive coverage as a result of doing this favour; I suspect they will end up being disappointed by that between now and the general election. Nevertheless, I am trying to make a compromise with them. I hope that the Government will look seriously at this.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend help the House by saying whether he has had any communication with *The Guardian* or *Private Eye* on this proposal?

George Eustice: I had multiple conversations with lots of publishers when the original Leveson architecture was put together, particularly around the royal charter. I know that *Private Eye* has always objected to joining anything at all, and it would be completely unaffected by the proposal. It is not a member of the Independent Press Standards Organisation, and it was never a member of the Press Complaints Commission. It has always remained entirely aloof, and there is nothing in the proposal that affects its position. Nor would anything in the proposal affect, say, *The Spectator*, which also has a view that it would not join a recognised regulator.

As I said, small publishers that want to do genuine investigative journalism and that do not have people with deep pockets standing behind them could benefit from the proposal by signing up to a recognised regulator. Many of them are already members of Impress, which is the recognised regulator at the moment, but others may form different regulators or encourage IPSO to join and seek recognition, so that they can benefit from that cost protection.

1.30 pm

I intend to press amendment 2 to a Division later. I hope the Government will recognise that they can accommodate the provision and that it can be consistent with their manifesto commitment. I hope that we will

not hear any nonsense from the Front Bench about freedom of the press, because what I am suggesting would strengthen the freedom of the press, rather than weakening it.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I would like to run through a number of the amendments in my name, which have largely been promoted by the National Union of Journalists. I will also say that new clause 2 appears to be part of the unfinished business of Leveson, which we need to move on fairly swiftly to ensure that people have proper redress and protections, while maintaining the freedom of the press.

I want to cover a number of issues in my amendments, such as the protection of public service broadcasting, diversity within the sector, media literacy and the demands for consultation on media changes. New clause 21 would add a detailed description of the range of genres that Ofcom must report whether the public service broadcasters have made available. It would also give Ofcom the responsibility to measure the extent of public service broadcasting across specific genres and the ability to set quotas if it felt that specific genres were not covered adequately. It comes from a campaign by the Voice of the Listener & Viewer to protect the requirements in the PSBs’ remit to broadcast programmes within specific genres.

Section 264 of the Communications Act 2003 sets out in some detail the requirements on public service broadcasting across a whole range of different genres, including “cultural activity”,

“the extent that is appropriate for facilitating civic understanding and fair and well-informed debate on news and current affairs,”

religion and so on. I will not go through the full list—it is very detailed.

The problem is that the Bill, as it stands, updates that position, but with a generalised list of what will be taken into account and protected in terms of the genres of audio-visual content. There is a general concern that that could lead to a number of specific areas, such as science or religion, becoming vulnerable. There will still be a variety of genres that there is no specific requirement on public service broadcasters to broadcast.

The Select Committee carrying out pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill raised the matter in its discussions. It felt that the Government’s replacing the list of specific commitments required of a public service broadcaster with a general remit was a “step too far”. The Government’s response was that their amendment was simply a simplification. Even the Chair of the Select Committee said the simplification of the remit and enforcement of it for Ofcom would come at a considerable cost. A number of pieces of evidence submitted to the Committee drew attention to areas where the requirement on public service broadcasters could be significantly weakened, even to the point of the overall removal of content.

I will quote the example given by Anna McNamee, the executive director of the Sandford St Martin Trust, about what is happening with regard to the coverage of religion. She said:

“In 2003 ITV successfully lobbied Ofcom for its PSB quotas for arts and religious content to be removed”

and, unfortunately:

“In 2015 Ofcom noticed that ITV’s provision of religion and ethics had all but ceased.”

The lesson from that drawn to the Committee and the Minister's attention was that there was:

"No quota: no obligation to do so"

and that, under competing pressures, individual genres and sections of broadcasting would be deleted overall.

What we felt was needed in the legislation was a statutory requirement that, where there is an identification of societal value of a particular genre, Ofcom would be able to track the PSBs' performance and ensure that the distinctive content is available to audiences. That is a reflection of Ofcom's own concerns so far. It has noticed a decline in the provision of those genres. Broadcasting legislation—until this Bill—has set out what is considered societally valuable content and defined the remit of Ofcom and PSB in that way. Unfortunately, this generalised statement within the Bill fails to enable that to happen in the future.

My new clause 21 would provide Ofcom with stronger powers, with a clearer remit of what should be protected and the ability to set quotas if it considers current levels in certain genres to be unsatisfactory. It should allow the regulator to stem the significant decline of those genres since 2013.

My new clause 22 would place a duty on public service broadcasters to publish their objectives on the promotion of diversity and equality among the workforce and on Ofcom to monitor and report on the public service broadcasters' performance on meeting that requirement. That comes out of an analysis of what is happening with regard to the diversity of the workforce in broadcasting.

If public service broadcasting is to represent all sectors of the UK population, the workforce should be truly representative. That is a general view that has been expressed across the House. Ofcom has recognised that broadcasters with advanced data collection practices tend to have more representative workforces. The new clause would further empower Ofcom to specify what kinds of data companies should be required to monitor and publish, therefore ensuring that they are looking at the impact of their diversity policies.

Some of the figures on the lack of diversity in broadcasting are quite startling. If we take class as an example, people from working-class backgrounds are under-represented in the broadcasting sector. Some 28% of employees who provided data were from a working-class background, below the UK population figure of 39%. In terms of gender diversity, men remain dominant in most senior roles, in particular the important roles of director—74.5%—and writers, with 67.3%. The number of women in senior roles has actually dropped in recent years from 46.8% to 45.4%. That has been declining continuously over the past four years. The figures for ethnicity are also pretty stark in terms of the lack of representation. Again, we are finding that without adequate monitoring, there has been a lack of any form of influence to improve the situation.

The Creative Diversity Network ran a project called Diamond to monitor diversity, but a number of the unions did not participate because the broadcasters had failed to share their statistics. Nevertheless, there were significant contributions made by individuals working offscreen and onscreen, reflecting people's concerns about the lack of diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity and disability. There are stark figures that demonstrate

the lack of representation in public service broadcasting. This new clause is simply intended to ensure that adequate statistics are provided and data collected, and that Ofcom's monitoring and intervention powers are strengthened.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I once met a young lady who was keen to work in television and she told me that she wanted to be a presenter. However, because she wears a hijab, she was sure that she would never get to be a presenter—she had never seen any presenter wearing a hijab. Does the right hon. Gentleman feel, as I do, that transparency in reporting those figures would help make clear to everybody what diversity is lacking?

John McDonnell: The reason for this new clause—I am not pushing it to a vote or anything—is to encourage the debate further, because we seem to have hit a brick wall, or a glass ceiling, whichever hon. Members prefer. Part of the reason those attitudes persist is the lack of ethnic minorities, particularly in senior positions. The figure for black, Asian or minority ethnic community members in all senior roles is just 13%, an under-representation compared with the population; for senior producers it is 5.5% and for heads of production it is 7.4%. South Asian representation offscreen at all levels has actually fallen to 2.4%, less than half of the figure in the population as a whole, which is around 5%.

The reason for this new clause is to stimulate debate because, in addition to the failure of the existing system to maintain levels, we are going backwards in some areas. Not only is the number of people with disabilities in senior roles at a low level, but it has not changed in four years. There needs to be greater intervention and more powers to monitor and to require the delivery of statistics, and there needs to be proper participation by public service broadcasters in that. Ofcom also needs the ability to intervene more effectively.

Just quickly, because other hon. Members want to speak, I will say that new clause 23 is intended to place on public service broadcasters a duty to report on media literacy. It would introduce a requirement for public service broadcasters to take appropriate steps to improve levels of media literacy among their audiences and allow Ofcom to monitor that to see how the public broadcasters are pursuing that media literacy requirement. The reason for this new clause is that things have moved on since the Communications Act 2003. I remember that debate at that point was around teletext; the huge expansion of social media had not been anticipated, still less the arrival of artificial intelligence.

I do not think I need to stress in this House the importance of countering misinformation, disinformation, fake news, conspiracy theories and the like across social media, or the need to raise the issue of media literacy more widely. Public service broadcasters have an even greater role and duty now not only to provide impartial and accurate information, but to increase media literacy and make greater efforts to reach all age groups in the UK, particularly young people.

The BBC's Marianna Spring, as people will know, is charged with covering some of these issues for the BBC, and a number of other broadcasters try independently to check the veracity of factual claims or to make an assessment of the credibility of sources, particularly in

[John McDonnell]

areas where there is conflict around the world. However, there is a need now to be more explicit about the issues that people face in the interpretation of media. For that reason, it is time for a duty to be placed upon public service broadcasters to develop media literacy strategies, which will enable the receivers of their broadcasts to better understand and better cut through some of the misinformation that is being purveyed.

There has been debate in this House already about the need for a greater recognition within the media itself of the threat posed by artificial intelligence. We have already seen the danger of artificially generated news stories and images, with reports of inaccurate data being used to inform artificial intelligence-generated stories, false attributions to journalists and creators, and people discovering that their likenesses have been used without their knowledge or consent. That is why the NUJ is trying to encourage the debate about who is responsible for raising the levels media literacy. New clause 23 would simply put a statutory duty upon public service broadcasters to develop and publish a strategy for what they are doing to raise media literacy, and give Ofcom a role in monitoring that.

1.45 pm

New clause 24 is a requirement for public service broadcasters to report on their consultation with the public, viewers and listeners. A number of Members of the House were involved in the discussions with the BBC about local radio services and the cutbacks that were taking place, with no consultation with the recipients of the local radio services, the listeners themselves. We saw the same with regards to the BBC's news channel and BBC World Service cutbacks. We found that there were groups who were not consulted or engaged whatsoever. As a result, we believe that poor decisions were made. It is within the BBC's governance framework and the royal charter to highlight public service broadcasters' obligation to regularly consult the general public and key demographics of viewers and listeners when making key decisions about programming and services to local communities. That seems to have fallen down dramatically in recent years.

It is also important that other public service broadcasters are placed under that obligation. New clause 24 puts public service broadcasters under an obligation to develop and publish a strategy for maintaining regular consultation, and gives Ofcom a duty to report on whether that is being undertaken appropriately. Although the new clause does not deal with this, we urge the Government to ensure that there is a recognition in the negotiations on the licence fee next time around that there is a proper process for the BBC to consult, rather than trying to negotiate secret deals with the Government.

My final point is on amendment 87. The issue here, which relates to amendments from other hon. Members that I will be supporting, is requiring a provider of regulated television selection to give significant prominence to designated internet programme services. It is vital that the digital platforms for on-demand TV do not exclude public service broadcasting content or relegate it to hard-to-find recesses of their sites. The wording of the Bill requires such content to be given appropriate prominence, which we fear is too weak. Raising the

requirements to significant prominence would better ensure that public service broadcasting has the level of prominence that the viewing public would expect.

There are other amendments that I welcome and support, particularly new clauses 5 and 7, as they extend the variety of and the commitment to public service broadcasting and the content that viewers would want to see.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): For information, I intend to call those who have tabled amendments before other Members.

I call Sir John Whittingdale.

Sir John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): You are absolutely right, Madam Deputy Speaker; I have an amendment that I would like to speak to. It might be slightly unusual for the person who was the Minister taking the Bill through Committee then to seek to amend the Bill on Report, but I am sure it is not unprecedented, and I hope my amendment is nevertheless helpful to the Government. It is certainly my intention that it should be.

I have taken the Bill through Committee, and it has already been subject to a lot of scrutiny by the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, in this House and in the other place, and with the publication of a draft Bill. I am therefore slightly surprised to see the number of Government amendments that have been tabled. Most are relatively minor and technical, and I welcome the measure that would correct the anomaly around independent national radio, requiring it to continue to broadcast on AM, even though fewer and fewer people are now accessing radio by those means. It is right to remove that anomaly.

Amendment 78 addresses local television, which was the invention of my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt). Although it has had a somewhat chequered history, it is successful in a number of areas across the country, particularly outside London. Rightly, the Government have consulted recently on whether they believe there is a long-term future for local TV, and I am optimistic they will conclude that they would like it to continue. The Bill will ensure that those broadcasters that the Government regard as making an important contribution should continue to thrive in a different media landscape. That is the purpose of the prominence provisions, which safeguard public service broadcasters to ensure that whatever means viewer choose to access television, they can find those public service broadcasters easily. Local television is not currently included on the list of channels that should have due prominence. As we move forward into an age when more and more people rely on internet protocol television to access channels, it will become increasingly hard for them if local TV is not obviously available on IPTV sets.

I have a Sky Glass television, which is an IPTV set, and at the moment I cannot get local television on it at all. One reason for that—and the reason the Government have previously given for not including local TV on the list of channels to be given prominence—is the absence of an app to deliver local TV. When I was filling in for the Minister over the past few months I had a meeting with local TV and was told that an app will be forthcoming quite soon that will allow local television to be received

by IPTV. The Government suggested in a letter to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) that they see a difficulty with that, and that because there are a large number of local television channels it would be difficult to give all of them individual prominence. However, I am assured by local television that they intend to come forward with a single app, which will be available on a number of major platforms and ensure that a specifically chosen geographical location in the country will receive the specific local TV channel that is appropriate for that area. We are only talking about one app. The Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport said in his letter that the Government will continue to monitor the situation and consider increasing the availability of local content.

As we know, media Bills do not come along every day, and this is our single opportunity to update the law covering the range of media services. It is likely that there will not be another opportunity for some considerable time. My amendment would allow Ofcom, at a future date, to recommend the inclusion of a local TV app, as and when it emerges, in the prominence regime. It would ensure that the Bill future-proofs the regime so that it can be amended in such a way. I hope the Government will consider adopting that measure. I understand it is unlikely that they will accept my amendment, but I ask the Minister whether she will continue to look at this issue and, if the Government believe it is appropriate, consider tabling an amendment to that effect in the House of Lords.

On new clause 3, regarding the abolition of section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013, I was slightly surprised to learn from my right hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) that the inclusion of a firm pledge to repeal section 40, which was not just in the 2017 Conservative manifesto but repeated in that of 2019, was a drafting error. It did not strike me at the time that either the initial pledge or the second one were drafting errors.

George Eustice: Is my right hon. Friend saying that there were no drafting errors in the 2017 manifesto?

Sir John Whittingdale: There may have been—I am not quite sure which others my right hon. Friend might be referring to, but I am pretty certain that that was not one of them.

George Eustice: Nobody ever said that they objected to the cost protections for the press contained in section 40. The arguments against section 40 were always shorthand arguments that essentially claimed falsely that it would require publishers to pay the costs of others—and that only related to one small part of section 40.

Sir John Whittingdale: My right hon. Friend is right, but as I think I pointed out on Second Reading, not a single major publisher has chosen to apply for recognition by the Press Recognition Panel through joining a recognised regulator.

George Eustice: But is that not precisely because the Government failed to move the incentives that encouraged people to join?

Sir John Whittingdale: As the Minister responsible, who said that we would not implement section 40, I had considerable talks. It was made plain that if the Government

had implemented section 40, no major publisher would apply for recognition. My right hon. Friend talked about the carrot and stick, and his new clause would require the Government to look for alternative incentives to encourage publishers to apply for recognition, even if the existing carrot and stick were removed. He did not go into detail in his speech about what alternative incentive there might be; it sounded slightly like a reference to Marlon Brando's making "an offer you can't refuse". The press have been absolutely plain: they object to any regulator that carries the stamp of Government approval. That is the fundamental principle that has caused every publisher to say that they will not apply for recognition.

George Eustice: My right hon. Friend knows that it is not a Government regulator. The Press Recognition Panel was established by the royal charter on self-regulation of the press. The Conservative party established that as a royal charter rather than a regulatory body for precisely that reason—to accommodate that wish of the press.

Sir John Whittingdale: I did not suggest it was a Government regulator, but nevertheless, any regulator that requires Government approval through the Press Recognition Panel is viewed by the press as having a Government stamp of approval, which they regard as unacceptable. My right hon. Friend spoke about the discussions he had, but he would agree that the stick and the carrot at that time were thought to be necessary to persuade red-top publishers such as *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun* to join a regulator recognised by the PRP. What I do not think he anticipated—indeed, nobody anticipated it at the time—was that not a single major publisher would agree to co-operate with the regime that was being put in place. That includes *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Observer* and the *Financial Times*. Not one major publisher said that it would co-operate with the system that was put in place, so it has plainly failed. For that reason alone the Government should revisit the issue, remove section 40, and instead encourage those who do not currently accept the ruling of an independent regulator to join the one in existence, which is IPSO. I know that my right hon. Friend and I will not agree on this point, but his suggestion that it was somehow an oversight to include a commitment to repeal in the manifestos of 2017 and 2019 is simply not correct. He will be aware that there is unanimity among all the major publishers that section 40 represents an attack on media freedom. It is not just the publishers who hold that view; many campaigning organisations, such as Reporters Without Borders, have actually downgraded the UK's press freedom rating because of the existence of section 40, and it is certainly viewed as an infringement of media freedom.

2 pm

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): This is one of the issues on which my right hon. Friend and I agree. May I suggest that those who wish to follow this up afterwards read a book called "The Laughter of Triumph", by Ben Wilson? It is about William Hone and the fight for a free press back in 1817. The press should not be forced into any Government regulation; there should be the law of the land, and that is it.

Sir John Whittingdale: I am extremely grateful to my right hon. Friend. I hope that this is not the only issue on which we agree, but it is certainly one on which we hold the same view. For that reason, I am sorry that my right hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) will press his new clause to a vote, because I shall not support him on it.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): We should remind ourselves why we are here: it is because those who were described by Alan Bates, the leader of the Horizon scandal complainants, as “small, skinny people” needed redress against the huge, overbearing press. The Hacked Off website pointed out that in 2021, only 0.6% of more than 14,000 complaints were upheld by IPSO—only 88 cases in total, which is a minuscule number. Is that a sign that the system is working?

Sir John Whittingdale: I do not think success can be judged simply on the number of complaints upheld. Indeed, as we have seen in other organisations, such as the BBC, we may find that a large number of those complaints relate to a single issue that has generated a great deal of concern. It is not as simple as, “There were x thousand complaints, and only so many were upheld.” Generally, however, IPSO is definitely an improvement on the Press Complaints Commission, which went before it. It is not perfect—no regulator ever is—and I myself have criticised it for not having yet imposed any fines, but the atmosphere surrounding the behaviour of the press is very different from what it was when, for instance, Hacked Off was created, and when I chaired the inquiry on phone hacking, which led to the establishment of Sir Brian Leveson’s report.

I do not want to detain the House any longer. I intend to press the Government, but not as far as a vote; I should say that I urge the Government to look at ways in which they can support local television through my amendment. Given the point about section 40, I cannot support the new clause tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I want to express my gratitude for the fact that the Bill has been prioritised in this new term, and is progressing quickly. For our public service broadcasters in particular, this legislation is long overdue. I want to refer to my amendment about the language surrounding prominence for PSBs such as the BBC, ITV and Channel 4. The Bill gives public service content an “appropriate” level of prominence on online services, which should make it easier to find not only the apps that take us to the BBC or ITV on a smart TV, but to find those channels on the traditional TV guide with which we are all familiar. However, the Culture, Media and Sport Committee made the suggestion, which I have tabled in the form of an amendment, that the word “appropriate” is perhaps unhelpfully subjective, and should be replaced with “significant”. The prominence of PSBs is an existential issue that should not be underestimated, so I ask the Government to consider that suggestion as the Bill progresses.

Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for tabling his amendment. I strongly agree with him: the issue cannot just be left in the air, given the importance of public service broadcasting. I therefore think that the guidance for Ofcom should be

stronger than the Government have recognised so far. I look forward to hearing from the Minister what they propose to do about that.

Jamie Stone: I thank the right hon. Member for her intervention.

Let me move on to the subject of Channel 4 and the removal of the restriction on in-house production. I have concerns about that change to Channel 4’s model, which has worked extremely well for a long time, although the previous Secretary of State was not so keen on its existence—or, at least, its future. Channel 4 has historically supported the independent production sector throughout the UK, in places such as my constituency in the far north of Scotland, but there are concerns that allowing it to create its own content could destabilise the sector. Given the Government’s track record on Channel 4, my ultimate fear is that this could be used as a stick with which to beat the channel, although I hope that does not happen. That being said, Channel 4 and the independent production sector are integral to each other, which is why I am glad to see the channel’s qualifying independent commitment to the sector increased to 40%, and to hear that any changes are likely to be very gradual, allowing the market to adjust accordingly. That can only be a good thing.

I come to the new clause tabled by the hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) on listed events. The Government must take his proposal forward, so that major sporting events such as the Olympics, the Euros, Wimbledon and the World cup remain free to air in their entirety. In an increasingly digital-first world, digital rights must be included in the listed events regime. Let me turn to a subject that is close to my heart. Earlier this week, Ben Stokes said that England’s test win over India was his “greatest triumph” since he had become England’s captain. I think we can all take pleasure in that, regardless of which of the four corners of the United Kingdom we inhabit. I acknowledge the nod from my colleague on the Scottish National party Benches, the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), for which I thank him courteously. I feel that this sort of shared cultural moment should be available for everyone to watch on free-to-air television. My amendment would enable people to see a cricket test and a one-day international on free-to-air TV each summer, and I hope that Members will strongly consider supporting it.

On the subject of local radio—something that I have mentioned in the past, and was beaten up about when I was a councillor long ago—I tabled amendments 7 to 13 to broaden the scope of the requirements in local radio broadcasting licences, so that the current scope of “local material” as

“news, information and other spoken material and music”

is retained. If only I could have heard myself say those words all those years ago! I can see the good that it does. It would not be right for the BBC to be left as sole provider of local speech radio. On a similar point, I welcome part 6 of the Bill, which safeguards the future of the industry with relation to voice-activated smart devices.

Local radio is integral to upholding democracy—a point made many times by many of us in this place. It provides trusted news and information, particularly during an emergency, as we saw during covid, and also

provides entertainment. That is especially important to my constituents, who, as may be imagined, often face long drives across very large rural areas.

New clause 3 and amendments 2 to 4 relate to section 40 and our press, a subject already mentioned by a number of Members today. Ten years ago, all the parties made commitments to the victims of press abuse that we would introduce the system of regulation recommended in the Leveson report to protect the public from press wrongdoing. We in this country benefit from a vibrant and rich media, as was pointed out in an urgent question earlier today, but whereas our broadcasting media are the envy of the world, our print media languish at the bottom of international league tables when it comes to public trust and confidence. However, the Government now seek to repeal section 40, although they have no plans to replace it with any alternative mechanism of independent and impartial regulation. That not only leaves local and independent newspapers unable to defend themselves against expensive litigation in the form of strategic lawsuits against public participation, but makes it harder for a normal person to take legal action against a large publisher. As they say, those with the deepest pockets win.

These amendments offer two ways forward. New clause 3 and amendments 3 and 4 would permit the repeal of section 40, but not before there has been a consultation on alternative incentives for the Leveson system. Amendment 2 would repeal the part of section 40 that would disadvantage unregulated newspapers, but keep the part that protects local independent titles that have done the right thing and signed up to regulation. Under either of those amendments, national newspapers would face no detriment at all for their potentially bad behaviour—there is no free speech reason to object to them—but they allow us to show our support for the victims of press abuse and for the underlying principles of independent regulation.

Many sensible amendments have been tabled to this Bill, and I am glad that the majority of us in the House and, indeed, the industry are singing from the same hymn sheet. The world and the way in which our media operate have changed beyond recognition since the Communications Act 2003, and I and my party will be very pleased to watch this Bill make its way swiftly through both Houses, so that our legislation at last reflects the world we live in today. I close by paying tribute to Members for the great efforts that have been made on all sides of this House to make sure that this legislation is fit for purpose.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call the Father of the House.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) for previewing the suggestion that time-shifted excerpts from listed events be available through public service broadcasters. I regret that test matches are not presently listed events, because I think that this country would have wanted to see the remarkable parts of the test match in India this week.

Some people may have only read press descriptions of Ben Stokes doing a backhanded flip to the wicket. That can be well described by people such as Neville Cardus and his successors, but it is even better to watch it in real life.

I believe that the number of listed events should be expanded. However, as the BBC and others have reminded us, the number of people watching events on the other side of the world at midnight or four in the morning might be 400,000, whereas those who would want to watch those events the next day might be 4 million or 14 million.

I believe that the new clause should be accepted, and I hope that the Minister will say some comforting words. Like many others, I do not propose to push my new clause to a Division today, but I do hope that the Government will respond by tabling an amendment or a new clause in the House of Lords that has the same effect. I could read out my full briefing, but the point has been well made by the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, and may be made by others.

What is the reason for embracing the future? It is not just about linear television; there is the opportunity for other rights. So many rights are bought by commercial businesses outside this country. What do they care about what happens in one part of the world broadcasting framework? We must have a requirement to stop those who think they can make money by making most people not watch key events, and making those who do watch pay a lot. People should be able to watch coverage on ordinary public service broadcasting.

My belief is that, for major events, the competition between the public service broadcasters will be sufficient to ensure a fair return for those who buy the rights. I do not believe in having an unrestricted auction, so that people can buy rights that will exclude most people in the country from watching sporting events of great importance. There have been examples of rights holders—Sky has done this well—making an event available on normal public service broadcasting, as well as on their own service, when one of our national teams has got into a final. I pay tribute to Sky for doing that.

I want to follow up on the words of the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), who talked about genres in public service broadcasting. I thought I would table an amendment or a new clause that does what he argued for. I believe that Ofcom should have an explicit duty to make sure that public service broadcasters are held to account and explain how they are meeting the requirements for the various parts of public service broadcasting. Public service broadcasting can be very interesting and fully commercial; a large number of people may want to watch it, and it may be very popular, but not necessarily. Religion, science and many other areas listed in the right hon. Member's amendment 86 are important.

I say to the Government: pay attention to what he has said, look to Colin Browne for what viewers and listeners have said, and accept the amendment, so that the requirements are explicit, and the responses by the public service broadcasters are open.

I believe that we can make a success of this Bill. I know that broadcasting regulation is normally about 10 years behind the technology, and I remember that about 30 years ago, David Mellor had to change a virtually complete Bill on Report because so much had changed between the Bill being drafted and its Third Reading in the House of Commons. I believe that we can make a major change, and I can sum this up to the Government in words that someone has offered me, which are absolutely right:

[Sir Peter Bottomley]

“Don’t let this opportunity pass by. The time to act is now. Once these moments go behind a paywall, that’s the final whistle.” Let us make all major events available to all people, at least in excerpts, so that they can watch them in daylight.

2.15 pm

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

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I refer hon. and right hon. Members to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. I thank all colleagues, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) and for Eltham (Clive Efford), and my right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw), for their service on the Public Bill Committee and for doing really diligent and careful work.

In general, my colleagues on the Labour Benches and I are supportive of this Bill. It has been too long in the making, and the delays have held back the UK’s world-leading public service broadcasters. They have also affected the productivity of the creative industries as a whole, and the public service broadcast sector is such a large and important part of the creative industries and their commissioning. The last time broad changes were enacted for our public service broadcasters was in 2003. I think we can all agree that the world is now a very different place, but better late than never. Broadly speaking, I believe this is a good Bill, and we support it.

Our public service broadcasters are a fundamental part of British cultural life. If we did not have them, we would want to invent them, and this Bill gives them and the wider broadcasting industry the tools they need to survive in the modern world. The Bill contains crucial measures to ensure that UK broadcasters can thrive in a digital age by protecting radio services when they are accessed on smart speakers, and by ensuring the fair prominence of public service broadcasters on smart TVs. I will return to the question of prominence shortly.

However, the Bill does not take full advantage of the opportunity it creates to shape the broadcasting industry for the next decade. Although we will not seek to disrupt or delay the passage of the Bill, there are areas where we believe it can and should be strengthened and improved. I hope the Minister will listen to our suggestions in the new clauses and amendments standing in my name and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East.

New clause 9 concerns children’s television. For many children and young people, public service broadcasting is an important part of how they learn and in particular how they learn to understand the world—it is a central part of how their curiosity is ignited. The Bill as drafted fails to recognise that importance by neglecting to try to understand how the viewing habits of children and young people are changing. Provision for children by public service broadcasters is under threat because so few children now watch live TV. The top-rated programme on CBBC attracts as few as 50,000 viewers. Children carry entertainment in their pockets, and they can and do switch between various apps and platforms in a matter of seconds, which is understandably affecting investment in children’s programming.

That creates a vicious cycle: as investment and resources decline, so too does the quality of the output. Instead of trying to provide high-quality, uniquely British public service content for children, broadcasters are then forced to prioritise profitable content that offers little public value and can be sold internationally. Our new clause 9 would enable the Government to take an important first step, recognise the problem and explore routes forward. It would be a shame not to take advantage of this opportunity to shape children’s programming for the future, in what is supposed to be a forward-looking piece of legislation. I ask the Minister to give that some consideration.

The Bill also fails to go far enough on age classification. The hon. Members for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Miriam Cates) and for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter) have tabled amendments in this area, for which I thank them, alongside our new clause 14, which shows the breadth of feeling across the House. All these amendments look to tackle the same underlying issue, which is that there is no consistency in how age ratings are currently used on streaming sites. Parents and children alike deserve to be able to have full confidence in age ratings so that when they pick something to watch, they can trust that it will be safe and age-appropriate. Ratings must be easily understood and recognisable by the public and underpinned by a transparent set of criteria that take into account British attitudes on everything from swearing to violence and anything else we might think of.

New clause 14 does not, in my view, overengineer the issue. It does not require every on-demand service to use any specific age rating provider, although we should collectively recognise that the British Board of Film Classification is a great example of best practice. Our public service broadcasters already follow stringent rules, which may mean that age ratings are not appropriate for their content, but where age ratings are already used, there should be clear criteria against which Ofcom can measure their success and quality.

The Bill also falls short when it comes to digital rights to listed events. Listed events have already generated some debate, and I have a great deal of sympathy with the points made by other hon. and right hon. Members about various sporting events. This legislation is supposed to contribute to the future-proofing of public service broadcasters, but I feel that to do that it needs to go further. Our new clause 10 seeks to address that. The rights to broadcast moments of national sporting importance are offered first to channels such as the BBC and ITV, enabling the broadest possible range of British people to watch the likes of Wimbledon and the Olympics.

We agree with the aim of the Bill, which is to protect and modernise the system, while making a few changes to ensure that it is appropriate in the digital age, but unfortunately the Bill falls short in this regard. By not extending the regime to include online clips and highlights, the Bill risks preventing thousands upon thousands of people from feeling the joy of watching British athletes or cricketers compete on the world stage, particularly when those competitions are happening far away, as happened this week with Ben Stokes and co. Considering that the next men’s football World cup and the next two Olympics after Paris 2024—

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Thangam Debbonaire: I am happy to give way.

Gavin Newlands: The shadow Secretary of State mentions sporting events. In addition to protecting the Six Nations for us all in group A, would she accept the principle that Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish football fans should have the same access to their national teams as English fans do at present?

Thangam Debbonaire: Of course I would, and I am glad to confirm what my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East said in Committee. If the hon. Gentleman is trying to press me on a specific aspect, I am also happy to confirm that we would support the new clause tabled in his name if it were pushed to a vote. I will be interested to see whether colleagues in his party will support our new clause on Gaelic broadcasting, as they seemed not to vote for it in Committee. It will be interesting to see whether they take up that challenge as well.

It is likely that, even in the near future, key sporting moments will take place in the middle of the night in this country. Despite the fact that Conservative Ministers ordered a review of this in 2022, there is simply nothing in this Bill as drafted to update the listed events rules so that clips or highlights from those events do not get stuck behind a paywall. Our new clause 10 seeks to guarantee that action is taken on this issue, but it is flexible enough to accommodate whatever mechanisms are identified as most appropriate following their review. I also note new clause 7, in the name of the Father of the House, the hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley), which is more prescriptive than ours but addresses the same issue.

If Ministers cannot lend their support to either of these amendments, they should at the very least publish the response to the review in full. It would be helpful if the Government took up the suggestion from my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East that criteria be published, so that we get a clearer sense, rather than having this ad hoc debate—sympathetic though I may be to certain sporting events. There is the question of national fairness—that is a principle—and also the question of what criteria we should use to add to the listings regime.

New clause 12 seeks to fix another problem with the Bill, which is that it fails to take the rising popularity of podcasts into account. I have mentioned podcasts before on the Floor of the House, and it gives me great pleasure to mention them again when discussing the regulation of selection services for audio content. Some 10 million adults listen to podcasts every week. It is emerging as a format that encourages collaboration, new partnerships, interesting discussion and the presence of a range of politicians and other personalities who have something interesting or unique to say. It seems counterintuitive, therefore, to exclude this fast-growing audio medium from the Bill. For example, the Bill as drafted guarantees access to the LBC breakfast show with Nick Ferrari but not to “The News Agents” podcast. Some of us will be listening to both, and we expect similar treatment for both. This new clause would simply provide that consistency.

New clause 11 is designed to ensure that public service content is available to linear services as well as online. Part 1 of the Media Bill introduces new measures to allow public service broadcasters to meet some of their remit requirements through their online services and on-demand channels. Given that streaming and on-demand are growing rapidly, this seems a reasonable forward-looking change. However, there are still millions of people who watch their television through a traditional broadcast set-up. This group of people primarily includes older residents, families in rural areas and those struggling with bills as a result of the cost of living crisis. It is crucial that they can still access public service content as usual. This new clause would give Ofcom the means to assess whether public service broadcasting delivery on linear services was adequate; and, if it found that provision to be inadequate, it would have the power to set binding quotas.

I have already mentioned new clause 13, which encourages the Secretary of State to consider and take advice on whether a Gaelic language service should be recognised as a public service broadcaster in its own right. This was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East in Committee. BBC Alba, the Gaelic language television service provided by MG Alba and the BBC, is a huge asset, providing a wide range of high quality programming for Gaelic speakers to enjoy and sustaining around 340 jobs, half of which are in economically fragile areas. However, despite apparent cross-party support for the service, Gaelic language broadcasting is still not recognised in legislation across the board in the same way as other minority language services are. That is not to say that Gaelic language broadcasting can be directly compared to Welsh broadcasting, for example, but it is an acknowledgment of the importance of language to our cultural life. Language is a daily expression of our history, and Gaelic language broadcasting is an important forum for that expression. It should therefore be considered for recognition in law.

Jamie Stone: I really hate to say this, but it is worth pointing out, in the context of Gaelic and Welsh, that the situation for Gaelic is very precarious indeed. It is strong enough in some of the Western Isles, but we need to remember that it needs to be nurtured big time now.

Thangam Debbonaire: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid and valuable contribution. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East, the shadow Minister with responsibility for media, has met those bodies recently. We understand the points that he is making and take them fully on board. This new clause, tabled in my name and that of my hon. Friend, is not prescriptive as to how we break the cycle; it leaves multiple options open to the Secretary of State.

I turn to clause 50 and the amendment tabled in the name of the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), who made his points earlier. The phone hacking scandal led to section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013. That scandal involved egregious acts, and the treatment of victims of crime or tragedy by some sections of the media was a disgusting abuse of power. We all say that that should never be repeated. The majority of British journalists are decent and honourable, but there are some who even now continue to drag the good name of that profession into

[Thangam Debbonaire]

disrepute. That profession is a cornerstone of our democracy and it is important that the public are able to trust it, but at the moment we are at risk of the public losing faith in the profession of journalism, as was certainly also the case before section 40 was created and before that scandal was exposed.

We on the Labour Benches want a press that is regulated in a way that makes it accountable for its reporting and that meets the highest ethical and journalistic standards. We want to see a financially sustainable free press in the UK that can carry on holding power to account. Clause 50 repeals section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act, but if the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth pushes his amendment 2 to a Division this evening, we will support it, because it offers a way through by keeping some of what he refers to as the carrots. Indeed, by removing some of the sticks, his amendment would incentivise more publishers to join up with an approved regulator, for the reasons that he has outlined much more coherently and clearly than I can now. We thank him for working co-operatively with us.

Sir John Whittingdale: It is interesting to hear that the Opposition intend to support my right hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), as they abstained in Committee. If a future Labour Government repealed section 40, would they put in place an equivalent or similar measure?

2.30 pm

Thangam Debbonaire: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but I am speaking about amendment 2, which we will support for the reasons that the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth set out.

I want to see publishers protected from defamation cases brought by Russian oligarchs and other wealthy individuals or corporations looking to evade scrutiny in the public interest. The Government have promised to do more to protect people from SLAPPs, but they have yet to come forward with concrete proposals. We would like to see those measures brought forward, as they are needed to secure our free press. We also look forward to seeing the private Member's Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Wayne David) on this subject.

It is an important principle that ordinary citizens should be able to access justice. As the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth said, amendment 2 would remove the stick. If that encourages more publishers to join the approved regulator, it would create more compliance with the arbitration scheme, which is another reason why we support the amendment. How will the Government protect publishers from SLAPPs and give complainants access to justice?

I acknowledge the amendments and new clauses tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell). In addition to covering many of the issues that I also support, he clearly cares about the care that public service broadcasters should take in consulting and fully representing their audiences in both their workforce and their output. I ask every culture, media and sport organisation I meet, "Where are the women? Where are the people of colour? Where are the people from working-class communities?" Those

questions have to be answered both horizontally and vertically, and my right hon. Friend made that case extremely well.

Before closing, I wish to raise a couple of concerns with the Minister on Government amendments 37 to 39. Those amendments appear to lack clarity and purpose, and they may weaken the position of public service broadcasters in future negotiations with commercial broadcasters. I urge the Government to reconsider them, and at least to make it clear to the House what problem they are trying to solve.

We support the Bill in general terms. I hope Members will join me in supporting the amendments I have outlined, including amendment 2 tabled by the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth and our new clause 13 on Gaelic. We feel that these amendments would strengthen the Bill, benefiting people across the country and helping to support our broadcasters in the coming years.

Sir Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con): I am pleased to speak in support of amendment 18, tabled in my name and the names of other hon. Members.

I generally welcome this Bill as a valiant attempt to bring the law and regulation up to date in a fast-moving sector of our society, namely broadcasting and on-screen entertainment. I will focus on part 4, which deals with on-demand programme services and, in particular, clause 38, which will usher in a comprehensive review, to be undertaken by Ofcom, of audience protection and the production of a video on demand code.

This welcome Bill reflects how many people watch their entertainment today. My two oldest grandchildren, aged 19 and 18, rarely watch anything on television, but they are always on their tablets or smartphones. They have no concept of seeing what is on the box in the evening, and maybe even recording it, as my wife and I still do. They simply source and download what they want to watch, when they want to watch it, via video on demand.

It is therefore important that we ensure the very best protection is in place, not so much for them—they are both adults now—but for my 12-year-old granddaughter, my seven-year-old grandson and even my two-year-old granddaughter, who has her own tablet on which she watches "Peppa Pig" and "The Wheels on the Bus"—I can confirm that the wheels go round an awful lot. [Laughter.] After 20 years, I am so sick of hearing that song.

Ensuring adequate audience protection measures for video on demand is vital, and clause 38 makes a commendable start, but I believe that amendment 18—shades of which are mirrored in amendments tabled by Members on both sides of the House, as was mentioned by the shadow Secretary of State—would enhance that protection. The amendment contains the following reasonable provision:

"When considering the adequacy of age ratings, OFCOM must report on the extent to which any age ratings used by providers are—

(a) clear and well understood by consumers;

(b) underpinned by a published and transparent set of standards; and

(c) informed by regular and substantive consultation with the UK public."

I do not think that is asking too much, and I therefore hope the Government will consider it carefully.

The Government have said that the Bill's objective is to bring in

"stronger protections from harmful or age-inappropriate shows through a new Ofcom... Video-on-demand Code".

Amendment 18 simply sets out objective criteria to achieve this aim with regard to age ratings. All it requires is that age ratings are clear, transparent and reflect UK expectations about what is age appropriate. That is not a high bar to expect services to meet.

As others have said, we are very fortunate in the UK to have a tried and trusted classifier of content, namely the British Board of Film Classification, which has been age-rating our movies ever since I first went to the pictures in Tiverton to see James Bond in "Thunderball"—I wonder how many colleagues remember that underwater film—and probably for a lot longer than that. The BBFC now rates online content and video on demand.

Opinion polls and surveys tell us that parents understand and trust the BBFC's rating system. My informal survey of parents in my constituency over the past few weeks has confirmed that. It is the gold standard, and the threshold against which Ofcom can consider the sector as a whole. It is therefore reassuring that Netflix, Apple and Amazon all use BBFC ratings for their video content.

Amendment 18 would not force every content producer to use BBFC ratings, but it would help to ensure that each rating system is fit for purpose. That is the bare minimum we can do to prevent commercial VOD services from exposing children to harmful content because, sadly, all is not well in this sector. It grieves me to say that that is particularly so in relation to Disney.

The current ratings free-for-all has seen Disney+ classifying scenes of sexual abuse as suitable for nine-year-olds and scenes of graphic, misogynistic violence or offensive antisemitic stereotypes as suitable for 12-year-olds. That is lower than it classifies some of its "Star Wars" and superhero content. Until we hold services to a minimum standard, we risk eroding public trust in age ratings as a child-protection measure, and thus perpetuating this entirely preventable harm.

The problem with Disney and Disney+ is that, for most of us, the brand conjures a sense of safety and security that is no longer warranted. When people of my generation hear the word Disney, we think of "Bambi" or "Cinderella", so the thought that our grandchildren are in the next room watching a Disney+ video is intrinsically reassuring. But that would be an error of judgment, because much of its content is now dark and explicit.

Disney's rating system is very different from the BBFC's, and it is based on a Dutch system. Transparency and consistency must be part of the new VOD code, and Ofcom should consider the current lack of coherence and consistency in its review and future work.

Amendment 18 does not seek to change the scope of the Bill or prevent new innovations in audience protection. It is not about mandating any particular solution. Most of us know and respect BBFC age ratings, but nobody will be forced to adopt age ratings where they are not appropriate or not expected, such as on services operated by public service broadcasters. It is purely about setting objective benchmark standards to ensure that, where age ratings are used, they are effective for the purpose of

child protection. As that is the stated purpose of the Bill, I hope the amendment will attract Government support.

It is not my intention to divide the House on amendment 18, but I hope that the excellent Minister will introduce similar amendments in the other place. If she does not, I am confident that similar amendments will be tabled in the other place that are likely to be supported, and I certainly would not vote against them when they come back to this place.

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

Kirsty Blackman: I want to respond briefly to the issues just raised by the hon. Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter). I wonder whether he has looked at my new clause 20. The definition of "on-demand services" is not as he imagines. In the Communications Act 2003, it covers only those services whose "principal purpose" is the provision of programmes, so services such as those on the iPad or consoles would not be covered by the legislation as it stands. The legislation is specifically about those whose principal purpose is to do with providing programmes. It will cover Fire sticks, for example, or Sky Glass, as was mentioned by the Minister, but it will not cover those people watching on a PlayStation or on-demand services on iPads, so the prominence regime would not apply for those who are not watching on something whose "principal purpose" is television.

Anything in the Bill that relates specifically to on-demand services, therefore, even when it comes to age ratings or some of the other requirements we are putting on on-demand services, will apply only to Sky Glass, Fire TV and those sorts of things. That is why I tabled new clause 20, which would amend the Bill to recognise how quickly things move, as a number of Members have pointed out. The way that we consume media changes very regularly, and it has certainly changed dramatically in the 20 years since a media Bill was previously proposed.

I therefore ask Ministers to look at the definition of on-demand services and consider whether it continues to be appropriate; if it does not, new clause 20 would ensure that Ofcom is able to regulate all those places where people watch television. I originally tabled the new clause because of the incredibly high percentage, comparatively, of people in Scotland who watch television exclusively on consoles, without the PSB prominence that we might expect in services that are specifically for streaming TV.

I will speak to a number of the amendments tabled by Members across the House, starting with those tabled by the SNP. I have covered my concerns about the definition of on-demand services, and generally I do not think that the Bill as drafted is all-encompassing enough. The issue of smaller studios, which is covered in our amendments 82 to 85, was raised with me by the Media Reform Coalition. Having quotas for independent studios is good, but some broadcasters have a predilection to using only the super-indies, which account for about 20% of the companies that make independent productions; the smaller indie studios account for about 80%. Some broadcasters commission almost everything from that 20% of the market, from companies such as Endemol. Those companies do a great job, but they cannot be considered to be small independent

[Kirsty Blackman]

studios. Amendments 82 to 85 would encourage public service broadcasters to move outside the scope of those largest independent studios and to give some of their work to smaller studios, which would have significant regional benefits.

New clause 1, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams), looks at how the regions are accounted for, the production hours in each of the regions, and making sure that productions are genuinely regional productions, rather than a lift-and-shift from somewhere else. Those issues are important. Looking at the quota system for stuff being done outside the M25, for example, is not enough. Amendments 82 to 85 would augment the regional quotas recommendations proposed by the hon. Member for Arfon. If broadcasting companies had to look at the smaller independent studios, it would naturally encourage an increase in regional production.

I have one last point to make about the SNP amendments that has not been covered so much by other people. New clause 22, tabled by the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), is similar to my new clause 19 on the diversity of the workforce. That is incredibly important. I made the point in an intervention that I am concerned by the lack of diversity in public service broadcasting. I am concerned by that lack of diversity on and off screen. It is important to look at both areas when considering the future of PSBs. This is not about sticks, nor is it about carrots; it is about transparency. It is about ensuring that all individuals are transparent about whether they are meeting the test of having something that looks like the general population. It is clear that Parliament does not match the diversity of the population, given the incredibly large percentage of men in comparison with women still in this place, even though it has been going in the right direction. However, we need people on screen to reflect the population.

2.45 pm

I was watching the Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration event on Saturday night and there was a dance group, I think called Chickenshed. It was the first time that I had seen on television a dance group involving someone in a wheelchair. It did not strike me how unusual that was until I saw it on television. Then I thought, "Why is this not more common? Why do we not see more people who look like the general population on TV on a more regular basis?" That was one of those moments that brought home to me how rare it is to see people with visible physical disabilities or in wheelchairs on television at all, and certainly in a dance group. It was an amazing dance. If hon. Members get the chance to look it up, it was impressive to watch and incredibly powerful.

The hon. Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) tabled new clause 19, or what was called new clause 5 in Committee, where I was absolutely clear that I was withdrawing my amendment on Gaelic in favour of hers. I also made it clear that I had to leave a few minutes before the end of the sitting, and so missed the vote on her new clause in Committee. I was totally supportive of it, and the SNP continue to be. Unfortunately, I had a clash that I could not get out of and we had

only one Committee member, so I could not have someone else vote for the new clause, but we continue to support it.

In Committee, the hon. Members for Barnsley East and for Arfon and I spoke in favour of the protection of the Gaelic language and the importance of it being used as spoken in Scotland on television. I mentioned the importance for places in Scotland where Gaelic is a very minority language. There is, for example, Gaelic-medium education in Aberdeen, but people in Aberdeen are much less likely to be exposed to Gaelic outside the education system, so things like Gaelic children's TV are even more important in Aberdeen than they are in places where Gaelic is more widely spoken. They mean that children and young people can be exposed to and immersed in the language, rather than only having it for the few hours a day that they are at a Gaelic playgroup or school.

We continue to support what is now new clause 19. I have had much communication from BBC Alba on this and I continue to support its work. I encourage the Government to do what they can to work with the Scottish Government, the BBC and BBC Alba to ensure that the situation continues as is, and that there is clarity about the future of funding, so that everyone agrees on the importance of Gaelic. To be fair to the Minister in Committee, he was also clear about his support for the Gaelic language. Agreement was very much across parties, but Gaelic still does not have the prominence in the Bill that we would like it to, despite the feeling in the House being in favour of it. Anything that the Government can do to improve the prominence of Gaelic in the Bill would be great.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): I emphasise the point that the hon. Lady made earlier in respect of the Gaelic language. In terms of language planning, extending the domain of a minority language is extremely important. That domain encompasses the media, including television and radio. She is perfectly right to argue for Gaelic television to be picked up in Aberdeen as well as in the Western Isles.

Kirsty Blackman: I thank the hon. Gentleman for backing up my point. I think we are very much on the same page. I am pleased at how much Welsh language TV has changed and moved in recent years. I congratulate him on his personal work to ensure that that happened. He was very clear about the history in Committee, and it was incredibly interesting to learn about that.

I support the amendments about age ratings. I agree that there should be consistency to them and that Disney tends to duck its obligations, which makes it more difficult for parents to make sensible decisions.

The shadow Minister talked about children's television and the way that children access some television. Children in more deprived households are less likely to have access to smartphones or online systems, and therefore the only way they can access good children's content may be through the public service broadcasters and their free-to-air services. I want to reinforce the shadow Minister's point that it is incredibly important to protect those services because of the discriminatory and differential impact their loss would have on the most vulnerable children and those who are least able to access educational programming and have access only to free-to-air services as they air.

It is important to protect children's television and ensure the provision of good-quality children's television. I continue to talk and think about the importance of CBBC and CBeebies when my children were young. Other services are available but 10 or 12 years ago, those channels were at the centre of what children and families were watching. I hope that they continue to produce high-quality, useful and interesting programmes. Sometimes we just need to sit our children down in front of the TV and have a few minutes. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] It is thoroughly recommended at times.

The right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington tabled new clause 21, about genres. We agree that there are issues with their removal from legislation. I hope that the Government will agree at least to keep a watching brief on that and that they are willing to ensure that Ofcom can change the genres covered or encourage extra genres to be added in a slightly easier way than is currently possible. The process for making changes is onerous and if problems are identified, it will be difficult for the Government to walk back from the position that they are including in the Bill. Giving Ofcom more flexibility to increase the number of genres would be helpful.

Let me deal with the issues about section 40 and the lack of independent regulators. I met members of Hacked Off yesterday. I have been speaking to the organisation throughout the Bill's stages, and I tabled an amendment on the subject in Committee. I have concerns about the Government's position on section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013. I understand that, as the temporary Minister—if that is the correct term—the right hon. Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale) said, the provision was a manifesto pledge. I still do not think that it is the right thing to do. We still have significant issues with the Independent Press Standards Organisation. The right hon. Member cannot say that Impress is a state regulator and that it is not independent while at the same time stressing that IPSO is an independent regulator. Either they are both independent or neither of them are. A press-backed regulator and a state-backed regulator would be closer to my definition. I believe that IPSO is not independent, as do many people, if we look at the results and the number of people who go through IPSO processes and do not get the recourse that they hoped for or that natural justice would give them.

I spoke to an individual yesterday whose daughter had died. The seconds before the young woman passed away were filmed and posted on a national newspaper's website. IPSO found that that was not intrusion into grief. It is against natural justice that that could happen. The individuals from Hacked Off and those who gave evidence to the Leveson inquiry were told clearly by those in charge at the time, "We will make changes. We will ensure that there is recourse." They were promised by those in the most senior positions that change would happen, yet 12 years on, those people are still waiting for any meaningful change to occur. Given everything that they have been through, they should not have to continue to fight simply to get the press to behave with a little compassion and common sense. I have massive concerns about the Government's position, and I will support the amendments that the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) tabled. I have a slight preference for new clause 3 over amendment 2 because the new clause is very similar to

the one that I tabled in Committee. However, I am happy to take the morally correct position and support amendment 2.

My hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) will cover the sports issues.

Clive Efford: I have been perusing new clause 18, which the hon. Member tabled. It would establish a fund to compensate sports governing bodies for loss of income for sale of TV rights. Would that be a levy on the sports governing bodies, which the Government would redistribute, or would the money come from general taxation? It is not clear how it would be paid for.

Kirsty Blackman: I do not mean to be difficult, but the amendments are in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North, and I was saying that he will cover the information about them. I am sure that he would be willing to take an intervention on that point and provide the answer. I have magnanimously allowed him to lead because I know very little about sport. He knows far more about it than me, so it made sense for us to divide up the amendments.

I want briefly to cover terrestrial television and specifically new clause 8, which the hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) tabled, and amendment 80, which my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North and I tabled. The Scottish Affairs Committee did an excellent piece of work on that, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) and the rest of the Committee on all their work. The Committee found that about a third of users in Scotland access television only through Freeview or digital terrestrial TV. Our amendment asks about the percentage of people who access television through means other than terrestrial TV. My biggest concern, which I made clear on Second Reading and in Committee, is about the potential for terrestrial television services to stop accidentally. If the Government refuse to make a commitment about those services' future, we could end up with the networks degrading accidentally, with nobody willing to make investment in them because the Government have not been clear about their future. I would like the Government to make clear statements about what those services will look like in future. We want to ensure that our constituents can continue to access them and that there is no impact on the most vulnerable and those who live in the most rural areas.

The Bill tries to strike a balance between the rights and the responsibilities of public service broadcasters. Everything that the Government do in regulating them is about striking that balance. They outline the recognised public service broadcasters' rights and their responsibilities to show certain genres and provide high-quality television. As a result of fulfilling those responsibilities, those broadcasters have the right to prominence on on-demand services. It is reasonable to consider public service broadcasters as different from other broadcasters because they have those responsibilities, which others do not share.

[Kirsty Blackman]

The changes to radio are also important. It was good to hear cross-party commitment to and positivity about radio in Committee. In the recent extreme weather events, people have relied on the radio. They need to know, for example, that a tree has fallen down on North Anderson Drive and that they cannot access the Haudagain slip road. My friend, who lives in Oxfordshire, had no electricity because of a recent storm, and could get updates only by listening to their car radio. Radio is incredibly important for resilience and I am pleased that Members across the House recognised that in Committee.

As I have made clear, the SNP will not oppose the Bill on Third Reading. Changes, which are long overdue, need to be made. However, there are some gaps in the Bill, including issues around future proofing, that have not been adequately addressed. As the shadow Minister did, I thank everyone on the Bill Committee, particularly the hon. Member for Arfon.

3 pm

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate about this important legislation, and to hear cross-party support for the Bill and the work done in Committee, on Second Reading, in which I took part, and now on Report. I warmly welcome the Bill and the work done by the Minister for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries and her team, as well as by the interim Minister, the right hon. Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale), in the early stages.

I will focus on new clause 8, which I tabled. The new clause looks at what is not in the Bill and what has been omitted, which I hope the Minister will consider during her summing up and in the Bill's remaining stages. Protection for digital terrestrial television and radio broadcast services that people receive via an aerial needs to be written into the Bill. New clause 8 would put in law for the first time a legal protection for these crucial life-line services. It would put a duty on the Government to keep issuing multiplex licences and on Ofcom to make available sufficient radio spectrum.

Currently, these services are guaranteed only until 2034, with the risk that they could be switched in 2030—in just six years. Ministers hinted at Second Reading that these services will have a longer shelf life than 2034, which is welcome. However, I will focus my remarks on the Scottish Affairs Committee, of which I am a member, and our report, which I will come to, because at the Committee, the Minister said:

“What happens after 2034 is a live question.”

I agree that it is a “live question”, which is why we need a live answer to the issue.

I welcome the Minister's positive comments in Committee and those of the Secretary of State on Second Reading—indeed, I quoted a speech by the Secretary of State. There is a lot of positivity about what I am hearing from the Government and I hope they will go a step further by taking on the conclusions I have come to in new clause 8.

No one is pushing against the tide on the growth in streaming, but terrestrial television, often referred to as Freeview, and broadcast radio still account for the bulk of viewing and listening across the United Kingdom.

I come to the issue from a Scottish angle, as I represent a Scottish constituency and am a member of the Scottish Affairs Committee, where we discussed this at length, but the issue affects people across the United Kingdom. Research from Ipsos in 2022 showed that most adults had watched digital terrestrial television in the last year and 43% of adults watched digital terrestrial television every week. Some 76% listened to broadcast radio weekly.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) was right to highlight the very good Scottish Affairs Committee report on the subject and she mentioned the issues. As the report says on page 13:

“Almost a third (31%) of households in Scotland only used Digital Terrestrial Television services...to watch television in the first quarter of 2022.”

Paragraph 33 highlights correspondence to the Committee from Laurie Patten, director of strategy and regulation at Arqiva, who argued that

“Scotland's greater rurality than the UK average, its island communities, and its comparatively older population”

make terrestrial TV services especially important in Scotland. That is why we made that issue so prominent in the report. I have continued to raise the matter with Ministers, and proposed new clause 8.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen North was right to say the issue is important not only to people in rural communities and older populations, and that it has an impact on some of the most vulnerable in society. The campaign group Broadcast 2040+ has assembled a coalition of groups representing those who rely on broadcast services the most. They include older people, who rely disproportionately on terrestrial television. Some 80% of those aged 75 and above only watch their media, news and programmes through that means, and they often struggle to access IP content.

Age UK is a member of the coalition. Their charity director, Caroline Abrahams, said:

“While broadcast TV and radio is enjoyed by many across the UK, it is especially important for older audiences particularly those on low incomes living alone. Many older people value the current universal services and would struggle to afford alternatives such as subscriptions services.”

Because they are free to air, they are also a lifeline to people on lower incomes or living in digital poverty, who often struggle to afford the additional cost of subscription streaming services and the cost of superfast broadband connections that are required to access them. Elizabeth Anderson, chief executive office of the Digital Poverty Alliance said:

“For the millions living in digital poverty in the UK, TV and radio broadcast services are vital sources of news, public education and entertainment. The universality of access to broadcast services must be paramount. Whilst many services have seen a rush to digital only delivery, applying this to TV and radio when so many lack the devices, skills and connectivity packages to access internet based media would simply push millions of people deeper into financial and social exclusion.”

Jamie Stone: The hon. Gentleman's words strike a chord with me because he highlights exactly the issues in my vast, far-flung constituency. In the straths and glens of Sutherland, Caithness, Ross and Cromarty, there are many folk who cannot afford such services, precisely as he is saying. I am glad he is saying what he is saying, and I am listening with very great interest. It is important that this issue is aired.

Douglas Ross: The hon. Gentleman represents an extremely rural part of northern Scotland. My constituency is not quite so rural, but many people in Moray experience similar challenges to those of his constituents in the far north.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): My hon. Friend is making some excellent points and I am hesitant to interrupt him. Although I would not sell his constituency short, my constituency is also very rural. Our constituencies, in common with many of the rural constituencies in Scotland, are very low down the league table of superfast broadband coverage. As much as people might be able to afford or want streaming services, they do not physically have access to them—at least, not yet. Does he agree that makes his new clause even more important?

Douglas Ross: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that point and for supporting my new clause 8. I will come on to not just the affordability but the availability of superfast broadband to get streaming services.

I highlight the importance of broadcast services for rural constituents, including mine in Moray, as well as those of my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid) and the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone). Graham Biggs, chief executive of the Rural Services Network, has amplified that point, saying that the

“issue of safeguarding DTT and radio is of fundamental importance to rural areas where the population is much older than the national average and the least well served by broadband connectivity. We strongly support the Broadcast 2040+ campaign.”

I have been extremely encouraged by the work of that campaign to get some movement from the Government on the issue.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan highlighted, the issue of broadband connectivity is of huge concern to constituents in his area, as well as in my Moray constituency. Large parts of Scotland and rural areas around the UK do not have reliable, high-speed broadband, so streaming TV is not an option. I have little confidence that the problem will be solved by 2040, particularly given some of the problems we have seen with the roll-out of the R100 programme in Scotland.

Even if that roll-out succeeds, all the targets are met and high-speed broadband is delivered across the country, the other measure that we must look at is broadband take-up. EY has recently undertaken a study on that, predicting that regardless of whether high-speed broadband is rolled out, more than 5.5 million properties in the UK will still not have a high-speed broadband subscription in 2040—well beyond 2034 as specified by my new clause. The report makes a number of other worrying findings and paints a compelling picture of the genuine dependence that millions of the most vulnerable members of our society have on broadcast services to stay connected and in touch. Any move towards an online-only system of TV distribution, without the option of digital terrestrial television, would put a significant group of people at risk of being left behind.

As for why I have tabled new clause 8 and why am I looking for certainty from the Government, both they and Ofcom are conducting reviews of the TV market. Ministers have urged us to await those findings, but 2034 is not far away and if these services are to remain, it is crucial that we attract investment and ensure that

they remain commercially viable. To do that, as the hon. Member for Aberdeen North correctly said, they need certainty from the Government. The danger is that without that longer-term certainty, beyond 2034, where the Minister has accepted there is a live question, broadcasters might run down their services and the technology might not be updated. If they get certainty from the Government, they can put in investment to ensure people are not without these crucial services and are not left isolated. If the commercial viability of the service is lost while millions of people are still relying on it, there is a real risk that, perversely, the Government would have to step in and use taxpayers' money to keep the service going. My constructive proposal would not only help keep people connected but, in the long run, perhaps save taxpayers' money. Surely it is better to provide the longer-term guarantee now that would enable that investment and deliver a good-quality, universal service for years to come.

I thank the Minister, the interim Minister and the Secretary of State and others who have listened to my concerns on this issue. I met the Minister just last week and I will continue the dialogue on this, because it is a crucial element that we should be debating in this House. I hope we will get some movement from the Government. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale) said, Media Bills do not come along often, so this is an opportunity for this Minister, this Government and her Department to put my new clause 8 into the Bill and give that guarantee going forward. That would allow the investment to be made and secure the commercial future for DTT, ensuring that people in Moray, across Scotland and around the UK can continue to rely on those services for many years to come.

Hywel Williams: First, may I apologise for my late arrival to the debate, Madam Deputy Speaker? I seriously underestimated hon. Members' capacity for brevity on the previous business. This afternoon, I would like to speak to my new clause 15 and to refer briefly to new clause 1 and clause 28. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) for her work with me in Committee—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. It will not be possible for the hon. Gentleman to refer to new clause 1, because he was not here to move it at the beginning. He is fine to speak to new clause 15.

Hywel Williams: Thank you for that guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker. New clause 15 seeks to establish a broadcasting and communications authority for Wales. That new independent body would have responsibility for and oversight of broadcasting and media matters in Wales, seeking to reflect the needs of Welsh audiences. Under my new clause, a shadow authority would fulfil the functions of that body before its establishment 12 months after the passing of this Act. The report by the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales recommended that move. Some Members will know that the commission was set up by the Welsh Government and is under the chairmanship of the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. It reported last week, and one of its conclusions was that there is a need to look at the devolution of broadcasting. An independent authority to regulate would be an

[Hywel Williams]

integral part of that provision. Recent events have shown that there is a real need for such an authority in Wales. Some Members will know about the internal issues at S4C, the Welsh language channel, which make the argument that the current broadcasting framework is unsustainable.

3.15 pm

I worry about the relatively low interest from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in this matter. The Bill gives the Secretary of State further decision-making powers, but if successive Ministers refuse to meet the chair of S4C, as has happened, I worry that they cannot be trusted to make the right decisions in respect of that broadcaster.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): My hon. Friend is making a compelling case, and the events of the past week involving the commission vindicate the position he has taken. The recent difficulties in S4C have been very damaging for the channel. My firm view is that if the matter had been in the hands of Welsh Government Ministers and the Senedd, which can provide scrutiny and accountability, we would not have got to the damaging state we are in.

Hywel Williams: I thank my hon. Friend for that point, with which I entirely agree. Even Welsh Conservative Members concede that the arguments for reserving powers over broadcasting have been undermined by what has happened, and by the Department's actions—or inactions. We are concerned about S4C, and its funding has plummeted since 2010. The decision to fund it through the licence fee led to a 40% reduction in staff. In 2015, its chief executive officer, Ian Jones, warned about the effects of huge funding cuts and called for “tegwrch” or fair play. That was a valuable contribution from him.

S4C's independence is clearly at stake. We need to remember that there was a substantial and hard-fought campaign during the 1970s to establish the channel. Indeed, we had a discussion about that in Committee, in which the right hon. Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale) made some interesting points. I had the opportunity in the interim to consult the Cabinet papers, which I obtained from The National Archives. They show how the threat by the then Plaid Cymru leader Gwynfor Evans to go on a hunger strike was integral to the then Prime Minister's decision to change course and allow the people of Wales our own channel. The Cabinet papers are very interesting to read, and I hope you will indulge my quoting briefly from them, Madam Deputy Speaker.

John Nicolson (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): Am I correct in remembering that the Conservatives had promised a separate channel in their manifesto, and had broken that promise until Gwynfor Evans threatened his hunger strike?

Hywel Williams: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point; that is what I am coming on to. However, a further argument arises from that unhappy episode, as I will show by quoting from the Cabinet papers. They state that the then Home Secretary, the late Willie Whitelaw, said that the Government

“would withdraw its plans to share Welsh language programmes between two television channels. Instead the programmes would, for an experimental period of three years, be broadcast on one channel as had been proposed in the Party Manifesto.”

That is the point that the hon. Gentleman was making.

What is more interesting is that the papers say that Willie Whitelaw

“still thought that the previous plans were preferable but he had agreed to change them in response to representations, put to him by Lord Cledwyn and others, of the views of informed and responsible people in Wales.”

The interesting point is the reference to

“the views of informed and responsible people in Wales.”

In fact, in the same Cabinet meeting, the Secretary of State for Wales said:

“Gwynfor Evans, the leader of Plaid Cymru, was threatening to go on what he called a ‘hunger strike’”,

before going on to say that there could be

“much tension and unpleasantness in Wales later in the year, if he persisted in this intention, and there would be a danger that Plaid Cymru would fall into the hands of extreme left wing leaders”,

mentioning no names. However, later on in the Cabinet papers, the Secretary of State for Wales said that it had been made clear in the press that the change been made in response to

“moderate opinion following very wide consultation in Wales.”

That is the point I want to make. The argument I am making for a Welsh broadcasting authority reflects settled and responsible opinion in Wales. As I said, the constitutional convention has met and taken evidence very widely over two years, and has come to the conclusion that broadcasting should be devolved to Wales.

Jonathan Edwards: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and for giving us a history lesson on the hard work of Gwynfor Evans. Anybody who is interested in this period in the history of Wales should watch the great drama that S4C recently commissioned on the life of Gwynfor Evans, and this campaign in particular. I was at Crymch rugby club at the weekend with Rhodri John, the actor who portrayed Gwynfor in the drama.

Hywel Williams: I can indeed recommend that production for anybody to have a look at; it is very interesting. I can also recommend the biography of Gwynfor Evans, which makes similar points.

The media industry in Wales is more than S4C. We have fantastic production companies, including Cwmni Da in my constituency, news outlets and radio—all kinds of things. The proposed authority would unite the media landscape in Wales under one regulatory roof and safeguard it from harms, including from large conglomerates. It would also focus on areas that are important to the people of Wales. The Labour Welsh Government's expert panel on a shadow broadcasting and communications authority for Wales proposed that public interest journalism, sports and children's media be areas of specific focus due to their cultural significance, position in relation to Welsh language ambitions and impact on long-term sustainability, among other reasons. The Welsh Government therefore propose a shadow broadcasting and communications authority for Wales. I look to those on the Labour Front Bench, as potentially the next Government, to give us reassurance

that it is their intention to establish that authority, as well as the intention of the Welsh Labour Government in Cardiff.

Wales needs to have a say on its own media landscape to ensure that what works for us is what we get. Prominent commentators such as Professor Tom O'Malley and Mike Birtwistle have said that S4C should be built on shared principles of social partnership, public interest and democratic pluralism; that is, as they say, the Welsh political tradition. An independent regulator for Wales would be better equipped to regulate, defend and promote our national broadcasting and media industry in Wales and ensure that those values are represented. That is my argument in favour of a broadcasting authority.

I will say a few words on the prominence of S4C on the selection services—a point that I also raised in Committee. S4C's content must be readily discoverable and prominent on television services, but I seek assurances that the “appropriate degree of prominence” will not lead to the limiting of S4C's coverage to specific audiences, thereby depriving people of a wide range of broadcasts. This language matches that of the electronic programme guides code, which allowed S4C to be on channel 166 on Virgin Media in Wales until 2021. The Government should provide clear principles to guide Ofcom in drawing up the new prominence code, so that public service broadcasters' designated internet programming services appear prominently and are easily discoverable on screens.

Miriam Cates (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Con): I rise to support new clause 6 and amendment 17, both in my name. The Bill is a substantial piece of legislation and I fully support what the Government are seeking to do through it to bridge the gap in regulation between linear television and internet-based on-demand platforms.

Nobody would argue against the principle that we want to protect children from watching age-inappropriate or harmful content. That is, after all, why Parliament over many years has brought in legislation that mandates age ratings on cinema releases, restrictions on children buying DVDs and videos and, importantly, until the relatively recent past, a watershed for broadcast TV. The watershed, of course, ensures that programmes broadcast before 9 pm are generally suitable for children.

However, now that the vast majority of content watched by children and adults is accessed through on-demand streaming services, the watershed has become increasingly redundant. It does not matter if a programme was originally broadcast live after the watershed; once it is available to stream online, it can be viewed by anyone of any age at any time. That is why we urgently need to apply the same standards of child protection to on-demand video as we do to cinema releases, physical DVDs and linear TV.

While a time-based watershed clearly cannot be adapted for video on demand services, we are very fortunate in this country to have world-class expertise in applying age ratings to video content. The British Board of Film Classification has been empowered by Parliament, through the Secretary of State, to apply age ratings across all cinema and DVD releases in the UK. The BBFC does an excellent job of this, as colleagues have mentioned, and is a global leader in its field. It has produced a system of age ratings that the vast majority of the British population recognises, trusts and understands.

Importantly, its ratings are based on regular consultation with thousands of people across Britain to ensure that they meet audience expectations.

We have the relevant age rating expertise already in this country, but as it stands, the Bill will not make use of that expertise. Amendment 17 would address this matter very simply by explicitly requiring Ofcom to consult the BBFC when drawing up the video on demand code. The code will set the rules for streaming platforms, including in relation to age ratings. Why would we not want to ensure that our world-renowned, Government-appointed experts are consulted as part of that?

There was a similar amendment to the Online Safety Act 2023 that required Ofcom to consult with the Children's Commissioner, and I can see no argument against applying the same principle here. Getting age ratings right is incredibly important, as they will likely become one of the main audience protection measures that platforms employ and will, of course, future-proof the Bill. If parents do not trust the ratings, they will ignore them, and we will then not achieve our aim of protecting children.

That brings me to new clause 6 in my name, which is similar to the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter), and I will reiterate some of his points.

Kit Malthouse: I am very supportive of the theme of my hon. Friend's amendment. She made an extremely important point about consistency for parents. Those of us who are lucky enough to have children find ourselves in a forest of different media that they consume, some of which seem to decide the rules and ratings on their own—of course, there are websites to go to for third-party reference. Does she agree that it would be sensible to have a standardised view for parents, to manage consumption by their children, as it is the parents' primary duty to manage that? We have seen in the past that the wider media industry will constantly push the boundary to try to get more under the wire for consumption by younger and younger people, such as in the deterioration of the watershed on terrestrial television. If an organisation such as the BBFC sets the tone and the standard, that must apply online as much as offline.

Miriam Cates: I agree with every word. The very important factor behind the BBFC is that parents trust it. It even has an app to search for any film or DVD, and it will tell parents not only the rating but exactly why it is there—swearing, violence or whatever. That detailed knowledge is crucial not only to gain parents' trust but to create an industry standard, as my right hon. Friend said. If we have no industry standard, some companies will try to get around the requirements if there is a commercial advantage. The Bill should set out exactly that.

3.30 pm

The Bill lists age ratings as one of the options that tier 1 platforms, such as the providers we have talked about, can use to comply with their audience protection requirements, but it shies away from setting the minimum standard that my right hon. Friend just mentioned for what those ratings should be. The Bill is right to recognise that there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. Research has shown that audiences have different expectations of

video on demand services than they do of those operated by public service broadcasters. But where age ratings are in use, is it not common sense to expect a consistent standard? My hon. Friend the Member for South West Devon talked about Disney+ and the fact that the film “Avatar” has a 16-plus rating, even though most parents would think it suitable for much younger children, whereas a series that has scenes of sexual coercion is apparently suitable for nine-plus. The outcome is that parents just turn off the security settings, because they do not trust the ratings. How are parents supposed to understand and apply them if they are not consistent across different platforms and providers?

New clause 6 would set a minimum standard for tier 1 providers that choose to use age ratings, by allowing them to use either the BBFC’s system or one of equivalent transparency, clarity, rigour and objectivity that has been approved by Ofcom. The new clause does not seek to mandate the BBFC system, although research has found that 90% of UK parents want on-demand age ratings to be consistent with those for cinema and DVD. Rather, it would set a minimum standard across platforms that parents can trust. We have proof already that that works. Netflix and Prime Video have both voluntarily set up innovative partnerships to include BBFC ratings in their content. That kind of collaboration is in the interests of everyone—parents, children and the platforms themselves. It shows that this can be done without high costs or a reduction in consistency. But the reluctance of Disney+ and others to follow suit shows why this kind of regulation is needed.

The BBFC’s system fits the Government’s own definition of best practice for age ratings. It would surely be preferable for all platforms to follow the example of Netflix and Amazon, but we do not need to be overly prescriptive in imposing solutions. Instead, I ask the Government to accept that it is the role of Parliament—not Ofcom—to set minimum standards to ensure the protection of children from harm. New clause 6 would achieve that by requiring tier 1 platforms to apply either the age rating classification system used by the BBFC or a system based on a transparent set of appropriate standards applied consistently. If this House really wants to protect children and wishes to see a trusted, effective regulatory landscape, it is hard to envisage what objections there might be to this provision.

My amendments are focused on that specific aspect of the Bill, but they speak to my wider concern about the approach to digital media regulation in recent years. In both this Bill and the Online Safety Act 2023, on which I worked with colleagues across the House and in the other place to secure strengthening amendments, we have given far too much power to Ofcom—not enforcement powers, which are needed, but the responsibility to determine regulatory policy. In this Bill, as in the Online Safety Act, Parliament is setting out only the very basic principles through legislation, leaving it up to Ofcom to draft and consult upon the vast majority of the detail.

I have nothing against Ofcom as an organisation—we must have an official regulator to ensure that broadcasters and providers adhere to standards required by law. However, when it comes to setting policy, I subscribe to the perhaps old-fashioned notion that it is our job as elected Members of Parliament. We cannot leave something so important up to the consultations of an unelected body, especially when the vested interests at play are so

substantial. As other hon. Members have mentioned, once we pass the Bill, Parliament will not get another chance to set the parameters of the video on demand code, so we must ensure that the final text of the Bill sets out what Parliament believes to be the appropriate standards of audience protection.

Sadly, my concerns in this area are well founded. In the recently enacted Online Safety Act 2023, Parliament decided that age verification checks for sites and platforms hosting pornography must be “highly effective” to address the significant problem of young children accessing violent pornography on social media and websites. “Highly effective” is an outcome measure. Just trying hard to prevent children from accessing pornography does not make a platform compliant under that Act. Compliance means actually stopping under-18s from coming across porn. In other words, this Bill requires effective outcome measures and must not give prizes to the tech companies just for taking part.

Yet in the draft consultation that it published last month, Ofcom does not set out what the “highly effective” standard means, so platforms and users are none the wiser when it comes to what does and does not meet the required legislative standard. Instead, the consultation outlines the kind of activities that Ofcom would like to see, rather than the outcomes that it demands. Given that Parliament has tasked Ofcom with adjudicating on what meets the “highly effective” standard, failing to set a clear definition is completely unacceptable. If Ofcom fails to meet the highly effective outcome standards that are clearly laid out in the 2023 Act, it will leave itself open to judicial review from those who take the view that the will of Parliament is serious and who wish to see age verification applied in a way that makes children safe.

That very concerning but current example demonstrates what may sadly happen to the measures in the Bill if Parliament leaves it to Ofcom to decide what constitutes effective age ratings for video on demand services. We cannot say that we were not warned. I do not intend to press my amendments to a vote, because I very much appreciate the Secretary of State’s continued engagement, but I urge the Minister and their lordships to consider the principle of the amendments. They are designed to set minimum standards for child protection, which are currently lacking. That is our responsibility as legislators, so let us do it thoroughly.

Gavin Newlands: I rise to commend my new clause 16 to the House, and to speak to new clauses 17 and 18, and amendments 79 and 80.

This summer will again see Scotland again in the finals of the men’s European championships in Germany. Thanks to listing, every game from the finals will be available free to air on the BBC and STV/ITV. However, once this summer’s Euro 2024 final concludes and Scotland have safely tucked away the Henri Delaunay trophy in the Hampden trophy cabinet, we will be back to the current set-up, which will maintain a paywall for the Scotland men’s national team games.

Last April, I hosted a roundtable summit on how to make progress on getting all of Scotland’s national team matches on free-to-air TV. Two things were clear: as it stood, that would not be an easy or quick fix, with umpteen moving parts and vested interests in the room; however, there was also a willingness to look realistically

at what could be done with the right will and resources. We saw how grassroots participation rates in English cricket slumped when the England and Wales Cricket Board signed a deal with Sky and put almost the entirety of the first-class game behind a paywall. The lack of public interest was such that the ECB effectively had to invent an entire competition, purely for terrestrial television, as a shop window for the sport. I assume that we are all aware of the Billie Jean King quote:

“You have to see it to be it.”

No one at the Scottish Football Association, STV, Viaplay, the BBC, UEFA or anywhere else involved in football rights is sitting there plotting to do in Scottish football fans. They are all rational actors, working within the system created by the UK Government and UEFA to achieve their own goals.

Hywel Williams: The hon. Gentleman is talking about the unanimity of opinion. I should tell the House that the Welsh Affairs Committee, the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, and the Senedd’s Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee have all called for the Six Nations rugby tournament to remain free to air for broadcasting. Indeed, the Welsh Conservatives have a whole Senedd debate on that matter tomorrow. Last week, I met a senior executive from BBC Cymru Wales, who said that losing the Six Nations, for example, which is currently shared with ITV, will be a blow both to the BBC and to the audience.

Gavin Newlands: I will come to the potential issue facing the Six Nations a bit later in my speech, but in the meantime, I am very much looking forward to visiting Cardiff this Saturday to watch Scotland beat Wales in that very competition.

Clive Efford: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Gavin Newlands: On that?

Clive Efford: It is just that the hon. Gentleman’s extensive list of events neglects to mention cricket. I wondered whether there was a reason why he had excluded cricket from his list.

Gavin Newlands: All I have sought to add to the list is the Six Nations competition and any and all qualification matches for all home nations’ national football teams. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, I am indeed a fan of cricket, which is probably not a majority position in Scotland. It is obviously not one of the main sports in Scotland at this time, although the SNP will be backing amendment 88, tabled by the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone), despite the fact that its proposed new clause 25(4)(a) would cover only the English cricket team, given that Scotland does not yet have test status—it is only a matter of time, I am sure.

Jamie Stone: Will the hon. Member give way?

Gavin Newlands: I was going to go back to football, but I feel that we are staying on cricket, so I will.

Jamie Stone: I thank the hon. Member for his generous remarks. Whether it is cricket, football or whatever, getting people to watch sport in the way that is being advocated so strongly means that they might become more inclined to take part in that sport themselves, which could ultimately improve the health of Scotland and the health of the nation.

Gavin Newlands: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point: the power of sport is simply huge. Participating is obviously the best thing for the health of the nation, but viewing a sport—whatever sport it is—is likely to drive up participation rates. We have seen the opposite with the England and Wales Cricket Board and the Sky contract.

If I can cycle back to football for a second, the problem for Scottish football fans is that sometimes the goals of those involved—again, I am talking about UEFA, the BBC, Viaplay and all the stakeholders—do not coincide with maximising access. What is needed is a change to the system that would change those goals for the better for our fans. The system is currently short-changing fans in Scotland, while elsewhere on these isles, it is a very different story. Football fans in England enjoy free-to-air coverage of their national team via the current deal with Channel 4 and the forthcoming deal with ITV. Viewers in Wales enjoy free-to-air coverage of their national team thanks to S4C’s sub-licensed Welsh language coverage, and viewers in Northern Ireland get free coverage of the Republic of Ireland via RTÉ broadcasts—while many in Northern Ireland welcome that, I appreciate that, for others, it is akin to having England games broadcast in Scotland on Channel 4 and STV. Scottish fans, though, are left with the prospect of paying subscription providers to see their team in action. That is very unlikely to change without amending legislation to level the playing field for Scottish supporters.

Similarly, these days, we are used to murmurings about the Six Nations being moved from its current home on the BBC and STV/ITV to behind a paywall. The airtime available to rugby union fans on free-to-air TV is already incredibly low: last year’s world cup was a four-yearly aberration. As we all know, the Six Nations is a ratings winner and rugby’s big annual shop window to the wider public and the players of the future. Even old relics like me can be convinced to play again—although, having tried to do so last year, it would have been very much for the better if I had not.

John Nicolson: Middle youth?

Gavin Newlands: Stupidity, not a mid-life crisis—yet.

Italian supporters are guaranteed to see their team on free-to-air TV; Ireland supporters will see their team on free TV, as will France supporters; but Scotland, Wales and England supporters face watching a blank screen if the rights are allowed to lapse into subscription TV’s hands. The Welsh Affairs Committee, which has already been mentioned and on which my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Ben Lake) sits, had it right when it recommended in its report on broadcasting in Wales that

“the Government adds the Six Nations to Group A of the Listed Sporting Events, to ensure its status on terrestrial TV.”

Obviously, that is proposed in new clause 16.

[Gavin Newlands]

These islands will host the men's Euro 2028 championships, and there is a reasonable chance that all five countries might qualify. Viewers in England, Ireland and Wales will be able to see their teams live and in full throughout the qualifying campaign without paying a penny—beyond the licence fee, in case anybody wanted to challenge me on that. My amendment would guarantee that right to all across these isles through a simple amendment of the existing legislation, extending the protections that exist to protect “events of national interest”, in the words of the 1996 Act. Scotland's journey in the past few years under Stevie Clark has shown how much interest there is across Scotland, and it is time that the legislation reflected that.

I am grateful to Labour, Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats for their support for the new clause. I hope that Tory Back Benchers who have been espousing the power of sport and arguing that sport should be shown on free-to-air TV will join us in the Lobby this evening.

3.45 pm

New clause 18, the related amendment, is designed to prevent any detriment below a certain annual revenue level to governing bodies and organisations that have their events listed and broadcast outside subscription paywalls. I know from my extensive discussions with governing bodies that they are in something of a bind. On the one hand, they support their sport and want to see it in front of as many eyeballs as possible—and perhaps, on a cynical level, to have as many eyeballs as possible in front of perimeter advertising as well. On the other hand, they receive a decent whack of cash for the TV rights—funds that go into developing the sport and supporting the grassroots—and that might well take a severe knock if the value of the rights is cut through listing in group A.

I fully understand that sports broadcasting rights inflation has been significant over the last decade and more. I understand that it is difficult for an STV to make a winning bid for Scotland rights commercially viable, due to the size of the TV market in Scotland. That is made harder still by the fact that UEFA has bundled Scottish international football rights with those of Wales and Northern Ireland to try and draw larger bids and more money for itself and the national associations. Although the same rights inflation has impacted the BBC, it does not have the same commercial considerations as an STV or an ITV. I appreciate, however, that Tory culture wars have inflicted severe damage to the funding levels available to the BBC in recent years. However, the BBC is required to serve all audiences across the whole of the UK, including provision for those in the nations and regions. From a sporting point of view, that simply does not happen.

We do not know how much the BBC paid to secure, yet again, the rights to “Match of the Day”, but we do know that it is a huge sum that takes up a huge proportion of BBC Sport's budget. Despite the figures not being available, it does not take a genius to ascertain that per-capita spending to secure English sports rights vastly dwarfs that which is spent on Scottish sports rights. Incidentally, I do not blame BBC Scotland for that; the blame lies firmly at BBC network's door. It

would seem that the approach by the network is to let Scottish football fans eat English cake. If BBC Scotland were afforded the per-capita sums used to secure England football rights, Scotland would be in a far better position to bid for, and secure, Scotland international rights. Or, indeed, if BBC Alba's funding was anywhere near the levels of per-capita support offered to S4C, that would very likely allow BBC Alba to secure secondary sub-licensed free-to-air Gaelic coverage.

In lieu of any action to address this, new clause 18 would attempt to solve the funding gap by providing financial support to governing bodies, who could rely on that revenue stream to offset any loss of income caused by group A listing. That is a proportionate, cost-effective way of ensuring that there is no detriment from listing, while limiting access to the fund to those who actually need it, rather than those organisations that are already awash with cash. Of course, governing bodies in the devolved nations, being much smaller, are hugely hit by being part of a large UK broadcast market but a very small domestic market. To address the question that the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) asked in an intervention, I would suggest that if the Government are content to flush away nearly £10 billion on unused personal protective equipment, they are flush enough to cough up the relatively small sum needed to protect both grassroots sports and the principle of national teams on free-to-air TV.

In Committee, the interim Minister or temporary Minister, or whatever title the right hon. Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale) is going with in this debate, made reference to the Scottish Government bringing forward such a scheme if they wished. While the Tories are taking such a relaxed approach to the concept of reserved and devolved powers, perhaps he and his colleagues might extend that relaxation to the other powers that the Scottish Parliament has, such as the right to hold a fresh referendum on independence at a time of its choosing. Whatever the then Minister may have said, the simple fact is that broadcasting is an entirely devolved matter. In schedule 5 to the Scotland Act 1998, section K1 states clearly that

“The subject-matter of the Broadcasting Act 1990 and the Broadcasting Act 1996”

are reserved to Westminster. If it were up to me, schedule 5 and its list of powers reserved to this place would be deleted in its entirety, but there we are.

If the 1996 Act is entirely reserved to Westminster, so must be the financial implications of measures enacted under that amended Act. It is not up to the Scottish Government to fix the consequences of the UK Government's broken devolution system, and it is entirely in order that the UK Government compensate governing bodies and others whose income falls below a threshold if it drops as a result of listing. Taken together, new clauses 16 and 18 would not only give group A listing a firm moral footing, but give rights holders a firm financial footing. Surely that is a win for everyone, including this Government.

I will touch briefly on my other amendments. New clause 17 would place the Gaelic Media Service, which in partnership with the BBC provides the BBC Alba channel, on the same statutory footing as its Welsh counterpart in the S4C Authority, which oversees the Welsh language channel. When the 1996 Act was passed, Gaelic broadcasting was restricted to opt-outs on the

two BBC channels and through STV and Grampian's schedules. MG Alba, which the Gaelic Media Service now operates as, did not exist. Television was entirely analogue, and Gaelic and Welsh language broadcasting were restricted to Scotland and Wales only.

My new clause would simply ensure that Gaelic language broadcasting has parity with Welsh language broadcasting when it comes to the consideration of listed events. It would be an utter nonsense to say that speakers of Gaelic have less of an interest in seeing sports on free-to-air TV than their Welsh-speaking counterparts, yet that is what the current legislation implies. BBC Alba has developed a reputation for high-quality sports coverage since its inception. It therefore has a strategic interest in where sporting rights go, simply because it has invested a great deal of time and money into securing some of those rights and broadcasting the sports free to air not just in Scotland, but across these isles.

On the Broadcast 2040+ campaign, I welcome the pledges made by the interim Minister in Committee, and I am sure that the current Minister will back that up. In response to that campaign for digital terrestrial broadcasting to continue for many years to come, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) made some good comments. Even the hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) made some comments that I agreed with, which is highly unusual.

However, pledges made by Ministers have a tendency to become pliable when circumstances make it easier to slide away from the original commitments. Amendments 79 and 80 would simply place into legislation a compulsory requirement for public service broadcasters to continue using digital terrestrial television to deliver their services. I can see no reason why that would be incompatible with those ministerial promises, which is why I see no reason for the Government not to accept my amendments.

Broadcast television has worked and, as the cliché has it, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." My amendments would keep the Government from fixing a problem that simply does not exist at this point, and I commend those amendments, as well as the other new clauses and amendments to which I have spoken, to the House.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): I would like to address a number of the amendments we have been discussing—some I support, some I oppose. Let me start on a positive note with new clause 7, which was tabled by the Father of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley). The new clause seeks to introduce protections for digital on-demand coverage of listed events, including clips and highlights of those events, and allows for time-shifted viewing. That is increasingly important for audiences, as it would enable viewing on multi-use devices or the viewing of events that take place overnight in other time zones, as we often see with the Olympic games and sometimes the World cup, depending on where they are in the world.

There are practical examples of how that change would make a difference. At the Olympic games in Tokyo, the gold-winning performance by BMX specialist Charlotte Worthington was watched by only 400,000 people because it took place in the middle of the night, yet in the days that followed, different forms of short-form coverage of the race generated a nearly tenfold increase in views. It is not just about time-shifting; that can also

happen just because that is how people absorb content these days. For instance, for the 2022 Commonwealth games in Birmingham, the TV reach was about 20% lower than for the 2014 games in Glasgow, but there were about six times more on-demand views of digital clips. The problem is that without enhanced regulatory protection, what should be shared national moments risk being lost to many people behind a paywall. This Bill is a genuine opportunity to safeguard the future of listed events, as they are now viewed, for future generations.

As it stands, the Bill offers no protection for digital on-demand rights, yet, as I said, that is now a key way in which many people consume such events. I support the new clause because it would ensure that, where possible, adequate digital on-demand coverage of listed events, such as those clips and excerpts, is made available free of charge to audiences in the United Kingdom. I pray in aid the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, of which I am a member. When we looked at this question, we concluded:

"Digital rights should be included as part of the Listed Events regime to reflect sweeping changes in how audiences consume content since the original legislation was passed. We recommend that the Government includes provisions in the Bill to enable digital rights to be included in the Listed Events regime without the need for further primary legislation."

I know the Government recognise the issue and have consulted the industry about it, but a year later they have not yet reported on the findings of their review.

If those protections were brought in, they would broadly mirror the framework that currently provides protection for live coverage. The new clause seeks to ensure that, where rights holders grant rights for digital on-demand coverage, it is not done on an exclusive basis and there is an opportunity for audiences in the UK to enjoy that coverage for free. I appreciate that my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing West has said he will not press his new clause to a vote at this stage, but I hope the Minister is listening and that the Government will take this away and move an amendment in the other place that meets the needs that my hon. Friend is trying to meet.

I also support amendment 78, tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale), which offers the possibility for local digital TV services to be given the protections of the prominence regime. I think he undersold the historic nature of having the Minister who took the Bill through Committee moving an amendment on Report. He said he was sure it had happened before, but I am absolutely sure it is the first time any Minister who took a Bill through Committee stage because of maternity cover has tried to amend it on Report. For parliamentary procedure nerds, that alone makes it an historic moment, but there are also great merits in his suggestion. While I am referring to him, I note that there have been various descriptions of him from those on the Opposition Benches as a "temporary Minister". I should say to the House, from some experience, that all Ministers are temporary at all times. The only permanent thing in any Department is the permanent secretary.

Reverting to the substance of the amendment, local TV is an increasingly important part of the landscape. It is still very small scale, by its definition, and it has had a rocky past, but there is clearly a market and a demand for it, and it is increasingly becoming part of

[*Damian Green*]

the broadcasting landscape. The only thing I would add, since the amendment was spoken to so well by my right hon. Friend, is that it must apply to genuinely local stations. It is important to establish that caveat.

Lia Nici (Great Grimsby) (Con): I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend about local television. People talk about specified channels and programmes for languages, but there are many areas, such as my constituency and his, where it is important that local viewers get a chance to see their specific areas and discussions relevant to them, rather than just regional television. That is why it is important that local television should be included.

Damian Green: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. There are distinct markets for regional TV and local TV. In some parts of the country the regions are so large that large parts of what national broadcasters tend to regard as local TV are not local to people and do not register with their interests, whereas local TV can genuinely do that, as local radio does and has always done.

4 pm

I wish to speak in support of the various Government amendments that cover radio, not least because parts 5 and 6 of the Bill are particularly important in enhancing the prospects of radio flourishing in future. Many people have been predicting radio's demise for some time, but the sector is doing strongly. I hope that will continue, and anything that encourages that in the Bill is extremely welcome. Some of the amendments remove an out-of-date requirement on Ofcom to impose fines on national analogue stations such as talkSPORT if they sought to terminate the broadcasting of analogue transmissions before the end of their licence period. I do not think there are any plans for that to happen, but it seems sensible to make such flexibility available, not least because analogue transmission and listening is becoming increasingly rare. Some 76% of listening to commercial radio is now on digital platforms, and looking ahead to the future seems perfectly sensible.

Amendments 53 to 59 that would ensure a DCMS consultation before regulations that affect a radio selection service are also sensible. The measures restate the need to ensure access through voice activated smart-speakers—a massively growing and important part of radio listening—and the big tech companies that make and operate those speakers, and which also provide content, clearly need a strong regulatory regime to stop any abuse of the market power that those big companies have. This has been a significant debate. We also had it in the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, and it is important that the regulatory regime recognises the reality of where power lies in modern broadcasting.

Moving to amendments that I am less keen on, I agree with the News Media Association that the argument for state-backed regulation of the press has been lost, and the amendments introduced eloquently and with great sincerity by my right hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) are flogging a horse that I am afraid died some time ago. I do not think there is a need for his amendments—

George Eustice *rose*—

Damian Green: I suspected that might happen.

George Eustice: My right hon. Friend will know that the royal charter on self-regulation of the press, which the Conservative party established, is still alive and well, and the Government have no plans for its dissolution.

Damian Green: My right hon. Friend's amendment seeks to revive the argument from more than 10 years ago, but I think that argument has gone. The world has moved on and the press has moved on. We had a discussion about whether regulation or the application of the law is the appropriate way to do this, and I submit that the reason why press behaviour has changed is simply the effective application of the law, and the fact that many newspaper groups have had to pay huge amounts of money because they broke the law in behaving the way they did 10, 15 and 20 years ago. That led to the change in behaviour. Where my right hon. Friend and I would come closer together is on SLAPP cases, and the need for legislation to allow individuals not to be intimidated by rich publishing companies. I know the Government have committed to introducing legislation to see those sorts of cases dismissed at the earliest possible stage, and I urge my colleagues on the Front Bench to do that as soon as possible.

While I am in sceptical mode, I similarly question the need for the various new clauses, proposed by Members in all parts of the House, that would mandate a more rigid system of age classifications for programmes already regulated by Ofcom. I absolutely get the intention behind them, which is to protect children from unsuitable content, but I am instinctively wary of suggestions that would mean one regulator having to consult another before introducing a code of conduct. Ofcom has considerable powers, and it can operate those powers. I do not think it sensible to try to tie this down to any particular age classification system, not least because some public service broadcasters, who are pretty responsible in not trying to expose content that is unsuitable for children, operate systems of protection that do not rely on age classification. ITV has its guidance system, and many broadcasters operate a system involving a PIN that sensible parents will keep from their children so that they can be protected at home.

Lia Nici: Is that not exactly the point? We have world-class regulation in the British Board of Film Classification, which gives us a benchmark. A good arrangement would be for broadcasters and other platforms to register with an organisation like the BBFC and have to pay a registration fee, and for the regulator to regulate that rather than the other way round. My right hon. Friend talks about responsible parents, but we need to guide the people who do not know what to look for, who are not media-savvy, and who need some guidance. Even our public service broadcasters do not always get it right, and sometimes there is content that really should not be seen by those aged 15 and under.

Damian Green: I take my hon. Friend's point, but I return to my original point. Given that the Bill and indeed our whole regulatory structure are based on Ofcom, and given that the Bill seeks to give Ofcom proper powers to provide, in this instance, protection for children in an appropriate way, introducing another different system would, I suspect, lead to more confusion rather than less.

Miriam Cates: That is precisely what the Bill will do: it will introduce a different system. At present Ofcom is responsible for regulating the public service broadcasters, which it does through the watershed, and the BBFC is responsible for DVDs and cinema. We now have a completely new landscape which resembles the DVD landscape much more closely because it is available on demand. It is therefore sensible to introduce an age-rating system based roughly on what the BBFC does, because the BBFC, not Ofcom, is the expert in that field.

Damian Green: I fear that we may go down a rabbit hole. Ofcom is the expert in that field, but the system is based on film classification. The age-rating system is designed for a situation where a person goes through a door and someone makes a guess whether that person was 16 or 18 or 12, for instance.

Miriam Cates: Will my right hon. Friend give way again?

Damian Green: I will give my hon. Friend one more go.

Miriam Cates: I take my right hon. Friend's point. However, the BBFC classifies not just films but items that are streamed directly and never released in cinemas by tagging every rateable incident, such as a swear word or an episode of violence, and uses that system to come up with a verifiable, standardised rating that everyone understands. It is exactly the same process as the one that is used to verify a video on demand, and it is what Netflix already uses to rate its own videos.

Damian Green: Netflix uses it, but, as my hon. Friend herself said earlier, Disney does not. There will of course be differences. I think that overregulating will just lead to disadvantages for people who are trying to produce content, and that insisting on one system that is partly designed for one mode of operation may well not work for another operation. If Ofcom does its job effectively it will achieve what we all want to see, which is age-inappropriate content not being available to children. As I have said, involving more than one regulator normally leads to confusion and worse regulation than would have existed otherwise.

As I say, a number of the amendments are wholly desirable, and I hope that the Government adopt them; others are less so, and I hope that the Government will resist them. I close by saying that this is a very good Bill, long overdue, and I wish it well in its future stages.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): It is an honour to follow the right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green), who, like me, is a member of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. He speaks with authority on many of these issues, although I did not agree with everything he said. However, I certainly agree with him about broadcasting highlights of major sporting events, and I hope the Government are listening.

I welcome the position taken by Labour Front Benchers, who have said they will support amendment 2. I am delighted that they have been listening to those of us who have been involved in this issue for a number of years and who have supported the work of Hacked Off. I claim only a minor supporting role; other Opposition Members have done far more than I have. None the less, I have been at those meetings and in those discussions. At times, I have taken part in debates in which I have

committed to support the aims and objectives of people who have been fighting hard through Hacked Off, and I am delighted that we are not closing the door on them completely today.

I commend the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) not just for his amendments, but for the way he has negotiated with others on this issue to get us to what I consider to be a compromise position—one that can allow us to go forwards and not close the door completely on the issue of an independent press complaints system. As he described earlier, his amendments remove the stick element, which is the element that is most opposed by people working in the press. I think it would have given them the incentive to join a proper independent complaints system. None the less, it is a sticking point and, in this compromise, removing it is the right thing to do at this stage.

Then there is the issue of the carrot. Many of us have taken part in debates in this place about SLAPP orders, which enable those with a great deal of wealth at their disposal to abuse our legal system in order to shut down independent reporting that exposes wrongdoing and shines a light into the places that need it.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): My hon. Friend underestimates his own role in this area, which has been very strong. I suspect that, like me, he wishes that we were seeing section 40 commenced rather than repealed today, as I am sure do the McCanns, the Dowlers, Christopher Jefferies and all the other historical victims of press abuses. Given that we are going for the carrot rather than the stick—the carrot is better than nothing—can my hon. Friend explain why there is not universal support for that across the House?

Clive Efford: I will leave it to others to explain why they are adopting their position, but I do take issue with some of the assertions that have been made by some Government Members, who say that the current system is an improvement on what we had before. As I pointed out earlier, the IPSO system received over 14,000 complaints in 2021, but only 88 of them, or 0.6%, were upheld—less than 1%. I challenge anyone to say that it is a satisfactory situation to have so few complaints upheld.

I met a mother, Mandy Garner, for the first time yesterday. Her daughter was killed in a hit-and-run. In the 24 hours after Mandy was given the news and tried to relay it to her family, the *Daily Mail* went down to the scene of the crime and managed to purchase CCTV footage from a nearby shop that showed the accident taking place. The *Daily Mail* did not actually show the moment of impact in the media, but within that 24 hours, it posted that recording for people to watch under a clickbait headline.

That happened in 2020, 10 years after Hacked Off started its campaign. Mandy described her experience in an article:

“the Daily Mail published the CCTV footage of my daughter’s last moments the morning after her death with a lurid clickbait headline—just as we were trying to explain to our other children what had happened. I complained that it was an intrusion into grief and therefore in breach of IPSO’s code on this. I thought it was an open and closed case. Clearly, it was a breach. If it wasn’t, what actually would constitute a breach?”

[Clive Efford]

Months of to-ing and fro-ing with the *Daily Mail* followed, while Mandy was mourning her daughter. She went on:

“Eventually...IPSO ruled that it was not a breach of their code. One of the reasons given was that you couldn't make out my daughter's face because the footage was ‘grainy’”.

There was nothing about how the footage would impact on the people who knew what had happened and knew who was involved, or about the family's concern that the brothers and sisters of the young woman who had died would see the footage. If that is a satisfactory complaint system, I fail to understand what people think we were seeking to achieve when we went through all of Leveson and supported setting up the royal commission.

4.15 pm

These issues continue to occur. The Calcutt report described the Press Complaints Commission, which IPSO was set up to replace, as having been

“set up by the industry, financed by the industry, dominated by the industry, and operating a code of practice devised by the industry and which is over-favourable to the industry”.

If that description of the Press Complaints Commission is not what we see now, I don't know what is. For people to assert that we are in a better place under IPSO is completely false and wrong. Further to that, the Government want to repeal section 40 in its entirety, but high-profile cases are coming down the road that will attract a great deal of public attention, and they will focus attention back on this area of press complaints and having an independent complaints system. They will call into question the decision of this House to repeal section 40.

I feel that the Government are in the wrong place on this issue, which is why I support amendment 2, tabled by the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice). We cannot close the door on this matter; the debate on it is not finished yet. There is much more to come, and it would be wrong of this House to shut the door on an independent press complaints commission in the way that a repeal of section 40 does.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I rise to speak to amendment 1, tabled by my right hon. Friend and fellow Cornishman, the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice). It would simply put a requirement on Ofcom to ensure that due regard was paid to the Council of Europe's framework convention for the protection of national minorities when assessing the fulfilment of the public service remit. This is of particular interest to us Cornish, because it is almost 10 years since the Council of Europe formally recognised the Cornish as a national minority and the Government accepted that recognition. This was a historic moment for those of us from the west of the Tamar, because although the Cornish have historically been recognised by this place as distinct from the English, this was the first time for a very long time that the Government had also recognised that. The Government said that the Cornish would be given the same recognition and status as the other Celtic nations of the UK—the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish. Over the last 10 years, we have been grappling with what that means in application. It is

disappointing to say that, at times, the Government have been criticised by the Council of Europe for not doing enough to deliver on this new recognition and status.

The Bill gives the Government a straightforward opportunity to do something fairly simple yet tangible that would give meaning to the recognition of Cornish national minority status. It is clear that Cornwall has a history, heritage and culture that is distinct from England's, and distinct within the UK. It is unique in many ways, and we have far more in common with our Celtic cousins around the fringes of the UK. We have our own language, and it has seen a revival over the last 10 or 20 years, with many schools now promoting the Cornish language and holding workshops. UNESCO has upgraded Cornish from extinct to critically endangered. It is important that we recognise and seek to continue this progress.

George Eustice: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for supporting amendment 1. He makes a powerful case for why Cornwall is unique and different. Does he agree that if the BBC had due regard for the framework convention on national minorities, it would take a very different approach to local radio? At the moment, the BBC treats Cornwall like any other part of England.

Steve Double: My right hon. Friend makes a very good point that I was going to make. There is clearly a role for the BBC in helping to protect, promote and inform about Cornish culture and the Cornish language. Measures in this Bill could be strengthened to ensure that the BBC plays that role, thereby helping the Government to fulfil their responsibility to give due recognition to the Cornish.

We have seen a revival and fresh interest in Cornish culture and history in recent years, some of which is down to the hugely successful “Poldark” series, which, for many, has brought to life the history of Cornwall and its role in the industrial revolution. Other programmes have also helped to put the spotlight on our unique Cornish culture. I think particularly of “The Fisherman's Apprentice”, in which Monty Halls went to live in one of our very small fishing communities to highlight both the historical and modern-day struggles of such places.

We are looking for programmes that present a picture of the true Cornwall and our history, heritage and culture, not programmes that present the idealistic, picture-postcard view of Cornwall, and that are just adverts for more second homeowners. We have rich, deep and strong heritage and culture in Cornwall, which is what we want to present and protect. In this day of increased multiculturalism—I do not want to go down that rabbit hole—and with all that is happening in the world, it is important that we do everything we can to protect the uniqueness of our Cornish culture. It is clear that broadcast media can play an important role in helping us to do just that, and in helping the Government to give real meaning and value to the recognition of Cornish national minority status in the UK.

I am not calling for our own Cornish station, just as Scotland and Wales have particular stations—I am not going that far—but more could be done to set an expectation that the BBC will give due regard to Cornish protected national minority status in its public service broadcasting responsibilities. That is simply what

amendment 1 would do. I understand that my right hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth does not intend to press it to a Division, but I ask the Minister to give careful consideration to the points that we have made, and to the purpose of the amendment, and to look carefully at whether the Government can adopt the measure or something similar as a clear sign of the importance that they place on protecting and promoting our Cornish culture and heritage.

John Nicolson: I agreed with all of that, except I am not quite sure how four countries can be described as a fringe. Rather, I would call us the anchor holding the Anglo-Saxon peninsula otherwise known as England in place.

During the lengthy passage of the Bill, we on the SNP Benches have engaged with the UK Government in good faith. We all want a healthy, functioning, responsible and free media. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) covered many aspects of the Bill in detail, and it is unnecessary for me to repeat anything that she said, so I will concentrate on the aspect of language.

Historically, the Conservatives have expressed great support for the Gaelic language. Indeed, at my suggestion, the House of Commons Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, on which I sit, has launched an inquiry on the future of Gaelic and other minority languages in these islands. Therefore, one piece of UK Government recalcitrance has been striking: why have the UK Government been so resistant to making statutory mention of the Gaelic language and of Gaelic services? We all agree, cross party, that this beautiful, ancient and vibrant language makes a vital contribution to our cultural life, and we know that its vastly positive impact dwarfs the miserly public expenditure on it.

I come from a long line of Gaelic speakers. Neither of my grandmothers had English as their first language—my mither’s mither was from Scotstoun and spoke Scots, and my faither’s mither came from the island of Harris and spoke Gaelic. I am the first generation not to speak the language at all. That is all too common a story in Scotland, where prejudice against and punishment of Gaelic speakers has seen the language retreat to the heartlands. Gaelic broadcasting has been vital in slowing the language’s decline by introducing it to new generations of young Scots, nurturing a more enlightened attitude towards Gaelic across Scotland and the United Kingdom.

Gaelic programme producers have offered their expertise; they volunteered to engage with Members during the drafting of the Bill and amendments to it. In particular, I mention John Morrison and Donald Campbell of MG Alba. It is therefore disappointing that the UK Government have not drawn sufficiently on that expertise and heeded the calls to reaffirm explicitly their commitment to Gaelic in the digital age. MG Alba, in its written evidence, said that the Bill

“will create a visible disparity in the treatment by Parliament of Gaelic and Welsh broadcasting,”

meaning that

“the Gaelic language will continue to be invisible in statute and, as a result, continue to suffer from unclear status and uncertain funding.”

I wish to record the disappointment felt among Gaelic broadcasters and the wider Gaelic-speaking community.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Does the hon. Member agree that one of the best ways for language lovers to cherish and build up languages, minority languages in particular, is to avoid what sometimes happens, which is the greater politicisation of minority languages? That becomes divisive, and people react badly.

John Nicolson: I do agree. I see no reason why languages should be party political. They are a shared cultural asset. When I look online, I am astonished to see people who do not share my constitutional position sometimes attacking Scots or Gaelic, as if it belongs to us and not them. The language belongs to all of us, as do the other national minority languages.

I hope that we will highlight some of the important shortfalls and opportunities when I join my friend the hon. Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage) and cross-party colleagues in taking evidence from expert witnesses during our minority languages inquiry.

4.30 pm

I was in hospital, recovering from injury and surgery during some of the Bill’s passage. I extend my gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North, who worked so assiduously on the measure in my absence and who consistently does so much good work in the House. As is her wont, she spent long hours in Committee, tirelessly scrutinising the Bill line by line. I note that not a single Scottish National party or other Opposition amendment was accepted by the UK Government—yet another bizarre example of Westminster’s methods. We turn up, work hard, research diligently, engage with stakeholders, contribute to debate and then we are largely ignored.

The Government are forcing through their curious insistence on Channel 4’s producing its own content. That is a fig leaf to justify the inordinate waste of time and money on yet another aborted attempt to privatise the channel. As we all know, Channel 4, which is surely best placed to determine its needs, did not want that power. What was it, Mr Deputy Speaker, that a Conservative Cabinet Minister once said about policy making—we have “had enough of experts”?

The Minister for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries (Julia Lopez): I thank Members for their contributions to today’s debate, and indeed during prelegislative scrutiny and the Bill’s passage thus far. The Bill has fantastic support. I have worked on it since 2021 and I am pleased to be back in post, taking over from the interim Minister—whom I prefer to call the eminent, knowledgeable knight and former Secretary of State—my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale); but as my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green) said, we are all temporary in this place. I am glad to take the Bill through its final stages, and I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon for his work and his defence of our position on section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013. He is in the curious position of amending a Bill for which he was once Minister. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford said, our right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon is breaking new parliamentary boundaries.

As we all know, internet access and streaming services have fundamentally changed how audiences access broadcast content, but our public service broadcasters and radio services are governed by laws written 20 or

[*Julia Lopez*]

more years ago. The Bill is vital to enable our PSBs to continue to be world leading in their content and to serve UK audiences, while also driving growth in the creative industries across the UK.

I shall briefly address some of the issues that have been raised, but I will first deal with the Government amendments. They are minor and technical and seek to ensure that the existing policy positions are properly operational. I have written to Members with more detail. I am glad to have the support of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford, particularly for the radio amendments.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) for his sustained interest. He is a passionate campaigner and has been pushing on section 40 for many years. The Government recognise the intent of his amendments, but their effect would not be to repeal section 40, but to delay its repeal while a consultation takes place. We feel that that would be at odds with our double manifesto commitment to repeal section 40 in full, notwithstanding my right hon. Friend's view that the manifesto was not the best that we have produced and that there may have been some drafting errors in the publication.

George Eustice: I understand that new clause 3 would delay the commencement of clause 50, but that is not the case with amendment 2, which would simply remove one part of section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013.

Julia Lopez: We have concerns about my right hon. Friend's amendments as a package. One issue is about delay, but another is about some of the smaller publishers that do not wish to be part of a regulator. That has been debated at some length this afternoon.

I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon is pleased about the Government amendment on AM. We discussed the matter together. I note his points about local television. He kindly accepts the unlikelihood of our accepting his amendment, but we will continue to consider his representations.

As always, I am glad of the support of the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone). He suggested that the proposal to privatise Channel 4 was part of a vendetta, but it was borne of a fundamental concern for its sustainability. We have put forward measures in the Bill to give Channel 4 greater freedom. We want the channel to survive and to have the flexibility to continue doing what it does. To the point raised in relation to those new powers, it will be granted the freedom to produce its own content, but it does not have to use them if it does not feel that is necessary.

On public service content being prominently and easily accessible, as is already the case in the linear space, we want PSB content to be as prominent as possible, but there is a question in relation to appropriate language. As has been discussed at length, the core aim is to secure prominence for PSB services and content online, but for it to be flexible, operable and proportionate, so that we can design the Bill for innovation and consumer choice. We are giving Ofcom the power to establish that balance.

The Father of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley), along with my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford and others, raised the issue of digital rights. We recognise the intent behind the amendment to bring digital rights within the scope of the listed events regime. The Select Committee, ably chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage), made a recommendation that would support that outcome. While there is a great deal of support in Parliament for that and I am sympathetic, it is a complex issue.

We have seen how technical just the Government amendments to close the streamer loophole are. Adding digital rights would be a much bigger change, bringing more complexity. It is important that we maintain the right balance between access for audiences and the commercial freedoms that allow rights holders to reinvest in their sport at all levels. We want to get the balance right, and our priority is the impact on the public. It is important that audiences can watch and celebrate major sporting moments, but broadcasting rights provide sports' national governing bodies with essential income, enabling them to invest in their sports, whether at elite or grassroots levels. We want to fully evaluate the issue, including how it could be best delivered, before considering legislation that enacts any particular conclusion. I assure Members the issue is under careful consideration and we have not yet made a decision.

Sir Peter Bottomley: The House will have listened with interest to the Minister's response to the points made by Members from across the Chamber, but the Government have got to try to sort this out while the Bill is before Parliament. We want to hear from her that the Government are capable of coming to the Lords with an amendment or new clause that does not get rid of the interest for the commercial bidders, but says that, when digital and reproduction rights come up for sale, the interests of people in our country, our team and the sports that we regard as important, whether they are new or old, established ones, are taken into account. The House will not be satisfied unless the Government come forward with a proposal about what they can either agree with the rights holders or the potential rights bidders. The House of Lords will be right to insist on something that addresses that issue, and we want to support them.

Julia Lopez: I appreciate that my hon. Friend wants to put down a marker on the issue—I have heard that, and so has the Secretary of State. I maintain that the issue of rights is more complex than one might imagine. We want to get the balance right, and we will continue to look at that.

Moving to the amendments on the issue of age ratings, we are in complete agreement on the need to protect children and vulnerable audiences from harmful and inappropriate video on demand content. I have two children; I have pushed for children to remain in the remit and for there to be protections for them. The hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) talked about the importance of public service broadcasters and access to them. A fundamental driving force of the Bill is that we want children to be able to continue to access public service broadcasters.

For the first time, we are bringing mainstream TV-like, on-demand services in the scope of a new video on demand code, to be drafted and enforced by Ofcom.

I welcome the general support for the Bill given by my hon. Friends the Members for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Miriam Cates) and for South West Devon (Sir Gary Streeter). Ofcom will be getting new powers under the Bill to look at broader protection measures and to mandate specific approaches in the code, if deemed necessary, which could be BBFC age ratings. We are trying to move to a more outcomes-based approach rather than a prescriptive approach. We think that there has been great innovation in the space of parental controls, which have often been more effective than a badge rating. However, I have heard what has been said in the House today and we will continue to listen on this subject.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen North also raised the issue of protections for viewers watching on devices such as PlayStations. I simply wish to reassure her that the definition of “on-demand programme services” is not platform-specific; Disney and Netflix viewed on a games console would be covered. She also raised questions about the size of producers of content. Smaller producers are not keen on some of the proposals that she has made, as they are concerned that they might one day be larger producers and therefore be penalised. We would not want to disincentivise their growth.

Let me move on to Scottish broadcasting in general. We believe that the Bill will bring significant benefits to the Scottish broadcasting sector and creative economy. I do not underestimate the vital role that our public service broadcasters play in supporting that Scottish screen sector. The Bill contains provisions to encourage our PSBs to broadcast programmes in indigenous, regional and minority languages, such as Gaelic, by including them in our new PSB remit for television. I know that this is extremely important to numerous Scottish Members in this House, and I hope the Government’s efforts here are recognised. The partnership between MG Alba and the BBC is particularly significant for Gaelic language broadcasting. I can assure Members that the ongoing provision of Gaelic will be a key consideration as the Secretary of State and I progress the BBC funding review and the forthcoming BBC charter review. Of course, Scottish audiences will also continue to benefit from the prominence provisions in the Bill.

The Government are also aware of Members’ concerns about being able to access TV via terrestrial means, and I have spoken to my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) about that directly. The Bill does not include provisions on that, but I wish to reassure the House that the Government remain committed to the future of DTT and to protecting the millions of households who continue to rely on it. That is why we have legislated to secure its continuity until at least 2034, but let me be clear that 2034 is not a cliff edge for DTT. We have allowed the renewal of the current multiplex licences so that they last until the end of 2034, but that does not mean that DTT will not continue after that point. Even if the Government simply sat on their hands, Ofcom would still be able to re-advertise the multiplex licences, and our public service broadcasters could continue distributing their linear channels over DTT. Furthermore, specific primary legislation would be required to remove the multiplex licensing regime, for example.

We are always keen to make sure that major sporting events are publicly available as widely as possible, which is why we have the listed events regime, but this is a balancing act. It is another issue where we are trying to

find a course through. Sports rights holders use income from the sale of rights to the benefit of the wider sporting sector. A lot of sports do not want the listed events regime to be opened up. I know that the Scottish National party likes the idea of a Government listed events fund, but SNP Members do not acknowledge the distortive effect it would have on the value of rights, nor do they say who would pay for it. I suspect that the UK taxpayer would and, once again, SNP promises would be paid for by everybody else.

Gavin Newlands: These SNP promises were to protect all governing bodies in the UK, not simply Scottish ones. I just want to correct the record on that. Will the Minister not admit that devolved sporting governing bodies are unfairly disadvantaged, given the size of our TV network, and therefore our free-to-air broadcasters are unable to bid, win and secure the rights? By contrast, the English Football Association, for example, has a large TV market, where we have seen ITV, then Channel 4 and now ITV again show the games.

Julia Lopez: I bow to my ministerial colleague the sports Minister on the intricacies of sports funding. However, on the listed events regime, it is for the Scottish Government not only to make a recommendation to us if they want to expand that, but to have the discussions with Scottish sporting bodies as to whether that is actually something they want.

I will finish by responding to my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double). I am glad to say that culture and heritage are directly addressed in the updated public service remit for television. Ofcom is therefore required to ensure that public service broadcasters collectively make available content reflecting the cultural interests and traditions of the UK and different local areas within the UK, which I would expect to include Cornwall.

I thank you again, Mr Deputy Speaker, and all Members present for their contributions to the debate. I am grateful for the scrutiny the Bill has received; it has benefited greatly from the expertise of everybody in this Chamber. I commend the Bill to the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I understand, Mr Eustice, that you wish to withdraw new clause 3.

George Eustice: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the clause.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 13

GAELIC LANGUAGE SERVICE

“The Secretary of State must, within six months of the passage of this Act, review whether a Gaelic language service should be given a public service broadcast remit.”—(*Thangam Debbonaire.*)

Brought up, and read the First time.

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

The House divided: Ayes 194, Noes 294.

Division No. 65]

[4.45 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy
vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-
Addy*)

Abrahams, Debbie

Ali, Rushanara

Ali, Tahir

Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena

Anderson, Fleur

Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Bardell, Hannah
 Beckett, rh Dame Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Creasy, Stella
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Dyke, Sarah
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Edwards, Sarah
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foord, Richard
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian

Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
 Hanvey, Neale
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Linden, David
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy (*Proxy vote cast by Ian Mearns*)
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, James
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan

Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Phillips, Jess
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Rees, Christina
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shanks, Michael
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh John
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo

Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, rh Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Badenoch, rh Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, rh Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Dame Karen
 Brady, rh Sir Graham
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex

Stone, Jamie
 Strathern, Alistair
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomson, Richard
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Whitley, Mick
 Williams, Hywel
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Christian Wakeford and
Samantha Dixon

NOES

Burns, rh Sir Conor
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carter, Andy
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Sir Simon
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, rh Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Steve
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Sir David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Docherty, Leo
 Double, Steve
 Doyle-Price, Dame Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Ellis, rh Sir Michael

Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, rh Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 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
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Dame Andrea

Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kniveton, Kate (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 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
 Lockhart, Carla
 Loder, Chris
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig (*Proxy vote cast by John Redwood*)
 Mackrory, Cheryl
 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
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Murray, Mrs Sheryl
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Patel, rh Priti

Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Sir Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Sir Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Mr Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Saxby, Selaine
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel

Stuart, rh Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, rh Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tuckwell, Steve
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, rh Craig (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggins, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, rh Craig
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Ruth Edwards and
Dame Amanda Milling

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 16

LISTED EVENTS

“(1) The Broadcasting Act 1996 is amended as follows.

(2) In section 97 (as amended by section 299 of the Communications Act 2003), after subsection (1B) insert—

“(1A) The following events must be included in Group A of the list drawn up under subsection (1)—

- (a) the Olympic Games;
- (b) the Paralympic Games;
- (c) the FIFA World Cup Finals Tournament;
- (d) the FIFA Women's World Cup Finals Tournament;
- (e) the European Football Championship Finals Tournament;
- (f) the European Women's Football Championship Finals Tournament;
- (g) the FA Cup Final;
- (h) the Scottish FA Cup Final;
- (i) the Grand National;
- (j) the Wimbledon Tennis Finals;
- (k) the Rugby Union World Cup Final;
- (l) Six Nations Rugby Tournament Matches Involving Home Countries;
- (m) the Derby;
- (n) the Rugby League Challenge Cup Final;

- (o) any match involving the national teams of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland or England pertaining to qualification for the events listed in paragraphs (c), (d), (e) and (f).” —(Gavin Newlands.)

This new clause would make it compulsory for the Secretary of State to place the list of sporting events in Group A of listed sporting events, ensuring they are available on free to air television in their entirety. The events consist of all current Group A events plus the home nations World Cup and Euro qualifiers.

Brought up, and read the First time.

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

The House divided: Ayes 193, Noes 295.

Division No. 66]

[4.59 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Bardell, Hannah
 Beckett, rh Dame Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blomfield, Paul
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Creasy, Stella
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dixon, Samantha
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Dyke, Sarah

Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Edwards, Sarah
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foord, Richard
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
 Hanvey, Neale
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma

Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Linden, David
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mc Nally, John
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy (*Proxy vote cast by Ian Mearns*)
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahan, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, James
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Phillips, Jess

Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Rees, Christina
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shanks, Michael
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Allyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh John
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Strathern, Alistair
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomson, Richard
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Wakeford, Christian
 Webbe, Claudia
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Whitley, Mick
 Williams, Hywel
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Peter Grant and
 Steven Bonnar

NOES

Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, rh Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, rh Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, rh Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John

Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Dame Karen
 Brady, rh Sir Graham
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Buchan, Felicity
 Buckland, rh Sir Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, rh Sir Conor
 Butler, Rob
 Cairns, rh Alun

Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Carter, Andy
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Sir Simon
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, rh Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Sir David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Docherty, Leo
 Double, Steve
 Doyle-Price, Dame Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Ellis, rh Sir Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, rh Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Gray, James

Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 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
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Dame Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kniveton, Kate (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Kruger, Danny
 Kwarteng, rh Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Largan, Robert
 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
 Lockhart, Carla
 Loder, Chris
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel

Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Karl
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Sir Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Sir Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Mr Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Saxby, Selaine

Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, rh Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tuckwell, Steve
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, rh Craig (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, rh Craig
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Ruth Edwards and
Dame Amanda Milling

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 2

OFCOM REPORTS: WIDER REVIEW AND
 REPORTING OBLIGATIONS

Amendment made: 19, page 6, line 28, at end insert—

“(2A) In subsection (2)(b) and (c), for “objectives”
 substitute “requirements”.—(*Julia Lopez.*)

This amendment secures that section 264A(2) of the Communications Act 2003 refers to “public service requirements”.

Clause 20

CATEGORIES OF RELEVANT SERVICE

Amendments made: 20, page 23, line 18, leave out “television programme services and internet programme” and insert “relevant”.

This amendment is consequential upon Amendment 28.

Amendment 21, page 24, line 4, leave out “An internet programme” and insert “A relevant”.

This amendment is consequential upon Amendment 28.

Amendment 22, page 24, line 5, after “is” insert “or forms part of”.

This amendment is consequential upon Amendment 28.

Amendment 23, page 24, line 6, leave out first “the service” and insert “it”.

This amendment is consequential upon Amendment 28.

Amendment 24, page 24, line 6, leave out second “the service” and insert “it”.

This amendment is consequential upon Amendment 28.

Amendment 25, page 24, line 8, leave out “an internet programme” and insert “a relevant”.

This amendment is consequential upon Amendment 28.

Amendment 26, page 24, line 14, leave out “No. 26, internet programme” and insert “relevant”.

This amendment is consequential upon Amendment 28.

Amendment 27, page 24, leave out lines 20 to 22 and insert—

“(a) television programme service;”.

This amendment substitutes “television programme service”, a term that refers to the types of service in section 98(7)(a) to (c) of the Broadcasting Act 1996, inserted by clause 20, and restricted services.

Amendment 28, page 24, leave out line 23.

This amendment secures that relevant services are defined without reference to the concept of internet programme services.

Amendment 29, page 24, line 24, leave out from “service” to end of line 26.

This amendment is consequential upon Amendment 28.

Amendment 30, page 24, line 27, leave out from “service” to end of line 29.

This amendment is consequential upon Amendment 28.

Amendment 31, page 25, line 1, leave out “an” and insert “a television programme service;”.

This amendment is consequential upon Amendment 27.

Amendment 32, page 25, leave out line 3.—(*Julia Lopez.*)

This amendment is consequential upon Amendment 28.

Clause 21

CONTRACTS RELATING TO COVERAGE OF LISTED EVENTS

Amendments made: 33, page 25, line 14, leave out from “force” to “for” in line 16 and insert

“which grants rights to include in a relevant service live coverage of the whole or any part of a Group A event”.

This amendment secures that the amendments of section 99 of the Broadcasting Act 1996 are in terms of “granting rights”.

Amendment 34, page 25, line 32, after “service” insert “which—

“(i) if the first relevant service forms part of an internet programme service, is also a service that does not form part of the same internet programme service, and

(ii) is not a service that is separate from the first relevant service only because section 98(2B) applies to it”.

This amendment secures that the other relevant service is not a relevant service that forms part of the same internet programme service and is not a separate relevant service only because of section 98(2B), inserted by clause 20(2).

Amendment 35, page 26, line 8, leave out “after “service” insert “or internet programme” and insert “for “television programme service” substitute “relevant”.—(*Julia Lopez.*)

This amendment is consequential upon Amendment 28.

Clause 22

RESTRICTION ON SHOWING LIVE COVERAGE OF LISTED EVENTS

Amendments made: 36, page 26, line 22, after “(2),” insert “(2A), (2B)”.

This amendment is consequential upon Amendment 37.

Amendment 37, page 26, leave out lines 23 to 35 and insert—

“(2) Live coverage of a listed event is authorised by this subsection if—

- (a) identical rights to include live coverage of the event in a relevant service other than the first service (“the second service”) have been acquired, and
- (b) the second service—
 - (i) is provided by a person other than the provider of the first service,
 - (ii) falls into a different category from the first service,
 - (iii) is not a relevant service other than the first service only because section 98(2B) applies to it, and
 - (iv) is provided for an area that consists of or includes all or almost all of the area for which the first service is provided.

(2A) Live coverage of a listed event is authorised by this subsection if—

- (a) rights to include live coverage of the event in two or more relevant services other than the first service (“the second and further services”) have been acquired,
- (b) those rights, taken together, constitute identical rights to include live coverage of the event in the second and further services,
- (c) each of the second and further services—
 - (i) is provided by a person other than the provider of the first service,
 - (ii) falls into a different category from the first service,
 - (iii) is not a relevant service other than the first service only because section 98(2B) applies to it, and
 - (iv) is provided for an area that consists of or includes all or almost all of the area for which the first service is provided.

(2B) Live coverage of a listed event is authorised by this subsection if—

- (a) the event is a sporting event that involves different sports,
- (b) rights to include live coverage of the event in two or more relevant services other than the first service (“the second and further services”) have been acquired,
- (c) that additional coverage, taken as a whole, is adequate live coverage of the event,
- (d) each of the second and further services is a television programme service, and

- (e) each of the second and further services—
 - (i) is provided by a person other than the provider of the first service,
 - (ii) falls into a different category from the first service,
 - (iii) is not a relevant service other than the first service only because section 98(2B) applies to it, and
 - (iv) is provided for an area that consists of or includes all or almost all of the area for which the first service is provided.”—(*Julia Lopez.*)

This amendment alters substituted section 101 of the Broadcasting Act 1996 to include cases where the showing of an event is authorised by coverage in two or more relevant services and to make more specific provision about the coverage of multisport events.

Clause 23

REGULATIONS ABOUT COVERAGE OF LISTED EVENTS

Amendments made: 38, page 27, line 33, leave out “101(2)(a)(ii)” and insert “101(2B)(c)”.

This amendment is consequential upon Amendment 37.

Amendment 39, page 27, line 37, at end insert—

“(4) After subsection (2) insert—

“(2A) Regulations made by virtue of subsection (1)(aa) may, in particular—

- (a) describe what represents the provision of adequate live coverage by reference to—
 - (i) the duration of the live coverage (whether expressed as a percentage of the duration of the proceedings or otherwise),
 - (ii) the number of television programme services in which the live coverage is included, or
 - (iii) a combination of those matters;
- (b) provide for live coverage not to be taken into account if the provider of the service is unable to select what parts of the proceedings are covered.

(2B) When making regulations by virtue of subsection (1)(aa), OFCOM must have regard to—

- (a) the forms of live coverage that OFCOM consider are likely to satisfy the interest of members of the public in the United Kingdom or an area of the United Kingdom in listed events of the sort to which section 101(2B)(c) relates;
- (b) the desirability of facilitating the making of arrangements under which rights to include live coverage of sporting events that involve different sports are acquired by providers of relevant services in both of the categories of relevant service set out in section 98(1).”—(*Julia Lopez.*)

This amendment makes provision about the regulations that OFCOM may make under the power conferred by section 104ZA(1)(aa) of the Broadcasting Act 1996 (inserted by clause 23).

Clause 25

SECTIONS 20 TO 24: FURTHER PROVISION

Amendment made: 40, page 30, line 29, at end insert—

- “(4) OFCOM must draw up a code under section 104 of the Broadcasting Act 1996 as soon as practicable after paragraph 18 of Schedule 2 to this Act (amendments of section 104) comes into force.
- (5) The code drawn up by OFCOM in accordance with subsection (4) is not to have effect in relation to any time before section 22 of this Act comes into force.
- (6) Regulations under section 55(5) (transitional, transitory or saving provision in connection with commencement) may provide for the old section 104 code to continue

to have effect in relation to cases specified in the regulations after the coming into force of the code drawn up by OFCOM in accordance with subsection (4).

(7) In this section—

“OFCOM” means the Office of Communications;

“the old section 104 code” means the code drawn up under section 104 of the Broadcasting Act 1996 which is continued in effect by paragraph 51(2) of Schedule 18 to the Communications Act 2003.”—(*Julia Lopez.*)

This amendment requires OFCOM to draw up a code under section 104 of the Broadcasting Act 1996, as amended by this Bill. It also provides for the old code to have effect until that new code comes into force and in relation to transitional cases.

Amendment proposed: 88, in clause 25, page 30, line 30, at end insert—

“(4) On the date on which section 21 comes into force, the Secretary of State must revise the list maintained for the purposes of Part 4 of the Broadcasting Act 1996 so that it includes—

- (a) at least one cricket test match each year between the months of May and September;
- (b) at least one cricket One Day International match each year between the months of May and September;
- (c) all other currently listed Group A events.
- (5) The events listed under subsection (4) must be allocated to Group A.”—(*Jamie Stone.*)

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Committee divided: Ayes 20, Noes 288.

Division No. 67]

[5.12 pm

AYES

Campbell, Mr Gregory
Davey, rh Ed
Dyke, Sarah
Edwards, Jonathan
Farron, Tim
Farry, Stephen
Girvan, Paul
Green, Sarah
Hobhouse, Wera
Lake, Ben
Lockhart, Carla

Lucas, Caroline
Morgan, Helen
Newlands, Gavin
Paisley, Ian
Shannon, Jim
Stone, Jamie
Wilson, rh Sammy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Wendy Chamberlain and
Richard Foord

NOES

Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, rh Edward
Atkins, rh Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Badenoch, rh Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, rh Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baron, Mr John

Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Dame Karen
Brady, rh Sir Graham
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Browne, Anthony
Buchan, Felicity
Burghart, Alex
Burns, rh Sir Conor
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Carter, Andy
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chishti, Rehman

Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Sir Simon
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, rh Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Sir David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Docherty, Leo
 Double, Steve
 Doyle-Price, Dame Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Ellis, rh Sir Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, rh Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 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
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Dame Andrea
 Jenrick, rh Robert
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kniveton, Kate
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 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
 Lopez, Julia
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig (*Proxy vote
 cast by John Redwood*)
 Mackrory, Cheryl
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, rh Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, rh Johnny

Metcalf, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Sir Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Sir Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Mr Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Saxby, Selaine
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, rh Laura
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tuckwell, Steve
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, rh Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Wild, James
 Williams, rh Craig
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim
Tellers for the Noes:
Ruth Edwards and
Dame Amanda Milling

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 28

PROMINENCE ON TELEVISION SELECTION SERVICES

Amendments made: 41, page 46, line 13, at end insert—

“(ga) the purpose of preparing or reviewing a code of practice under section 362AP (code of practice relating to duties under section 362AO);”

This amendment adds to the list of particular purposes for which information may be required by OFCOM.

Amendment 42, page 47, line 8, at end insert—

“(11A) In this section, a reference to the functions of OFCOM under this Part includes a reference to their functions under Schedules 16A and 16B, so far as relating to this Part.”

This amendment makes provision about the reference to OFCOM's functions under Part 3A in section 362AS of the Communications Act 2003.

Amendment 43, page 60, line 8, at end insert—

“(9A) In this section, a reference to the functions of OFCOM under this Part includes a reference to their functions under Schedules 16A and 16B, so far as relating to this Part.”

This amendment makes provision about references to OFCOM's functions under Part 3A in section 362AZ6 of the Communications Act 2003.

Amendment 44, page 62, line 37, at end insert

“and Schedule 16B (so far as relating to this Part)”.

This amendment expands the reference to Part 3A in section 362AZ9(c) of the Communications Act 2003.

Amendment 45, page 62, line 40, after “Part” insert

“or Schedule 16B (so far as relating to this Part)”.

This amendment applies section 362AZ10 to notices given by OFCOM under Schedule 16B, so far as relating to Part 3A.

Amendment 46, page 64, line 32, leave out from “service” to end of line 34 and insert

“has the meaning given by section 362AA;”—(*Julia Lopez.*)

This amendment corrects an error in section 362AZ12(1).

Clause 30

C4C'S DUTIES IN RELATION TO COMMISSIONING PROGRAMMES

Amendments made: 47, page 67, line 33, after “service” insert

“that is or forms part of a designated internet programme service”.

This amendment limits the reference to on-demand programme services provided by C4C to those that are or form part of a designated internet programme service.

Amendment 48, page 67, line 34, after “service” insert

“that is or forms part of a designated internet programme service”.

This amendment limits the reference to non-UK on-demand programme services provided by C4C to those that are or form part of a designated internet programme service.

Amendment 49, page 68, line 3, at end insert—

“(4) In this section, “designated internet programme service” has the same meaning as in Part 3A (see section 362AZ12).”—(*Julia Lopez.*)

This amendment is consequential on Amendments 47 and 48.

Clause 32

S4C'S POWERS AND PUBLIC SERVICE REMIT

Amendments made: 50, page 70, line 7, leave out “power” and insert “powers”.

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 51.

Amendment 51, page 70, line 19, at end insert—

“(3A) S4C may do anything it considers appropriate in association with anything it does in exercise of the power in subsection (1).”

This amendment confers on S4C the power to do things other than providing audiovisual content where it considers it appropriate to do so in association with the provision of audiovisual content.—(Julia Lopez.)

Clause 41

LICENSING OF ANALOGUE RADIO SERVICES

Amendment made: 52, page 81, line 29, at end insert—

“(7A) In section 103A (renewal of national licences), in subsection (9)—

(a) after paragraph (b) insert “and”;

(b) omit paragraph (d) and the “and” before it.

(7B) In section 111 (power to revoke licences)—

(a) omit subsection (4) (procedure where national service ceases to be provided);

(b) in subsection (6), omit “, (4)”.—(*Julia Lopez.*)

This amendment removes the procedure for revocation that may be used in certain cases involving licences for national analogue radio services.

Clause 48

REGULATION OF RADIO SELECTION SERVICES

Amendments made: 53, page 90, line 25, at end insert—

“(5A) Subsection (4) applies in relation to the making of regulations under subsection (5) as it applies in relation to the making of regulations under subsection (1).”

This amendment provides for consultation before the making of regulations under section 362BB(5) of the Communications Act 2003.

Amendment 54, page 101, line 29, at end insert—

“(11A) In this section, a reference to the functions of OFCOM under this Part includes a reference to their functions under Schedules 16A and 16B, so far as relating to this Part.”

This amendment makes provision about the reference to OFCOM's functions under Part 3B in section 362BQ of the Communications Act 2003.

Amendment 55, page 103, line 19, leave out “confirmation” and insert “contravention”.

This amendment corrects a drafting error.

Amendment 56, page 108, line 11, at end insert—

“(9A) In this section, a reference to the functions of OFCOM under this Part includes a reference to their functions under Schedules 16A and 16B, so far as relating to this Part.”

This amendment makes provision about references to OFCOM's functions under Part 3B in section 362BX of the Communications Act 2003.

Amendment 57, page 110, line 40, at end insert

“and Schedule 16B (so far as relating to this Part)”.

This amendment expands the reference to Part 3B in section 362BZ1(b) of the Communications Act 2003.

Amendment 58, page 111, line 3, after “Part” insert

“or Schedule 16B (so far as relating to this Part)”.

This amendment applies section 362BZ2 of the Communications Act 2003 to notices given by OFCOM under Schedule 16B, so far as relating to Part 3B.

Amendment 59, page 112, line 39, at end insert—

““internet radio service” has the meaning given by section 362BF;”—(*Julia Lopez.*)

This amendment is an addition to the defined terms listed in section 362BZ4(1) of the Communications Act 2003.

Clause 50**AWARDS OF COSTS**

Amendment proposed: 2, page 114, line 7, leave out subsections (2) and (3) and insert—

“(2) Section 40(3) of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 is omitted.”—(*George Eustice.*)

This amendment would allow the Secretary of State the option in future of commencing subsection 2 of Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Acts 2013.

The House divided: Ayes 195, Noes 284.

Division No. 68]**[5.24 pm****AYES**

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Anderson, Fleur
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Bardell, Hannah
 Beckett, rh Dame Margaret
 Begum, Apsana
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bonnar, Steven
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, Ian
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Carden, Dan
 Chamberlain, Wendy
 Champion, Sarah
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Creasy, Stella
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Alex
 Daby, Janet
 Davey, rh Ed
 David, Wayne
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doogan, Dave
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Dowd, Peter
 Duffield, Rosie
 Dyke, Sarah
 Eagle, Dame Angela

Eagle, rh Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Edwards, Sarah
 Efford, Clive
 Elmore, Chris
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Eustice, rh George
 Farron, Tim
 Farry, Stephen
 Fellows, Marion
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Stephen
 Foord, Richard
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Sarah
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
 Hanvey, Neale
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Howarth, rh Sir George
 Hussain, Imran
 Jardine, Christine
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kyle, Peter
 Lake, Ben
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive

Lightwood, Simon
 Linden, David
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy (*Proxy vote cast by Ian Mearns*)
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahon, Jim
 McMorris, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Mishra, Navendu
 Monaghan, Carol
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Helen
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Murray, James
 Neill, Sir Robert
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onwurah, Chi
 Oppong-Asare, Abena
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owatemi, Taiwo (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Phillips, Jess

Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Rees, Christina
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Shanks, Michael
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, Alyn
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh John
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Strathern, Alistair
 Stringer, Graham
 Sultana, Zarah
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tarry, Sam
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomson, Richard
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Vaz, rh Valerie
 Webbe, Claudia
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Whitley, Mick
 Wiggin, Sir Bill
 Williams, Hywel
 Winter, Beth
 Wishart, Pete
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Christian Wakeford and
 Samantha Dixon

NOES

Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aiken, Nickie
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy (*Proxy vote cast by Marcus Jones*)
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, rh Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bacon, Mr Richard (*Proxy vote cast by Marcus Jones*)
 Badenoch, rh Kemi
 Bailey, Shaun
 Baillie, Siobhan
 Baker, Duncan
 Baker, rh Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett

Barclay, rh Steve
 Baron, Mr John
 Baynes, Simon
 Bell, Aaron
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Dame Karen
 Brady, rh Sir Graham
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Bristow, Paul
 Britcliffe, Sara
 Browne, Anthony
 Buchan, Felicity
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, rh Sir Conor
 Butler, Rob

Cairns, rh Alun
 Carter, Andy
 Cash, Sir William
 Cates, Miriam
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Sir Simon
 Clarke-Smith, Brendan
 Clarkson, Chris
 Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
 Colburn, Elliot
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Courts, Robert
 Coutinho, rh Claire
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crosbie, Virginia
 Crouch, Tracey
 Daly, James
 Davies, rh David T. C.
 Davies, Gareth
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Sir David
 Davison, Dehenna
 Docherty, Leo
 Double, Steve
 Doyle-Price, Dame Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duguid, David
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Ellis, rh Sir Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Mrs Natalie
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, rh Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Frazer, rh Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gibson, Peter
 Gideon, Jo
 Glen, rh John
 Goodwill, rh Sir Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen (*Proxy vote cast by Marcus Jones*)
 Gray, James
 Grayling, rh Chris

Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Griffith, Andrew
 Grundy, James
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Halfon, rh Robert
 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
 Henry, Darren
 Higginbotham, Antony
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Holmes, Paul
 Howell, John (*Proxy vote cast by Marcus Jones*)
 Howell, Paul
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, Jane (*Proxy vote cast by Marcus Jones*)
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkinson, Mark
 Jenkyns, Dame Andrea
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Kearns, Alicia
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kniveton, Kate (*Proxy vote cast by Marcus Jones*)
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Langan, Robert
 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
 Lopez, Julia
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig (*Proxy vote cast by John Redwood*)
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul

McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, rh Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morrissey, Joy
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Nici, Lia
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, rh Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, rh Victoria
 Pritchard, rh Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, rh Sir Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Randall, Tom
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, rh Sir Jacob
 Richards, Nicola
 Richardson, Angela
 Roberts, Mr Rob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean

Rutley, David
 Saxby, Selaine
 Selous, Andrew
 Sharma, rh Sir Alok
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trevelyan, rh Anne-Marie
 Trott, rh Laura
 Tuckwell, Steve
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Sir Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Webb, Suzanne
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, rh Craig (*Proxy vote cast by Marcus Jones*)
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Williams, rh Craig
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Ruth Edwards and
Dame Amanda Milling

Question accordingly negated.

Schedule 1

QUOTAS: THE BBC AND S4C

Amendments made: 60, page 120, line 8, leave out—

“an on-demand programme service” and insert “a qualifying audiovisual service other than one to which paragraph (a) relates”.

This amendment alters paragraph 10(1)(b) of Schedule 12 to the Communications Act 2003, inserted by paragraph 4(b) of Schedule 1, to refer to qualifying audiovisual services.

Amendment 61, page 120, line 9, leave out “the duty under paragraph 7(1)” and insert—

“a duty imposed by virtue of paragraph 7(1) or (4)”.

This amendment adds a reference to the duty of S4C imposed by virtue of paragraph 7(4) of Schedule 12 to the Communications Act 2003.

Amendment 62, page 120, line 15, at end insert—

“(d) after sub-paragraph (11) insert—

“(12) See also sections 278B and 278C (which make further provision for the interpretation of this paragraph etc).” —(*Julia Lopez.*)

This amendment is consequential on Amendment 60.

Schedule 2

PART 1: FURTHER AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: 63, page 121, line 13, leave out “In section 97 (listed events)” and insert—

“(1) Section 97 (listed events) is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (2)(d), for “televisé” substitute “show”.

This amendment and Amendments 64 and 65 add amendments of the Broadcasting Act 1996 similar to those in paragraphs 14(2) and 15 of Schedule 2.

Amendment 64, page 122, line 15, at end insert—

“(5A) In subsection (4)(a), for “televisé” substitute “show”.

See explanatory statement for Amendment 63.

Amendment 65, page 122, line 26, after “(4)” insert—

“(a) in paragraph (c), for “televisé” substitute “show”;

See explanatory statement for Amendment 63.

Amendment 66, page 123, leave out lines 18 and 19.

This amendment removes an unnecessary change to section 105 of the Broadcasting Act 1996.

Amendment 67, page 123, line 26, at end insert—

“, or

(b) is available for use by members of the public (within the meaning of section 368R(4) of the Communications Act 2003).”

This amendment relates to the meaning of a reference in Part 4 of the Broadcasting Act 1996 to an on-demand programme service or a non-UK on-demand programme service being available to members of the public.

Amendment 68, page 123, line 28, leave out from second “a” to end of line 29.

This amendment is consequential upon Amendment 27.

Amendment 69, page 123, line 31, at end insert—

“(aa) a reference to the provision of an on-demand programme service or a non-UK on-demand programme service is to be read in accordance with section 368R(5) and (6) of the Communications Act 2003.”

This amendment adds provision about the meaning of references in Part 4 of the Broadcasting Act 1996 to providing an on-demand programme service or a non-UK on-demand programme service.

Amendment 70, page 123, leave out lines 32 to 34.

This amendment is consequential upon Amendment 28.

Amendment 71, page 123, line 39, after “Part” insert—

“as it relates to relevant services of the kind described in section 98(7)(g).” —(*Julia Lopez.*)

This amendment secures consistency within section 105(1D) of the Broadcasting Act 1996, inserted by Schedule 2.

Schedule 4

CHAPTER 2 OF PART 3: MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: 72, page 133, line 3, at end insert—

“23A In section 107 (code relating to avoidance of unjust or unfair treatment or interference with privacy), in subsection (5)(b), for “the Welsh Authority”, in both places it occurs, substitute “S4C”.

This amendment adds a consequential amendment relating to S4C.

Amendment 73, page 137, line 15, at end insert—

“(2A) In sub-paragraph (2), after “of a” insert “television”. —(*Julia Lopez.*)

This amendment secures that the relevant purpose set out in paragraph 10(2) of Schedule 12 to the Communications Act 2003 relates to television programme services.

Schedule 5

TIER 1 SERVICES: CHAPTER TO BE INSERTED AS CHAPTER 3 OF PART 4A OF THE 2003 ACT

Amendment made: 74, Schedule 5, page 142, line 31, after “to” insert—

“an on-demand programme service that is”.

This amendment clarifies the reference to on-demand programme services that are Tier 1 services by virtue of section 368HA(1)(a) of the Communications Act 2003.

Amendment made: 75, page 146, leave out lines 9 to 14. —(*Julia Lopez.*)

This amendment removes repeated text.

Schedule 7

TIER 1 SERVICES: AMENDMENTS OF OTHER LEGISLATION

Amendment made: 76, page 159, line 41, at end insert—

“(4) In Schedule 9 to that Act (certain internet services not subject to duties relating to regulated provider pornographic content)—

(a) in the italic heading before paragraph 5, after “services” insert “and non-UK on-demand programme services that are Tier 1 services”;

(b) in paragraph 5 (on-demand programme services (entire internet service))—

(i) in sub-paragraph (1), after “programme service” insert “or a non-UK on-demand programme service that is a Tier 1 service”;

(ii) in sub-paragraph (2), for “has” substitute “, “non-UK on-demand programme service” and “Tier 1 service” have”;

(iii) in sub-paragraph (2), for “section 368A” substitute “sections 368A, 368AA and 368HA”;

(c) in the italic heading before paragraph 6, after “services” insert “and non-UK on-demand programme services that are Tier 1 services”;

(d) in paragraph 6 (on-demand programme services (part of internet service))—

(i) in sub-paragraph (2)(a), after “programme service” insert “or a non-UK on-demand programme service that is a Tier 1 service”;

(ii) in sub-paragraph (3), after “programme service” insert “or a non-UK on-demand programme service that is a Tier 1 service”. —(*Julia Lopez.*)

This amendment adds to the descriptions of internet services that are listed in Schedule 9 to the Online Safety Act 2023 and are therefore internet services that are “exempt” for the purposes of Part 5 of that Act.

Schedule 11

SCHEDULE TO BE INSERTED AS SCHEDULE 16B TO THE 2003 ACT

Amendment made: 77, page 168, line 6, after “362AZ(6)(a)” insert—

“or (as the case may be) 362BR(6)(a)”.—(Julia Lopez.)

This amendment adds a reference to the corresponding provision in Part 3B of the Communications Act 2003 (inserted by clause 48).

Third Reading

5.36 pm

Julia Lopez: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I am glad that, as we finish the Bill’s passage through this House, it is with the same enthusiasm and cross-party support as when we began. My hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Rob Butler) told me that he had enjoyed the Public Bill Committee, which is quite the achievement. While we have made some changes to refine and clarify the intentions of the measures, the Bill and its aims remain relatively unchanged. This is in part down to the considered and thoughtful contributions from industry stakeholders following draft publication and throughout the pre-legislative scrutiny process.

I would like to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale) for his efforts to prepare and introduce the Bill. I am grateful for his enthusiasm and thoroughness in ensuring that the Department continues to deliver for our broadcasters and journalists. He is a true champion of these industries and I know how appreciative they are of his work. Even now, he sidles up to me in the Lobby trying to get his particular issues over the line.

I would like to extend my particular thanks to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Dame Caroline Dinenage), for its thorough pre-legislative scrutiny earlier this year. I thank all the stakeholders for the time they gave as witnesses to the inquiry. My right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb), the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) and Baroness Stowell of Beeston have all, in their respective Chair positions, played a vital part in the Bill’s passage and I thank them for their work thus far.

I should also like to thank my hon. Friends the Members for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins), for Aylesbury, for East Devon (Simon Jupp) and for Warrington South (Andy Carter) for their thoughtful and considered engagement. On the Opposition Benches, I extend my particular thanks to the hon. Members for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock) and for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) for the constructive way in which they approached the Committee scrutiny of the Bill.

Before the Bill moves to the other place, I should also like to say thank you to the significant number of DCMS policy officials and lawyers for their work in preparing such a substantial Bill alongside my parliamentary counsel. Finally, as is customary—and also because I mean it—I want to say thank you to the Bill team from DCMS: Victoria MacCallum, Charlotte Brennan, Lisa Bourke, Mollie McHale, and Elie Pelling. I would

also like to thank Myrtle Macpherson and Liam Hunt from private offices, who have supported us throughout this process. We have a truly talented media team in DCMS, and I am grateful to them for all the work they have done and for the patience they have shown throughout the years we have been working on this together.

We have discussed the significance of the Bill at length. When it receives Royal Assent, we will launch a wide-ranging programme of secondary legislation to fully implement its measures. We will see further considered collaboration between the Government, industry and Ofcom as these new reforms are implemented. I look forward to seeing this important legislation come into force, and to supporting industry and Ofcom as we move into a new era for broadcasting.

I commend the Bill to the House.

5.39 pm

Thangam Debbonaire: I join the Minister in celebrating the collaborative and consensual approach to the Bill, although I am disappointed that the Government chose not to support the excellent amendments that we either tabled or supported. I am sorry that there has been no movement yet on SLAPPs, to which I hope we will return.

I thank everyone who has contributed today, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) and my hon. Friends the Members for Eltham (Clive Efford) and for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter). I also thank my colleagues who sat on the Public Bill Committee, including my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock), who did such a brilliant job on the Front Bench, my right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) and my hon. Friends the Members for Luton North (Sarah Owen) and for Eltham.

I also thank the Select Committee members who did such a great job of coming up with good ideas, and who were so thoughtful and considered in their work. I thank the right hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) for being willing to communicate with me on possible amendments. I thank colleagues on both sides of the House who have been open to listening to difficult arguments.

The Bill’s stakeholders are many and varied. Some broadcasters are thrilled to bits and others still have questions, but they have all been willing to take time to talk to us. We have looked at a wide range of measures that we know are necessary for broadcasters, but section 40 has been difficult for many people. I respect the fact that people have approached this with serious intent, purpose and commitment.

We probably will not vote on Third Reading, because we all agree that the Bill is necessary. As the Bill goes to the other place, section 40 will be removed and we will not stand in its way, as my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East outlined in Committee and as I reiterate now. However, we have missed an opportunity this evening for a more nuanced version of that repeal, and we are disappointed that amendment 2 did not pass.

There is a further discussion to be had about how we can protect the provision of trusted public interest journalism in the modern age. If we are in government after the next general election, Labour commits to working with the Press Recognition Panel, IPSO, Impress

[Thangam Debbonaire]

and anyone else we need to work with to ensure the highest standards of ethical journalism. Whether it is online disinformation undermining our democratic institutions, the decline of local press outlets or the rise of SLAPPs, all these issues have to be taken seriously.

For now, our aim must be to ensure the passage of this Bill so that these important measures reach the statute book. The film and TV industries remain crucial to our economy, contributing more than £18 billion in 2020 alone and supporting 280,000 jobs across the country. It is right that we update the law after 20 years, so, as well as thanking colleagues, I thank the Clerks in the Public Bill Office, who have worked incredibly hard to ensure the Bill receives proper scrutiny by assisting us in drafting amendments.

I thank the public service broadcasters, UK radio stations, TV and radio platforms, podcasters, viewer representative groups and all the other stakeholders. And I particularly thank the Hacked Off campaigners, who have been willing to speak so generously and openly about their often painful experiences.

5.43 pm

Rob Butler (Aylesbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak on Third Reading. As the Minister said, it was quite fun and enjoyable to serve on the Public Bill Committee—although the Whips Office should not see that as a hint that I want to be on every future Public Bill Committee.

The Media Bill is an important piece of legislation, and a key theme throughout its passage has been the importance of prominence for our public service broadcasters—the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5. I should declare that I have worked for three of them, and I am sure that Channel 4 will one day complete the set. That is not a hint that I will be looking for a new job in a year's time, perhaps much to the Opposition's chagrin.

I am extremely pleased with the new regime to ensure appropriate prominence for public service broadcasters, but I wanted to say a word about it. I was pleased to hear the Minister say that there will be detailed consultation on the work with Ofcom, but it is important that Parliament sets out clearly to the regulator what we mean by prominence. I look forward to the Government taking a robust stance to ensure that Ofcom feels entitled and empowered to adopt a muscular approach. It must be bold with the TV manufacturers in expressing the will of this place to ensure that the PSBs really are featured prominently.

We need look at only one recent example of television to prove the value of PSBs: the drama that has made the headlines in recent weeks, the ITV programme “Mr Bates vs. The Post Office”. It highlighted an injustice to millions of people who had not previously been aware of the Horizon scandal, despite the fact that it had been covered in many news media and that the Government were already working extremely hard to provide redress and recompense for postmasters well before the drama was aired.

“Mr Bates” has had an immediate and important effect, but the programme could only have been made by a PSB. The nature of that story is such that, yes, it is of massive interest to the UK audience, but its international

appeal as a television programme might be less evident. ITV recognised the significance of the scandal, put serious money into it and took a commercial risk that would likely not have been approved by a non-PSB. That speaks to the value of the legislation before us.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight this issue, but it is also right to highlight the role of the Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade, the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake). For 18 months before that broadcast, the Minister worked hard. We need to recognise that his 18-month contribution coincided with the ITV programme, and the two came together at the right time.

Rob Butler: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point. As I said, the Government had been acting well in advance of the drama, but the programme made the public aware in a way that the news had not been able to. The Government made serious efforts—he is right to draw attention to the incredible work of the current Minister with responsibility for postal services—to achieve recompense and redress, but the TV drama made the public aware of the scandal and the need for redress.

Channel 5 has pointed out that public service content relies on “easy access” for viewers. Without the reforms in the Bill, the significant risk is that proper public-value content will be harder to find for audiences. That cannot be tenable. I am delighted that the Bill seeks to overcome that. It is imperative that Ofcom ensures and assures prominence for our PSBs, as the House expects.

I do not want to detain the House any longer, but I will just say that public service broadcasting is one of the things that makes this country special. There is a Britishness about our broadcasting system and market that is unique. The Bill recognises and protects that, and I am delighted to support it.

5.47 pm

Kirsty Blackman: I want to say a few thank yous, but I will first talk about the Bill briefly. We need a Media Bill. I am glad that the Government are doing their best to strike a balance between rights and responsibilities with the PSBs, as I said earlier. It is important that the Bill updates the existing situation and improves things for internet access services. It includes many welcome steps forward.

I still have the concern I expressed earlier about the definition of on-demand services. I appreciate what the Minister said—for example, that Disney+ is covered by it—but if we look at TV viewing apps on a PlayStation, the order of the apps or of the programmes is not covered by the definition. Because a PlayStation is mostly for playing games, its on-demand TV section is not covered. I think more can be done to future-proof the definition and update it to ensure that it covers everything that the Government want it to cover. It should cover the ways in which people generally watch television, especially those methods that increase as time goes on. I do not want to be overly critical, but I wanted to flag that point again.

Coming to the thank yous, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) for his work and that of his team, especially on listed events. He has been working on that campaign ever since I have known him, and I am certain

that the rejection of his new clause today will not result in him sitting quietly. He will continue to speak on behalf of Scottish football fans, although Six Nations rugby was also an important part of his speech.

We did not take oral evidence, which is fairly unusual for a Bill Committee that starts off in the House of Commons. I understand the Minister's reasons for that decision, which involved the pre-legislative consultation that took place. However, several organisations were disappointed not to have the opportunity to give oral evidence directly to the Committee. I thank all those organisations that came forward. The shadow Secretary of State mentioned quite a few.

Many organisations have worked incredibly hard to ensure that Members of Parliament know their views. I particularly thank Broadcast 2040+, the Media Reform Coalition, BBC Alba, STV, Channel 4, BBC, Amazon and Hacked Off, members of which I met on several occasions, particularly about the amendments that we discussed today. I hope that we get close to what was promised to those who gave evidence to the Leveson inquiry and to a resolution that means greater fairness for everybody. Unfortunately, it feels as though the Bill is not the place where that will happen. It is clear from views across the House that change needs to happen to ensure that people get the redress and justice that they hope for.

I thank all those who have put time and effort into trying to improve the Bill. I thank all the staff who have worked on the Bill, whether those on the Government's Bill team or the Clerks who have done their best with the messy amendments that I sent them and asked them to make into something that looks vaguely sensible. Those staff are never mentioned enough. I thank all those who have had an input into the Bill.

5.51 pm

Damian Green: I congratulate the Minister and the Department on getting the Bill this far. If I may be presumptuous, in the unavoidable absence of the Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, I thank the Minister for her kind remarks about the Select Committee's contribution to the scrutiny of the Bill.

This is probably the appropriate time to note the Bill's historic nature. It is 20 years since the House passed an equivalent Bill. Twenty years ago, Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat and Twitter or X—whatever we call it these days—did not exist. The entire landscape has changed completely. Regulating with tools that are 20 years out of date is impossible. That is why it is important that the Bill is future proofed. The thought occurs to me that if it takes 20 more years before the House comes back to the subject, by then we will doubtless get sound and vision beamed straight into our ears and eyeballs after pressing the chip that will have been implanted in us. Regulating that will be even more difficult. I was pondering which Minister will be here in 20 years to cope with that, and it will almost certainly be my right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale), who has done the job on and off for several decades already. I have every confidence that he will still be doing it perfectly well in the 2040s when we next come back to the subject.

I echo the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Rob Butler) about the importance of public service broadcasting, which is one of the glories

of this country. That is something that we have got right over many years. I hope and expect that the Bill will allow us to continue to get it right for many years to come. I wish the Bill well for the rest of its passage.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Roger Gale): May I simply say that if the right hon. Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale) is here for the next Bill, I hope that I will be in the Chair to see it?

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS

That the draft Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) Order 2024, which was laid before this House on 18 December 2023, be approved.—(*Robert Largan.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

SENIOR COURTS

That the Civil Procedure (Amendment No. 4) Rules 2023 (SI, 2023, No. 1397), dated 14 December 2023, a copy of which was laid before this House on 18 December 2023, be approved.—(*Robert Largan.*)

Question agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT (FEBRUARY, EASTER, MAY BANK HOLIDAY AND WHITSUN RECESSES)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 25),

That this House, at its rising on Thursday 8 February 2024, do adjourn until Monday 19 February 2024; at its rising on Tuesday 26 March 2024, do adjourn until Monday 15 April 2024; at its rising on Thursday 2 May 2024, do adjourn until Tuesday 7 May 2024; and, at its rising on Thursday 23 May 2024, do adjourn until Monday 3 June 2024.—(*Mr Marcus Jones.*)

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Household Support Fund beyond April 2024

5.54 pm

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I rise to present a petition about the need for the Government to fund the household support fund from April 2024. The fund has supported over 10 million people since October 2022 to afford food and utilities during the cost of living crisis, preventing millions from being plunged deeper into poverty. Yet the Government are axing this funding in March 2024, with no regard for the most vulnerable families across the country. The petition states:

"The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to provide adequate support for low-income households for essentials through the Household Support Fund, and ensuring this provision is extended beyond March 2024."

[Afzal Khan]

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the constituency of Manchester Gorton,

Declares that the Household Support Fund has played a vital role in supporting low income households to pay for essentials like energy bills and food following the pandemic and during the cost of living crisis; notes that since October 2021, the Government has provided over £2 billion to local authorities in England; further declares that over 10 million awards were made using this funding between 1 October 2022 and 31 March 2023, playing an important role it played in alleviating poverty; and further declares that the government has failed to commit to funding the Household Support Fund beyond March 2024 which risks plunging millions of people across England into poverty.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to provide adequate support for low-income households for essentials through the Household Support Fund, and ensuring this provision is extended beyond March 2024.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002900]

Food Insecurity

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): I rise to present a petition on behalf of the constituents of Linlithgow and East Falkirk, relating to food insecurity. At this time of a cost of living crisis, it is shocking that one in four households in the UK with children have experienced food insecurity, with 28% of young mums skipping meals—a figure that rises to 37% for those on universal credit.

With your indulgence, Mr Deputy Speaker, I say to those petitioners affected by the issue and other aspects of the cost of living crisis that I am hosting a cost of living drop-in event on Friday at the Reconnect Regal theatre and I encourage them to come along.

The petition states:

“The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to review the rate of Universal Credit to ensure it covers the essentials and that no parent or child goes hungry, and also that the Government introduces measures to stop oil and gas companies profiting at record levels whilst families are unable to afford necessities.

And the petitioners remain, etc.”

Following is the full text of the petition: [The petition of residents of the constituency of Linlithgow and East Falkirk,

Declares that in a time of crisis in the cost of living, one in four UK households with children have experienced food insecurity, affecting an estimated four million children; further that in their struggle to feed their children, 28% of young mums are skipping meals each day, with this figure increasing to 37% among young mums on Universal Credit; and notes that while the spiralling cost of energy is affecting the cost of food production, storage and transport and families find themselves choosing between heating and eating, oil and gas companies post record profits, paying out billions to shareholders and continuing to be aided by UK Government subsidies and tax reliefs.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to review the rate of Universal Credit to ensure it covers the essentials and that no parent or child goes hungry, and also that the Government introduces measures to stop oil and gas companies profiting at record levels whilst families are unable to afford necessities.

And the petitioners remain etc.]

[P002906]

Ceasefire and the State of Palestine

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): This petition, on behalf of the residents of Glasgow North, was drafted before the ruling of the International Court of Justice and the decision of the UK Government to cut funding to that United Nations Relief and Works Agency, but that makes the petition calling for an end to the collective punishment of the Palestinian people, 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 civilian populations all the more urgent.

The petition also recognises the resolution of the House on 13 October 2014, calling on the UK Government to recognise the state of Palestine, alongside the state of Israel. The petition states:

“The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to join with others in the international community in urgently pressing all parties to agree to an immediate ceasefire, and to call on the UK Government to recognise the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel.

And the petitioners remain, etc.”

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the constituency of Glasgow North,

Declares that the attacks by Hamas on Israel on 7th October 2023 were acts of terror, and unequivocally condemns the taking of hostages and the loss of innocent lives in those attacks; further that the petitioners condemn the disproportionate response of the Israel Defence Forces, and affirms that there must be an end to the collective punishment of the Palestinian people; further declares 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; further declares support for the calls by the United Nations and many other international actors for an immediate ceasefire on all sides of the conflict and supports the global consensus in support of a two-state solution with a sovereign, prosperous Palestinian state, living side by side with a safe and secure Israel; and notes the resolution of the House of Commons on 13th October 2014 calling on the UK Government to recognise the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to join with others in the international community in urgently pressing all parties to agree to an immediate ceasefire, and to call on the UK Government to recognise the state of Palestine alongside the state of Israel.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P002908]

Fossil Fuels: Lobbying

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Robert Langan.)

5.59 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): To avert climate breakdown, the vast majority of the fossil fuel industry's coal, gas and oil reserves need to stay firmly in the ground. Yet successive Governments, led by different political parties, have failed to take the kind of action that the science demands. They have known the indisputable facts and the consequences of inaction. Such consequences include the fact that the costs of delaying, and of failing to address climate, economic and social chaos, far outweigh those associated with an orderly transition along the lines of a jobs-rich, inequality-busting green new deal. Yet Government after Government have continued with business as usual. Government after Government have refused to grasp that despite some breakthroughs, successes and progress, the big picture has continued to get worse.

I do not deny that we are now seeing record amounts of energy being generated from renewable resources, for example, but these very welcome achievements do nothing to eliminate the dangerous damage arising from the continued extraction and burning of fossil fuels. Given what the experts have been saying for decades now, we have to ask ourselves why this Government, and others before them, have presided over, and colluded in, the frankly criminal decisions that have seen yet more oil, gas and coal continue to be explored and exploited. The answer to that question can be traced back to one consistent factor: the role of the fossil fuel industry in our politics. For over those very same decades when climate scientists have been warning of the rapidly shrinking window to avert a climate emergency, fossil fuel companies and their lobbyists have been denying the science, and then they have delayed, weakened and sabotaged climate action. Those tactics have enabled them to make billions in profits, while heating the planet and destroying communities.

In this debate, I want to highlight some of the ways in which fossil fuel influence is exerted in our politics and to propose how it should urgently be curtailed. I want to start with a case study, featuring the little-known fossil fuel lobby group Offshore Energies UK—OEUK—whose members include North sea operators such as Equinor, Harbour Energy, BP and Shell, and whose activities have resulted in a windfall tax that actually rewards companies for digging up more oil and gas, and a “price floor” introduced entirely at the industry's behest. Let me explain how that has happened. According to analysis of data in the public domain, OEUK and its members met UK Government Ministers more than 210 times in the year following Russia's invasion of Ukraine—that is nearly once every working day. In June 2022, in that one month, when the Energy (Oil and Gas) Profits Levy Bill was drafted and consulted on, the industry went into lobbying overdrive: OEUK and its operator members had twice as many meetings with Ministers as they did in the month before or after. It also held a parliamentary reception, in the name of the all-party group on the British offshore oil and gas industry, for which it provides, conveniently, the secretariat. The main message for the MPs and peers in attendance was that the windfall tax would “undermine and disrupt”

investment in the sector. In a meeting a few days later with the then Chancellor, now Prime Minister, the industry spelt out what it wanted to see in the Bill. Its recommendations, also put in writing to the Treasury, included protection for petroleum revenue tax repayments, which are, in essence, an existing tax break that can pay fossil fuel firms back for taxes they have paid in the past. The subsequent legislation did exactly as OEUK requested. Moreover, it introduced an enormous 80% “investment allowance”, which, combined with existing tax breaks, means that fossil fuel companies can claim £91 back for every £100 they invest in UK oil and gas extraction. As a result of that climate-wrecking loophole, Shell, for example, went on to pay no windfall tax at all in 2022.

The lobbying around the Bill was happening in the context of a wider lobbying campaign by OEUK, which had been urging the Treasury all year to reinstate regular meetings of the so-called “fiscal forum”, an advisory group that basically invites OEUK and its members to shape their own tax regime. On 9 December 2022, they got their wish; the fiscal forum met again, hosted by the new Chancellor, the right hon. Member for South West Surrey (Jeremy Hunt), and the industry used the meeting to claim, yet again, that the windfall tax would harm investment in the sector. That meeting occurred in the wake of the Chancellor's already having announced further changes to the windfall tax regime that would, in effect, see taxpayers actually paying and handing over money to oil and gas firms for investments being made. None the less, those companies wanted still more and they used the fiscal forum to demand that a price floor be introduced—and, surprise, surprise, they got it.

In spring 2023, OEUK board members of Harbour Energy and Equinor met with Treasury officials. The minutes, secured via a freedom of information request, state that the “Equinor reps smiled” at Government's reassurances—yes, I am sure they did.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): The hon. Lady is eloquently setting out how the Government are responding to heavy lobbying from the fossil fuel industry. Does she agree that no future generation—neither our children nor our grandchildren—will ever thank us, the politicians of today, for having put all our energy and focus into the energies of the past? Does she agree that the fossil fuel industry should really look at itself as well?

Caroline Lucas: It will come as no surprise to the hon. Member that I completely agree with her. I do wonder what our own kids will think when the planet continues to heat still further, and what their kids, in turn, will think. What were we thinking of? What was the fossil fuel industry thinking of, certainly, beyond its profits? Apparently very little.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady for bringing forward this debate. She has been assiduous in her commitment to these issues. Indeed, I would go as far as to say the hon. Lady has, on many occasions, been the conscience of this House on these issues. Does she agree that it is essential that votes cast and actions taken in this place are influenced by facts and reasoned opinion, and never by one individual or group? While there is a place for lobbying—let us be

[Jim Shannon]

honest: it is through lobbying that we learn more; I understand that—it should be only a part of the consideration of any issue.

Caroline Lucas: I thank the hon. Member for both his comments, with which I agree, and his kind remarks. He is right: of course, lobbying happens, but a line gets crossed when money starts to change hands. There are perceptions—never mind what the reality is—of Members and groups potentially pursuing interests that are to their own advantage, rather than for the public good.

In June 2023, after sustained further lobbying meetings, letters and statements in the press, the Government introduced the price floor that OEUK had so assiduously lobbied for—surprise, surprise. To summarise: privileged access and meetings with Ministers, an opaque, official-looking lobbying group and an oil and gas fiscal forum advising the Treasury collectively resulted in significant changes to Government plans, which, in turn, resulted in a windfall tax that raised just half of what the Government had promised and saved corporations billions. All, of course, at a time of record fossil fuel company profits and a cost of living crisis for consumers. That is what happens when we let fossil fuels into every corner of our politics.

That is only the tip of the iceberg. Last year, it was reported that Gulf states pushing fossil fuels at COP28 had hired the now Lord Hammond and Lord Maude, along with former Prime Minister Tony Blair and other former leading politicians as “consultants”. As we know, it is incredibly easy for senior British politicians and civil servants to swap Government offices for consultancy retainers; they simply have to register with the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments—a body which even its chair, the former Conservative MP and now Lord Pickles, admits is toothless—if they take up any new paid or unpaid work within two years of leaving office. For example, ACOBA’s response to Lord Hammond working for Mohammed bin Salman’s regime was to note that his inside knowledge of the UK Government could be

“perceived to offer an unfair advantage”,

and then it went ahead and approved it all the same. When, in 2021, Lord Hammond’s advisory work was deemed by ACOBA to have breached the rules, the only sanction was a strongly worded letter.

I know and accept the convention not to criticise the conduct of individual MPs or peers, so I simply want to set out facts that are already in the public domain and on the public record. It is not just former Ministers going through the revolving door between parliamentarians and the fossil fuel industry to take up lucrative consultancy roles. Second jobs, placements, internships and sabbaticals are all different sides of the same coin, and all too often a lot of coins are made or exchanged.

Members of this House can benefit financially from the fossil fuel sector in other ways, too, as the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers) presumably did when she held £70,000 worth of shares in Shell for five years when she was Environment Secretary, as published in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests in August 2023. I have done the courtesy of alerting any Member to whom I am referring in this Chamber, by emailing them to let them know. The right hon. Member

for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) also did in the shape of payments from oil company clients to business advisory service Zahawi & Zahawi, pieced together in research carried out by journalists Jonathan Watts and Pamela Duncan for *The Guardian*, from his shareholdings in an oil and gas exploration and production company, and the £1 million worth of donations he received from fossil fuel companies, including a regular monthly payment of £30,000 that stopped only when he became a Minister.

The right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes)—who is in this place and with whom I have had a conversation to inform him that I am about to reference some of his interests—has been a Member of this place since 1997. He served as the Energy Minister under the now Foreign Secretary, and held down a second job for BB Energy, which trades more than 33 million metric tonnes of oil every year. As a strategic adviser, he was paid £50,000 per year for the equivalent of around 11 days’ work, according to his own Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

Three of the biggest donors to the Conservative party are funders or board members of the climate science sceptic think-tank the Global Warming Policy Foundation, or its spin-off Net Zero Watch. Companies from Cardiff Airport to ExxonMobil are handing out football tickets and passes for hospitality events to MPs across the political spectrum. In fact, I think I can safely say that there is probably only one UK-wide political party represented in Parliament that has not had some kind of handout from the fossil fuel industry, whether donations, expenses-paid trips, salaries or gifts. At this point, I give credit to the hon. Member for Coventry South (Zarah Sultana) for going public about the food hamper sent to her by staff at Heathrow in the hope it would secure her support for their third runway. They obviously did not know her very well.

Financial benefit cannot be divorced from conflict of interest or perceived conflict. It is worth noting that there is no requirement on Members of this House to declare any income from dividends or any income gained from the sale of shares. Given the seemingly routine way in which shares get moved into blind trusts when MPs become Ministers, as used by the current Prime Minister and Chancellor, or the £70,000 threshold at which we are supposed to publicly declare a shareholding stake, the idea that we have transparency around conflicts of interests is laughable.

The evidence suggests that Members of the other place are just as at risk of the perception, at least, that they are influenced by dirty fossil fuel money. A total of 43 peers have a significant stake in the industry according to 2021 data. There, the declaration threshold is lower at £50,000. It is lower again at the Senedd and Holyrood, but they are certainly not immune to fossil fuel influence. A lower threshold would clearly be an improvement, but we need to do more than just tinker with the existing rules. In the vast majority of these instances, nobody is doing anything that breaks the parliamentary rules. The Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 only restricts about 5% of lobbyists—mostly trade unions representing workers, and charities. Meanwhile, corporations can pretty much do what they like, and consistently they do.

When we realise, as analysis by *The Guardian* clearly shows, that there is a direct link between fossil fuel money and the positions that MPs take in Parliament, it

is self-evident that the rules cannot be fit for purpose. I believe that being an MP is about serving the public interest, not the interests of fossil fuel companies. In case anyone wants to suggest that they are working in the public interest, let me remind the House of the economic impact of continuing to extract and burn fossil fuels: public debt could rise to 289% of GDP by the end of the century if climate change is left unchecked, according to the Office for Budget Responsibility.

The climate impact is well known: if we want to be in with even a 50% chance of staying within the all-important 1.5° limit, we cannot open new fields, and we should be phasing out existing fossil fuel infrastructure in ways that will secure a just transition. That is not what these companies are using their influence to make happen, and they are frighteningly effective. Climate Action Tracker cites the Government's doubling down on North sea oil and gas extraction as a key factor in the UK's insufficient rating on compatibility with the Paris agreement and 1.5°. These companies' dirty fingerprints can be seen all over our politics, and it is time to clean things up. What does that look like?

First, there would be a firewall between the industry and decision making—no lobbying meetings. If meetings are happening—for example, about the best way to secure the green transition—there must be full transparency, delivered in something approaching real time, not months after the event. At present, the Government publish details of some meetings every three months or so—often, it is every six months—but they are incomplete at best. I had to ask a series of formal parliamentary questions to expose a lunch that the then Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the right hon. Member for Spelthorne (Kwasi Kwarteng), had with Saudi oil company Aramco. It was missing from his official declaration. First I was told that that was because it was a “social” occasion, and then that there had been an administrative oversight. All that happened months after the event—an event that, frankly, should never have happened in the first place.

It goes without saying that the behind-closed-doors cosy dinners, drinks events and so forth have to be dragged into the sunlight. There is no convenient line between social events and political business for Ministers or Ministers-in-waiting. If they have conversations about policy, either off or on the record, with someone from the oil and gas sector, or indeed another sector that stands to benefit, they should be required to make that public pretty much immediately.

A proper firewall means no industry representation on panels, Government research bodies, or expert or advisory bodies; no fossil fuel involvement in climate negotiations; no place on Government delegations to international negotiations or trade missions; no staff exchanges between the industry and Government Departments; far greater periods between leaving a ministerial role and Parliament, and consulting for an oil and gas firm, for example, with a complete ban on any sitting parliamentarians doing that kind of work, paid or otherwise; no implicit endorsements from politicians as a result of their speaking alongside industry representatives, or at events with which the industry has any kind of association; and certainly no fossil fuel company sponsorship of political party conferences.

Last year, Chevron co-hosted an event at Conservative party conference with the tagline:

“Can fossil fuel companies play a role in the energy transition?”

We know that the only role that they want to play is one of delay and obfuscation, so why should they be able to pay to get privileged access to Ministers and potential Ministers?

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): The hon. Lady will be surprised to learn that I agree with some of what she has said. It would certainly be wrong of such companies to lobby Ministers on any interests that they have. She will know that my views on these matters long predate any such interests—and for the record, I never lobbied any Minister on any matter connected with the interests that she has described.

Caroline Lucas: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and I understand, of course, why he would want to make it. I would simply say that there is concern around perceived influence as well as direct influence. I have no reason to doubt for a second what he has just said—I am sure that it is absolutely true—but at the same time, when people outside this place look at the facts that I have been laying out this evening, in a dispassionate way I hope, alarm bells will start to ring, at the very least. We are talking about an industry that has a massive impact on the future of our planet, and I think it right, given the access that it appears to have to people in high places, to have this debate and raise those questions in this place.

Wera Hobhouse: Does the hon. Lady agree that, although we all roughly agree that we need to get to net zero, the biggest problem is the pace of change? The fossil fuel industry has successfully lobbied us all to say, “Not so fast! You can't do it so fast. Don't pull the rug from under our feet.” That is the biggest danger we face, because if we miss the target, there is no point talking about net zero. We have a 2050 target and we need to reach it urgently; we cannot delay any further, or go at a slower pace than necessary.

Caroline Lucas: I thank the hon. Member for her intervention, which reminds me of a powerful thing that the US campaigner Bill McKibben says: delaying is the new denial, and winning slowly is the same as losing. There is a real imperative here to be fast.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this Adjournment debate, and on the strength of her arguments. I echo the points made by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) about her contribution to this House over the years. It has been a pleasure to serve with her over the last decade and more.

Would the hon. Lady add to her list the need to reduce the overall cost of politics? An article I read recently estimated that spending in the forthcoming general election will dwarf anything that has happened before. The expenditure on social media alone will be greater than for the last official campaign period. Political parties go looking, as they are at the moment, for vast amounts of money to spend on electioneering, but it comes at a cost, because the funders who give them that money then want something in return.

Caroline Lucas: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and his kind comments. It is always a great pleasure to work with him, and I agree entirely: when it comes to spending on elections, we seem to have

[Caroline Lucas]

an arms race that is out of control, which of course drives the obsession with getting more money to line the war chests that enable parties to fight those elections. A cap on that funding is urgently required, which brings me to the next point I wanted to make.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): To take the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) made about elections a bit further, does the hon. Lady have any confidence that things might change following the next election, given that the Labour party has said that it will stand by any licences granted between now and then?

Caroline Lucas: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. It is incredibly disappointing that Labour has, in a sense, not followed its own logic; it is happy to say that it will not accept any new licences, but if Labour were to make the clear statement right now that once it got into power—if it did—it would revoke those licences, that could have a chilling effect on all the licences that are going ahead. They are going ahead at a huge rate, and the Government want to see them go ahead even faster. When an official Opposition has it in its power to stop that process and chooses not to, “disappointing” is too polite a term, frankly.

I was coming to the issue of dirty money in politics. I want to see an end to it, because it comes with strings attached that are tying up in knots our chances of a liveable future. There can be no conceivable justification for allowing the fossil fuel lobby to directly or indirectly buy favours from politicians, so there should be no donating to MPs or to political parties, and no donations in kind, whether that is to all-party groups or via football tickets, event sponsorship or trips overseas. At the same time, the rules on conflicts of interest need redesigning to shut out vested fossil fuel interests, not simply have them declared on the record. It is time to close the revolving door. No side jobs or cosy secondments; no blind trusts, putting things in the name of one’s spouse, or raking in money from shares or second jobs; and of course, much tougher sanctions for breaches of the rules—including suspension, for example.

Thirdly and lastly, the preferential treatment meted out to the fossil fuel industry must come to an end—most immediately, the handing over of public subsidies and other incentives for fossil fuels must end. Most notably, that comes in the form of favourable tax regimes, which in the past have resulted in oil companies paying less than \$2 in tax per barrel of oil pumped from the North sea, compared with the \$15 per barrel that companies pay if they are operating in Norway.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The hon. Lady is making some excellent points. Does she agree that it is quite frustrating to look at the regime in Norway, which collects more tax, meaning that the people of Norway have a fund for the future, while we will not have anything at all by way of legacy benefits from the oil and gas industry—only an unliveable planet, if things continue as they are?

Caroline Lucas: I thank the hon. Lady very much for her eloquent intervention. She is exactly right. She underlines the point that stopping these vast subsidies for the fossil fuel industry is not only the moral thing to do, or in the interests of the climate; it is in the

economic interests of the future of this country. The wealth fund in Norway is a very good model that we could, and should, have followed.

What I have described is one of the countless ways in which our politics is siding with and enabling the fossil fuel sector, as well as the banks, lawyers, lobbyists, consultancies, think-tanks and many others that feed off it. Those companies should have no place in our politics; if they do, it is undemocratic, and deeply dangerous for climate action, given that their priority is putting forward policies that actively and significantly undermine the UK’s climate commitments. Instead, we should seek to change politics into a force that sides with the economic writing on the wall, and the only chance we have of a liveable future: a transition to a climate-safe future with the public we are elected to serve.

I will bring my remarks to an end with three questions for the Minister. First, can he tell me who in Government has overall responsibility for monitoring the influence that fossil fuel companies have as a result of their political lobbying? Secondly, can he confirm whether the Government are satisfied that the checks and balances in place are sufficient to ensure that parliamentarians are not influenced by fossil fuel lobbying? Thirdly, does he agree that this goes to the very heart of how Government and Parliament are run, and therefore warrants the establishment of, for example, a new dedicated Select Committee to properly and regularly scrutinise the influence of the fossil fuel industry, and indeed other corporate influence on political decision making, as well as to make recommendations for change?

We are talking about not just the impact on climate but the standing of Parliament in this country. I think many people look at this place and draw conclusions that are not particularly favourable; it looks as if we are out for ourselves. We need to clean up politics, both because it is the right thing to do and because it might be just one step towards beginning to rebuild our reputation with the British public.

6.25 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Alex Burghart): I congratulate the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) on gaining this Adjournment debate, and echo in part what the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said: although we do not agree on everything, we appreciate that she is to some extent the conscience of the House on these matters, and is always there to encourage Government and everyone else to go further.

I am pleased to be able to respond to some of the points that the hon. Lady raised. She made the case that the interactions between representatives of fossil fuel companies, political figures and those in public life should be transparent. The Government believe that lobbying is a legitimate part of political development in all areas, as long as it is conducted transparently and ethically to maintain the highest standards in public life. The Government outlined wide-ranging improvements to transparency around lobbying in their “Strengthening Ethics and Integrity in Central Government” policy statement of July 2023. These include revising guidance to widen the range of lobbying engagements declared by Departments, and linked reforms to the consultant lobbying framework. These measures, when implemented, will ensure that all lobbying activity, irrespective of

which sector is being represented, will be conducted openly and in accordance with the principles expected of participants in public life.

In the UK, a number of systems ensure that lobbying activity is conducted honestly and transparently. Taken together, these systems, which set the rules for the consultant lobbying industry, Ministers and Government Departments, Members of Parliament and political parties, ensure that it is clear whose interests are being represented in public life. The register of consultant lobbyists, created by the lobbying Act—the Transparency of Lobbying, non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014—has significantly increased transparency around the work of consultant lobbyists since its creation in 2015. The register makes it clear whose interests are being represented by consultant lobbyists, and provides accessible online information about those undertaking consultant lobbying and their clients, as well as details of investigations into alleged breaches of the Act.

The Act also established an independent registrar of consultant lobbyists, who has powers to monitor and enforce compliance and administers the register of consultant lobbyists. The register of consultant lobbyists complements existing transparency mechanisms, including the quarterly publication of ministerial meetings with external organisations, business appointment rules and industry-led regulation, such as subscription to industry codes of conduct.

From January 2024 onwards, meetings held between Ministers and consultant lobbyists will be declared through routine quarterly transparency. This will also apply to those senior officials who are subject to meeting declarations. New transparency guidance was published on gov.uk in December 2023, detailing stricter minimum standards for meeting descriptions, to ensure that declarations contain relevant, constructive information. As I said, new guidance expands the scope of transparency declarations for senior officials to include meetings held between external organisations and individuals, and directors general, finance and commercial directors, and senior responsible owners in the Government's major projects portfolio.

The code of conduct for Members of Parliament sets out the standards of behaviour expected of Ministers, and the rules on the registration and declaration of interests. The code provides that Members must fulfil conscientiously the requirements of the House in respect of the registration of interests in the Register of Members' Financial Interests and must always be open and frank in declaring any relevant interest in any proceeding in the House or its Committees. It is for the Standards Committee, not the Government, to consider any changes to the approach to the registration of interests.

Caroline Lucas: The Minister is obviously going through the existing architecture that is supposed to guard against undue influence from lobbyists, corporations and so on. I wonder whether he would agree with his presumably former colleague, now Lord Pickles, who admitted that the office of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments is toothless, and that work does need to be done on that. If when a Member breaches the rules they simply get a letter telling them, "You should not do that again," that will hardly be a sanction that anyone will be particularly worried about.

Alex Burghart: Obviously, the Government take seriously anything that Lord Pickles says, and I certainly do. He was my predecessor in Brentwood and Ongar, and I hold him in high regard. There is a process by which such comments are considered, and we will continue to go through it.

I hope the hon. Lady will appreciate that a chunk of the framework that I have just set out is new, and it is important that we give it a chance to work. What governs a lot of our thinking—perhaps where we diverge from her—is the fact that we cannot envisage a situation in which it would be wise to shut energy companies out of the discussions. We consider them to be fundamental to the transition to net zero. We also believe that some may have a role when we get to net zero and that it is clear that some fossil fuels will be necessary even when we reach that destination.

Consequently, the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero and her Ministers regularly met a wide range of stakeholders to discuss issues relating to energy security and net zero. Of course, that includes meeting oil and gas companies and representative organisations, as well as environmental organisations and charities. For a sector that supports around 200,000 jobs and is at the forefront of the drive to net zero and the energy transition, where the workforce is transferable to green jobs of the future, that is a responsible position to take.

The Prime Minister has reiterated that net zero is a priority for this Government, and we remain absolutely committed to meeting our legally binding net zero target. More than ever, we are determined to adopt a fair and pragmatic approach to net zero that minimises the burden on working people. No other country has matched our record on decarbonisation. Unlike most other countries, the UK's climate commitments are set in law. The UK is a net importer of oil and gas and a fast-declining producer, hence new oil and gas projects simply reduce the fall in the UK supply; they do not increase it on current levels. The new Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill will not undermine those commitments.

Caroline Lucas: The Minister is being generous with his time. He will know that just today the Climate Change Committee issued an interim report saying that the Government are off target when it comes to their commitments and the thresholds they are meant to meet. He will also know that the same committee has been pretty critical of, for example, the new Offshore Petroleum Licensing Bill. He cannot simply rest on his laurels and say that we had a good reputation in the past and therefore things are going to go well now—we are off track right now.

Secondly, the Minister talked about consultant lobbyists, but they are a tiny proportion of who is doing this work. For example, the Foreign Secretary was not registered as a consultant lobbyist when he worked for Greensill. The consultant lobbying issue is, frankly, a complete red herring here. We need to look beyond that at who is speaking to whom and with what effect.

Alex Burghart: Alas, I have no laurels on which to rest; I am merely a junior Minister. Obviously, the Government are keen that we have a fit-for-purpose regime that ensures that lobbying is transparent. That is why we have introduced a number of the changes that I have already outlined.

[Alex Burghart]

On the report published today by the committee, the hon. Lady will have to forgive me because I have not yet had time to consult it, but we always take the committee's findings seriously. She will also be aware that it has previously said that, even when we get to net zero, we will still require some fossil fuels for certain purposes.

Sir John Hayes: I think the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) has got a point about ACOBA, and so does Lord Pickles. Happily, I have never breached ACOBA's rules or any parliamentary rules, as she knows, but if anyone did so, surely there ought to be some measure that ACOBA could take? My hon. Friend the Minister has been through the process, as those of us who have been Ministers all have, and he will know that my own, long-established views on these subjects are unaltered, unaffected and uninfluenced by anything I do outside this place. But none the less, the point remains.

Alex Burghart: It is hard to imagine my right hon. Friend breaking any rules, I have to say. I know the authorities will have noted what he said on ACOBA.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion has clearly articulated her views on how the UK should aim to reach the goal of net zero. That we might differ on that does not detract from the core principle that a range of energy stakeholders all have a role. The Government's firm belief is that lobbying activity has an important and legitimate role to play in the policy development process, so long as interactions between lobbyists and political actors are properly declared.

We support the existing rules, which apply to the lobbying industry, Government and Parliament—both to individual Members and to informal groups and all-party parliamentary groups—and we shall continue to drive forward reforms to improve transparency. The hon. Lady might disagree, but in a democratic society, public policy is best informed by engagement and political debate. Elected representatives have to meet a wide range of people, not just people they agree with; that is democratic engagement. Such debate should be supported by an independent free press, and then, at the ballot box, we should trust the people.

Question put and agreed to.

6.35 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 30 January 2024

[CAROLINE NOKES *in the Chair*]

Victims of Road Traffic Offences: Criminal Justice System

[Relevant documents: e-petition 623592, Lifetime driving ban if you are convicted of causing death by dangerous driving; e-petition 617180, Make disregard for learners' safety an aggravating factor in driving offences; e-petition 590271, Shakeel's Law—Reform laws on hit and run drivers; e-petition 575620, Ryan's Law: Widen definition of 'death by dangerous driving'; e-petition 323926, Tougher sentences for hit and run drivers who cause death.]

9.30 am

Caroline Nokes (in the Chair): Before I call the hon. Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) to move the motion, can I ask for the co-operation of all Members taking part in this debate in ensuring that they abide by the House's sub judice resolution? That means that there must be no reference in debate to cases that are active in the UK courts, including inquests and any cases that have not reached the sentencing stage. I ask Members to take all reasonable steps to assure themselves before mentioning specific incidents that there are no active court proceedings at this time, and to avoid saying anything that appears to prejudge the outcome of a future case. I will intervene if it appears that a case being discussed is indeed active.

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered victims of road traffic offences and the criminal justice system.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this morning, Ms Nokes.

I am speaking not just as a representative of my North Devon constituency, but primarily as co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on cycling and walking. I am also here as a voice for the countless people across our country whose lives have been or could be tragically impacted by road crashes. I am careful to use the word "crashes" or "collisions" rather than "accidents" because RoadPeace, the charity supporting those who are bereaved or seriously injured after road traffic collisions, highlights that accidents are seen as "just one of those things". In many cases, as we will hear today, there are a series of actions leading up to avoidable tragedies.

This debate has been secured following the APPG's report on "Road Justice", published late last year, which is a profound testament to the urgent need for reform. It is not an exaggeration to say that this is a matter not just of policy, but of life and death. This inquiry was a follow-up to the first in 2017, when my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), who is now the Justice Secretary, held my position on the APPG. I spoke to him yesterday evening, and he is taking a keen interest in today's debate; he will be facilitating a meeting for me with the relevant Minister following it.

The Government's vision, as articulated in "Gear Change", is ambitious and commendable. It is to see half of all journeys in towns and cities made accessible by walking or cycling by 2030. However, this vision is currently jeopardised by a prevailing climate of fear among vulnerable road users, such as pedestrians and cyclists. It also does not consider the complexities of active travel on rural roads, the encouragement of which requires a vastly different approach compared to the encouragement of active travel in more urban environments. The Department for Transport has made fantastic efforts to include rurality in its funding, but I ask that it extends rural thinking across the whole portfolio, so we can have a joined-up approach to road safety.

As many of us will know from the volume of correspondence from constituents, road safety is an issue that affects pretty much all of us, and pedestrians and cyclists are most at risk. To tackle road safety and improve the experience in the justice system, everybody needs to work together, and that includes Government Departments. Many of the responsibilities in this area fall between the Department for Transport, the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice, and I am sure that collaboration can be improved.

The inquiry conducted by the APPG included 10 recommendations categorised into two groups: group A, requiring ambitious reform; and group B, rapid and more uncontroversial proposals that could be implemented quickly. They would all require support from the Ministry of Justice, the Department for Transport and the Home Office.

The first recommendation in group A—aiming for ambitious reforms—is that the Government introduce escalating penalties for repeat road traffic offences. Analysis of police data from 2014 to 2017 has revealed that 47% of those convicted for driving while disqualified had at least one previous conviction for the offence. However, there is not currently a means for penalties to increase in steps. Instead, the magistrate or judge is limited to the same maximum penalty that applies to a first offence. I raised this point in the Chamber with the Minister for prisons, parole and probation—the Minister of State, Ministry of Justice, my right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar)—last year, and asked about his Department's plans to escalate traffic offences, especially as repeat offenders are given the same penalty as a first-time offender. This would be an important step towards making road justice a reality for those walking, wheeling and cycling.

The APPG also asked for compulsory retesting of offenders. Any driver who has been disqualified should be required to undergo retesting. This currently happens only for the most serious of offences, such as causing death by dangerous driving. This is not punitive, but a necessary measure to ensure that drivers possess the skills and awareness needed for safe driving. The report proposed increasing the maximum sentence for dangerous driving to four years, reflecting the severity of such offences and their potential for causing harm. We need to deter and tackle dangerous drivers before they kill, so dangerous driving needs to be treated more seriously.

The concept of exceptional hardship in the totting-up process for driving disqualifications must also be revisited. We advocate a stricter interpretation to ensure that it is not misused as a loophole. Approximately 23% of those who amass 12 penalty points successfully argue against

[Selaine Saxby]

disqualification on the grounds of exceptional hardship. We should prioritise the hardship felt by families and victims of road crashes rather than prioritising the convenience of offenders.

The second part of the report calls for “thorough investigation of serious collisions”.

Standardised best practice-based guidelines for investigating serious road traffic collisions must be adopted across all police forces. This uniformity will ensure justice and proper accountability. There is also a need to implement a standardisation system for third-party reporting of traffic incidents via dashcams. Currently, this can be a postcode lottery, and the change would facilitate a more consistent and efficient handling of such reports.

The report recommends establishing a UK commissioner for road danger reduction. The role would involve measuring road danger, setting reduction targets and ensuring effective collaboration among various stakeholders. This campaign is championed by crash victim Sarah Hope, who I know hoped to be in the Public Gallery today. We need to recognise that crash victims should be treated as victims of crime, barring clear evidence to the contrary. This recognition is vital in addressing their trauma and loss.

As we look at extending understanding of the highway code, we need a better communication campaign to enhance that understanding and compliance with the revised highway code, which would also contribute significantly to improving road safety.

In addition to the report, I feel it important to mention some of the additional issues that road safety campaigners have highlighted to us. One is the lengthy delay in the publishing of various calls for evidence by the Department for Transport, and the delay in publishing its road safety strategy. The call for evidence for the Department for Transport’s roads policing review began on 13 July 2020, with recommendations due in spring 2021. To date, no update has been published. In May 2014, the coalition Government at the time committed to undertake a full review of offences and penalties. Although this is no longer the same Government, for 10 years various Ministers in both the Department for Transport and the Ministry of Justice have promised that this is coming in “due course”. I hope that today the Minister will be able to provide a significant update on that timeline.

The Department for Transport has said that it intends to publish a new road safety strategy. There is currently a document in place for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but not England. It is essential that we know when such an important document will be published and put into practice. I again ask the Minister whether he can give any indication of a timeframe for the publication of that road safety strategy.

Unfortunately, most Members will have seen awful cases of road violence in their constituencies and struggle to understand the reasoning behind the charge and sentencing. The Under-Secretary of State for Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones), asked me to represent the case of Harry Webb on behalf of Harry’s parents in Powys. Harry was cycling in Hackney when he was killed by a driver. Harry was killed in a 20 mph limit area; if the driver

had been driving at the speed limit, Harry would probably have got away with broken limbs at worst. However, that was not the case and if someone is charged—and there is no indication that they have been—it is regrettable that the case will not come to court until 2025. If someone is charged and found guilty, a criminally reckless driver will have been allowed behind the wheel until then. Harry’s parents have emphasised that perpetrators of road violence who have caused death or life-changing injuries often receive shockingly low sentences; their case is not the only one.

Not far from North Devon, my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann) has worked for some time on an upsetting case from his constituency—one in which the Saltern family were deprived of a much-loved son, and a wife was robbed of a life together with him. The family have since campaigned for a change in the law—Ryan’s law—to try to widen the definition of death by dangerous driving. Unfortunately, my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall was unable to attend today’s debate as he is in a Bill Committee, but I know that he, too, has met Ministers to discuss whether it is possible to introduce a new offence or new sentencing guidelines relating to failing to stop. In my constituency of North Devon, 451 residents have signed the Ryan’s law petition calling for the Government to widen the definition of death by dangerous driving to include:

“failure to stop, call 999 and render aid on scene until further help arrives.”

The distinction between careless and dangerous driving is blurred, leading to inconsistency in charging and prosecution. In my local policing area of Devon and Cornwall, the ratio of careless driving prosecutions to dangerous driving prosecutions is 21:1. Across England, the ratio differs greatly between 1.8:1 in Cleveland and 41:1 in Essex. That inconsistency cannot be attributed solely to variations in local driving behaviours or to different environments; it points to a systemic issue in our enforcement and understanding of these offences.

Sarah Dyke (Somerton and Frome) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) for securing this important debate. Sentences do not reflect the impact and nature of the crime in all circumstances. Family and friends should be able to have faith in the criminal justice system. Does the hon. Member agree that family and friends should be able to have faith that the punishment will fit the crime and that justice will be done?

Selaine Saxby: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention and highly recommend that she digest a copy of the “Road Justice” report, which covers that point. I entirely agree that there is a real need to ensure that families feel that confidence.

I want to highlight an important campaign, by RoadPeace West Midlands and Action Vision Zero, on the inadequacy of the law around hit-and-run collisions. Also unable to join us today is my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean), who wanted to highlight the work of local councillor Lucy Harrison, who unfortunately lost her brother in a road crash and is running the Remain and Report campaign with RoadPeace.

The rise in hit-and-run collisions, particularly involving pedestrians and cyclists, is alarming. The current laws, which allow up to 24 hours to report a collision, might be appropriate for a supermarket prang, but are woefully inadequate for serious or fatal collisions, especially as offenders potentially wait for alcohol or drugs to leave their system. The existing summary charge of “fail to stop”, which carries a maximum custodial sentence of six months, currently applies to all collision severities, including damage only; it is not appropriate for serious collisions. Two new criminal charges—failing to remain at the scene of a fatal collision and failing to remain at the scene of a serious injury collision—should be considered.

I want to draw attention to the Vision Zero South West scheme. Vision Zero’s ambition is to cut road deaths and serious injuries to zero by 2040 and to reduce current numbers by 50% by 2030. In 2022, however, there were 47 fatal injuries and 743 serious injuries in Devon and Cornwall, according to the road casualties summary. That number must come down. Although it is one of the safest regions when it comes to road safety, any death or serious injury is one too many.

Throughout the evidence gathering for the report, it became clear to me that the system has an issue with driving disqualifications. It is important to state and remind us all that driving is a privilege and not a right. When done correctly, driving can be an enormous tool for good, but we should remember that it is a dangerous activity—dangerous enough to need to be licensed.

Another flaw in the system that needs to be looked at is the fact that killer drivers can continue to drive while they await trial; sometimes that can be years, because of the delays in the courts. RoadPeace advocates for immediate licence suspensions for offenders. Of course we need to ensure that people are innocent until proven guilty but, as I have mentioned, driving is a privilege. A fork-lift truck operator involved in a fatal accident in the workplace would not be invited to carry on operating that machinery while they were under investigation. This change would not require new legislation, as guidance could encourage bail conditions to more regularly include restrictions on driving after being charged.

Finally, on the subject of disqualification, if a person kills someone through careless or dangerous driving, why should they ever be able to drive again? The mandatory driving ban for causing death by dangerous driving is five years. Why is it not a lifetime disqualification? Again, lifetime bans would not necessarily require new legislation. They happen now, although are exceptionally rare; guidance could change that.

The APPG’s recommendations are essential calls to action. We must act decisively and without further delay to reform our road justice system, protect the vulnerable and ensure that our streets are safe for all. We must foster an environment wherein every road user, regardless of their mode of transport, feels safe and is protected by a just and effective legal system.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Caroline Nokes (in the Chair): As you can all see, many Members wish to contribute. I will not impose a formal time limit yet, but I ask Members to consider limiting their comments to five minutes or so.

9.45 am

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Ms Nokes. I thank my co-chair of the APPG for cycling and walking, the hon. Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby), who gave a tremendous speech outlining the content of the “Road Justice” report that the group published in September 2023. I will add a little to what she said, but she was pretty comprehensive, and I am grateful to her. I took over from my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) as co-chair late last year; I thank her for her years of dedication and the huge contribution she made to the APPG in the years that she chaired it with the hon. Member for North Devon.

On 21 December 2017, just over six years ago, I secured an Adjournment debate in the Commons Chamber on the case of my constituent Ian Winterburn, a cyclist who was killed at the junction of Whitkirk Lane and the A6120 ring road in Leeds on the morning of 12 December 2016. He was wearing a cyclist’s high-visibility jacket and his helmet, and his lights were on. In spite of that, a car turning right in front of Ian drove straight into him, the driver claiming that she did not see him on the road. He died in a coma 10 days later as a result of his injuries. On 4 October 2017, the driver of the Skoda that killed Mr Winterburn was convicted by Leeds magistrates court of causing death by careless driving. She was handed down a four-month prison sentence suspended for two years, a £200 fine, 200 hours of community service and a two-year driving ban—not even the five-year ban that is now mandatory. As I described to the House at the time, the way in which the West Yorkshire police and the Crown Prosecution Service dealt with the case and treated the family was utterly appalling, as was the family’s treatment by the court service and the coroner. I detailed the case then, so I will not repeat what I said, but I sincerely hope that the treatment of victims of cycling fatalities and their families has improved over the past seven years.

In summer 2022, I received a distressing email from the daughter of a constituent who had been killed by a taxi driver on his way to work, early in the morning. My constituent was an experienced cyclist who had been travelling by bike regularly for over 40 years. He was hit and killed instantly by a car that had seemingly gone through a red light at a junction. As the case is still sub judice, I cannot give further details except to express my anger and that of the family that West Yorkshire police told the victim’s wife and daughter that the case could take up to two years to bring evidence or a prosecution for what appeared to them to be a clear-cut case. The anguish that they suffered and still suffer is unimaginable. It truly is a case of justice delayed, as the saying goes, being justice denied.

In 2023, as the hon. Member for North Devon said, the APPG for cycling and walking launched an inquiry into road justice that reported in September and made 10 recommendations. I will briefly repeat them at the end of my speech. However, a few years ago, while on my routine ride from Parliament to King’s Cross station on my way back to Leeds, I was stopping at the traffic lights at the junction of Holborn and Kingsway, a notoriously dangerous area for cyclists, when another cyclist cut across my path, causing me to brake so sharply that I fell off my bike on to a stationary taxi.

[*Fabian Hamilton*]

The other cyclist, realising what he had done, stopped and returned to help me—the lights were red and the traffic was at a halt. At the same time, however, the cab driver wound down his window and started shouting abuse at me—while I was lying injured on the ground—for possibly damaging his vehicle. The other cyclist made it plain that the accident was his fault, not mine, but the cab driver would not have it and demanded that I pay for the damage to his taxi cab. When he finally got out of the cab he realised, after inspecting it, that no damage had been done, but instead of helping me up off the road, he simply told both of us that we were a menace to all cars on the road and should not be allowed to cycle on any main road. Thankfully, cycling infrastructure in London has improved so much since then that I do not have to use the Aldwych/Kingsway route any more, which is a big relief. I am sure there have been far fewer casualties at that junction since London's cycle routes were created, but the same cannot be said for the rest of the country.

It is my experience as a cyclist, and I am sure that of many other Members, that drivers—most of us are drivers too—do not recognise the right of cyclists to be on the road with them. As the hon. Member for North Devon said, they do not want to share the road with road users who are not in motorised vehicles. Driving a motorised vehicle is a privilege, as it is a dangerous weapon in the wrong hands if not used properly. We cyclists have every right to use the road and should not be treated with the contempt that most motorists show us. How many of us have suffered abuse from people winding down the windows as they overtake us because we are slowing them down to tell us that we should pay tax as a cyclist—which we do anyway—or should not be on the road at all? Sometimes, in rare cases, they take action they think is appropriate and try to run us off the road. Many of us have experienced that horror.

Justice for cyclists involved in these collisions is really important, especially when a motor vehicle is involved. We want the points we made in our report to be implemented as quickly as possible to help more people cycle on roads, walk and get involved in active travel.

Caroline Nokes (in the Chair): I repeat my request for Members not to sail too close to the wind when it comes to the sub judice regulations.

9.51 am

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) for securing this important debate on victims of road traffic offences and the criminal justice system. According to Brake, someone is killed or seriously injured on UK roads every 16 minutes or so. Although my hon. Friend focused on the work and recommendations of the APPG for cycling and walking, which she and others work hard to passionately support, we all recognise that victims of road traffic offences extend beyond that group. They include pedestrians, passers-by and other vehicle users right across the country. I therefore believe that the improvements that should be made in line with the report's recommendations have the potential to have a much broader impact.

Like other right hon. Member and hon. Members, I have had tragic incidents of road violence in my constituency, and constituents who have been victims of road traffic offences outside the constituency. That is one of the reasons I am here today. Sadly, the victim's family is too often left seeking the justice that has not been provided and campaigning to improve the system.

My constituent Lola Chapman's beloved brother, Harry, was tragically killed by a speeding drink-driver on Aldridge Road. She is campaigning determinedly for changes to improve road safety, and has launched a petition seeking measures to reduce driver speed.

In a tragic case in 2021, an uninsured car mounted the pavement in Brownhills in broad daylight, killing an 18-day-old baby in his pram; the community was left in shock and the family was absolutely devastated. Some 18 months later, following a successful campaign, the Court of Appeal increased the driver's sentence, but why must victims and families go through that?

Many other victims join support groups such as RoadPeace West Midlands, which my hon. Friend mentioned. It is an incredible volunteer group that provides support to others to raise awareness of the impact of road death and campaign for change. Whether it is Aldridge Road, Brownhills High Street, Pelsall Lane, Bosty Lane or other areas of my constituency, I come back to the fact that behind every number is a victim, a family and loved ones. That is why we must continue to improve the system. Sentencing should be tough, and crash victims should be treated as victims of crime. There is so much that the APPG seeks to change. We should create a UK commissioner for road danger reduction and revise the 2020 guidance and the totting-up disqualification. However, I believe that education and awareness matter too in ensuring that there is increasing knowledge of the highway code and driver awareness—I will touch on that briefly, because I am conscious of the time and the fact that many others want to contribute. Last week was Neighbourhood Policing Week, as I am sure you will be aware, Ms Nokes. I was fortunate to spend Saturday afternoon out with my excellent local Brownhills team, which conducted a speed awareness operation encouraging better driver behaviour to comply with speed limits as an important part of the work going ahead. There is so much to do. The issue and the work continue, and I look forward to hearing what my hon. Friend the Minister has to say to update us on actions and the timeline.

9.55 am

Mrs Paulette Hamilton (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): I first thank the hon. Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) for securing this important and timely debate. I also pay tribute to Better Streets for Birmingham, which campaigns tirelessly in my community to improve the safety of our roads.

Road traffic collisions, certainly fatal ones, are some of the most tragic incidents that we see across the UK, especially as many of them are preventable. In reported road collisions in the year ending June 2023, there were more than 1,500 fatalities and more than 130,000 casualties in Britain. In 2022 in my constituency, there were 338 road collisions, with casualties rising by more than 100 since 2021. On 29 May last year, a four-year-old boy was tragically killed after being hit by a car in my constituency.

Two days before, on 27 May, a 13-year-old girl was reported to be fighting for her life after she was struck by a hit-and-run driver. Just 15 minutes' drive away, on 31 May a cyclist was killed in a hit and run. In the space of five days, three families in my constituency had their world turned upside down.

In October last year, I backed Birmingham City Council's campaign to reduce the speed limit on one of the roads in my constituency from 40 mph to 30 mph, and the council is doing some important work throughout this year to make our streets safer, such as average speed enforcement, giving priority to pedestrians and refreshing its road harm reduction strategy. However, we can and should do more. There have already been two serious incidents on Birmingham Road this year. One of the biggest barriers to active travel as a replacement for driving is safety, and in the three weeks when the three cyclists were killed on Birmingham Road in June last year, the impact was felt right across our city.

It is also vital that people feel safe and secure when walking at night, so we must tackle the issues of crime and antisocial behaviour, which are soaring under this Government. We need to rebuild neighbourhood policing to increase the number of police and police community support officers in community teams so that people can be confident that someone will always be there to help them to remain safe. Government, both local and national, must do what they can to improve routes and roads so that people can feel safe walking and cycling, instead of driving. They must also ensure that penalties for breaking the law when driving are strong deterrents. Failure to stop after an accident and give details and failure to report an accident are an offence, which carries a maximum penalty of an unlimited fine and/or six months' imprisonment.

It is clear that we are not doing enough to prevent that kind of driving. A maximum of six months in prison for a hit and run is absolutely not enough, and clearly it does not deter as it should. Sentencing outcomes for summary motoring offences generally have not changed over the past 10 years, and most offenders each year are only fined. For some offences, a fine is adequate; for others, it is absolutely not—I am sure that those families in my constituency would say the same. We should feel safe walking to school, cycling to work and strolling to the shops, but the reality is that in my city, between 2019 and 2021, more than 200 collisions were caused by careless and reckless driving. More than 120 were caused by drivers speeding; more than 100 were caused by aggressive driving; more than 70 were caused by drivers impaired by alcohol. Currently, deterrents are not working. We need to see a dedicated road safety strategy from the Government, with a plan to fund active travel, deter dangerous drivers, and make our streets safer for everyone. We can do more to ensure we all feel a little safer on our streets—and we should.

10 am

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) on securing this debate, which is of great importance to my North West Norfolk constituents and to Members across the House. I want to focus particularly on the sentence for causing death by dangerous driving. In the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, Parliament

legislated to increase the maximum sentence for this crime from 14 years to life imprisonment, which we did to reflect the devastation that such crimes inflict. The sentencing guidelines issued for that change have a range for the category A offence—the most serious offence—from eight to 18 years.

Are those guidelines effective, and are judges following them? In the case of my constituent, Summer Mace, I do not think so. I confirm that it is not an active case. Three members of Summer's family—her mother, sister and stepfather—were killed by a dangerous driver. Having had an Adjournment debate on this case, I return to it to highlight the devastating impact on Summer, her family and her friends, and the inadequate sentence imposed. The judge rightly classed this as a category A offence, owing to a prolonged, persistent and deliberate course of very bad driving. There were six aggravating factors in the case: three people were killed; greatly excessive speed was used; the driver knew he was deprived of sufficient sleep; he had consumed drugs above the legal limit; he had previous convictions for motoring offences; and he was on police bail for a driving offence at the time, breaking the curfew to commit the crime. The only mitigating factor was a letter he sent to the court—not even to the family.

It is unacceptable that after a guilty plea was taken into account, he was sentenced to only 10 and a half years for three separate counts of causing death by dangerous driving. He could be out in seven years. The question that the family and I want to ask is what is required for a large sentence to be imposed? Those sentencing guidelines took effect in June last year. When more data is available, I hope the Minister and the Lord Chancellor will consider very carefully the impact on sentencing that those guidelines have had, and whether judges are actually imposing the sentences that this House and the House of Lords legislated for. I hope that the Lord Chancellor uses his power to formally request that the sentencing guidelines are reviewed.

The other point I want to raise is around disqualification, as touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon. In my constituent's case, a ban for a period of only eight years was considered appropriate, extended to 15 years to take account of the time the offender will be in prison. Again, that strikes me as far too lenient. Courts can impose lifetime bans, and RoadPeace is campaigning for them to be applied. The House of Commons Library reports that disqualification for life only happened in four cases in the year ending June 2023, out of more than 116,000 who were disqualified. The Government should consider whether it should become a mandatory element in some cases because, as my hon. Friend said, driving is a privilege and not a right. The Sentencing Council will shortly consult on new overarching guidelines for driving disqualification, and I encourage everyone with an interest in this topic to respond to that consultation.

I end by noting the frequency of driving offence cases. I was struck by the statistics that, in the case of driving under the influence of drink or drugs, 79% of cases result in a fine, with only 1% resulting in a custodial sentence, and 99% of people disqualified for a year to less than two years for that offence. Does that reflect the seriousness of the crime? Does it create a deterrent effect? I do not think so. We need to apply a

[James Wild]

robust approach, including prison sentences and lengthy bans, to send a message that these are serious crimes with serious consequences.

10.4 am

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship this morning, Ms Nokes. I too would like to congratulate the hon. Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) on securing the debate and opening it powerfully. I would like to raise a specific case I have been working on for some time. In August 2017, 22-month-old Pearl Melody Black from Merthyr Tydfil was tragically killed while walking with her father and brother. Pearl was killed when an occupied vehicle rolled from a private drive in Merthyr Tydfil on to the highway, down a hill, crashing into a wall that subsequently crushed her and injured her father and brother.

In the months after the incident, officers from the serious collision unit of South Wales police worked tirelessly to put a case together to provide justice for the family. In short, all tests concluded that the car was mechanically sound, and that it had rolled because the handbrake was not fully engaged, and the automatic transmission was not fully placed into park mode.

The case was sent to the Crown Prosecution Service locally and in London, and an independent QC was hired by the CPS to consult. Everyone was hopeful of a conviction under the death by dangerous driving category. The CPS looked into other possible options. After a number of months, however, it stated that it was unable to send the case to court, as a glitch in the law states that the vehicle must have started its journey on a public road for a prosecution under the Road Traffic Act 1988.

Even though Pearl was killed on a public road, the fact that the vehicle started its descent from a private drive meant that the prosecution was not possible. The coroner stated that the vehicle was well maintained. It seemed the issue was very much driver operation. The inquest heard that the handbrake had not been fully applied in the park mode. The inquest in October 2018 resulted in an outcome of accident.

With the support of South Wales police and the CPS, Pearl's parents seek a change in the law to prevent other families from finding themselves in a similar situation, unable to secure justice due to a legal loophole, following such a tragic and completely preventable incident. As Gemma and Paul acknowledge, it will not help to bring justice for Pearl, as legislation is not retrospective, but if the law can be changed to prevent anyone else from suffering such injustice again, that might provide some comfort.

I have had meetings with Government Ministers in the past few years. Although they were helpful and sympathetic, there has been no major transport Bill to provide a way of introducing this change. I pursued a ten-minute rule Bill, but it failed as it ran out of time. I am hoping that an amendment to another related Bill may be a way forward, in the absence of a wider overhaul of the road traffic offences legal framework.

There are a huge number of incidences where private land adjoining public land is regularly used, and is potentially dangerous, including residential driveways, as I mentioned, as well as verges and land for schools

and nurseries, to mention some of the most common. When we consider those examples, we can see that driving on that specific category of land can present a high risk to people in everyday situations, especially children, the elderly and the more vulnerable among us.

Many hon. Members would agree that nobody who has suffered the loss of a loved one, or who has had an accident or been injured as a result of a driving offence, should have to endure the injustice of seeing those responsible go free, simply because of a loophole in the law. Prosecutions for driving offences, and any illegal action, should be based on what happened, not where something happened.

The campaign to amend, update and overhaul current legislation would give people such as Gemma and Paul Black, as well as many others, the peace of mind that there are consequences for dangerous driving, no matter where it occurs. It would send a powerful message to help prevent such needless and avoidable tragedies happening in future. I thank the hon. Member for North Devon and wish her success. I congratulate her and the all-party parliamentary group on their work. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

10.8 am

Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) on introducing such an important debate, on an issue many colleagues are concerned about.

Urban speeding in Wolverhampton is, to my mind, getting worse. That could be just my personal experience driving round local roads, but I am regularly overtaken by other drivers on residential roads with a speed limit of 30 miles per hour. I have taken taxi journeys from the station to my home, but I cannot remember an occasion when I did not have to say to the driver that it was a 30 mph zone.

I strongly feel that we need to do more than intervene to prevent urban speeding only when there is a fatality. In many cases, people will slow down only if they fear they may be caught and fined. StreetWatch teams have been going out with speed guns, and I have urged West Midlands police to look at having more mobile speed cameras in vans. We need measures that create the perception that drivers may be caught and fined, because that can reduce urban speeding. Taxi drivers have trackers in their cars, and licensing committees could clearly be doing spot checks on taxi drivers to ensure that their journey time correlates with the speed limit. All those measures could help reduce urban speeding, which is a huge issue.

Moving on to serious accidents, City of Wolverhampton Council will look at traffic calming and speed reduction measures only where there has been a serious injury or fatality. Because time is brief, I will focus my remarks on one tragic case we had in Wolverhampton. In 2018, Mandy Gayle's father, Hopton Gayle, was run over and killed on the Stafford Road, which is one of the main arterial routes into Wolverhampton. It has a 40 mph limit, but it is estimated that the man who hit Hopton was travelling at well over 60 mph. He had slowed down to avoid getting caught by a traffic camera, and he was speeding up again when he hit Mandy's father and

killed him. The case is made more horrific by several factors, including the fact that the driver only stopped to push the bonnet of his car back down before driving away, leaving Hopton Gale lying on the Stafford Road.

Mandy lives on that road, and when she left her home, she saw her father under a blanket on the road. These accidents have effects. Mandy has now moved house, and she is campaigning with RoadPeace West Midlands. I again thank my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon, because what happened to Mandy's father is a case study in the report from the APPG for cycling and walking. In the report, Mandy comments that she does not go a day without thinking of her father, and the consequence for her is a lifelong sentence. The driver, who left the scene, did hand himself in many hours later, and he was sentenced to three years and nine months and banned from driving for only four years. When someone has driven so recklessly and killed a much loved great-grandfather, that does not seem a sufficient sentence.

Most constituents send us to this place to try to pass laws and to ensure that common sense shines through when people receive sentences. When life goes wrong, constituents want our support and they want justice for their families and loved ones. The work of RoadPeace and its "Remain & Report" campaign are therefore important, and I am interested to hear the Minister's comments on making leaving the scene of an accident a significant factor in the length of sentences—sorry, collisions, not accidents; I will remember to use the new terminology. For the sake of all our constituents, we need to reduce urban speeding, and it would be appreciated if we could hear what the Government's plan is to help with that and to punish those drivers who endanger us all every day.

10.13 am

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Nokes. I thank the hon. Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) for securing today's debate, and my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton) for the incredible work he does on the APPG for cycling and walking. We have heard so powerfully today about why we need greater justice for vulnerable road users—for cyclists and pedestrians and for those who wheel and scoot.

The APPG report articulates where those changes need to be focused, and I trust that, in his response, the Minister will refer to the report's 10 recommendations and to the opportunity to put in place a system of justice that addresses the huge inequality that vulnerable road users experience. In particular, the right to continue to drive needs to be examined in greater detail, because we know that disqualification is a major intervention that will change behaviours. That, together with sentencing, re-testing and an escalation of penalty, is long overdue.

I want to focus on speed limits, which other hon. Members have talked about today. I thank the York Cycle Campaign for its work on abiding by speed limits. In the entry and exit points of York, in particular, people accelerate beyond the speed limit. It cannot be beyond the mind of technology today to better audit, monitor and provide penalty for those who exceed the speed limit. However, across all urban areas, we need to consider whether 30 mph and 40 mph are appropriate

speed limits. The Minister will be very familiar with the 20's Plenty for Us campaign, and we do need to look at this issue, particularly where there are blind corners and steep hills, which can occlude a driver's vision.

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a very important point about speed limits. In my constituency, on Swinston Hill Road in Dinnington, we have an issue with speeding. The council conducted a speed watch to work out how fast drivers were going. Drivers were speeding, but the council's response was that maybe the speed limit was too low and that it should be raised because there were no accidents. Does the hon. Lady understand the concerns of residents who report speeding, when the council says that, if there are no accidents, there is no problem? Speeding is always a problem.

Rachael Maskell: I agree, and we must ensure that we put safety first at every juncture.

I want to address the issue of creating zones around schools, nurseries and other areas where young people play, as well as around heavily pedestrianised areas, to ensure that there is a safety strategy in such locations. There are many schools across York where young people have to navigate dangerous roads, and 30 mph is not a safe speed for children. I urge the Minister to consider an integrated schools strategy, so we can deploy proper measures to keep children and young people safe when they walk, wheel, scoot or cycle to school. The work done in Manchester, which states that the infrastructure should be there for a 12-year-old to navigate, is really important, but we need to ensure that it is applied across the country, because it is clear that there is inequality at the moment.

Where we see repetition in a locality, or indeed even a single incident, there should be a duty on local authorities to ensure that proper signage and speed mitigation are put in place to highlight areas of risk and to ensure that junctions and other areas are safe for walkers and cyclists. I urge the Minister to look at that.

I draw Members' attention to the work of the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety on speed limits and the opportunities for technology in this area. Its recommendations, too, are important, and I thank it for its work.

I also want to raise with the Minister the work undertaken by the Institute for Safe Autonomy at the University of York, in the light of the on-board technology that is available for vehicles, which can act as evidence in court cases. That could secure more convictions and ensure a chilling effect on poor driving.

The licensing of taxis is long overdue, and the Government have had a long time to implement the Law Commission's report on it. We often see some of the worst driving behaviours in our city when licences have been granted in authorities other than our own. I really urge movement on that issue to ensure that licensing relates to the authority in which somebody is licensed to drive, and to bring greater safety for road users.

Finally, I want to draw attention to the work City of York Council is doing with its transport consultation. If we are serious about seeing an escalation of active travel and proper safety measures put in place, it is really

[*Rachael Maskell*]

important that every local authority has a proper integrated transport plan. That would benefit not only the environment and the economy, with all that that brings, but cyclists, walkers, wheelers and scooters, ensuring that their safety in the road space is acknowledged and made a priority.

10.20 am

Jonathan Gullis (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) on securing this important debate.

I concur with a lot of what my hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk (James Wild) said about sentencing guidelines in relation to the case he mentioned. He and I have exchanged messages on that issue, due to tragic cases that have occurred in both our constituencies. That is why I would like to focus specifically on the case of Charlotte-Sky Naglis, which has now been dealt with, and the individual involved has been sentenced.

The case relates specifically to section 7A of the Road Traffic Act 1988. John Owen had put himself behind the wheel of a vehicle, having been drinking and taking class A drugs all day, and was using his mobile phone when he hit and killed six-year-old Charlotte-Sky Naglis, who was walking along the pavement in Norton Green to buy some sweets from a local shop with her father. The impact that that had on the local community still scars me to this day. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) was at my Adjournment debate on this issue, and he kindly intervened to allow me to gather myself, because Claire—Charlotte's mother—was in the Public Gallery listening to what was being said.

Claire had to spend weeks—actually, months—not knowing what had caused the death of her six-year-old daughter. That was because John Owen was in a coma, and even though his blood had been taken without his consent, as is allowed under the provisions in legislation, the blood itself could not be tested unless he awoke from his coma and gave his consent. What seems bizarre is that we can forcibly take blood from someone, which is the most intrusive thing we can do, but we cannot then immediately allow it to be tested to give answers as quickly as possible to the police and, more importantly, to the victims of the offence.

For me, this is also a perversion in the law. If someone chooses to withhold their blood sample to stop it being tested, they may receive a maximum of two years added on to their sentence. But if it came out that they had taken class A drugs, their fear would be that they would receive an even greater sentence. So where is the incentive for them to be honest and to admit to what they have done, when they know that two years is far better than the four, five, six or whatever it is that they will receive because drug abuse, particularly involving class A drugs, is such an aggravating factor?

I have been campaigning with Claire since that awful event in 2021 to get Charlotte's law introduced. I am looking to secure a ten-minute rule Bill opportunity to bring this issue to the Floor of the House so that we can tidy up this area of law and say that, when blood has been taken, it will be tested, regardless of whether consent has been given, so that victims get answers to

their questions. Why should we allow the police to store blood when, God forbid—by accident, I am sure—it could be contaminated and that evidence could be lost, or when it might not be stored correctly, meaning that that sample would no longer be fit for use? Why even risk allowing the perpetrator of a crime the opportunity to escape the justice he should face?

Sadly, in John Owen's case, because the incident took place before the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, he was sentenced under the old guidance. He received only a pathetic six years of prison, and within two years he has already had the opportunity to be considered for transfer to an open prison. I would like to put on record my thanks to the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, who has intervened to ensure that John Owen remains in a full custodial prison—I believe it is a category B—to make sure that, at the very least, he understands, albeit very briefly, the consequences of his heinous crimes.

The campaign I mentioned has the backing of 5,500 petitioners, many of whom are Claire's colleagues, and I thank them and her boss for sharing it with other employees and with clients to get them to sign up. I have also secured the backing of charities such as Brake, SCARD and the Campaign Against Drink Driving and of Stoke-on-Trent City Council, which in September 2023 voted unanimously across the political divide to fully endorse and support the campaign. When this issue comes to the Floor of the House, I hope the Government can, as they have with other legislation I have worked on, put their full weight behind it and ensure that we get it on to the statute book, so that we can tidy up this perversion in the law and ensure that victims get answers to questions and people get sentenced for the crimes they commit.

10.25 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) on highlighting this issue and giving us all the chance to be part of this debate. It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis)—he knows he is a dear friend, and I am looking forward to him coming to my constituency in the first week of March and renewing that friendship on the ground.

Although the UK legislation does not extend to Northern Ireland, we have a very similar legislative system in place. Consequently, issues faced by people here on the mainland are replicated in Northern Ireland, and so, too, must the solutions be replicated. My contribution to this debate will be from a Northern Ireland perspective. The Minister will not be able to automatically respond, and nor does he have any duty to, but I just want to add to the debate and to support all those who have contributed.

In Northern Ireland, we have had an awful year for road deaths, with 71 people losing their lives on the roads in 2023—that is the highest number for eight years, and the annual death toll had not risen above 70 since 2015. In addition to those families losing their loved ones, figures from the Police Service of Northern Ireland show that some 679 people were seriously injured on the roads between 1 January and 31 October 2023. The data also shows that there were 13 motorcyclists and 19 pedestrians among the deaths in 2023. Provisional

figures also show that single-vehicle collisions accounted for almost one fifth of all road deaths in the first months of 2023. That clearly shows that there is a need to enhance safety. So the question for me, and probably for others as well, is: with all the new safety features in cars, including anti-lock braking systems and greater non-slide technology improvements, should those numbers not be declining rather than increasing? The facts, of course, disprove that, and that is why this debate is so important.

While I have seen indicators that as many as nine in 10 accidents are avoidable, I also believe that road infrastructure has a major role to play in these statistics. We see people crossing dividing lines to avoid potholes or being pulled into the verges and ending up—as we would call it—in the sheugh in the dark, due to no fault of their own. I am sure the hon. Member for North Devon would agree that part of improving safety has to be the improvement of road structures and surfaces, and the Minister must take that aspect back to Cabinet colleagues and bid for enhanced funding. I think it was two weeks ago that I met one of the companies from the mainland, and it had a brand-new idea for solving pothole problems that looks really good. It is financially viable, quicker and more efficient, and maybe there is an onus on the Government to try to put these things in place.

In my time as an elected representative, I have seen too many deaths on our roads and the impact that that has on families. I have also seen the impact of seeing the perpetrator receive what seems to be an unfair sentence, which is nothing short of devastating. One case that springs to mind is drink-driving case where the driver was substantially over the limit, and the accident resulted in death, yet the judge handed out a suspended sentence. I was heartened by a recent case, in November last year, which resulted in a nine-and-a-half year sentence for the drunk driver. I believe that the message is starting to make its way through: driving over the limit will not be treated as a mistake but as a decision, and that decision has consequences.

I support the hon. Member for North Devon in her view that sentences should not simply reflect the damage of the crime but send a message to others. I was shocked to read that PSNI officers conducted 7,250 preliminary breath tests during the Christmas drink-driving campaign between 1 December 2023 and 1 January 2024. Of those 7,250 tests, 4.9%, or 355, resulted in a fail or fail to provide. Males accounted for the majority of those arrested for drink or drug-driving offences in the 2023-24 campaign, and half of those arrested were between 30 and 49 years of age.

However, the most shocking statistic is that the youngest person arrested for drink-driving offences during the 2023-24 campaign was 14. My goodness—how on earth could that happen? The oldest person, and they are not guiltless either, was 82. It is clear that the message is still not getting to the people who need to hear it. I believe that a means of lowering the prevalence of drink-driving would be to enhance the penalties and to remove the ability for mitigating circumstances to affect any form of punishment or rehabilitation.

I will conclude now, Ms Nokes, so as to adhere to your five-minute rule. The issue should be considered UK-wide. I support the hon. Member for North Devon and all the hon. Members who have called for action,

and I have absolutely no doubt that the Minister will respond positively and give us some of the assurances that we wish to hear.

10.30 am

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure, Ms Nokes, to have you here in the Chair today.

I congratulate the hon. Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) on securing the debate as well as everyone who has taken part in it. The strength of feeling from everyone who has spoken has come across extremely well, including in the personal stories and those told on behalf of constituents who have been victims of road accidents. I completely agree that referring to “road accidents” is exactly right, considering what happens on our roads. There has been a sense that driving offences are not viewed as as serious as they are in reality; that has come across loud and clear. I also congratulate the APPG on its work, as well as Roadpeace and the other charities mentioned today.

I want to mention some personal stories of my own. A friend of mine decided to return to cycling recently. On his first outing on his bike, he hit a pothole and was badly injured, and he has not been able to go back to work. I mention that incident because one of the issues that has not come up today is the need for decently repaired roads. Before I move on to what others have said, let me briefly say that road safety, in its widest sense of ensuring that we can all travel safely on our roads, means investing in proper repairs. I am glad that we are going to see some more money for repairs after the cuts—indeed, the halving of the budget.

Caroline Nokes (in the Chair): May I gently remind the shadow Minister that the title of the debate is “Victims of Road Traffic Offences: Criminal Justice System”?

Bill Esterson: Indeed, and I will say why road repairs are relevant. In October 2023, the AA had the highest level of call-outs in any October ever, and accidents are sometimes caused by or related to poor road conditions. We still need justice, whatever the cause of an accident is.

I hope that we will see a proper level of investment in our road repairs, including—I say this gently to the Minister—the specification of a higher quality of sustainable repair. The technology exists, although it is not always applied. That is all I have to say on the matter of road repairs, but I wanted to refer to it because I think it is relevant to the debate.

The other personal story I have is about a motorcyclist, who is the friend of a friend. A driver pulled in front of him and he crashed, and is now in a coma. The prognosis is that he will never recover, because he is paralysed. I was reminded of his story while I listened to some of the others. I have no idea whether there will be a prosecution in that case. I will make no further reference to it, to where it happened or to who was involved, but it is a reminder that accidents cause life-changing injuries and even deaths.

In her excellent speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mrs Hamilton) mentioned the very high level of deaths on our roads—1,500 fatal injuries, as well as 130,000 casualties in Britain. We all have a duty to reduce that level of accidents, and I have mentioned repairs.

Selaine Saxby: Just to clarify, given that every person in the Chamber today has asked for these events not to be referred to as “accidents”—we are talking about “crashes” or “collisions”—is it the Opposition’s policy to persist in calling them “accidents”?

Bill Esterson: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her intervention, but she heard me say at the start of my remarks that it was entirely appropriate that we spoke about “collisions”—

Selaine Saxby: If the hon. Member refers back to *Hansard*, I think he will see that that is not what he actually said at the start of his remarks.

Bill Esterson: Well, I was referring to what the hon. Lady said in her speech, but I think we are talking at cross purposes. I completely accept that it is correct to talk about “collisions”, and all I would say in response to her intervention is that this shows just how easy it is to slip back into calling them “accidents”. I accept her point, and I am happy to correct the record.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington told us how many deaths and how many casualties there are from collisions, and we all have a duty to reduce the number and to prevent them from happening. What we have so often heard today is that that is not happening. The way that drivers are allowed to continue is a real problem. My right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) spoke in a previous debate about a driver who had been banned something like nine times, and went on to be involved in a collision in which somebody died. This is about the short nature of such bans, and that point has been well made. I welcome the Government increasing the length of bans, and we supported the amendment to do that in legislation that went through a few years ago. The question is: what more can be done? I very much welcome the recommendations made by the all-party group, and I am very keen to hear what the Minister has to say in response to them.

I will say a few things about what Labour wants to see. We have published our approach to government, with our mission to raise confidence in the police and the criminal justice system to their highest levels. We want to see 13,000 extra police on our streets, and to address the cuts in the police and in support staff. I know that the Minister will say that police numbers, having declined first, have increased again, but there has not been a return to the previous numbers of support staff.

As Her Majesty’s—now His Majesty’s—inspectorate of constabulary and fire and rescue services said in 2020:

“The number of dedicated roads policing officers has declined”. It also said that they have been moved to addressing “responsibilities for supporting general policing”.

That has to change if we are to support victims, investigate the incidents—collisions—that happen on our roads and deliver justice in a timely fashion. We heard about how long it is taking to bring one case to court; I think it was my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton) who made that point about a constituent. The challenge for us is to support victims and to ensure that justice is seen to be delivered, and that it is not delayed. There were 83,581 cases in a nine-year period where drivers were not disqualified

due to mitigating circumstances. I think we should address the recommendation in the all-party group’s excellent report on mitigating circumstances.

I will quickly reiterate those questions for the Minister, because I am keen to learn whether he accepts the recommendations. Whoever is in government has a duty to seriously consider the requests.

Caroline Nokes (in the Chair): Very quickly.

Bill Esterson: Indeed. We have 20 minutes left, but I do not intend to use many more of them.

Does the Minister support the all-party group’s 10 recommendations? Does he want escalating penalties? Does he agree that we should require retesting for those wanting to drive again following disqualification? What is his view on increasing the maximum sentence for dangerous driving to four years? What is his view on issuing guidance to police officers and increasing their use of bail powers so they can remove the right to drive from people arrested for dangerous driving? Does he agree that we should revisit sentencing guidelines so that exceptional hardship should be granted only in truly exceptional circumstances? What is his view on removing tolerances in speed enforcement, creating consistent guidelines for forces to investigate serious collisions, implementing a standardised system for third parties to report actual or suspected road offences, creating a UK commissioner for road danger reduction, and implementing guidelines so that victims of crashes are considered victims of crime unless there is clear evidence to the contrary?

The debate is about justice for victims. I am very keen to hear whether the Minister agrees that we really need to consider victims of road traffic collisions as victims, and that they should be covered by the victims code and other aspects of criminal law. Far too often, drivers who commit serious offences are not regarded by society as guilty of a serious crime. Everybody in this debate is calling for that to change, and I am very interested to hear whether the Minister agrees.

Caroline Nokes (in the Chair): I am sure the Minister will want to leave a couple of minutes for the hon. Member for North Devon at the end.

10.42 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Guy Opperman): Thank you very much indeed for your chairmanship, Ms Nokes. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) on securing this very important debate. Sometimes Parliament is knocked or decried for its lack of impact, but nobody could have listened to the debate and not realised that what is being raised is of real importance to individual Members of Parliament, on a cross-party basis, and the families who have been so affected.

Road safety matters to all of us. As we are all aware, the solutions are complex, but that does not mean that we should not try to grasp them or engage with them, or that we do not take debates of this nature very seriously indeed.

We are on a journey. I am a veteran of a 20-year legal career, having prosecuted many of these types of cases and defended some, and there was no victim impact statement when I started out. It just did not exist; the victim was never consulted in any way whatever. I have

been a cyclist for the past 40 years, and there were no such thing as cycle lanes in days gone by. The hon. Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton) is entirely right that things are getting better, albeit we have a way to go.

Having just been with the fantastic people who work at Active Travel England, which is based in the constituency of the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), and having cycled around the Roman and medieval streets of York with all their complexities, I fully understand that putting cycle infrastructure in such a town is very difficult. Active travel did not exist before, and it clearly has a way to go before it is as good as all Members would like it to be. We are all on this journey, and solutions will not be ticked by this Government or the next one straightaway, but there is an acknowledgement that we are all, on a cross-party basis, trying to improve the situation, and that is something we should get behind.

Before I get into the nuts and bolts of the debate, I put on record that colleagues are entirely right to state the impact that this issue has had on individual families, including that of Harry Webb, represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Fay Jones); the Saltern family, represented by my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann); the Winterburn family, represented by the hon. Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton); and the Chapman family, represented by my right hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton). There is also the tragic case raised by my hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk (James Wild); the case specifically raised by the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones)—I will come to new clause 49 of the Criminal Justice Bill in a second—as well as the case of Sharlotte, raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Jonathan Gullis); and the Gayle family case, raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Jane Stevenson). Those families all have tragic and terrible stories to tell, and it is right that their representatives make the case for a better system. I take all the points on board. There is much being worked on by various Departments, which I will try to address in the limited time I have.

I represent the Department for Transport and have supported the all-party group; in fact, many years ago, I sat in this room while our colleague Lord Austin led a debate on these issues in this Chamber. This is clearly a cross-departmental matter, and we need to stress that the solution is cross-departmental. I give apologies from the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Laura Farris), and the Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire, my right hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), who are debating the Criminal Justice Bill as we speak and addressing, for example, new clause 49, tabled by the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, on the use of private roads and the impact of particular cases that arise. That is something to be discussed in the House, in the Public Bill Committee.

I should also point out that I bear scars myself. On 23 June 2019, I was the victim of a pretty serious road traffic accident. I broke my ankle and ruptured my knee ligaments when I was knocked off my bicycle by a car

on a London street, also not in a designated lane. I still bear the scars, and my running days are definitely over as a result.

We want to foster an environment of safety. Great work is being done to pursue that. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon that the word “accident” should no longer be used; indeed, the Department for Transport no longer uses it. The appropriate terms are “crashes” or “collisions”, and we encourage others to use them. My hon. Friend will understand that “accident” is the correct word in certain pieces of legislation, but the prevailing approach of various Departments is a difference and a change in words. I hope it is of benefit that my brief includes not just roads but road safety and active travel, as we try to bring those things together. I have certainly been fighting to address them.

In the time allowed, I will try to address the particular points raised. I will start with the issue of escalating penalties. Section 65 of the Sentencing Act 2020 provides a statutory aggravating factor, stating that:

“The court must treat as an aggravating factor each relevant previous conviction that it considers can be reasonably be so treated”.

Judges must therefore consider the appropriate level of any sentence uplift justified by that factor as part of considering the full circumstances of the case. I will come to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk, but the point is fairly made that these are relatively young pieces of legislation. The changes that the Government brought in to make sentencing take account of aggravating factors are still being worked through the criminal justice system.

Although I cannot speak specifically for the Lord Chancellor and the MOJ, it is unquestionable that, as cases take place, one can review guidance, take a second look at each situation, and see to what extent and how sufficiently the aggravating factors are being taken into account. That is not something that one can do straight away, but one can step back, take a proper review and look at that in a bit more detail. I will come to the increases in sentencing in a second, but first let me turn to the issue of compulsory retesting. I take the point that has been raised. Clearly, it is a cross-departmental issue, but there is, none the less, a mandatory retesting requirement on causing death by dangerous driving, dangerous driving and causing serious injury by dangerous driving. I accept, however, that the last update in the guidance was 2015, so it is something that the Department for Transport is considering. That is an ongoing process and, as Members will see when I come on to mention particular cases, there are many factors at play, ranging from insurance to consequential impacts on sentencing.

Let me turn now to increasing the maximum sentence for dangerous driving. As was outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk, the sentence has been increased: the maximum penalty for dangerous driving while under the influence of drink or drugs went from 14 years to life. I accept that that was of little comfort to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North and his constituents, but, at the very least, the Government have listened and taken action. I take on board the criticisms of the sentences. It is a dangerous thing for Ministers to start criticising individual judges for the way in which they reach their decisions, so I will not get into that without being fully party to all the

[Guy Opperman]

circumstances. None the less, as I think the Ministry of Justice will do, there is a legitimate case for reviewing the sentences and the totality that followed those particular cases and establishing proper guidance. That is what is done with other offences. That is what will be done in this case and I hope the affected families will feel assured to know that that process is in hand.

In respect of the exceptional hardship point, having prosecuted and defended a similar case, I know that it is up to the individual defendant to raise exceptional hardship; the presumption is not that one can bring that forward. The Sentencing Council's explanatory guidance makes it absolutely clear that it is for the offender to prove that these circumstances exist and that they are, and must be, exceptional. If it is genuinely the case that the argument has been made that the exceptionality is not being implemented in the appropriate way, that is something for us to review. I take the assertions on board, but it is ultimately up to the sentencing court to genuinely take that into account. I stress very strongly that it cannot be that it is an inconvenience; it cannot be anything other than truly exceptional hardship. The loss of one's driving licence does not constitute exceptional hardship in any way.

Let me turn now to the extraordinarily vexed issue of speeding. Any Welsh MP will know of the issues relating to the 20 mph situation and the complexities that that has brought, but at the same time, as I said in this Chamber barely a month ago, there is, in my respectful view, a consensus that 20 mph zones outside school are utterly accepted. There is no question of any of us going back on that—in fact there is massive encouragement. Frankly, those schools that do not have 20 mph zones need to take a long hard look at that, which might involve local councils and parish councils as well. Exceptional circumstances may apply in relation to the location, but, as a broad presumptive, this House is utterly committed to that in those circumstances. The blanket application of that, in my respectful opinion, is much more difficult to achieve, but, at the same time, just because a policy may be difficult to achieve does not mean that we cannot attempt to address it. The point is fairly made in the report and it needs to be made again here: the impact evaluation of the national speed awareness course, which was published in 2018, found that participation in that course was more effective at preventing speed reoffending than fines and penalty points. That is proper evidential data that we should take on board. I think that there is a widespread and strongly held view across the House that greater use of such courses is the way ahead and a much better approach than the simple approach that has been put forward.

I will briefly touch on new clause 49, proposed by the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones). I met him yesterday, having met him previously when he raised his constituent's case at PMQs.

Bill Esterson: Will the Minister give way?

Guy Opperman: No, I will not. Sorry, I have only three minutes, and I have loads of points to address.

New clause 49 is a cross-departmental matter. Clearly, it will be debated, but complexities are involved in doing what the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and

Rhymney proposes for private land. Those range from military vehicles and the extent, to issues with insurance and the like, but I very much take on board the point that the hon. Member raised.

I entirely accept that police forces have differing approaches when it comes to the thorough investigation of serious collisions. Effort is being made by the chief constables to change that, and I would urge the Home Office to drive that forward. Without a shadow of a doubt, some police forces are better than others in relation to the issue of recognising crash victims as crime victims. It is clear that the victims code permits and, frankly, encourages victims of road traffic offences to seek the support that they require. The Ministry of Justice, which provides police and crime commissioners with annual grant funding to commission local, practical and therapeutic support for victims of all types, should apply that to individual crime victims who have suffered crashes or collisions.

I respectfully suggest that the Department for Transport is very keen on the expansion and understanding of the highway code. It has spent millions of pounds on that, whether through its Think! campaign, social media campaigns, factual awareness campaigns or other particular ongoing campaigns on radio, digital, video-on-demand and social media. We genuinely wish to push those campaigns.

I totally accept that this is a work in progress, and on a cross-departmental basis. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon and this House that we will meet the three key Departments to try to drive forward an integrated Government policy on all these matters. It is not for one Department to fix this; it should be done on a cross-departmental basis. I thank my hon. Friend for securing this debate and all my colleagues for bringing this matter forward.

10.57 am

Selaine Saxby: It has been a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Ms Nokes. I thank the Minister for his response and all right hon. and hon. Members for participating in the debate. I pass on my thanks and heartfelt sympathy to the families that we are representing today.

I fully accept that this is a journey, and while it has been great to reiterate some of the legal points and things that we have done to move these things forward, we all might like to see this journey speeded up a little—without wishing to break any speed limits—to enable us to get better justice for the victims that we have come to speak about today.

I put on the record my commitment to continue this journey with the APPG, through meeting with the Departments. We all recognise that when things fall between Departments they are often harder to keep on the road, but we really need to progress this.

I will take one more opportunity to thank everyone for who has taken the time to join this debate and to thank the APPG and all those who helped contribute to the report who are with us in the Gallery.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered victims of road traffic offences and the criminal justice system.

Future of UK Capital Markets

Caroline Nokes (in the Chair): I will call Alun Cairns to move the motion and then the Minister to respond. There will not be an opportunity for Mr Cairns to wind up, as is the convention for 30-minute debates.

11 am

Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of UK capital markets.

It is a great privilege to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes. It is also a pleasure to propose this debate on the future of UK capital markets. I have raised this debate following engagement from stakeholders across the sector. Like many other European markets, we have seen de-equitisation, as well as a slowdown in initial public offerings, with the US strengthening its position against other markets around the world. Arm's flotation in New York over London last year attracted much attention, and we need to look at why that happened. We should also consider what is happening to the small cap and fledgling indexes, which the UK Equity Markets Association understandably highlights.

There are certainly examples where companies that may well have listed in the UK in the past are now floating in New York. We need to be conscious of that, and if the trend continues, we need to be concerned by it. I am not yet alarmed, but I look to the Government, regulators, fund managers, the London stock exchange and others to consider what can be done to ensure that London maintains its prominence in world financial markets.

The success of the Square Mile is hugely important to the whole of the UK—to its economy, tax revenues and status—and it is equally important to the UK financial infrastructure that is available to companies and individuals all over the UK, whether that is companies seeking capital, or individuals, including pensioners, looking for investment opportunities and potential enhanced financial returns.

The point I am making is that capital markets matter to us all and extend well beyond the world of finance. We need to recognise that domestic investors have moved away from UK equities in recent years. Asset managers' investment in equities has dropped significantly, from 30% in 2017 to around 20% now. Although the London stock exchange remains the largest in Europe, its capitalisation has declined and the contribution of new international IPOs is down significantly. The number of companies listed in the UK is down by a third over the past 15 years, and UK retail investors have moved away from equities. Around 10% of assets are held in equities in the UK, compared with more than 30% in the United States. That is in spite of technology enabling more and more platforms. It is a far cry from the famous "If you see Sid, tell him" ad of the 1990s.

Some outlets, such as the BBC, sensationalise the reports of London losing its listings. An excellent report written by EY on UK finance last year provided a more balanced perspective, highlighting how London dominates in Europe in every aspect, even after the aggressive marketing by some cities in the EU following Brexit.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan on securing this debate, and I am pretty sure he will agree with what I am going to ask. Does he not agree that we cannot live up to the potential in the City market without implementing the necessary changes to promote safeguarding and safety? Those are critical. Does he believe that the Government and the Minister must be more proactive in that matter?

Alun Cairns: The hon. Member makes an extremely important point, and I will come on to it as I progress. He is right about the importance of standards. London's reputation on standards is essential not only to London, but to every part of the United Kingdom and well beyond.

I was highlighting the challenges we have had in the UK. If there are challenges here in London, there are even greater challenges elsewhere. London still dominates the European market. However, the market is always evolving and we need to react. That being the case, I am pleased that the Government are already alive to change and, along with others, have launched a series of initiatives to analyse and act on what the UK needs to do to secure London's important international role. We have seen the wholesale markets review, the UK listings review, the Kalifa review, the UK secondary capital raising review and the London stock exchange UK capital markets industry taskforce. Those are just some examples of what has been going on in recent times.

The influence of some of the reviews led to the Edinburgh reforms and the Chancellor's Mansion House speech last year. Those are positive steps but, 12 months on from the Edinburgh reforms and six months on from the Mansion House compact, this is a good time to take stock. There is a need for co-ordination and assessment of developments. I am concerned that there has been a series of reviews, including those I mentioned earlier, but securing outcomes for the benefit of companies and investors must be our focus.

There is clearly a balance to be struck between evolution and revolution. The Chancellor is on record as saying that he favours evolution, which is fair enough, but we do need to see progression, too. We also need to consider the freedom that Brexit provides, against the diversion from standards in our closest markets. I am not saying that is easy, but regular review of progress is a positive step. There are wins available for the United Kingdom, and I look to the Government to respond.

The central piece of the Mansion House speech was an agreement with the largest UK defined contribution fund managers to invest at least 5% in private equities by 2030. There are also clear ambitions for defined benefits schemes, and I hope the Minister can provide a further update on that in his response. After all, when we consider that just 1% of the UK's near £5 trillion assets are in private companies, the 5% target is a major step. I press the Minister by saying it is a good start but we need to go even further, and monitor progress towards that 2030 target. I also look to the Minister to provide further details on the defined benefits reforms and ambitions.

I recognise that the Chancellor announced plans to consolidate the local government scheme. As he said, when it comes to pension pots, big is beautiful. I get that, and the wider benefits that consolidation will

[Alun Cairns]

bring. I would, however, add a note of caution. Large funds need large investments, which in general is a good thing, but we could end up squeezing small and mid-sized companies out of the equation. Guidance to secure the role of smaller private equity funds, which usually focus on smaller firms, would be helpful. I am concerned that large pension funds will have few places to go, other than to large private equity firms in the US, defeating much of the Government's objectives.

The London stock exchange plans for an intermittent trading venue also offer new opportunities to bridge the gap, but it would be helpful to gain feedback on the timing of the regulatory approval. I also welcome the Treasury's commitment to the replacement of the EU prospectus regulation with the Public Offers and Admissions to Trading Regulations 2023 that stem from Lord Hill's listings review. That is welcome and will streamline the process significantly.

We obviously await detailed Financial Conduct Authority rules, and look to it to act swiftly in that respect. To credit the FCA, it has streamlined the listings process and loosened the rules for related party transactions. These reforms and others are very welcome, and I pay tribute to the Minister and his colleague for the part they have played. The scale of the reforms should be recognised and will have effect. However, the speed of change and the scale of reform need to increase. The capacity of the regulator will be a challenge, but we need to do whatever possible to support it to make the necessary changes we are asking of it, at pace.

In this technical debate, however, we need to remember why we are doing it, and what else can be done. We need to make it easier to raise capital in London, and the process of listing less clunky, while also focusing on attracting capital from domestic and foreign investors to provide the liquidity and funds for growth. London's reputation for high standards is a good thing, and something we need to work with. We should continue the momentum to review the access for early stage business finance, to expand the scope and remove the potential cliff edge.

Tax incentives and greater digitalisation of capital markets processes can help too. Enterprise management incentives could play a part in widening the opportunity for staff to take a stake. Stamp duty changes are also relevant. We need a new approach to investing at both fund manager and retail level. Current regulations force fund managers towards bonds and Government debt to de-risk, which almost came back to bite us just a little over 12 months ago. Savers have also been encouraged to remove risk. The classification of investments needs to be reviewed, and better research needs to be available, akin to Rachel Kent's report.

We need to re-engage the retail market in the opportunities of equities. I can recall—as I am sure you can, Ms Nokes—the privatisation of public services in the 1980s and 1990s, and the opportunities that provided for the public to invest. I have already mentioned, “If you see Sid tell him.” Regulations aimed at protecting the public from risk have removed legitimate opportunities like those. It is almost impossible for an adviser to facilitate investments directly into equities, in spite of today's reduced costs and swifter processes. Proportionate regulations are required, along with further ISA reform.

I can well recall the personal equity plans of the '90s, which had a specific allowance for a single company PEP. That made capital investment accessible and relevant to the masses.

In closing, I want to recognise the changes and reforms that have taken place but to suggest that we need regular—at least annual—reviews of progress and of the impact of change, with all stakeholders involved. That would show the world that we are determined to get it right and to continue to evolve to ever-changing needs. We must always remember that gaining and accessing new capital is essential to growing business and the economy. By getting this right, we can offer greater returns for the public through better pension and investment returns, while maintaining the UK's prominence in this vital industry.

I started off by talking about Arm, and I want to highlight a quote from Craig Coben, a prominent journalist in the field. He wrote that

“Arm should float in the US not because London has any particular flaws as a listing location, but rather because the scale, scope and depth of American capital markets make it a more compelling venue... Nasdaq-only flotation offers the broadest access to investors without the complications of two primary listings.”

That is just one example of the sort of change that can be brought about. I look to the Minister to continue his positive agenda.

11.12 am

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Gareth Davies): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Alun Cairns) on securing the debate, and I thank him for his remarks about our capital market system, which I will address in some detail.

I am grateful for the opportunity to set out the key role that capital markets play not just in our UK economy, but in wider society, which I have long spoken about not just in this House, but in my career in financial services before coming into politics. No matter the size of the company or how many countries it operates in, behind every major listed company are thousands or even millions of investors who own a stake in that company, and own a stake in a country. A FTSE 100 or S&P 500 stock will be owned by teachers, nurses, firefighters and lots of other regular people who, by owning stocks through their pensions, have a stake in the success of the company and the wider economy, and a means to benefit when both those things do well. It is an extension of what Noel Skelton, a former Member of Parliament for Perth, said in the 1920s when he talked about a property-owning democracy. It is the idea that if people have a stake in our economy, they become more engaged with the economic outcomes of the country, which in turn become more equitable, because they engage and affect normal people in more prescient ways. In that way, strong capital markets that people can easily access, interpret and utilise can be an incredible tool for broad-based engagement with our economic systems.

As my right hon. Friend alluded to, capital markets also have a more immediate impact through the allocation of capital, facilitating investment, which drives growth and jobs, and creating investor returns. That helps to

build a market that is buzzing with opportunity and optimism and attracts the best and the brightest, bringing new energy and ideas to our economy, all of which drives economic activity in every part of the country. It is worth pointing out that of the about 1 million people employed in the financial services industry, two thirds are outside our capital city. That is not always appreciated.

However, London is an international powerhouse in its own right, with a foreign exchange market three times the size and a derivatives market about 50% bigger than those of the United States, making the UK a genuine global hub for investment. In 2021, more than £17 billion of capital was raised for firms in the UK—a 15-year high. Over 120 deals were completed in that year alone. Of course, we have not been immune to the limited IPO activity caused by market turbulence across 2022 and 2023, yet in 2023 the London Stock Exchange raised more capital than Frankfurt and Amsterdam—the two largest exchanges in the European Union—combined.

More importantly, this Government recognise that there is always more we can do to improve our markets and make them even more open and competitive. My right hon. Friend mentioned that the first step on our reform journey was, as the Economic Secretary to the Treasury stated in a speech last week at Bloomberg, to diagnose the problem—to acknowledge that there was a problem and then seek a way to fix it. That started with Lord Hill's 2020 UK listings review, alluded to by my right hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan, which builds consensus on how to boost IPOs and capital raising on UK capital markets. He will be aware that in 2021, at Mansion House, we launched the wholesale markets review to consider how we could use our new-found regulatory freedoms to make UK markets more competitive.

Next came our solutions to the problems that we had diagnosed. I am happy to say that reform has progressed across all those areas, not only in our legislation and our regulatory regimes, but in the culture and mindset of the Government and of regulators, which is not to be underestimated. The Financial Services and Markets Act 2023 delivered the wholesale market review's most urgent changes. As a result, firms can now trade in the most liquid market and get the best price for investors. We have also set statutory growth and competitiveness objectives for our regulators and introduced new accountability mechanisms to ensure delivery against those objectives. Following the passage of FSMA 2023, we are taking forward a host of new initiatives, such as the digital securities sandbox, which will test the use of distributed ledger technology in trading and settlement. That is just one of a huge range of reforms coming in the near future.

The result of those reforms is that after three and a half years, we are now within sight of making the UK's public markets match fit again, which my right hon. Friend and I both seek. But he is right that we must go further and use this as an inflection point to ensure that we are delivering on the promise and opportunity presented by our capital markets. That is why we are taking further steps now and supporting companies through every stage of their investment lifecycle.

First, we will ensure that companies can scale up effectively so that they are primed and ready for listing. To do that, as my right hon. Friend alluded to, we are establishing a world first—a new class of exchange. The private intermittent securities and capital exchange

system—catchily named Pisces for short, thankfully—will be established by the end of this year. He asked for assurance, and I can assure him on that timing. The Pisces platform will give private companies better access to capital markets and break down the artificial regulatory cliff edge between public and private markets. This development will allow investors to take advantage of the structural shift to private markets, rather than suffer from it.

Secondly, we want to ensure that, when companies choose to list, the process is as easy and frictionless as possible. A fortnight ago, the Economic Secretary took the UK's new prospectus legislation through Parliament, paving the way for the FCA to complete its entire rewrite of the prospectus regime's rulebook to deliver on the recommendations of the Hill and Mark Austin reviews, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan referred to. That will boost the operating environment for our capital markets in two important ways: it will increase the pool of investors participating in capital raises, and it will enable firms to raise larger sums of capital more quickly.

Finally, we want to ensure that, once listed, companies are matched with the best investors for their offering. We welcome the FCA's commitment to consult on the changes to the unbundling rules this spring. That was a recommendation of Rachel Kent's investment research review. Subject to the outcomes of that consultation, the FCA will make relevant rules in the first half of this year. We aim to revive the research market by delivering more efficient and accurate pricing, in particular for small and medium-sized enterprises.

In the autumn statement, the Chancellor announced his plans to explore options for a NatWest retail share offer this year, and a wider ambition to get the public buying more shares. My right hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan rightly said that we should get Sid investing again. For those who do not know, that is a reference to an advertising campaign that only Members of a certain vintage will appreciate—it is entirely lost on my private office.

I will move on quickly to some of the wider issues. My right hon. Friend talked about Charlie Geffen's accelerated settlement taskforce, which will upgrade our back-office operations for the 21st century.

This year will mark substantial progress in all three of the investment cycle stages that I have set out. Alongside the regulatory reforms, the Government are looking to reverse the trend of British investors—both institutional and individual—shifting away from investing in UK equities. As my right hon. Friend points out, the statistics are pretty stark. They have been on a downward trend for many years, and that is particularly evident in our pension funds. As he rightly said, at Mansion House the Chancellor began the process of announcing the Mansion House compact, which will see 11 major defined-contribution pension schemes allocate at least 5% of their default funds to unlisted equities, unlocking capital investment in high-growth companies. With the pension reforms now in train, we expect the pension pot of a typical DC saver to increase by as much as £16,000 over the course of an average career.

This agenda is underpinned by a commitment to openness, competitiveness, growth, dynamism and innovation in financial services, as first set out by the then Chancellor, now Prime Minister, in 2021. When

[Gareth Davies]

those principles are properly applied, they have an impact far beyond financial markets. They can be a way to open the doors of our boardrooms to a far wider range of people, democratising our capital markets and inspiring individuals throughout the country to take an active interest in our markets, while making sure that more people have experience and an understanding of the risks and rewards that are such a vital component of our capital markets.

Our capital markets in this country are a source of great pride, including to me, having worked in them. It is right that we all feel pride in the UK capital market structure, but I want more people to speak with pride about our stocks—the stocks that they own today or may own in the future. Our capital markets have helped shape the country that we live in. They have helped us make this country more prosperous, they have created more jobs and they have made us more competitive overseas. The Government are working to ensure that that remains the case for many years to come by making our markets more attractive, competitive and, crucially, accessible. I am proud to be taking forward that important work with colleagues from across the House, and to have been able to speak about it today under your chairmanship, Ms Nokes.

Question put and agreed to.

11.24 am

Sitting suspended.

Children's Mental Health Week 2024

[MARK PRITCHARD *in the Chair*]

2.31 pm

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): May I apologise to colleagues for being a minute late? I was informed about two minutes ago, so that was the best workout I have had in a while.

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Children's Mental Health Week 2024.

It is a pleasure to serve under you as Chair, Mr Pritchard—a breathless Mr Pritchard.

The challenges facing the mental health of our young people have never been greater. One in five children have a mental illness, and half of all mental illnesses develop by the age of 14. In the coming years, as many as 1.5 million children will need support for their mental health needs. Amid this escalating crisis, we need bold action to support our young people, but the Government too often lack the ambition, funding and attention that are needed. Meanwhile, the human cost of their inaction only grows.

In A&E, I see children coming in younger and younger. I will never forget their emaciated faces when attending having self-harmed, living with eating disorders or having attempted to take their own lives. I will never forget the faces of parents agonised by their children's suffering, exhausted from being on suicide watch and fighting tooth and nail for their child, or pushing to access vital services that their child needs, and frequently finding their children being turned away and left to languish for months or even years on waiting lists while their condition deteriorates exponentially.

Pretty much every year we have a debate like this in Westminster Hall and we have many debates in the main Chamber. Every year, we all agree that this has to end, that we must do better and that our children deserve better, but year on year there is simply inaction. Parents are having to give up work to stay at home to be on suicide watch, because they fear what their child will do if they go to work. This affects families in a way that no one can ever possibly understand. A lack of investment in that one young person goes on to affect their parents, their siblings and their future, as well as their and their family's ability to contribute to the economy and, most importantly, their ability to have a quality, healthy and happy life.

In calling for this debate I am labouring under the hope that we can actually move forward and do something. It is simple: poor mental health is carried through childhood into adulthood. The failures to address the mental health crisis in our young people will leave them ill-equipped as they grow older. We know all too well that prevention is better than cure, yet we ignore that wisdom when it comes to children's mental health. That is something I simply do not understand. We have the ability collectively within the House positively to impact the lives of millions of children yet, somehow, remarkably, we fail to do so. The Government should invest in early intervention, working to improve child and adolescent mental health services and ensuring prompt access to vital support. Instead, children are being let down and left behind.

Despite young people making up a quarter of all contacts with mental health services, only 8% of funding goes towards children's mental health services. There are almost half a million children on CAMHS waiting lists. That is a record figure that should be a badge of shame for this Government. Let me remind everybody that, when we talk about half a million children, we are talking about wider families who are affected, people who will never see their children again because those children felt they had no choice but to take their own lives. There are families begging their children to eat that one extra morsel of food because they have not been able to get the services they need for eating disorders.

We are talking about pain and anguish of epic proportions, and on a scale that we have to take seriously. Forgive my passion, but I care deeply about this. We must all care deeply, because this crosses the socioeconomic divide. Regardless of the size of house someone lives in or the amount of money their parents earn, if this pain is known to a family, it does not matter who they are or where they live—it is crippling. A parent loves their child just as much if they live in a £5-million house or a one-bedroom flat.

Dr Neil Hudson (Penrith and The Border) (Con): The hon. Member is making a powerful and passionate speech. As an expert specialist clinician, she has touched on the concept of prevention, and the fact that the key is preventive medicine and signposting. I have had applied suicide intervention skills training and mental health first aid training. I have been privileged to work with 3 Dads Walking, who tragically lost their daughters to suicide. A key part of their campaign is to get suicide prevention on to the school curriculum. Does the hon. Member agree that prevention is a key part of this that we should invest in, and that we should support efforts to get suicide prevention and mechanisms for helping young people into schools and education colleges?

Dr Allin-Khan: I thank the hon. Member for his passionate intervention. He is right that prevention is better than cure. Anybody who knows anyone who has lost someone through suicide will know that it is not a pain someone ever gets over. They simply hope to God that they can learn to live with it in some way, so that they may get through their own lives with a semblance of existence. If there is any way in which we could prevent even one needless loss of life, that would go a long way.

The 3 Dads Walking are incredible—I have had the honour of following their marvellous work—but there are many people who are not in the public light, and many who are too embarrassed to admit how they lost their loved ones, for fear of blame and shame and what that means. We know that many people who have lost people in that way feel they want to take their own lives, and often do.

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member on securing the debate and her passionate advocacy. Many of us across the House share a deep understanding of the need for it. Does she agree that, if we are to tackle the causes, we need better data? We need to understand what is driving this epidemic. I particularly want to draw attention to the children of alcoholics and the great work done by the National Association for Children of Alcoholics; the children of divorce and conflict; and those children badly affected

during the pandemic. Does the hon. Member agree that we need better data to understand the causes, then we can start to prevent it, as well as, importantly, treating it when it occurs. We could prevent a lot more of this.

Dr Allin-Khan: I thank the hon. Member for that intervention. Yes, I wholeheartedly agree that there is definitely space for more research. Adverse childhood experiences are the single biggest driver of mental ill health in children and, later on, in adults. I will touch on that later.

I want to know today when the Government will finally get their act together to end the wait for children's mental health services. We are sick and tired of the same old meaningless platitudes from the Government. I know the Minister: I had the pleasure of working with her in my role as a shadow Minister. I know she is decent, good and kind, and she absolutely wants the best for children. I believe that. I also understand that her hands, regardless of what she might want to do, will be tied. However, in my role as shadow Cabinet Minister for mental health over three and a half years, the number of times the Minister and her predecessors have harped on, quite frankly, about the £2.3 billion they have put into mental health services! They have used that figure no fewer than 90 times in five years for many different things, depending on the focus of the debate. Whenever we have a debate about eating disorders, the £2.3 billion comes out. Whenever we have a debate about access to IAPT—improving access to psychological therapies—the £2.3 billion comes out. Whenever we have a children's mental health debate, it is again rolled out. I understand that, but we really need tangible answers because the waiting lists grow, children are let down and families suffer.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I commend the hon. Lady for securing a debate on this important issue. She is absolutely right to highlight the fact that we have known there are challenges in CAMHS for many years: we know there are problems with commissioning CAMHS and we know there are workforce challenges. We know there has been a failure to properly recruit mental health doctors and nurses to posts across CAMHS. Does she agree that we need to hear proper answers from the Minister today? We have known about these challenges for a long time. It is time we got on and did something about it.

May I apologise, Mr Pritchard? I should, at the beginning, have drawn the attention of the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests as a practising NHS psychiatrist.

Dr Allin-Khan: I thank the hon. Member, whom I would like to call my hon. Friend, because we have worked very closely on this issue for a number of years. He speaks not just as a politician, but as a practising NHS psychiatrist and I take my hat off to him. He speaks from a position of authority. We also sat together on a pre-legislative scrutiny Committee for a number of months, where we heard how black people and those with autism and learning disabilities are affected by current policy. We made cross-party, cross-House recommendations, but all of that has been scrapped. The Bill has not been introduced to the House and we are wondering how, with such cross-party agreement, that can be.

Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for bringing this very important issue to Westminster Hall. She just spoke about black children. Does she think that this crisis is impacting disproportionately on black children and young people? Does the profession need to look at racism as a trauma, and does more work need to be done to consider those issues and deal with this crisis?

Dr Allin-Khan: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. Absolutely yes, black people are significantly more adversely affected. The work has been done. We sat together and saw the evidence, and the Government have chosen to ignore the recommendations. Experts have been working for years on understanding the drivers and coming up with solutions. Young black men are four times more likely than white men to be diagnosed with mental ill health when they have entered the judicial system, when their life is over and they have already had their cards marked, as it were. What beggars belief is the fact that we had consensus. We had the experts who did the research. They came and presented, yet we have got nowhere. I am fed up, as are many people here, with the same old soundbites and no meaningful action.

Tonight, many children will be going to bed cold and hungry. More than 120,000 children will be without a home. Let us think about that for a moment: 120,000 children without a home. Millions more are living in poverty in damp and mouldy houses. Parents simply wanting the best for their families are suffering under the sharp pinch of the cost of living crisis. That is the damning reality of 14 long years of Tory rule.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech, in keeping with the expertise that she has in this area. I agree that one of the great driving causes of the epidemic of mental ill health among young people is the unnecessary poverty and lack of opportunity in this country, following the political choice that was made to pursue 14 years of austerity. That means that, in one of the richest countries on earth, we need not only a solution to the root causes of unnecessary child poverty, but extra Government investment in children who are already on a waiting list for mental health support. People may be shocked to discover that, in West Yorkshire, 24,560 children were on a waiting list for mental health support as of November last year—a nearly 30% increase from the same time the year before. Does that not go to show that urgent action and urgent extra funding are needed from this Government?

Dr Allin-Khan: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, and he is absolutely right. This is about understanding. As I alluded to earlier, adverse childhood experiences are the single biggest driver of poor mental health in children and then later on in adults. Of course, there are other causes—most definitely—but adverse childhood experiences are huge. That is why, as my hon. Friend articulated so well, it is important to understand that, yes, there has to be money going directly into the mental health pot, but there must also be a wider ambition for our children. There must be an understanding of how we tackle these root drivers that are causing so many children to have poor mental health.

Inequality and poverty drive mental illness. We know that children from the very poorest households are four times more likely to develop a mental illness. Some 43%

of children who are receiving mental health support from Place2Be, a fantastic organisation, are on free school meals. Addressing the mental health crisis in children must go hand in hand with addressing the cost of living crisis and child poverty. Yet, as many families continue to struggle to afford food and bills, the Government have offered little to tackle childhood poverty.

It will come as no surprise to Members here that I believe we need a set of policies that bring essential change to young people's mental health. That means having specialists in schools; fixing the chronic staffing shortages and recruiting more staff; ensuring that patients are getting timely access to treatment and not languishing on long waiting lists, desperately waiting for that letter to come through the door telling them that they have an appointment; and enabling young people to access support in the community. As a country, we have a duty to be bold in our offer and uncompromising in our aims, with mental health interwoven into every decision the Government take.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): The hon. Lady is being very generous with allowing interventions. I agree with much of what she has said, particularly in regard to early intervention. I was the Children's Minister when we set up the early intervention fund, which recognised that having money invested early and attention on children as young as possible would bear dividends later on. The hon. Lady has made a number of criticisms of the Government, saying that they have done nothing, but she has not mentioned the Best Start for Life project set up by the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Dame Andrea Leadsom), which is all about that early intervention, from conception to age two. Does she acknowledge the good that that is beginning to do, because in addition to adverse childhood experiences, the other biggest impact on a child's mental health is the lack of attachment, or attachment dysfunction? There is a 99% correlation between a mother suffering from depression or low-level mental illness during pregnancy and the likelihood of her children going through similar mental health and depression episodes as teenagers. Therefore, working with parents, and particularly the mother, before conception is absolutely where we can have the biggest impact in making sure that children are well-balanced, ready to join society, join school and join nursery, and able to avoid many of the problems that happen later on.

Dr Allin-Khan: I thank the hon. Member for his intervention and for highlighting something that we so often forget. When we talk about mental illness and children's mental health, we often do not talk about the early years—the early attachment-forming part of life that is so important for positive mental health. He is right that healthy mental health in a mother is essential for positive mental health in a child. I would pick him up slightly on some of his points, because if we look at health inequalities, the groups that I have been talking about, who are most adversely affected with their mental health, are the ones who struggle to access any of the support available. The numbers speak for themselves.

Of course, all projects, interventions and ambitions for our children and their parents are important, but right now we have a children's mental health epidemic.

That is why it is important that we talk about these things during Children's Mental Health Week next week, and beforehand in this debate. As a country, we have to be bold in our offer and have mental health interwoven in every decision the Government make. That goes to the point made by the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), having been early years Minister, about the importance of having mental health not in a health silo but across Departments, from local planning applications to Bills taken through this House. However, our children are being failed by a lack of prevention and early intervention, by long waiting lists, by a lack of funding, by an overstretched system and by a Government who are simply not concerned with children's mental wellbeing.

We simply cannot allow our children's future to continue to be squandered as a result of more inaction. The Minister may challenge me on this point, but the proof of the pudding is in the eating. It is no longer time for warm words; they have to be backed up with resources and ambition for our children. I hope we will hear something new from the Minister today, and I thank everybody for attending the debate.

2.51 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): It is an honour to serve while you are in the Chair, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate the hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) on introducing the subject in such a wide-ranging and compassionate way. I prepared only a few notes because I thought the debate would be over-subscribed, but I hope we will still fill the time. I might add a few things that I have not prepared.

I want to focus particularly on adverse childhood experiences. I have been the chair of the all-party parliamentary group for the prevention of adverse childhood experiences, which we now call the APPG for childhood trauma, for some years. Listening to and understanding the science of adverse childhood experiences has given me a real insight. I commend the WAVE Trust, which has also done a lot of work on attachment disorder and the importance of a child's early attachment to their mother. The trust has been a fabulous supporter of the APPG for childhood trauma.

Our children are falling through the cracks. It is clear that our approach to childhood mental health is not working—I agree with the hon. Member for Tooting on that. As the chair of the APPG for childhood trauma, I will focus my attention on trauma in mental health.

Adverse childhood experiences, also known as ACEs, are the biggest drivers of poor mental health in children. They can be anything that threatens to overwhelm the child, including abuse and neglect. Being unable to process prolonged stress can alter a child's normal brain function, which often stays with that person all their life. That is what we call trauma. A child's brain helps them to survive in the moment, but it assumes that persistent stress or danger is normal and it therefore adapts to constant adrenalin. Because of that, those who experience childhood trauma are twice as likely to develop depression and three times as likely to develop anxiety disorders.

Very often, children's behaviour at school is also affected. I asked a question in Education questions earlier this week about the Government's behaviour policy,

because ACEs are not even mentioned in it. If we do not talk about ACEs more—I use every opportunity to talk about them—gaps appear in the behaviour policy or guidelines to schools. The Department for Education does not even mention ACEs and childhood trauma; that needs to be corrected.

Many children carry their traumatic experience into later life. Someone's chances of dropping out of school, being obese or even developing diseases such as strokes are higher the more ACEs they have experienced. The life expectancy of those with six or more ACEs is 20 years lower than that of peers with none. There is no limit for the reach of ACEs. That does not mean that people who suffer adverse childhood experiences are invariably condemned to a life of disadvantage, but it is so much more likely. We therefore have to focus on it.

Poverty is also an adverse childhood experience. That is why the connection between mental ill health and poverty is so important. We need to focus and see it for what it is.

Sir Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a fascinating speech, and I look forward to hearing more from her on a future occasion. She draws attention to how young people can get support and be recognised. In my constituency, we had a series of tragic events. Out of that, the NHS has provided i-Rock Horsham District, which is an opportunity for young people without a referral—without being told by a teacher, parent or doctor that this is the appropriate path—to present themselves for professional support. It will not be fully-fledged psychiatric support but it will have that triaging process, sometimes helping them with more basic issues or reassuring them, but often helping to pick up where they really need the kind of support my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Dr Hudson) and others have referred to. That is proving extremely effective in my constituency.

Wera Hobhouse: I could not agree more. I hope my speech will make everybody here realise that we need much more understanding about ACEs. Some countries have that understanding and roll out trauma-informed services across the board, including police, education, welfare and health. A better understanding of ACEs will lead to more specialism and more people understanding this area. Trauma-informed schools, for instance, would also mean that teachers pick things up and go deeper into the issues of childhood trauma. I was a secondary school teacher before I became a Member of Parliament, and I sometimes wish I had known about ACEs, given some of the behavioural challenges I faced, which would make someone think, "That is just a very difficult child." If I had known more, I would probably have picked up the behaviour as that of a traumatised child, rather than that of somebody who was consistently causing trouble. We would therefore deal with children differently.

George Freeman: The hon. Lady is making a powerful case, and I am keen to hear as much of it as I can. To the point I was trying to make earlier, extreme poverty is one cause of childhood trauma, but there are many others. Like many people in this House—I put my own hand up—I experienced childhood trauma, but I was in a materially privileged family. Poverty can provide a lot of those drivers that the hon. Lady has talked about,

[George Freeman]

but I was taken out of the arms of my father by the police at 11 months, and I was a child carer of an alcoholic parent. Poverty has a part to play, but does the hon. Lady agree that we need to make sure we frame this in the context of the real causes, some of which are not related to poverty but to other chronic problems, such as alcohol, addiction or domestic violence? If we view the matter simply through the prism of a poverty attack, we are in danger of missing out some of the causes that are really embedded in repeated patterns of trauma within families.

Wera Hobhouse: First of all, it is brave that the hon. Gentleman is sharing his experiences of trauma. I think we need more people to do that. He is also absolutely right that not all of this is directly linked to poverty. Poverty or extreme poverty is one ACE among many others, and these things can happen in any family. Those who are doing research into ACEs would always recognise that trauma is not just suffered in a particular type of household but across socioeconomic backgrounds. The hon. Gentleman will know how difficult it is to overcome the traumas of early childhood and deal with them.

I want to make some progress. I am sorry that I cannot expand on ACEs now, but I encourage everybody who is here to inform themselves about them and the research that the WAVE Trust has done into the subject, which is fascinating and ongoing. That research suggests that the adverse childhood experiences of abuse and neglect alone, which can happen in any family, cost the UK more than £15 billion a year. Clearly, the cost of preventing adverse childhood experiences is less than that of inaction.

Unnoticed and unaddressed, adverse childhood experiences can be a lifelong sentence. Childhood trauma does not end with the child and it gets transferred to the next generation—that is also something that the APPG for childhood trauma has researched further. Then, there is a spiral or a vicious circle of repeat trauma. If childhood trauma is not addressed, those who become parents will carry their adverse childhood experiences into the next generation, and their children may suffer trauma, too. We must end this cycle, and that starts with early intervention. One factor that can help to prevent childhood trauma is whether the child feels capable and deserving. A supportive and reliable adult presence is key, and we often hear about how teachers, for example, have helped a great deal because they, as an adult, have been in the room when home life has been very difficult.

As I have said, trauma-informed services across the board—in schools, the NHS, the police and our prisons—would have a transformative impact on the whole of our society. Social workers must be supported to recognise the effect of ACEs early in children's lives. Early years practitioners can spot signs of trauma at the age at which it is most likely to be resolved. I hope to hear commitments from the Minister on implementing trauma-informed services. Examining how trauma affects minds allows us to gain an enriched understanding of behaviour, and I have mentioned how that would support teachers. Rounded insights and changes in approach lead to better care for children, and better care for children now will be felt for generations to come.

3.1 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I had not intended to speak, but there appears to be an opportunity to do so, and I am not one to pass it up, so I will make just a few comments. I declare my interests as per the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Until recently, I was also for six years the chair of the trustees of the Parent-Infant Foundation, which did and continues to do very important work on infant mental health awareness, attachment and the provision of services.

I again congratulate the hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) on securing this debate. It is a subject about which she knows much, and her passion shows through. I disagree with little of what she said, although her speech became a little partisan at some stages. This issue has besieged Governments over many years, but if one looks at the figures, most alarmingly, the incidence of mental illness among children has got particularly bad since the beginning of covid, and there are reasons for that that we should continue to be worried about. This is not a gradual progression; there has been a very serious downturn in recent years, which I will come back to.

I agree with all the comments that have been made about the disproportionate impact on children in the care system, children from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and those in poverty. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman) said, the issue is not exclusive to people from deprived backgrounds. In some projects run by the Parent-Infant Foundation around the country, we see parents from well-to-do city backgrounds who have serious attachment problems with their children. At times, we forget that mental illness spreads across the whole of society in different ways, and we need to be open to all of them.

Wera Hobhouse: Does the hon. Member not recognise that those from a less deprived background have better access to help than those from a poorer background?

Tim Loughton: There is something in that, and people from better-off backgrounds may have recourse to the private sector as well, but the point is that the illness impacts on everybody, although I certainly agree that the capacity to get early help for that illness is differentiated across families.

The impact of covid should not be underestimated. During covid, we saw the impact on new parents, particularly new single parents. One of the biggest impacts was the absence of health visitors able to go across the threshold of new parents' homes, particularly on single parents having a child for the first time. There were the other horrors of covid going on, and people were detached from the normal family networks they might have, such as grandparents coming along to share their experience and give support. On top of that, they did not have a health visitor coming to visit them physically, because about three quarters of health visitors were diverted to the frontline of dealing with covid. It was only in the most deprived cases, where there were concerns, that health visitors physically got to go and visit.

On top of that, we had a decline in the numbers of health visitors, which reversed the position that the coalition Government produced, where we had an

additional 4,200; quite rightly, that was a pledge by the Government, and it was actually delivered in the lifetime of one Government. Since then, numbers have declined again. I think there is absolutely a false economy.

Dr Poulter: I agree entirely with what my hon. Friend said about health visitors. I think I was actually the Minister who oversaw that increase in the number of health visitors. The change to commissioning by local authorities has been a very big mistake in the provision of health visitor services. I wonder more generally—after reflecting on the link between poverty and poor mental health—whether he would also reflect on family nurses, who provide significant support to deprived families and families with challenges. That workforce also struggled to do its good work during the pandemic, which has had a consequential effect on those families and indeed the mental health of young people.

Tim Loughton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Family nurse partnerships were another great success story, for which he can take part of the credit. There are various ways of providing that support, in particular to new families, but a lot of it was not available during covid.

I have a real concern about babies born during covid. We are only starting to see the consequences. I remember well one of our own colleagues in a debate in this Chamber during covid saying that she gave birth during that time and it was five months before her own baby got to meet another baby, and the baby did not react well—“What on earth is this? Another baby?” There were no mum and toddler classes available then, and there were no support networks of grandparents and others coming in. If there were no health visitors or other professionals there as well, it was difficult to spot signs of attachment disorder or safeguarding issues within a household—and we are only starting to see the consequences now. It has compounded the issues for these children. Now at last, they are at least being diagnosed with a mental illness, but it might have been prevented earlier if all that support was there. That really needs to be on the radar of the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education.

Then there is the impact of school lockdowns, which should also not be underestimated. There is a strong correlation when it comes to children, particularly younger children, not being able to go to school and socialise with their friends, or go through all the normal disciplines of what school brings. There are also safeguarding concerns that teachers and early warning exercises can pick up. We are seeing the impact of children being cooped up at home and not able to get on with the ordinary day-to-day business of growing up and being a child, and there were many safeguarding problems as a result of the schools lockdowns.

I will not apportion blame here, but it was a big mistake that the schools were closed down, and the unions forced those closures in the early days. We are seeing the consequences now. I agree with many of the solutions. Of course we need more investment. The Government have been investing, but they need to invest more, and we need more professionals to come into the system, because they do not grow on trees. It is absolutely right that awareness is needed of mental health first aiders and the mental health support available in schools—and we need more of that.

The trouble is that when somebody's mental health problem is spotted in school, the thresholds for getting the treatment, therapy or whatever they require are so high that it takes too long, and in too many cases the condition worsens over that time. It really is a false economy. We need far quicker referrals, and without having to go through so many hoops. As the hon. Member for Tooting said, parents are waiting weeks or months on end to get a referral—in many cases, just to get the diagnosis before they can actually get the appropriate treatment.

I also have big concerns about eating disorders. The Government have put a lot of investment into increasing eating disorder specialist placements, but they are full up. I had a particularly tragic case in my constituency. The father rang every hospital in the country, including all the private hospitals because he could afford to fund treatment for his daughter, but everywhere was full. Eventually he secured a bed on, I think, Christmas eve. This was a teenage girl who was suicidal and had been through various episodes before. Eventually she got good treatment in hospital.

But there is a problem when people come out of hospital; often it is a case of falling off a precipice because the support services are no longer there. We need a much better system where people who need residential intensive support can be supported when they come out of that residential environment, which is a particularly tricky time because too often they end up having to go back into that intensive residential environment.

Dr Poulter *rose*—

Tim Loughton: I will give way one more time. I have one more point to make and then I will finish.

Dr Poulter: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. He is making an excellent contribution to this debate. His points about eating disorders are absolutely right. On the arrangements that are in place for discharge from in-patient units and also on preventive care such as community services for eating disorders, does he agree with me that one of the challenges is that there has been a failure to develop the workforce in that area? There are many unfilled posts in community eating disorder services. Unless we get that right, we will not address the challenges of eating disorders that he has outlined.

Tim Loughton: Again, my hon. Friend reinforces my point. I think we have done better on the provision of beds for that intensive care, although there are still not enough of them, but we have not done nearly enough on picking up afterwards and on preventing people from getting to that stage in the first place. The issue disproportionately affects young girls, who have all the pressures of social media. The Media Bill is being discussed in the main Chamber at the moment, and we are clamping down on sites that pretend to be there to offer support but that actually encourage vulnerable teenagers into obscene eating disorders as though they are a badge of honour. So much more needs to be done. It is so expensive—financially, as well as socially—when we do not act at the appropriate time.

My final point comes back to early intervention and prevention. The Best Start for Life project, pioneered by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Dame Andrea Leadsom), really is a game changer.

[Tim Loughton]

It has had the buy-in of all the political parties. I was a part of the various advisory research groups that we had in this place working with Members across the Floor, and we now have the roll-out of family hubs. This is all about supporting families, particularly mums, but not exclusively mums because fathers have a role; too often they are neglected and yet they are a part of the support mechanism. There are mental illness problems affecting new fathers, which are quite severe, as well as the perinatal mental illness around women. We need to do much more to make sure we have happy mothers and that we attack domestic violence problems, a third of which happen during pregnancy. If we have a happy mum, we have a happy baby, who is likely to grow up well attached, happier, well balanced, and more resilient against all the pressures and problems of mental illness in society that are manifested in schools and beyond.

It is not true to say that the Government have done nothing and have not invested in this issue. We need them to do more and invest more. The Best Start for Life project is one of the most exciting and fundamentally important projects for attacking a problem right at the beginning, before it becomes a much bigger problem for children, families and society as a whole.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Order. I am afraid I will have to impose a time limit of five minutes for each speech—we have about three left. We will move on to the Front-Bench speakers just before half-past, so that will be 10 minutes each. I call Yasmin Qureshi.

3.13 pm

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton). I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) on securing this really important debate. I thank her for all the work that she has done over the years on mental health issues. She works as a doctor while still working as a Member of Parliament, so I thank her so much for everything that she has done.

I will speak for about two minutes, so hopefully colleagues will have a chance to get in. The problem is that mental health has always been a bit of a Cinderella service; there has never been proper investment in, for example, the training of professionals, or in sufficient spaces—for example, in schools—to help children with mental health issues. As a constituency MP, parents come to see me when they are trying to get their children into a special school, and I am sure other colleagues will have heard about the same issues: there are not enough spaces available and, if there are spaces, they are often far away. It is heartbreaking to see parents crying about how much their children are suffering. In Bolton, the wait just to get a first appointment with CAMHS is at least 12 weeks, and the NHS Greater Manchester integrated care board recently reported that, as of November 2023, there were 29,690 children on the waiting list for mental health support—a 25% increase on the figures in November 2022.

Mental health issues have affected almost 1.6 million young people—double the number 10 years ago—who are effectively being reported as “disabled”, and 650,000 children receive disability living allowance. There are many reasons why children experience mental health issues. We have discussed the cost of living crisis; being unable to access proper food, a warm home and clothes will have an impact. I agree with the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham that the covid lockdown, school closures and other reasons have also contributed to the situation. There are also existing recognisable mental health issues, like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, eating disorders and self-harm—and we often forget about factors such as the sexual and physical abuse of children in the home. These are real crises that we are facing.

The country cannot afford to have 1.6 million children who will become adults with mental health issues. There is a moral argument for the situation to be resolved. I heard what my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting said about the Government; whether people like it or not, this Government have been in charge for the last 14 years, so if there are still problems now, they have to take responsibility and tackle the issue properly. I will say it again: while there is a moral case to address the situation immediately, there is an economic case as well, because we will have adults with a lot of emotional health issues, and that is not good for our society. The time for discussion is over.

3.18 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) on securing the debate and on all the work that she has contributed in looking at mental health and, in particular today, children's mental health.

I believe that no one has the monopoly of wisdom in this area—every day we are learning how to move forward—but key components need to be put in place. We know, and have heard in the debate, the role that trauma plays and its impact on children's mental health. We also know that the environment to which a child is exposed can trigger and escalate the challenges they face.

We have heard about the shortfalls in the number of professionals required in the services. We need greater investment, not just through ringfenced and protected finance and funding, but to ensure that the NHS long-term workforce plan focuses on the mental health workforce that is needed now and into the future. As we have heard, whether workforce issues are due to the impact of covid or other factors, they will have a significant impact; and unless we make the right interventions early, there will clearly be consequences.

I particularly want to focus the Minister on the issue of leadership, because in an ever more complex health system—we have heard again today about the challenges of trying to navigate local authority and health systems—we need to have very clear leadership in this area. I urge the Minister to go back to the major conditions strategy and to pull out mental health, specifically looking at children and young people's mental health, and to develop a 10-year strategy, not just for mental health in general as was originally planned, but for children and

young people's mental health, so that there can be not only a laser focus on the interventions that are needed but so the strategy can be held up to scrutiny, which is what this place needs to do.

I also urge the Minister to co-ordinate cross-departmental work to ensure that that strategy is robust and that the inter-relationships between different Departments work, because we recognise that the issues we are discussing today have impacts in so many different areas, whether we are talking about the environment, housing, poverty—as we have today—or indeed education. We need to ensure that we pull all that work together. I urge her to take that work forward and to respond to the debate.

In particular, I also want to focus on the intersections with children from the care sector—care-experienced young people—and the additional traumas that they have. Just last Thursday, we heard powerful evidence in this place when Adoption UK put forward its latest report, which discusses how the education system itself needs to change. I would be really interested to know what discussions the Minister is having with Education Ministers about creating a trauma-informed approach to schooling, particularly addressing some of the behaviour codes that are in place, and the processes of isolation and exclusions, which are bearing down on young people who, as we have already heard, have faced significant challenges since covid and before. It is incredibly important to ensure that such an approach is put in place, in particular for children with autism and children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD.

Those children are having an adverse experience in the education system, which will be costly in the long term. There are too many children in that situation. I met an Education Minister this morning and highlighted the number of children who are not in school. We cannot just say that children are refusing to attend school with no reason and we also need to ensure that the school environment is safe for children.

I welcome the presence of health professionals in schools. I have to say that relying on teachers to lead on mental health in schools is the wrong approach, because teachers have so much to do already that they need back-up. Teachers are scared that they will miss something because they have not had the training that mental health professionals have. However, the roll-out of those teams of health professionals in schools is far, far too slow. I appreciate that there is a workforce challenge, but we need to expedite that work.

I will close by drawing attention to the work of Healthwatch York, which has really dug deep into children's mental health issues in our city, and to the work that I have been doing and a recent meeting that I have had with parents from across our city. Systems seem to be impossible to navigate, there are long waits and ultimately services are overstretched and under-resourced. It is not just the young people themselves but their parents who need support, so I trust that the Minister will ensure that there is a parents strategy in all the work she does.

3.23 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a real pleasure to speak in this debate, Mr Pritchard, which is on an issue that I have a very big interest in.

I start by thanking the hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) for securing this debate on such an important subject and on setting the scene really well with her massive knowledge of this subject, which helps us all to develop a better understanding of it. This issue is experienced in all of our constituencies; it is not just a nationwide issue but a universal one. So, I am very pleased to be able to make a contribution to this debate today.

I know first-hand stories about this issue from my own constituency. I will not mention any names, but I know that a large number of children are genuinely struggling, so it is great to be here to represent them and discuss ways to combat mental health issues. It is the parents who I deal with; they speak on behalf of the children who have the problems.

I will give a Northern Ireland perspective. I am very pleased to see the Minister—the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield)—here in Westminster Hall today. She is a Minister who understands these issues and I have no doubt that she will reply very positively to our requests. In Northern Ireland, the system is operated by child and adolescent mental health services, or CAMHS, which goes above and beyond to support young children who are suffering from conditions such as depression, problems with food or eating, self-harm and abuse, violent tendencies, bi-polar disorders, schizophrenia or anxiety. More than 2,000 young children are waiting for an assessment by CAMHS and some of those children have to wait for up to nine weeks.

There is no greater worry than the worry that one has about a child or grandchild. I have six grandchildren and I really do worry about the six of them and the society that we live in now. It is different from when I was a teen growing up, which, by the way, was not yesterday. Support and openness is the main source of encouragement and I will go on briefly to that in terms of school and education. In my constituency of Strangford, I have heard of and taken many phone calls concerning eating disorders. I commend the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) because she has been at the forefront and done a grand job. She has highlighted the matter, not just here but in the main Chamber, and I congratulate her on that.

I have spoken about having good and efficient eating disorder services available. For example, in my constituency there is no access to a clinic to allow people to weigh in with their GP or to receive specialised treatment. Each year in Northern Ireland, 50 to 120 people develop anorexia, while 170 develop bulimia. Way back when I first came here, the Minister in Northern Ireland at that time helped one of my constituents, who was a young girl of 15. She went to St Thomas' hospital across the road here. My Minister, along with the then Minister of Health here, saved that girl's life.

That is a story of how our NHS works. We do not always hear the good stories. I know as a fact that that young girl is now married with two children. I remember meeting her with her parents in the Lobby here, who were worried sick about her. Yet our health service, our Minister back home and the Minister here saved her life at St Thomas', just across the water.

There are 100 admissions to acute hospitals for eating disorders every year. It is important to remember with these figures that that they record only people who have

[Jim Shannon]

been admitted to hospital, so there will be more. What is this about? Young boys and girls who suffer with eating disorders struggle with their looks and self-confidence. Children and teens spend so much time in school, that often their parents will be completely unaware of what is taking place. We must also make discreet pastoral care accessible for young children. It is really important to have that, and I hope the Minister will provide a response on pastoral care and where we are here.

I can speak for the schools of Strangford, as I am in frequent contact with them regarding multiple issues. The care our teachers have for young people is unwavering. It is a fact of life that so many young people are struggling. I have never seen anything like the struggles of the past two years. The hon. Member for Tooting mentioned that in her introduction, and I see that replicated, unfortunately, in my constituency.

Other features are struggling at school, personal appearance, heartbreak and grief. We must always remind them of the importance of speaking up and sharing feelings, so that we can help them. In conclusion, I urge the Minister, the Department and the Government to engage with devolved institutions. I always say that because it is important that we work better together, to ensure we have the necessary means to support our young people with their mental health.

This issue is incredibly important, as I have witnessed in my own constituency, from what parents and children have brought to me. To reiterate the point I made at the beginning, this is an issue we must all understand and must resolve as a nation. I have said often that we can do these things better together, and I think the Minister grasps that.

3.28 pm

Amy Callaghan (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) on securing this debate and the passion and professional experience she brought to her contribution.

The contributions we have heard so far highlight how important it is to take action to improve children's mental health and address the root causes and aggravating factors leading to poor mental health in children. As the MP for East Dunbartonshire and the SNP health spokesperson, I am fully committed to tackling the underlying causes of mental health issues. The key themes I want to reiterate are improving support for children who are struggling with their mental health, and poverty as a key driver of poor mental health. Addressing that is key, to ensure children are not taking on the burden of this Tory Government's financial mismanagement.

I will start with support. The theme of this year's children's mental health week is "My Voice Matters". It is important that we acknowledge in this place that we are here to represent our constituents and give a voice to those not feeling heard. It is our responsibility to advocate for those families and ensure that, when children are struggling with their mental health, they are met with support and a listening ear.

It is also important to note that LGBT young people are more likely to struggle with their mental health. It is no wonder, really, when the rhetoric in this place and

from the Government constantly undermines and questions young people who may already be struggling with their identity. Instead of questioning and doubting these young people, we all have a duty to understand and support our young LGBT constituents. That is why the Scottish Government recently announced additional funding for a new project to support LGBT children and young people's mental health. LGBT Youth Scotland will receive £50,000 to establish a new mental health LGBT youth commission. The commission will explore barriers and the challenges young LGBT people face when accessing mental health support and services. That will involve listening to young people and their lived experience to help inform future work, designing targeted and tangible solutions formulated by the LGBT Youth Scotland mental health ambassadors.

The SNP believes that supporting children's wellbeing should be rights-based, strength-based, holistic and adaptable. That is why, in 2021, the Scottish Government published the whole school approach framework to assist schools in supporting children and young people's mental health. The Scottish Government's mental health transition and recovery plan also emphasises a health-promoting and preventative approach to mental health and wellbeing. The preventative approach is something we have heard about from across the Chamber today, so I am delighted to represent the SNP in that regard.

Education and the time children spend in schools have a large part to play in that approach, through raising awareness and understanding, and supporting the positive mental health of children and young people. Included in the framework are considerations for local authorities and guidance for schools to develop and embed policy in practice within schools and the wider community, and to support them in evaluating their mental health practices and identify areas for improvement. It is essential that schools, where children spend so much of their time, are equipped with the proper tools and knowledge to support children and ensure their mental health is prioritised and understood. That is why the Scottish Government also continue to support local authority partners with £60 million of funding to ensure that every secondary school has access to counselling services. The Scottish Government have also published a mental health and wellbeing strategy built around the three pillars of promote, prevent, provide: promoting positive mental health and wellbeing; preventing mental health issues occurring or escalating, while tackling underlying causes; and, of course, providing mental health and wellbeing support and care.

That leads me to the other major theme I want to highlight, which is tackling the underlying and aggravating causes of poor mental health, the most prominent being financial pressures and the impact of the Tory Government's cost of living crisis. Childhood should be a time of happiness and freedom. Children should not need to worry about their family's finances or whether they will be warm and well fed, a point explored by the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), who is no longer in his place.

Tim Loughton: Yes, I am!

Amy Callaghan: Oh, sorry, you've just moved.

Low-income families with children continue to be disproportionately hit during the crisis. It is no surprise that that has had an horrendous impact on mental

health. When families are in fuel and food poverty, struggling to keep warm and fed, the stress is certainly not limited to parents, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Tooting. It can aggravate specific mental health conditions, including, but not limited to, eating disorders.

The cost of living payments from the British Government have been one-off flat-rate payments. That means that a single person receives the same as a family of five. Research has shown that single-person households saw their income rise by 6% thanks to those payments, which is of course welcome, whereas for families with two or three children, the increase was only 3.3%. The Work and Pensions Committee's cost of living payment report states that the failure to provide extra support for families is notable and should be examined further by the UK Government. Unfortunately, the response from the British Government rejects the idea that cost of living support payments should take account of family size, despite that being a common sense recommendation based on data and fairness.

We in the SNP are deeply concerned about the UK Government's welfare policies. Instead of heaping additional pressure on low-income families, the British Government need urgently to address the fundamental issues with universal credit. One particular example is ending the two-child limit and the rape clause, a policy that I am afraid would be kept by any future Labour Government. The End Child Poverty Coalition analysis estimates that almost 90,000 children in Scotland are impacted by the two-child limit, and ending it could lift 250,000 children—15,000 of whom are in Scotland—out of poverty. This British Government's political choice to keep and force kids into poverty is simply to the detriment of children's mental health across these isles.

Meanwhile, the Scottish Government have lifted 90,000 children out of poverty with ground-breaking, game-changing policies such as the Scottish child payment. We in the SNP are not the only ones who are concerned and calling on the British Government to end the two-child limit. The chief executive of the UK Committee for UNICEF, Jon Sparkes, said:

"We urge the UK government to take steps to protect all children from poverty, starting by making child poverty reduction a government priority, scrapping the two-child limit policy and benefits cap, and improving services and support, especially for the youngest children".

I ask the Minister this: why is reducing child poverty not an ambition of this Government? We in the SNP call on the British Government to scrap the benefit cap and to introduce an essentials guarantee to ensure that universal credit is set at a level that allows households to cover essential costs such as food and utilities. As much as the Scottish Government progressively mitigates the policies of this place, 85% of welfare expenditure and income replacement benefits remain reserved to Westminster. That is why social security policy should be fully devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

Adverse childhood experiences are of course a significant factor in a child experiencing poor mental health, as outlined by the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), who chairs the childhood trauma all-party parliamentary group. ACEs and the trauma associated with them are, by and large, linked to poverty. I sat on and chaired children's panels in the central belt of Scotland before being elected to this place. I saw at first hand the trauma that ACEs and poverty can cause to children and families.

The SNP Scottish Government's strategy of investing in people, investing in children, would work much more significantly if our hands were not tied by this place.

It is clear that the Scottish Government have the willingness and the ideas to help children's mental health. We just need the powers. It is abundantly clear that, no matter which party forms a British Government after the next election, ending child poverty will not be a priority. Only with the full powers of independence will we be able to tackle the root causes of child poverty and improve the mental health of children in Scotland, continuing the Scottish Government's current ambitions as an independent nation.

3.37 pm

Abena Oppong-Asare (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Pritchard.

Let me start my remarks by praising my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan). She is a true champion for the nation's health. She works tirelessly to highlight mental health issues, especially those among children. In my unbiased way, I have seen how she has operated as an MP and as an NHS emergency doctor, as echoed by some of my colleagues, and she commands huge respect on these issues, so I wish to congratulate her, as others have, both on securing the debate and on her excellent speech.

I also wish to thank hon. Members who have contributed to this debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi) said that this was not just a moral case, but an economic case, especially as children grow into adults and continue to be negatively affected. My hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) talked about the impact on the mental health workforce and the fact that there needs to be clear leadership in this area. She called for a 10-year mental health strategy along with a parent strategy.

I am delighted to be marking Children's Mental Health Week, which starts on 5 February. This is its 10th year. It is organised by Place2Be, which deserves great thanks for all the work that it does to support children's mental health. I also congratulate its chief executive, Catherine Roche, and its president and founder, Dame Benny Refson. These are strong women leading the way. This year's theme, "My Voice Matters", goes to the heart of the issue. Every child matters. Each child counts no matter who they are, what their parents do, what their race or religion are, or where they live. Every child must know that their voice matters. We need a system that listens to every child. We know that our child and adolescent mental health services are in a severe state of crisis—they are at breaking point.

Last May, we read reports in *The Guardian* that the number of children in mental health crisis in England was at a record high. NHS data collected by the excellent YoungMinds charity revealed more than 3,500 urgent referrals for under-18s in May, three times higher than the same month in 2019. The number of children and young people undergoing treatment or waiting to start care also reached new highs, with record open referrals to children and young people's mental health services. This month, *The Independent* newspaper revealed that NHS figures show that a record 496,897 under-18s—nearly half a million—were referred by GPs to child and adolescent mental health services at the end of November last year, up from 493,434 the month before.

[Abena Oppong-Asare]

More children than ever with anxiety, depression and other serious mental illnesses are waiting, for longer than ever, in anguish. We know that the causes are complex: social disintegration, harmful social media, bullying, worries about the climate and anxiety about the future. As has been mentioned, covid was a real game changer. Secondary school pupils across the UK experienced significantly higher rates of depression and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties—overall, the worst mental wellbeing—during the pandemic. An Oxford University department reported that cases of depression among secondary school pupils aged 11 to 13 rose by 8.5% during the pandemic compared with a 0.3% increase among the same cohort before covid, that girls' mental health deteriorated more than that of boys during the pandemic and that girls were also more likely to find the return to full-time schooling difficult. This is a generation in pain, so when we use the word “crisis”, we mean it.

The Oxford University research highlighted something else that is really important: the students who were most resilient during the pandemic were those with plenty of social interaction and support, including a supportive school environment, along with good relationships at home and a friend to turn to for support during lockdown. That is why the centrepiece of Labour's plan for children's mental health is the introduction of specialist mental health support for children and young people in every school. That will mean that every child in the school will have someone to talk to, someone to listen to, someone to offer support and someone to prove that “My Voice Matters”. It will go alongside recruiting thousands more mental health staff to cut waiting lists and ensure that more people can access treatment. Labour will create an open-access mental health hub for children and young people in every community. We will focus on prevention, early diagnosis, early intervention and timely treatment near where people live. It simply cannot be right that young people travel miles and wait for months to see a specialist. We know that mental illness is best tackled early and that it seldom gets better as the wait goes on longer. Prevention is not just socially just but, as has been mentioned, economically efficient. It saves young lives and it saves money. The next Labour Government will pay for this move by abolishing tax loopholes for private equity fund managers and tax breaks for private schools. That is social justice.

That promise sits alongside the many other measures in Labour's child health action plan—a plan that adds up to a comprehensive mission to create the healthiest generation of children ever. That is why, when we meet again for Children's Mental Health Week in early 2025, after the ballot papers have been filled in at the general election, we hope that we will have a new Government and a fresh start for children's mental health.

I once again thank my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting for securing this important debate.

3.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) for securing this debate ahead of Children's Mental

Health Week. I thank all hon. and right hon. Members for their thoughtful contributions, and I will try to answer as many points as I can in the time that I have.

It is absolutely clear that we face a challenge in ensuring timely support is available for children and young people's mental health. Two factors are proving the greatest challenges. The first, as was pointed out by a number of speakers today, is the historic underinvestment in mental health services in this country. No other Government before us had tackled this, trying to introduce a parity in esteem between mental and physical health. The Government are investing £2.3 billion extra a year—I know the hon. Member for Tooting is tired of this figure—in mental health services. That is making a difference.

I just want to correct one figure that the hon. Member raised, about only 8% of funding going to children and young people's mental health services. Actually, 1.63 million people were in contact with mental health services in November last year, and 31% of those were children aged between nought and 18. That shows that children are making up a large proportion of those benefiting from the funding. The extra £2.3 billion a year is going into projects such as our capital investment programme to eradicate mental health dormitories, and is being invested in our crisis centres, our crisis cafés, and 27,000 additional staff. We are seeing evidence that that is making a difference already. Our crisis cafés are associated with an 8% lower admission rate and our crisis telephone services with a 12% lower admission rate, and detentions under the Mental Health Act 1983 are 15% lower.

Our second challenge is the sheer scale of demand for services in the past few years. Even though we are investing more than ever before in children and young people's mental health services, as the hon. Member for Tooting pointed out, one in five children now suffers with a mental health problem, compared with one in nine in 2017. There were 743,000 new referrals to children and young people's mental health services in 2022, up 41% from just the year before. We recognise that we have to put in more funding. We are doing that, but it is difficult to meet the sheer demand for the support that children and young people need.

This is true across all four nations of the United Kingdom and not just here in England, where the Government are responsible for health. In Cardiff, for example, where Labour runs the health service, 83% of CAMHS are not on target for seeing children and young people. The Welsh Labour Government target of 80% of children and young people being assessed within 28 days had not been met for the five years up to 2021, the dates covered by the latest figures. I was quite surprised by the contribution from the SNP spokesperson, the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Amy Callaghan), as Scotland have been missing their national targets. Under some health boards, children and young people have been waiting for more than 1,000 days for services. In Northern Ireland, 60% of those targets have not been met, either. All four nations of the United Kingdom are facing exactly the same pressures.

In England, however, we have a plan, and I can assure hon. Members that it is far from just warm words. While our spending on children and young people's mental health services has increased from £841 million in 2020 to just over £1 billion in 2022-23, it is not just about how much we spend, but about how we spend it. An additional 345,000 children and young people are

getting the mental health support they need. As of August last year, 703,000 children and young people aged under 18 were being supported through NHS-funded mental health services. That is a 13.1% increase on the year before.

Amy Callaghan: I recognise what the Minister is saying. Things are not perfect, but we in Scotland are investing more in the NHS and mental health services than they are in England. We recognise the problem, but we are doing something about it. That is more than can be said for down here.

Maria Caulfield: Let me point out what we are doing with our funding. We have introduced two waiting time standards for children and young people. The first is for 95% of children up to 19 with an eating disorder to receive treatment within one week for urgent cases and four weeks for more routine cases. I can showcase for the hon. Member for Tooting figures from her local integrated care board for eating disorders: 82% of children and young people under 19 are seen within four weeks. That is not 95%, so we are not where we want to be, but a significant proportion are being seen according to our new target. Our extra funding to children and young people's services for eating disorders will rise to £54 million in the coming financial year, creating more capacity, but we absolutely acknowledge that there is more to do.

The second waiting time standard we have introduced is for 50% of patients of all ages, including children and young people, experiencing a first episode of psychosis to receive treatment within two weeks of being referred. That target is being met across the country.

Our plan for children and young people is cross-Government, because this is not just a health and social care problem. Mental health is everyone's business. That is why we are working with the Department for Education to implement proposals from the children and young people's mental health Green Paper.

Dr Allin-Khan: If the Government are interested in implementing cross-party proposals, why on earth have they scrapped the Mental Health Bill?

Maria Caulfield: I will touch on what we are doing and come back to the hon. Lady on that point.

Last week we met the Education Secretary and the chief executive of the NHS to discuss how we can better support school attendance, because we know that children with mental health problems are the most likely not to attend school. I do not think there was a single proposal from any of the Labour MPs, apart from on mental health support teams in schools, which we are already rolling out. We have rolled out 400 mental health support teams, covering 3.4 million pupils in England—something that Labour has not started to do in Wales, where it runs the health service. Our original ambition was to cover 25% of pupils, but we have done that a year earlier than expected; we are now on track in March this year to cover just under 50% of pupils with a mental health support team. We will also have 13,800 schools and colleges with a trained senior mental health lead, including seven in 10 state-funded schools in England.

We are already doing what Labour says it plans to do if it ever gets into government, and our evidence shows that that is making a difference across the country. In addition, in October we announced £4.92 million of

new funding to develop new mental health and wellbeing support hubs for young people across all of England. We will be announcing in the next few weeks the successful hubs and where they will be based. That clearly shows that the work we are doing is on track and amounts to far more than just the warm words we have been accused of.

Dr Allin-Khan: Let me point out two things. First, 12,140 children are on waiting lists at my ICB, an increase of 18.15% on last year. Secondly, the Minister spoke about 1.63 million people accessing mental health services and said that 38% of them were children, but that is actually up on the 25% that I cited. She used that figure in her argument about the amount of money that has been spent on children's mental health services. She was incorrect, and all she did was highlight that the situation is getting worse, rather than arguing against my point that only 8% is being spent on children. She did not address that point.

Maria Caulfield: The hon. Lady is making my argument for me. We are seeing a significant increase in demand, and that is why we are spending more on rolling out these services. She did not welcome the progress we are making on mental health support teams across our schools, or the fact that we are set to announce new mental health support hubs across England.

Last year we published our new suicide prevention strategy; my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Dr Hudson) talked about 3 Dads Walking, who I was pleased to meet. We are also rolling out mental health and wellbeing support in our school curriculum, teaching young people what good mental health looks like and about support mechanisms. Our strategy sets out over 100 actions to help reduce suicide and to ensure that young people in particular, who are identified as a high-risk group in the strategy, are getting the support they need. That includes making mental health and wellbeing part of the school curriculum.

Jim Shannon: Has the Minister had the opportunity to look at how to ensure that young people have some church activity and pastoral care, which is very important?

Maria Caulfield: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Part of that can be done in our schools. With the increase in mental health support teams, which will now cover 4.2 million pupils, there will be different levels of support, from pastoral support right through to acute help for those with more acute mental health needs. It is really important that we ensure that those teams are rolled out as we are planning. Our hubs in local areas will also be able to provide more bespoke services for the communities they represent, which is crucial. I would like to thank Dr Alex George, the Government's youth mental health ambassador, who has been leading much of this work, particularly on the suicide prevention strategy and making children and young people a priority group.

I reiterate my thanks to everyone who has contributed to the debate. The Government have a plan to improve mental health services for children and young people by investing in services, with capital projects to improve infrastructure in order to provide the care that is needed, from crisis centres right through to the 27,000 extra mental health workers; rolling out mental health support

[*Maria Caulfield*]

teams in schools and our new children and young people's mental health hubs, which will be announced shortly; and dealing with the sheer tsunami of demand, whether it is due to the fallout of covid or the fact that people are coming forward because we are encouraging them to talk about their mental health and ask for support.

Our plan is making a difference. I am hopeful that, with the investment we are putting in to tackle the lack of investment for decades under many Governments, we are providing the building blocks to improve the mental health of our young people in this country.

3.57 pm

Dr Allin-Khan: I thank all Members, including the Minister and my hon. Friend the shadow Minister, for their contributions. Disappointingly, I have not heard anything about the scrapping of the Mental Health Bill, which the Minister conveniently avoided.

Maria Caulfield: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dr Allin-Khan: No, I will continue. The Minister had ample opportunity to respond to a direct intervention, and she chose not to. That Bill was a great piece of cross-party work that would have improved the lives and outcomes of so many people in our country, particularly minority groups. The Minister did not address the fact that only 8% of funding is spent on children's mental health services, but she highlighted that the need is greater than ever.

The £2.3 billion was promised before covid. We have heard multiple arguments today that the situation has got worse post covid. There has been no money to make up for the increased need related to covid, and no assessment of how we are going to deal with the fact that adverse childhood experiences and poverty are contributing so greatly to our nation's mental ill health.

The Minister talked about the fact that there are many new referrals. There are many new referrals, but she did not mention that in so many parts of this country, and even in parts of this city, it is a postcode lottery. In some places, up to 50% of referrals are closed before the person has even been seen. While I welcome the fact that efforts are being made—it would be churlish of me to suggest that they are not—the fact remains that they are not good enough, they do not reach far enough and they are not ambitious enough. Even on the £2.3 billion, I know for a fact that the head of mental health services in the NHS asked for more, and that was before covid.

I thank everyone for being here and for their contributions. Although we are all on the same page in the sense that this is an issue we all care about, regardless of how we vote, where we live or what our socioeconomic background is, this Government still lack ambition for children in this country and for their mental health. Let me again, on the record, thank all the organisations that work so tirelessly in this space.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Children's Mental Health Week 2024.

Type 2 Diabetes: Availability of Drugs

4 pm

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the availability of drugs to treat type 2 diabetes.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak about what is a vital and, I think, under-recognised issue. I wish I did not have to, and that all the necessary medicines were available for all of the serious, life-changing conditions we face, but the reality at the moment is that they are not. Specifically, I would like to talk about type 2 diabetes, which is more common than type 1 and can go undiagnosed for years.

To be clear about what we are talking about, if someone's body does not make enough insulin or what it makes does not work properly, the result is high blood sugar levels—type 2 diabetes. If untreated, that increases the risks of serious problems with their eyes, feet, heart and nervous system. High blood sugar levels can cause serious complications, potentially at great cost to individuals, but also to the national health service. The reality is that any of us can develop type 2 diabetes, but it mostly affects people over 25, and often those who have a family history of it.

What about treatment and medication? We know there is currently no cure, but we also know that type 2 diabetes can be put into remission by losing weight. We all know that eating well and exercising are the key to a healthy lifestyle, and that is never truer than with preventing and reversing the onset of type 2 diabetes.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady for bringing the debate forward. I am a type 2 diabetic—I declare an interest as such—and when I was diagnosed some 13 or 14 years ago, I went on a weight loss course right away. The doctor told me, "You lose weight!" I lost about 4 stone, and I have kept it off, but that did not stop the diabetes in its entirety. I still have it, and I still have to be very careful about what I eat.

The point I want to make is that there are recent indications that certain diabetes treatments can also be successful for weight loss, but weight loss is really important at least for the first stage of diabetes, and priority for such treatments must be given to those with type 2 diabetes before, with respect, those who are finding success with them for weight loss. How can the Minister and our Government encourage such guidelines to be firmly set in place?

Christine Jardine: I thank the hon. Member for that intervention, because that point is at the heart of the matter. We have to ensure that the supply of drugs, which is short at the moment, is prioritised for those who need them for important health reasons.

A healthy weight, as the hon. Member said, and keeping active make it easier for someone's body to manage their blood sugar levels and help prevent insulin resistance, which can lead to type 2 diabetes. Research has shown that, for some people, a combination of lifestyle changes can reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes

by about 50%, but sufferers may also need to take diabetes medication such as metformin and insulin, as well as making changes to their lifestyle.

In the UK, 4.6 million people have type 2 diabetes and around 13.6 million are at risk of developing it. People often need help, such as intervention and medicines. Last year, I called on the UK Government to take action on the shortage of medicines for type 2 diabetes patients, after a constituent came to me concerned that her treatment and her health would be impacted by a shortage of the diabetes drugs she needed. They are known as GLP-1 RAs—glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonists—and include one of the most common drugs, semaglutide.

As for many other manufactured drugs, there is currently a supply problem with semaglutide. In this case, the problem has been made worse, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said, by the fact that the same drugs are effective for weight loss. The very thing that semaglutide does to help diabetes patients is making it difficult for them to access it.

I wrote to the Scottish Government, who told me they did not expect the supply to return to normal until mid-way through this year. I appreciate that that is not the most helpful response, but in some ways it is understandable, because medicine supply and licensing is a reserved matter. That is why I am raising it with the UK Government. We have seen issues with drug shortages beyond diabetes, and that is why I am so concerned at the slow response to the lack of medication.

Patients find themselves stuck between the proverbial rock and a hard place. In Scotland, they have the Scottish Government unable to act, and they perceive the UK Government to be very slow to act. It seems that neither Government have realised how potentially serious this situation could be for patients who use these drugs daily. For a patient to be in a position where they do not know whether they can get what they need to help them get well and keep them healthy is simply not acceptable. I have heard from people in my constituency and beyond about the impact that the situation is having on their lives.

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady recognise that this is not just about access to drugs for type 2 diabetics, but about access to medical equipment, such as the LibreView glucose monitoring sensors that have changed people's lives? Does she agree that, because the incidence of type 2 diabetes is closely related to areas of social deprivation, where the finance is not available, the NHS should look to give those sensors to as many people living with type 2 diabetes as possible? That would save a fortune in the future, and it would reduce harm to lots of people who are currently suffering greatly because of diabetes.

Christine Jardine: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point, and I completely agree.

Type 2 diabetes is a problem in itself, with the lack of medication, but it is also an illustration of a major problem that our health services are facing with growing costs. We should be looking at how we prevent the problem in the first place, both in areas of social deprivation and in society generally. We should be looking at how we help people to avoid the problems that come with conditions such as type 2 diabetes. If we fail in that,

people will fall into the situation where they are living with diabetes—a condition that requires 24/7 self-management to stay healthy. I invite Members to imagine living with a condition that they have to manage every day—a condition that has the power to affect them at any moment, disrupting what they are doing and altering their day to day life—when they have done all they can to stop that happening. Now consider how the lack of a medication that we have organisations and administrations responsible for providing makes that situation worse.

A couple of years ago, as part of a campaign by Diabetes UK, I tried to live life as if I had diabetes, and I have to say that I failed dismally. I realised just how difficult it is, and I realised that people living with diabetes—type 1 or type 2—deserve much better than they are getting at the moment. To be turned away at the GP surgery or pharmacy through no fault of the practitioner and to be told, “You might have to wait 18 months for what has been helping you get on top of the condition”, is simply unacceptable.

I know some people who have been left waiting since 2023. Shortages have been linked to those without diabetes using the drugs, as the hon. Member for Strangford mentioned, simply for weight-loss purposes. Drugs such as Ozempic are being sold online for nearly £200—a 1,765% increase on the cost of what they would be on an NHS prescription.

The Association of Independent Multiple Pharmacies has talked of the shortage of medication to treat the likes of epilepsy and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder as well as diabetes, all of them potentially life-changing and life-ending conditions. That is true also of some cancer drugs and hormone replacement therapy. The consequences do not lie just at the door of patients but, as we have heard, at that of the NHS and community pharmacy teams, which are under increased strain.

A national patient safety alert has been issued by NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care to address supply, but I ask those with the power to consider standing in the shoes of those going through this. People who should have been started on GLP-1s are facing delay or are being put on to less effective options. Let us imagine being told that we had to take less effective medicine for a life-changing condition. If the supply is interrupted, a person potentially has to go through the side effects again and again when being restarted. People have been contacting Diabetes UK regularly since the start of the shortage in early 2023. This is not just about equality or ease of access. For all those affected, it is about quality of life.

4.12 pm

The Minister for Health and Secondary Care (Andrew Stephenson): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Pritchard. I thank the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) for raising such an important issue. I want to begin by emphasising that I understand that medicine supply issues are a significant cause of frustration for many of our constituents across the United Kingdom. I also recognise that there have been particular challenges recently with certain medicines. Without diminishing those challenges, it is important that we set them in context.

There are around 1,400 medicines licensed in the UK, most of which are in good supply.¹ The Department is regularly notified of supply issues; thankfully, the vast

1.[Official Report, 1 February 2024, Vol. 744, c. 14MC.]

[Andrew Stephenson]

majority of those can be managed with minimal impact on patients. The medicine supply chain is highly regulated, complex and global, meaning that there can sometimes be supply issues that affect the UK, along with other countries around the world.

There are a number of reasons why a limited number of medicines might be subject to a disruption in supply, such as manufacturing difficulties, regulatory non-compliance, access to raw materials or distribution problems. We cannot always prevent supply issues occurring, but where they do the Department has a range of well-established processes to manage them and help mitigate the risk to patients.

Where there are concerns about supply, they largely, although not exclusively, concern medication to treat the most common conditions. That is exactly the case with what we are talking about today—diabetes—a condition experienced by more than 4.9 million people across the UK. Action on diabetes will be included in the major conditions strategy, as it is an important risk factor for cardiovascular disease. If someone has diabetes, they are twice as likely to have heart disease or a stroke than someone who does not have diabetes, which goes to the heart of what the hon. Member for Edinburgh West said about the importance of ensuring diabetics get their medication.

Jim Shannon: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive and helpful response. Some years ago, when I first came to Parliament there was a diabetes strategy for the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. If the Minister could look at it, I think a renewal of that particular strategy would help. It was agreed here at Westminster, but took in all the regions of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It was a marvellous objective to address diabetes and it seemed to work. I would like to see it happen again.

Andrew Stephenson: The hon. Member makes an important and powerful point, as usual. As he knows, I am a proud Unionist and am keen for us to do as much as we can in collaboration. I recognise that health is a largely devolved matter. However, since I joined the Department of Health and Social Care in October, I have visited Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, I have talked about how we can collaborate more closely on things such as research and innovation, and I am sure that we can do more together where the devolved Governments agree. Last night we had encouraging news. Hopefully we will have power-sharing arrangements back in place in Northern Ireland so that we can work together collaboratively to deliver those benefits for patients.

I will finish the point I was making about the major conditions strategy. That strategy aims primarily to improve care and health outcomes for those living with multiple conditions, and it will be centred on prevention. We have heard from a wide range of stakeholders, whose views are informing the development of the strategy. I will meet Diabetes UK this week to continue that engagement.

With regards to the availability of drugs to treat type 2 diabetes, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh West set out, there has been a significant global supply

issue affecting glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonists—GLP-1RAs—with the shortages driven by an increase in demand for such products for licensed and off-label indications, meaning that the medicine is being used for a different use from that stated on its licence.

I will set out the steps we have taken to manage those issues. We have continued to work with suppliers to take action to resolve the issues as quickly as possible, including expediting deliveries and boosting supplies. In July last year, we issued guidance for healthcare professionals, which took the form of a national patient safety alert on how to manage patients during the supply disruption. Clinicians and prescribers were directed not to initiate new patients on these medicines, which were to be used only to treat their licensed indication, protecting supplies for diabetic patients. Guidance was supported and echoed in a statement issued by the professional regulators.

One of the particular shortages affecting the market at the moment is Ozempic, which is the brand name for semaglutide, which is licensed to treat type 2 diabetes. Wegovy is the same medicine—semaglutide—but licensed specifically for weight management and is generally used at a higher dose than Ozempic. Obesity-related conditions can be serious, so it is right that we support people living with obesity to lose weight, and Wegovy is one option for those with severe obesity and comorbidities. However, it became available for prescription in the UK only on 4 September 2023, having received approval for use on the NHS for weight management in March 2023.

We believe that supply issues with Ozempic have in part been contributed to by off-label prescribing of that medicine for weight loss ahead of Wegovy's launch. However, the strong and clear guidance that we provided on the use of those treatments only for their licensed indications and our ongoing work with the industry has helped to protect supplies for diabetic patients.

As a result of our continued intensive work with the supply chain, I am pleased to inform hon. Members that the supply position of that particular drug has improved. Supplies of Rybelsus have been boosted to support demand from new patients with type 2 diabetes, patients switching from Byetta injections and patients switching from Victoza injections. The national patient safety alert was amended on 3 January to reflect that positive development. The professional regulators have issued a second statement to highlight that update.

I am also delighted to highlight the fact that the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency gave regulatory approval in the last few days to Mounjaro, an injectable medicine for adults with type 2 diabetes. That will bring an additional treatment option and will mean that more diabetic patients will have access to the medicines that they need.

Sadly, supply is not expected to return to normal due to the issues with certain products, but we will continue to work with the manufacturers, the NHS, the MHRA and others working in the supply chain, to help ensure that, overall, supplies of GLP-1 RAs are available for patients.

Jim Shannon: I think the hon. Members for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) and for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery) and I would be interested to know about the other option—if I caught you right, Minister—that you mentioned, which is in the form of an injection but is not insulin. Just so we know, is it a different system?

Andrew Stephenson: Sorry, was the hon. Gentleman asking about the approval of the new drug, Mounjaro, which I just mentioned?

Jim Shannon: Yes, I am trying to understand, because I am not aware of it, and neither are the hon. Lady or the hon. Gentleman. It is not insulin for type 2, is it? The Minister mentioned an injection system.

Andrew Stephenson: It is an injectable medicine for adults with type 2 diabetes. It was recently approved by the MHRA. To put a little bit of extra information out there, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence recommended Mounjaro, the same drug, for the treatment of patients with type 2 diabetes who meet specific criteria. The NHS in England is therefore now legally required, in line with NICE recommendations, to fund its use for eligible patients. The availability of that new medicine in Scotland is, however, a matter for the devolved Administration. The Scottish Medicines Consortium, which makes decisions on the use of medicines in Scotland, has not yet published guidance on Mounjaro. It will be a matter for the SMC as to whether that becomes an option in Scotland.

As I was saying, Mr Pritchard, unfortunately we expect supply chain issues to continue for the rest of the year. Throughout the management of this issue, our guidance has been supported by additional advice issued in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which has, critically, reinforced the messaging provided by the national patient safety alerts.

Ian Lavery: Does the Minister understand and recognise the benefits of glucose monitoring centres? It is not a supply chain issue, but an access issue. They can and do change people's lives, but they are not widely accessible. People are very much unaware that they actually exist.

If they did and understood that the centres were available from the NHS, it would save the NHS millions if not billions of pounds. It would change the lives of many people, mainly in deprived areas. Can the Minister give a commitment to look at that and see how we can allow more people to access glucose monitoring systems?

Andrew Stephenson: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says and I am more than happy to look at the issue. However, I believe—I may be mistaken—that he is suggesting something that we would routinely advise for type 1 diabetics to be provided to type 2 diabetics. As far as I am aware, the clinical advice does not suggest that we do that, but I am more than happy to look at the issue, because I want to ensure that we support people living with diabetes as much as we can.

Finally, I emphasise that our guidance remains clear that medicines licensed for the treatment of type 2 diabetes should be used only for that purpose. All prescribers, whether employed privately or by the NHS, are expected to take into account the appropriate national guidance. Unfortunately, the supply disruption is a common issue for the UK and other countries around the world, which is both frustrating and distressing for patients. We cannot always prevent supply issues from occurring, but where they do arise, the Department has a range of well-established processes and tools to manage them and to help mitigate the risk to patients. Addressing issues with GLP-1 RAs continues to be a priority for the Department. We will continue to work hard with industry to resolve the issues as quickly as possible. Once again, I am grateful to the hon. Member for Edinburgh West for raising such an important issue.

Question put and agree to.

4.24 pm

Sitting suspended.

Somerset Council: Funding and Governance

4.30 pm

Mr Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the funding and governance of Somerset Council.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard.

When I became a councillor—some years ago; probably 10 or more years ago now—one of the things that I took most seriously was my duty to those in our community who are more vulnerable than others, in particular looked-after children within the authority of Somerset, as it then was. I passionately believe, as do all of my Conservative colleagues here in Parliament, in trying to ensure that we have the best possible quality services for both our young people and all those in the rest of society who are vulnerable. That really goes to the quick with me and indeed with all of us. I am therefore passionate about trying to make sure that our local services have the funding that they need, and the inspiration that they need, to be able to do the best possible job in the best possible way. I want to make that a reality for those who depend on us for their care.

When I became a councillor, I also became aware that under previous Liberal Democrat administrations—there are various arguments about the genesis of the current situation, but the fact of the matter is that a large debt had been run up by the council to some of the public sector financing organisations and others, which needed to be serviced. The debt was of some £350 million or more. What we needed to spend on the interest on that debt was really detracting from what we needed to spend on for our constituents. The need to get that debt under control, to begin to repay it, was a big deal for the council in Somerset at that time.

Of course, at that time—under the coalition and after a massive debt had been run up nationally—there was a big need for councils across the country to make savings. The coalition made the decision—indeed, my predecessor as the Member for Yeovil, David Laws, was the Chief Secretary to the Treasury who decided, at that time, that he would champion the idea of being “the axeman in chief”, according to his autobiography, in trying to get spending by the Government generally under control. One of his decisions was to make savings in local authority budgets.

At that time, that was a necessity. What we also saw under the coalition, as things evolved, was that in order to try to protect some of the county spending budgets—the local authority budgets—money was provided to councils, so that they were able to restrict the increases in council tax that would otherwise have been required to pay for some services. The national Government made more money available, which meant we could limit council tax rises to 3%, 4% or 5% a year, rather than what otherwise might be required.

That is the context for the financing of Somerset Council and for the wider council environment. However, it also has to be said that part of managing the budgets for local authorities is that there needs to be creative thinking about how to get more growth, more investment

and more housing into an area, with more council tax being delivered through that development, to be able to finance some council services.

In recent years, I have been quite disappointed that the new administration in Somerset, which is Liberal Democrat, has not taken some of those opportunities to think more holistically about how we might grow such economies to help pay for services. At the end of the day, it is only by getting the top line—the revenue—growing that we can get the tax revenue coming through to support the good-quality services that we all want to see for our residents.

For example, getting the town centre in Yeovil going again has been really important. As an MP, I got the Government to commit to very substantial town centre regeneration funding of £9.75 million through the towns fund to make that happen. The idea was to have a transformative change in Yeovil’s value proposition. It involved regeneration to enable the town centre and surrounding areas to be seen as places on the up, and to engender a virtuous circle that could increase property prices and get people excited about investing in their property, making sacrifices and a life for themselves and being able to make money from that. That kind of vision is essential for making places in the UK inspiring, where people think there is a future for them and an opportunity to make something of themselves for their families and their retirement.

Such things are really important, so it has been disappointing to see the local Lib Dem administration—thus far, at least—not capitalise on that investment. The projects have stalled. I have been working constructively with the local authority to make sure that the opportunities come forward properly in the time available, to transform those areas rather than just spending, or wasting, money on projects that do not quite work out or on public realm improvements that are not well thought through or well contracted. It is essential to focus on those basic issues of competence in the administration of how the funds are spent.

Another reason why Somerset is in a troublesome situation more generally is that the business case at the heart of the plan to move to a unitary authority, which was based on a very good decision by the previous Conservative administration to save money by amalgamating all the councils, has not been pursued by the new Liberal Democrat administration. Those savings have therefore not come through, some of the personnel and management rearrangements have not occurred, and many tens of millions of pounds that would otherwise have been saved have not been saved since the savings were to have started, a year or two ago. That means that the council is in a difficult position and needs more funding.

I am supportive, as my parliamentary colleagues in Somerset are, of the Government helping with more funding for social care and for thinking more carefully about how we manage some of the inflationary aspects that, in part, have put the council in the position that it is in. However, we cannot get away from the fact that the current Liberal Democrat administration has not taken the decisions and done things according to the business plan that was set out to save the money required to make the changes necessary to keep the council’s finances on an even keel.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the challenges for local authority budgets, particularly for upper-tier local authorities, from rising social care costs, with the potential for productivity and other savings from a move to unitary. However, I am sure he will be aware that the Office for Local Government has published a report, with a dashboard to help councils identify how efficiently they are running their services and the general state of their finances. The conclusion of the Office for Local Government is that this was not just about money, but that where there have been failures in council finances—as, indeed, is the case in Somerset—it is down to a poor civil service and poor political leadership. It is incumbent on politicians and, indeed, council civil servants to take responsibility for that.

Mr Fysh: I agree with my hon. Friend. He is absolutely right that it is important that responsibility is taken and that some of these decisions—or lack of decisions, should I say—are held up for scrutiny. It is not acceptable for residents, because of the lack of money, to face the potential loss of services that are really important to them, such as the Yeovil recreation centre and the tourist information centres in Cartgate and Taunton. Such services are essential for our communities, and it is not right that those non-statutory services should now be threatened.

It is also right that we protect non-statutory services generally by making sure that the council does not go into special measures, or is subject to a section 114 notice, which is the council version of a bankruptcy. The Minister will know well how that works. These are potentially very threatening to things that are not core or statutory council operations, and we do not want to see bus services being cancelled because a council goes bust. Residents may not know or necessarily care who is in charge and what is happening, but this is a serious situation. The reality is that the current administration has caused this issue and has not taken the decisions necessary to avoid it. Nevertheless, none of us wants to see that happen and to see these services go, because they are really important.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): My hon. Friend is making very powerful points. I have been trying to work out how long it is, but I have worked with Bill Revans, the leader of the council, for over 25 years, and I have a great deal of respect for him. My hon. Friend is quite right that none of us wants the council to go into special measures. The Minister has been very kind to all of us, and he has given us an enormous amount of time on this. I am also grateful to him for the money he has given so far—I thank him very much.

Would my hon. Friend agree that the big trick with this will be our working together, regardless of our personal views or our political views, to make sure that this does not happen? Once, many years ago, I had the commissioners in to West Somerset Council, and it was a complete disaster. We lost our cohesion, and that council disappeared soon after. This is not something we should take lightly, and I ask my hon. Friend to dwell a little bit more on how we can help the Minister and Somerset Council to get what they want, which is to maintain services—schooling, education and children's services—so that we do not have a complete disaster on our hands.

Mr Fysh: I thank my hon. Friend, and he is absolutely right. We need to work together, including across the aisle. I am very fond of my Liberal Democrat ex-opponents on the council. I know them well, and in many cases they are very good people who want the best for their communities, as we all do. We need to work together, whatever we think about the decisions that should or should not have been made. I am willing to do that, as is my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset (Mr Liddell-Grainger). I know that my other colleagues in the parliamentary party and the Ministers are willing to work on that, too.

I want to make it clear that this is not some story of Government underfunding; that is absolutely not the case. My hon. Friend is right to point out that the Government have listened and have given substantial new money, which Somerset Conservative MPs lobbied for. Their voices were heard loud and clear and we were given that money. None the less, we still face challenges and there are things that will be required, but we need to make sure that we keep these essential services that people rely on—the recycling centre in Crewkerne, the libraries and the various services that are not protected within statutory limits, which would be protected should there be a bankruptcy. My constituents rely on their bus services; they cannot see them cut. That would be a fundamentally difficult thing for them to deal with. We cannot allow that to happen. *[Interruption.]*

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Order. There are Divisions in the House.

4.46 pm

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

5.31 pm

On resuming—

Mr Fysh: Yeovil is one of those places that is dripping with potential. It has an incredible defence manufacturing industry, people, skills and development organisations. In my opinion, as someone who has been around the world looking at development and business opportunities for many years, I have never seen an environment that is so conducive to partnership working between business and local institutions to make things happen as there is at Yeovil College. Yeovil and the wider area need that vision from the council to back that up, to be the glue to make permissions happen more easily or to put in infrastructure, whatever is needed.

We need that vision from our local council, and that is what we are not getting right now. It is incredibly frustrating, for someone who wants to do the best to make that difference, with opportunities for people in our town, to find that at all stages it has been underwhelming, shall we say, for everybody dealing with the local council. I urge Ministers to think structurally about change, so that local councils have more accountable responsibility for bringing those things forward.

It is extraordinary, when looking around the world, to see how welcoming some other places are to investment, new thinking and different ways of doing things. When I proposed the idea about six or seven years ago of a new town development on the A303, to capitalise on the advantages of investing so much money in the A303 dualling, which we in Somerset fought so hard to get from the Government, we were met with a brick wall

[Mr Fysh]

when talking to the council about executing those opportunities, and thinking about whether such things should be in the local plan, to excite local entrepreneurs. It has been such a frustrating process. We need to make sure we have well-equipped, local economic development operations of one kind or another, and to make sure we have good access to local and national incentives that attracts business to set up in different places.

Mr Liddell-Grainger: My hon. Friend is making a very powerful point. I think what he is getting around to is levelling up. Somerset has not done very well out of levelling up, and my hon. Friend and I have talked about this. I would say to the Minister that levelling up would help immeasurably. What we need to look at is the learning of skills, rural deprivation, helping young people get on to the job ladder in rural areas—that covers the whole of Somerset—and we certainly need to look at the way people are leaving school. Although we have Bridgwater, Taunton and Yeovil, there is not much in between, and therefore young people have not got those opportunities. I therefore make a plea through my hon. Friend to the Minister that we start talking about getting a levelling up bid for Somerset, where we could work with the council to get money to help the most vulnerable.

Mr Fysh: My hon. Friend makes a brilliant point. This is all about thinking of a plan for how we join up those urban and rural development opportunities and our skills development opportunities to make the most of what is an incredible area.

Somerset is a rural area, but I have never seen anything like it in my travels of the whole world—there is so much energy and sophistication in what is a rural environment. Yeovilton is in the north of my constituency—it is the home of the Fleet Air Arm, and the site of one of its core operations. We have the manufacturing cluster around Yeovil, and indeed we have north Dorset, which is second to none in the world in its defence manufacturing abilities. We need to support that—it means people come from all over the world to work and raise their families there; it is not an average rural area by any stretch of the imagination. We need to build on that; it is a massive opportunity for the country in exports, high-value engineering jobs, and all the things that we as a nation are supposed to be trying to encourage.

We need to support our local authorities and ensure they are doing the right thing. We need to ensure they are making the right decisions, at the right time, to be able to save money where it is required, and that they are also thinking about ways of making money where it is required. That should not just be through some fly-by-night plan to invest in commercial real estate; local authorities have no ability to judge if such plans are a good idea, and that is something we need be careful they do not do. However, those core activities of working with private industry to make sure the incentives and skills are there for business is the way forward—that is the way to finance any local authority.

There can be endless arguments about who gave what money to who and so on, but unless that core business of getting growth going in an area is there, with proper support and incentives from local and national government, it will be very hard to compete with some other parts of

the world that are doing a brilliant job of it. They are rolling out the red carpet to welcome people to those areas, and they are giving massive incentives: 40% or 50% capital incentives are being paid up front to people who want to start businesses and invest in renewable energy generation—or whatever it is.

There are very serious things going on out there, and we need to think about how we match that. This idea that we can just put our fingers in our ears and pretend it is not happening is for the birds. These are real-time decisions being made now that people are having to think about, and we need to make sure that we are on the same page and we are competitive. Somerset is an amazing place with amazing opportunities, and we need to focus on how we can capitalise on those. They could be an absolute driver of economic performance, and the realisation of the aspirations of people in all income brackets across our country. I hope the House will urgently consider this point.

5.40 pm

Sarah Dyke (Somerton and Frome) (LD): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Sir Mark. I thank the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Fysh) for securing this really important debate. I agree with him on many of his observations about our wonderful county that is Somerset and, indeed, the opportunities that it offers.

Local authorities exist to provide crucial frontline services to their residents. Some 63% of Somerset Council's budget is spent on children and adults who need council care, but the stark reality is that the funding model is broken. As a proudly active Somerset councillor, I have seen the situation at first hand. The Government have decimated council finances and local communities are paying the price. This is a national problem that requires a national solution; it is not specific to Somerset.

Somerset Council has declared a financial emergency. It did so late last year because of the significant pressures on its finances due to sky-high inflation, spiralling costs of providing services, especially in social care, and a broken system for the funding of local government.

The council has been completely transparent about the measures that it has taken to address the £100 million funding gap for next year and will do what is necessary to continue to provide those essential services to its residents. I know that most of Somerset's MPs have met Councillor Bill Revans and the Somerset Council team to learn more about the financial emergency, but sadly the hon. Member for Yeovil has not yet been able to find time to do so. However, speaking to the council's leader this morning, I found that the offer of a meeting still stands, and I would be happy to join him if he wishes to meet Councillor Revans.

The hon. Member will be aware that some of the issues facing the current administration are the legacy of the previous Conservative council. Vesting day for Somerset Council, the new unitary council, was on 1 April 2023. The previous administration's One Somerset business case stated now that the seemingly meagre £18.4 million-worth of savings would be realised after three years, not within nine months of forming a new council. The previous administration was guilty of irresponsible fiscal decisions. Six years of council tax freezes from 2010 reduced income from council tax, a move that saw a minimum shortfall of £24 million per year and delivered a total cut to services of £150 million.

During this period, central Government reduced the council's revenue support grant, leaving councils more dependent on council tax and business rates. In 2018, the council was close to bankruptcy, which is why Somerset turned to the Liberal Democrats to sort out the mess.

It is important to note that Somerset has historically low council tax rates, compared with its contiguous councils, such as Dorset and Wiltshire. Somerset lost many of the higher-banded homes in Bristol and Bath areas to Avon in the 1974 reorganisation, and council tax then was set low in 1993 against the national average, all while the council tax itself is still based on the 1991 house values. This funding model is clearly unfit for purpose, and I do not believe that anyone would design a system like that now. Let me just add that there are now 18,000 homes with planning permission in Somerset caught in a moratorium due to the phosphates issue, which obviously has an impact on income that we would possibly then be able to draw down in council tax.

Where council tax income is lower, the need in the population is generally higher. Somerset is a rural county with an ageing population. The 75-plus age group is expected to double over the next 25 years. The cost of care in Somerset rose by 47% between 2022 and 2023, and the number of people needing more care is rising. That equates to a £70 million increase in council costs. There is an elephant in the room almost identical in size to the cost of living crisis that people face right now: fair funding from the Government to allow councils to get the basics right and give local people a fair deal.

It costs more to deliver services in rural areas, and the Government recognised that by altering the funding formula in 2013-14. However, due to damping, only 25% of the new benefit has been received by rural councils. Support from the Government does not match the increased cost, and the cost of years of underinvestment is now being felt by councils across the country.

Every single council bar the Greater London Authority is expected to experience a real-terms cut of at least 6.4% in 2024-25. That means that there will be a real-terms shortfall of £5.75 billion in council finances compared with 2016-17. The Government failed to get a grip on the situation early and now they are scrambling at the last minute to try to avoid a situation in which more local authorities go bankrupt.

Hon. Members from across the political spectrum have demanded action from the Government. Recently, I was pleased to join colleagues from across the aisle, including the hon. Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset (Mr Liddell-Grainger), in signing a letter that called for urgent additional funding for local government.

The previous Conservative leader of Somerset County Council, as it was, also previously called out this Government for leaving needs in social care unmet, and advocated for immediate investment. I was glad to see that the Government had listened to those pleas, but the extra funding announced last week is simply inadequate to quell the oncoming costs. It is like a rugby team converting a penalty in the 81st minute when they needed to score a try to prevent a crushing defeat.

We are all seeing councils that are close to the cliff edge; unfortunately, some have tipped over that edge. The situation is hurting residents and communities.

I urge the Government to provide more funding to support councils as a matter of urgency, while allowing them increased powers to deliver for their communities and to reform business rates to boost local economies. The Liberal Democrats would provide additional funding by reversing tax cuts for the big banks, which could raise £18 billion over five years. We would also look at implementing a proper windfall tax on the oil and gas giants, and we would collect more of the £36 billion of tax that goes uncollected every year.

I have experienced—indeed, I continue to experience—the privilege of working in local government. I have seen the impact that local government can have on our communities and I am determined to defend it, but we need a Government to listen and to help turn the tide against this crushing wave.

5.47 pm

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): I always find—my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr Fysh), the Minister and you, Mr Pritchard, all know this—that the best speeches in this place are the ones that you write yourself, and not the ones you deliver in parrot fashion after they have been written by someone else.

As my hon. Friend said, in the last few months we have worked together to try to solve this problem. Let us look back at the history of the situation. I will gently say that it was going on under the coalition Government. We made representations then and I do not remember being completely supported by David Laws, David Heath, Tessa Munt or—I have forgotten now, but I think that is about it. That is a problem.

It is easy to cast aspersions, but let us look at the reality. I am very grateful to the Minister; I must give credit where credit is due. He has worked very hard to make sure that he gives the time that is needed to all these councils to get this situation sorted. The point was made that £5 million is very little. Yes, of course it is, but it is a start.

I do not think it is any secret that tomorrow the Minister is meeting the leader of Somerset Council, Bill Revans, and his team to talk about the next phase. My conversations with the Minister—I do not know how many there have been, but there have been an awful lot—have always been constructive and helpful. We are in a crisis—we must be absolutely frank about that.

I absolutely abhor having in commissioners. Having suffered that, as I said in my intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil, who was very noble about it, I know it is an absolute disaster. If they come in to Somerset, I can tell hon. Members exactly what will happen. They will shut the recycling centres, stop the buses and pull back on the funding for roads, for the most vulnerable and for many others, and the money we give to colleges such as Yeovil, Bridgwater & Taunton, and Strode just will not happen. No matter what we do—parliamentarians, councillors or anyone else; parishes, towns or whatever—it will make no difference at all.

The problem we have is that councils such as Taunton, I think Yeovil, Minehead and others are raising council taxes way out of proportion with what they need to do. I am worried that they will raise them so high to take on services that the county has been running up to now, and they will not be able to cope. In all my 23 years in this place, I have seen when councils have taken on

[Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger]

assets, and after a while they just cannot cope. That is partly down to the people they have, partly down to the rises in costs that we all have, and partly down to the fact that these things are damned complicated, and that goes not just go for the loos, but for much more.

We really must talk with the Minister about how we make sure that when assets are given to other councils—mainly town councils, because it is more difficult to do for parishes—they are able to deal with those assets in the future. Taunton is to have a 200% increase in council tax, and that is huge, but it wants to take on a lot of things, and Taunton covers the whole of Taunton—not a bit of it, but the whole thing. I am not going to cast aspersions about whether this is right or wrong; I am just making the point that the assets that go over to such councils still have to be managed.

The other issue I have is about the superb colleges we have, and my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil and I have talked about Yeovil College, and Bridgwater & Taunton College. We have come an enormous way in Bridgwater, and these colleges are superb. When I first came in all those years ago—and let us be honest—they were not as good as they are now. There has been a huge amount of work by the teams in both those colleges, and we have created proper colleges for Somerset. The debate goes on, and the conversations between Bridgwater & Taunton, Strode and Yeovil are brilliant. They are really looking at how we move on in the future.

Another point, and the Minister must be aware of this, is that not only are we building the biggest infrastructure project in Europe, which is Hinkley Point, but we are about to start building the Gravity site. Again, my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil has been very helpful, with his wonderful workforce at Westland and so on. This is a 423 acre, 11 million square foot battery factory for Jaguar Land Rover under the Tata Group. It is a phenomenal investment in the west country, with 9,500 jobs, and it is crucial to the future of our beautiful county.

In the time I have left as an MP—God willing, and the electorate willing, I will still be an MP, but not for Bridgwater—I will be absolutely dedicated to getting this to the stage where we have the infrastructure, but we need a functioning council. We have to have that. It is going to be difficult for the council, because it has to put in some money, and we will have massive infrastructure costs. I do not want to have to come back to the Government in however long it is—in the next six months—and say, “Look, we haven’t got the money to put in the roads, the railway and the college campuses for Bridgwater & Taunton and for Yeovil.” We must get this sorted.

In the short time I have left, I say to the Minister that this is going to be a partnership. As I have said, I have worked with Bill Revans for a very long time, and I have enormous respect for him. He is trooping on, and not perhaps in the best circumstances, as we all know. He is still there fighting his corner, as he has long done—he stood against Tom King in 1992. He is a long-term, committed politician for whom I have a great deal of respect; as hon. Members know, that is not always the case.

We have to work together to get the funding we need to stabilise the situation, and this cannot wait until after the election. I have no idea about the policy of the

Labour party—I genuinely do not know—but I know the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) will be sympathetic because I was in opposition when I came in and I will probably be in opposition when I go out. However, when I had issues when Tony Blair was Prime Minister, they were listened to, and I can only say that I am very grateful for everything, but we need to do this now, Prime Minister—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Simon Hoare): I am not the Prime Minister.

Mr Liddell-Grainger: Yes, I know. I do apologise. Minister, we need to sort this now, and that conversation is crucial. We need to keep this going as much as we can. We need to take it forward in the constructive way in which it has been dealt with so far. I am one of the worst offenders in this place for taking it to the lowest common denominator and attacking everybody, but this is a time when we cannot do that. There are too many vulnerable people whose futures and wellbeing are at stake, so I say to the Minister: please, just keep talking to us.

Minister, you have been brilliant. I cannot fault you or the Secretary of State. I cannot fault the way in which you have dealt with Bill and his team, Duncan Sharkey and everybody in Somerset. At every meeting I have had, we have talked about how we have work to do, and we will do it. We have discussed what needs to be done. I am conveying that to Bill, the Minister will convey that tomorrow, and we will work on it. In the next few months we have to come up with a formula that safeguards those vulnerable people. My constituency covers Exmoor. The problems we face with things like social mobility and access in one of the most rural parts of England will be devastating if we cannot come to an agreement.

Minister, we are here to do the best for our constituents; we always have been. That is why you do it, why I do it, why my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil does it, and why everyone else does it. If you can come halfway, we can come the other half. That will be most important. You could use Somerset as a guinea pig in order to come up with a formula that will get this working, so that we can work with you and land what we need to do. I am meeting the Chancellor tomorrow. I am going to put the plea to him and ask him to be generous—

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): Order. Forgive me—

Mr Liddell-Grainger: Thank you very much, Mr Pritchard.

Mark Pritchard (in the Chair): No, I am not curtailing the hon. Gentleman’s speech, if he has anything more to contribute. I just gently remind him that he should address his remarks through the Chair rather than speaking directly to the Minister. I have let it go a bit, but he should speak through the Chair.

Mr Liddell-Grainger: I am so sorry, Mr Pritchard. After all these years, I should know better. I do apologise.

That partnership will be crucial. It matters more than anything. I look forward to working with the Minister on this.

5.57 pm

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard, and to respond to the debate secured by the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Fysh). Despite the clear localised political differences that have played out, we have heard quite a lot of commonalities in terms of the structure of local government finance and the issues that are driving demand pressures. That is important: we need at least a shared analysis of the issue before we try to find common ground on the potential solution. I welcome the exchanges today and congratulate the hon. Member on securing the debate. We perhaps need to talk about issues like this more than we do.

I hope very much that the offer of a meeting with the local council leader is taken up, because this matters to all our constituents. That is why we bring such debates to the House, but in the end, the solution lies in local partnerships and in Members of Parliament working in partnership with their local authorities, regardless of political affiliation, for the best outcome for their constituents. That is the only way to work, in the end, so I hope that is taken up and that the council enters into the spirit of partnership in return.

Let me be clear: we are here to talk about funding and governance in Somerset Council, and we have heard many of the arguments, but this issue affects councils of all political colours. I have met many council leaders up and down the country. The one thing they have in common, and the one thing they continually raise, is that they often feel that they are standing alone in dealing with the pressures of rocketing demand while trying their hardest to prioritise services for their local communities. We have heard about some of those issues today: the number of children who need child protection; older people living longer but needing care in older age; the homelessness crisis and people staying in temporary accommodation—all those things have a significant impact on council budgets at a time when central Government funding has been reduced in real terms. Those were political choices made over 13 years of a Conservative Government. They have fundamentally changed the structure of council funding, and Somerset will feel that too.

We should not forget that in 2010 the coalition Government announced the closure of the Audit Commission. It is not just that money has been taken away; the infrastructure required to raise a red flag when there are concerns was taken away as well. What does that mean, 14 years later? The audit market is still dominated, by and large, by six firms, with very few new market entrants. The market size has not grown in comparison. As a result, there is real tension in the system. As one could predict, the closure of the Audit Commission and the limitations placed on the National Audit Office mean that there is a gap in local as well as national reporting. Councils are often left alone to inspect their own financial risk, rather than looking for value for money, or to use a broken audit market.

How does that manifest itself here today in 2024? There has been a sharp increase in the number of local authorities that have not had their accounts audited by the statutory deadline. In 2022-24, just five of the 467 councils delivered their audits on time. That means just 1% of English councils published their audited accounts by the deadline. When a council is in financial

difficulty, the warning system which should escalate the matter is just not there. The Minister needs to consider how that might be improved.

We have talked a lot about the grant funding and, as such and in the interests of time, I will not go over old ground. However, it is a matter of fact that Somerset Council has £100 million less than it needs to provide services in its area, when compared with demand. Labour understands that councils like Somerset are funding the impossible balance between demand rocketing and budgets not keeping pace. When the austerity programme started, cuts were targeted at local government far more than at any other part of Government. We know that local government was always the prevention arm of Government. When we take away the prevention arm, all we have left is the reactive. We see that in the NHS and right across the board, but in the end it always comes right back to local government to pick up the pieces. That is what we have seen in social care, children's services and homelessness. It is important that councils are given the tools to take the long-term decisions that are needed. Labour would commit to single pot, multi-year settlements to give the financial certainty that is needed, as well as funding that follows the need where it exists.

We often hear debates in this place about the difference between the north and the south, between our towns and our cities, and between counties and villages, but in the end, for a funding formula to be fair, surely it must follow need, wherever it is? It is not right that an older person in any part of England is denied the care they need, or a young person is placed at risk because they do not receive the care they need, or someone is not given the home they need. For a funding formula to be truly fair, it has to follow the need where it exists. That also requires a resetting of the partnership to be a partnership of equals. That is why Labour would introduce a take back control Act to reset the balance of power between central Government and local government.

6.3 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Simon Hoare): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this evening, Mr Pritchard, and to reply to the debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr Fysh). We have covered a lot of ground. The danger of covering a lot of ground is that it leaves the Minister with precious little time to respond to that ground, so I shall canter through as quickly as I can, with some barely connected bullet points.

I am grateful for the comments made by those who participated in this afternoon's debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil said that we all want to see top-quality services for our communities. My take, and I say this as a party politician, is that the public out there do not really care what type of council is delivering the service. When push comes to shove, they are not that motivated by which party, if any, is doing it either. They just want to know that the services are there when they need them and that the council can deliver those services with resilience and robustness.

In response to the point made by my friend the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), I would gently remind him that in broad terms the funding of local government formula today is that which we inherited, authored and

[Simon Hoare]

written by his party when in government. I think we all recognise that the formula needs change. Certainly, as late as last week, the Government committed to a fundamental review in the next Parliament. I am tempted to say that it would have been done had it not been for covid, which took up significant bandwidth within local government, but it is a job that needs to be done.

My hon. Friends the Members for Bridgwater and West Somerset (Mr Liddell-Grainger) and for Yeovil, and the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Sarah Dyke), are right to point out that there is a clear role for local government, not just in delivering statutory service, but in making place and effecting beneficial change. My hon. Friends were right to point to the excellent Yeovil College. About 40% of the students of Yeovil College come from my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder). The principal, Mark Bolton, provides exemplary leadership. My hon. Friends spoke of Bridgwater & Taunton College, about which I am afraid I do not know, but if it is half as good as Yeovil College, it is excellent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil talked about the role of trying to attract business and he is absolutely right, because business rates help to grow the services. If he thinks of Leonardo and Yeovil College in his own constituency, the giga-factory investment not far from Bridgwater that my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset spoke about, and the massive investment in Hinkley Point C, I would suggest that Somerset as a rural county is very much punching above its weight in economic activity. That is to be applauded, and the role of Somerset Council in helping to foster that environment is to be noted and the council congratulated.

What is the basic problem that Somerset faces? The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome talked about money. She said that the Government were not listening. I take issue with her; I do not like taking issue in normal circumstances with the hon. Lady, but I am going to in this case. She said that we need a Government who will listen. I can give the hon. Lady half a billion pounds of listening, which we announced last week. The rural services delivery grant will now stand at its highest-ever level. We are raising the funding floor from 3% to 4%—an ask of the district councils. We have listened.

Part of the underpinning of Somerset going unitary was to deliver efficiencies and savings. For reasons that my officials and I continue to explore and doubtless will touch on in conversations tomorrow, those savings have not manifested themselves. The steam has fallen out of the engine of change. I appreciate any new party coming into an administration will want at least to cast a casual eye over a plan, but to have delayed and prevaricated for as long as it has is, in my judgment, inexcusable because the basic premise of going unitary will have been submitted. The programme of savings and efficiencies will have been looked at by officials in my Department and have been a key part in determining whether Somerset was to go unitary. A very clear and compelling case was put forward.

I know from my experience of when I did it with our colleagues in Dorset, including my right hon. Friend, the former Member for West Dorset, Sir Oliver Letwin, the numbers that we put in were gone over with a fine-tooth comb because there is no point delivering

change if there is no tangible and obvious benefit. I urge Somerset Council to build up that head of steam, to put some wind in the sails—I am mixing my metaphors; not unusual for me—and to drive forward the efficiency, innovation and modernisation that underpins the unitary process.

I am not going to comment—I know colleagues have invited me to do so—on the minutiae of the conversations that officials and I are having with Somerset Council. I know that the House would not expect me to do so, but the points I am making in this debate are ones that I have and will continue to make. Somerset's budget is up 6%—£565.3 million in '24-'25. There are no cuts anywhere in local government budgets for this coming financial year. We are a Government who have listened. We asked, we heard.

A section 114 notice is often referred to as bankruptcy. It is not bankruptcy in the commercial sense of the term. That is the key message from me. This is not bankruptcy. No Government would ever allow any council to fall over, not because of politics or politicking, but because the vulnerable who need services need to have the comfort and security that those services will be provided. I do not want to scare the most vulnerable in our society and have them suddenly think that at the stroke of a pen and the issuing of a section 114 notice, everything they rely on for their quality of life will suddenly be removed. That would not be the case.

Mention has been made of the levelling-up agenda, which falls within the portfolio of my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Jacob Young). My hon. Friends the Members for Yeovil and for Bridgwater and West Somerset are right to make the point that the levelling-up agenda is not reserved solely to our northern and industrial towns, as important as they are to the levelling-up agenda. There is an element of coastal levelling up. There is an element of rural levelling up.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome made a point that I have made in every speech in this place since my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil and I were first elected way back in 2015—with all we have gone through, it feels a lot longer, I am sure he will agree. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome was right: the cost of delivery of services in a rural area, which is wider in geography and sparser in population, is by definition going to be higher than in denser urban populations. We do not then move forward and rob Peter to pay Paul and say that the deprivation in a rural area is more important than the deprivation in an urban area, or that need is greater in an urban area compared with a rural area.

Need is need. Deprivation is deprivation. We must meet the two where they manifest themselves in order to make the lives of our fellow citizens better and more comfortable. I am not a Minister who believes in robbing the rurals to pay the urbans or vice versa. I believe in trying to get equity in the system and having a more sophisticated way of recognising and addressing need. I have every confidence that in a review of the formula that would be an absolute kernel of all that we do.

The hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton referenced the audit issue, and he was right to do so. It is a serious issue. There are some announcements on that in the not-too-distant future, which I will, of course, share with him in due course through the usual channels. In conclusion, let me say this to the three representatives

of the great county of Somerset—not as great as Dorset, I hasten to add. From the Blackmore hills, nothing gives me greater pleasure than to look down on Somerset, but it is a great county. It is full of innovation and good people working hard and paying their taxes. I do not believe that they should be overburdened with taxation to mask deficiencies in the public sector. I think that is something that resonates across this Chamber—indeed, I see the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome nodding in agreement.

A number of Members spoke about the importance of partnership. The central theme since I was appointed in November has been the pivotal, positive partnership between central and local government to achieve for our people, wherever they are and whatever their needs. My door stands open to work with colleagues across the House representing Somerset to ensure that their residents secure the services that they need at a good value-for-money rate. I expect Somerset Council to rise to that challenge, and I look forward to furthering my discussions with it in due course.

6.14 pm

Mr Fysh: The Minister has set out exactly his case, and he is right to say that we need to work together on this. Councils are integral, and they have been for hundreds of years, to our local people and their experience of life. They are vital. We in this House support the Minister in trying to make sure that the process works well and efficiently, that savings are made and that the vision we can try to set out as Members of Parliament and councillors can be translated into real change for people on the ground. I am extremely grateful for his attention on this issue, and I look forward to working with him over the months and years ahead.

*Question put and agreed to.**Resolved,*

That this House has considered the funding and governance of Somerset Council.

6.15 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Tuesday 30 January 2024

TREASURY

Overseas Funds Regime: EEA Equivalence Assessment

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Bim Afolami): Today I am notifying the House about the Government's decision regarding the equivalence assessment for states in the European economic area, including European Union member states, under the UK's overseas funds regime.

Asset management makes an invaluable contribution to the health of both the UK economy and individuals' savings. The UK sector is the second largest globally and manages the savings and pensions of millions of UK citizens. Asset managers often set up their investment funds internationally, marketing their funds to investors in the UK and around the world.

In the Financial Services Act 2021, the Government legislated for a new overseas funds regime, to create a more streamlined process for overseas investment funds to be sold to UK investors. Given the importance of funds domiciled in the EEA to the UK market, it was determined that an equivalence assessment of the EEA would be the first to be conducted under this regime.

Today I can confirm that, following a detailed assessment, the Government have found the EEA states, including the EU member states, equivalent under the OFR. To enact this decision, secondary legislation will be required, when parliamentary time allows. The Government do not intend to require the funds assessed to comply with any additional UK requirements as part of this equivalence determination at this time.

This decision will apply to undertakings for the collective investment in transferable securities except those which are also money market funds, as there is ongoing regulatory development in this area.

In accordance with the principles set out in the guidance document for the UK's equivalence framework for financial services, the UK will monitor this equivalence decision on an ongoing basis, in light of UK and EEA regulatory developments.

Separate to the assessment of the EEA, the Government recognise that there are ongoing regulatory developments in relation to sustainable disclosure requirements. The Government intend to consult on whether to broaden the scope of SDR to include funds recognised under the OFR. The Government will ensure that there is adequate time for industry to adapt to any future requirements.

Currently, EEA funds which were marketing in the UK prior to EU exit are able to continue doing so under temporary arrangements. This arrangement was due to expire at the end of 2025.

Today, I can also confirm the Government's intention to extend this arrangement until the end of 2026, to ensure funds are able to smoothly transition to the OFR.

Today's announcements demonstrate the Government's commitment to maintaining a safe, open and globally integrated financial system, enabling international financial services business by reducing barriers and frictions, where safe and practicable.

[HCWS220]

EDUCATION

T-Levels: Wave 4

The Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education (Robert Halfon): As part of our delivery of wave 4 T-levels and our assessment of overlap between T-levels and technical qualifications we have been consulting with employers and representatives from many sectors.

After discussions with representatives of the hair and beauty sector, we have decided to separate our plans for a combined T-level in hair and beauty. The beauty sector has fed back that a good-quality level 3 classroom-based progression route is desirable. Therefore, this Government will explore introducing a T-level which focuses on the beauty sector, with the expectation that this could be introduced after 2025.

This differs from feedback we have had from representatives in the hair sector which has led us to conclude that the best route is for learners to progress into their industry through completion of an existing level 2 or level 3 apprenticeship or a level 2 classroom-based qualification. As such, we will no longer be introducing a combined T-level.

To support apprenticeships in the hair sector, we have increased funding for apprenticeships in these industries with funding uplifts of 57% for the level 2 hairdressing professional standard and 28% for the level 2 barbering apprenticeship.

T-levels remain our flagship technical qualification for 16 to 19-year-olds, with tens of thousands of students studying or having studied T-levels, and they will form the backbone of the advanced British standard. The Secretary of State made a statement on 9 March 2023 (HCWS619) on the future T-level roll out. I am pleased to announce that we are on track to deliver the T-levels in media, broadcast and production and craft and design for September 2024, alongside the animal care and management T-level, as well as the marketing T-level from September 2025. This will bring our portfolio of T-levels to 21 from September 2024, and 22 from September 2025.

With today's announcement we are also publishing the provisional list of 71 technical qualifications that have been assessed to overlap with wave 4 T-levels rolled out in or before 2024, which can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wave-4-t-levels-overlapping-qualifications>.

These are agriculture, land management and production; animal care and management; craft and design; legal services; and media, broadcast and production. Subject to the outcomes of an appeal process which gives awarding organisations the opportunity to contest a qualification's placement on the list, we will withdraw 16 to 19 public funding for new starts on these qualifications from 1 August 2025. 16 to 19-year-olds enrolled on these 71 qualifications accounted for around 1% of all total enrolments for 16 to 19-year-olds. Eleven of the qualifications had no enrolments and a further 23 had

fewer than 100 enrolments in the 2021-22 academic year, highlighting the need to streamline the qualifications system. Removing funding from technical qualifications which overlap with T-levels will ensure young people can feel confident that they are studying technical qualifications which will prepare them for jobs in their chosen occupation.

This is the final part of phase 2 of our reforms removing qualifications that overlap with waves 1 to 4 T-levels.

[HCWS221]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

CQC Review: Nottingham Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Victoria Atkins): I have requested that the Care Quality Commission (CQC) conduct a special review of mental health services in Nottinghamshire under section 48 of the Health and Social Care Act 2008.

Like many of my Parliamentary colleagues, I was appalled by the horrendous and tragic killings of Barnaby Webber, Grace O'Malley-Kumar and Ian Coates in Nottingham in June 2023. I would like to place on record my deepest sympathies and condolences to the families of Barnaby, Grace and Ian.

The CQC special review will focus on reviewing the care provided by Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and identifying where things may have gone wrong. This will give the families much-needed answers and will help identify how to improve the standard of mental health care in Nottinghamshire.

Any concerns regarding patient safety, quality of care, or public safety will be reported by the CQC, who will consider carefully the available relevant evidence, including witness and other oral evidence made public during the criminal trial of Valdo Calocane.

It is essential we move quickly to get the answers we need. This is why I am asking the CQC to conclude their investigation by the end of March at the very latest.

This special review will proceed alongside the Trust's own internal investigation and NHS England's Independent Mental Health Homicide Review, which is standard practice in these cases. I expect all parties to share information to avoid duplication and make sure that we receive as full a picture as possible. The CQC review will focus on this case and on wider issues in mental health care provision in Nottinghamshire, including at Highbury Hospital and Rampton Hospital.

I would also like to take this opportunity to update the House on the next steps of the Health Services Safety Investigations Body (HSSIB) investigation into mental health inpatient settings, which my predecessor announced in June 2023, in response to a number of tragic incidents that had taken place across the country.

Since June, the HSSIB, and its predecessor, the Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch (HSIB), has undertaken significant preparatory work, including holding over 30 meetings as part of the process of determining the scope of the investigation, and have reviewed the research evidence on safety.

The terms of reference for the investigation have today been published on the HSSIB website at <https://www.hssib.org.uk/patient-safety-investigations/>. There will be four investigations, which will focus on the themes of:

Learning from inpatient mental health deaths, and near misses, to improve patient safety.

The provision of safe care during transition from children and young person to adult inpatient mental health services.

Impact of out of area placements on the safety of mental health patients.

Creating the conditions for staff to deliver safe and therapeutic care (the workforce, relationships, and environments).

The investigations will identify risks to the safety of patients, and the HSSIB will seek to address those risks by making recommendations to facilitate the improvement of systems and practices in the provision of mental health care in England. This will include consideration of patient and staff safety with regard to allegations of sexual assault and rape. The investigations will conclude by the end of 2024.

Patient voice will be integral to the HSSIB's investigation and report. They have been in touch with patients and families who have experienced poor care, as well as their parliamentary representatives, and are working with patient advocates and the charitable sector to arrange focus groups to support these investigations.

The HSSIB can also be contacted directly by any patient, carer or family member who wants to share their experiences of the mental healthcare they or their loved ones have received by emailing enquiries@hssib.org.uk. I would strongly encourage all Members to highlight this opportunity to their constituents who may feel they would like to engage with this process and have their voices heard.

[HCWS226]

Measles

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Maria Caulfield): Following my written statement of 22 January 2024, I wish to provide a further update to the House on the actions that the Government and health system are taking in response to an increase in measles cases in England, particularly in the west midlands.

The current measles outbreak

Between 1 October 2023 and 23 January 2024 there have been 347 laboratory confirmed measles cases reported in England, with 127 of these cases confirmed in January 2024. From 30 January, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) will publish national laboratory confirmed measles case numbers on www.gov.uk weekly, rather than on the previous monthly cycle. This will provide more frequent and up-to-date information to support preparedness and response activity while measles cases remain raised.

Actions under way to protect the public

Measles is a vaccine preventable disease, with long-lasting immunity provided through the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine. To support increasing the uptake of the MMR vaccine, NHS England has rapidly implemented a catch-up campaign for missed MMR vaccines as part of a major drive to protect children from becoming seriously unwell as measles continues to rise in parts of the country. From 6 February, parents

and carers of unvaccinated and partially vaccinated children aged six to 11 will receive a first reminder letter, text or email inviting them to make an appointment with their child's GP practice for their missed MMR vaccine. From 12 March, second reminders will begin to be sent.

This national campaign supplements existing measures under way to work with specific communities to boost uptake in priority areas, for example, by offering MMR pop-ups and whole-school vaccination campaigns. Extensive local engagement and communications have also been undertaken with community and faith leaders to encourage groups less likely to get their jab to come forward.

Additionally, in London and the west midlands, the first reminder invitation letters, texts or emails will be sent in February to the parents and carers of unvaccinated and partially vaccinated children aged 11 to 16 and, following that, to young people aged 16 to 25 to invite them to catch up on their missed MMR vaccinations. This will be followed by a second reminder to these age groups in March. Reminders will also be accessible for those over 16 who utilise the NHS app.

In the west midlands, strategic partnership groups are in place in three of six NHSE integrated care board areas to oversee planning, delivery and response across the health system. The other three integrated care boards also work on a multi-agency basis to assess preparedness and response activities.

UKHSA West Midlands and regional Department for Education colleagues hosted a webinar for education and early years settings last week with over 650 attendees. This focused on describing the signs and symptoms of measles, what schools need to know and how they can access more support. In addition, UKHSA West Midlands and NHS Midlands hosted a webinar for clinicians and frontline staff in maternity services with over 280 attendees, and significant work across the region to promote MMR vaccination continues through a range of mechanisms, including social media and community engagement at a local level.

I will also be chairing a regular measles ministerial co-ordination board, bringing together local and national actors to bring the current outbreak under control.

Work also continues at pace across England's regions, particularly in London, to prepare for the possibility of further cases and outbreaks, learning from the west midlands experience. This preparation includes a multi-agency planning exercise led by UKHSA that was focused on a potential outbreak in London and exercising the response to that.

Correction to written statement UIN HCWS200

I would like to amend the written statement I gave the House on 22 January 2024 and an answer I gave to the House on the same day in response to an urgent question from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill).

In the written statement and at the urgent question, I stated that an existing MMR vaccination campaign by NHS England had resulted in a 10% increase in vaccine uptake compared to the previous year. I would like to clarify that this 10% increase is not an overall figure but rather refers to the proportion of children aged one to five who came forward for their MMR jab as a result of having been identified as eligible for and/or missing one or both doses and contacted proactively by the NHS between

22 September and 23 February last year to get the jab. The figure I quoted was from a published NHS England press release, which was corrected on 23 January 2024.

[HCWS224]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Independent Office for Police Conduct: 2022-23 Annual Report

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (James Cleverly): I am today, along with my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Nigel Huddleston), publishing the annual report and accounts of the Independent Office for Police Conduct. The report has been laid before the House and copies will be available in the Vote Office.

[HCWS223]

Legal Migration Implementation

The Minister for Legal Migration and the Border (Tom Pursglove): Our points-based immigration system allows us to control who comes to the UK to work, study and visit. It enables the Government to prioritise the skills and talent we need to help our economy grow and support our NHS, while encouraging investment in, and protecting, our resident workforce. On 4 December 2023, the Government announced a major package of measures to curb immigration abuse and further reduce net migration.

Since the pandemic, the UK has experienced unprecedented levels of immigration. This is in large part due to growth in humanitarian routes like Ukraine, Hong Kong and Afghanistan, as well as growth in health and social care visas, and students. The latest official estimates show that net migration in the year to June 2023 was 672,000—up significantly on pre-pandemic volumes, but lower than the estimated 745,000 who came in the year to December 2022. The Government are clear that this level of net migration is too high and must come down swiftly to avoid unsustainable pressure on public services and housing.

In May 2023, the Government took decisive action to prevent students from using the student route to access work prior to completion of their studies and arrest the substantial rise in the number of students bringing dependants to the UK. These reforms have been implemented. The ability for students to switch out of the student route early ended on 17 July 2023 and from 1 January 2024, student visa holders can only bring dependants if they are studying for a multi-year postgraduate research degree.

The measures announced in May and December 2023 mean that around 300,000 people who were eligible to come to the UK last year would not be able to do so in future.

Good progress has been made on implementing the package announced on 4 December:

On 19 February, we intend to lay immigration rules which will remove the right for care workers and senior care workers to bring dependants, which will come into force on 11 March 2024. The rules will ensure that care providers in England will only be able to sponsor migrant workers if they

are undertaking activities regulated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC). This will help tackle the abuse of the health and care visa route that we have seen and ensure that those coming through this route genuinely support the social care system.

On 14 March, we intend to lay immigration rules to increase the earnings thresholds for those arriving on the skilled worker route, with the minimum threshold rising by 48% from £26,200 to £38,700. These changes will come into force from 4 April and will ensure that our immigration system is focused on attracting skilled, highly paid talent from around the world. Those coming on the health and care visa route will be exempted from this specific threshold so we can continue to bring the healthcare workers that our care sector and NHS need. We are also exempting workers on national pay-scale occupations.

On 17 January we commissioned the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) to carry out a rapid review of the shortage occupation list to inform which occupations should be temporarily added to an immigration salary list from early April. The immigration rules we intend to lay on 14 March will remove the 20% going rate discount for occupations on the shortage occupation list, as well as temporarily adding any occupations as recommended by the MAC to the new immigration salary list.

On family visas, we will bring this in line with the new minimum general salary threshold for a skilled worker of £38,700. We will raise the minimum income for family visas incrementally, in stages, to give predictability to families. The immigration rules we intend to lay on 14 March will set out that from 11 April we will raise the threshold to £29,000—that is the 25th percentile of earnings for jobs which are eligible for Skilled Worker Visas. We will incrementally increase the threshold to the 40th percentile—currently £34,500—and finally to the 50th percentile, currently £38,700, and the level at which the general skilled worker threshold is set, by early 2025.

This major package of measures sits alongside our major transformation of the border and immigration system to deliver a simple, quick, digital end-to-end customer journey, while strengthening border security.

A key part of this transformation is the introduction of the UK's electronic travel authorisation (ETA) scheme. ETAs are a new requirement for passengers visiting or transiting through the UK who do not currently need a visa for short stays or who do not already have any other UK immigration status before travelling. The scheme will increase our knowledge about people in advance of travel, which will not only make the UK safer, but help deliver our ambition to increase automation of passenger clearance at the border.

The scheme is being introduced in a phased manner, on a nationality-by-nationality basis. As of November 2023, it is now a requirement for nationals of Qatar to obtain an ETA prior to travel to the UK. On 1 February 2024 the scheme will be extended to the remaining Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries—Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, UAE—and Jordan. Other nationalities will be added to the scheme later this year.

All of the above changes show that we welcome those who are here to contribute their skills and talents to the UK, but it is not a right to come here. Those who come must be willing to contribute to our country. In keeping with this, those who use and benefit from our public services, such as the NHS, should make a sufficient financial contribution towards the cost of those services. Legislation has been passed this month to enable the immigration health surcharge to be raised by 66% to £1,035, in respect of applications made on or after 6 February 2024. The new rate reflects the increases in

healthcare expenditure and better reflects NHS service use by payers, remembering that payment of the charge provides near comprehensive access to our health service. The level of IHS will be kept under regular review to ensure it covers the cost of treating IHS payers.

We continue to keep all aspects of our immigration and border system under review to ensure it works for the British people and our economy.

[HCWS222]

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

Social Housing

The Minister for Housing, Planning and Building Safety (Lee Rowley): Social housing is a finite resource and in any compassionate society it is incumbent upon the Government of the day to ensure it is utilised in the most effective way to support those who truly need it and those who play by the rules. This is not least because those fortunate enough to get a social home benefit from paying below market rents and almost all will have the security of that social home for life.

Over 1 million households are on the social housing waiting list and around a quarter-of-a-million new tenancies are agreed each year. It is therefore important that social housing is fairly allocated. The British public want to know that decent and hard-working people who have contributed to this country can secure a home in their local community. People already living in social homes want to know that anyone moving near them will be respectful of their neighbours. That is why the Government are going to make sure that all applicants and tenants benefit from a system that rewards responsible behaviour and protects local households, while supporting the most vulnerable and those in priority need.

Today we are launching a consultation on our proposed reforms regarding who is eligible and who qualifies for social housing, and how local housing authorities decide to allocate social housing stock where demand exceeds supply. The changes seek to prevent people who abuse the system from benefiting at the expense of those who have played by the rules.

The reforms would apply both to new applicants in England and those who are already on a social housing waiting list. The introduction of a UK connection test and new qualification tests—local connection test, terrorism and antisocial behaviour tests, false statement test and income test—will apply to new social housing applicants and those on a waiting list, meaning those currently living in social housing would not be subject to these new tests. The new ground for eviction for unspent terrorism convictions, as well as the “three strikes and you’re out” policy for antisocial behaviour, would apply to those currently living in social housing as well as future tenants.

When drawing up qualification tests, local housing authorities decide on matters including when to prioritise those newly arrived in the country or a local area over local families; and under which circumstances they should allocate a social home to a high-income household over a lower income one, or to grant social housing to those who commit antisocial behaviour. Our proposals seek to set a national minimum standard for qualification tests while still allowing for local flexibility.

Social housing waiting lists have stabilised at around 1.2 million after rising from 1 million in 1997 to 1.7 million in 2010 under the last Labour Government. The waiting list remains too high, but it is also essential that local housing authorities do not disproportionately allocate social housing to those newly arrived in the country or local area while local families are left on waiting lists. In Labour-run Brent, 40% of new social lets in 2021-22 were to non-British citizens. In Labour-run Oxford the figure was 25% and in Labour-run Haringey the figure was 24%.

The Government believe that everyone has the right to a safe, decent and warm home that meets their needs. We have made significant progress both to increase the quality and quantity of social housing, and at the same time to hold negligent landlords to account.

Under the affordable homes programme, the Government are spending over £11.5 billion of taxpayers' money to deliver more than 100,000 affordable homes, among them tens of thousands specifically for social rent. This will unlock a further £38 billion in public and private spending in affordable housing. It builds on the Government's record since 2010—with over 696,000 new affordable homes delivered, including over 172,000 for social rent. Through the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, we have strengthened the powers of the Regulator of Social Housing, and improved residents' ability to seek redress by granting new powers to the Housing Ombudsman.

Overview of proposals

The new set of tests on which we are seeking views are as follows:

UK connection test—requiring people to be a British citizen, Irish citizen, Commonwealth citizen with a right of abode, or EEA or Swiss citizen with equal treatment rights in matters of housing under the withdrawal agreement, the EEA-EFTA separation agreement or the Swiss citizens' rights agreement, or otherwise to have been lawfully resident in the UK for 10 years, in order to be eligible for social housing. We are consulting on an exemption for those arriving via safe and legal resettlement routes and the Ukrainian temporary visa schemes. This will allow for the allocation of more social homes to those with the strongest connection to the UK, while enabling the Government to continue to deliver their commitments to provide urgent humanitarian support.

Local connection test—preventing individuals from being allocated social housing if they have not had links to the local authority area for two years—for example, through residence or work. This will ensure greater consistency across

the country and ensure more local people can access social housing in the area they call home where they need it, supporting people to put down roots and maintain links to family and community.

Income test—households earning above a maximum threshold—to be defined following responses to the consultation—would not qualify for social housing. This would only apply to new tenants and existing tenants would be unaffected.

Antisocial behaviour test—disqualifying people who have unspent convictions for certain criminal antisocial behaviour offences, as well as certain civil orders, from social housing for a defined period.

Terrorism test—we propose that people who have unspent terrorism convictions should be disqualified from social housing unless excluding them would increase the risk to public safety.

False statement test—mandating a period of disqualification for those who knowingly or recklessly make false statements when applying for social housing.

The Government do not believe that those who repeatedly commit acts of antisocial behaviour or have unspent terrorism offences should continue to access social homes while law-abiding individuals remain on waiting lists. We are keen that all social landlords should be able to evict those who have unspent convictions for terrorist offences; we are also committed to a “three strikes and you're out” expectation of social housing landlords, as set out in the “Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan” published last year. This means that they will be expected to evict tenants whose behaviour is disruptive to neighbours and jeopardises community cohesion.

To ensure that the reforms are informed by the expertise of local housing authorities, social landlords, tenants and the wider public, the full consultation launched today will run for eight weeks. Reforms based on the consultation responses will ensure that waiting lists are managed effectively and that more social housing is allocated to those with the closest connection to the UK and their local area. Changes will be delivered by secondary legislation at the earliest opportunity.

The proposals will help to fulfil the Government's pledge to tackle antisocial behaviour, and ensure we preserve and protect the country's social housing.

A copy of the consultation document will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and published on www.gov.uk.

[HCWS225]

Petition

Tuesday 30 January 2024

OBSERVATIONS

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

Energy bills support

The petition of residents of the constituency of Linlithgow and East Falkirk,

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 Bill 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.—[Presented by Martyn Day, *Official Report*, 28 November 2023; Vol. 741, c. 806.]

[P002881]

Observations from The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Amanda Solloway):

The Government recognise the challenges posed by cost-of-living pressures, including the impact of energy bills, and is already providing extensive financial support to households.

This includes a package of support to assist households and individuals with rising costs of living that will total over £104 billion, or £3,700 per household on average, over 2022 to 2025.

While the current price cap has risen slightly, the Q1 2024 price cap of £1,928 has decreased significantly since the last year, when the Q1 2023 price cap peaked at £4,279.

The Government are working with Ofgem and suppliers on the best way to support customers facing high levels of debt or other challenges linked to their energy bills.

In instances where consumers anticipate difficulty paying their energy bills, the Government recommend they contact their energy supplier at the earliest opportunity. Under Ofgem rules, suppliers must work with consumers to agree a payment plan they can afford.

Forms of support from suppliers with the cost of energy include:

- payment breaks or reductions
- more time to pay
- access to hardship funds
- advice on how to use less energy

As the Government are not responsible for support that individual energy suppliers offer, we cannot provide a full list of different support offered by various energy suppliers for customers in varying circumstances. Instead, the Government recommend that any customer struggling to pay their energy bills contacts their supplier for additional support.

Many energy companies offer schemes or grants to help with home heating and energy costs, for example by making homes more energy-efficient, or offer free boiler checks and upgrades. Some of these schemes are available to non-customers also.

Citizens Advice lists the grants that some larger suppliers offer on its website and provides access to energy advisers via the telephone. They will provide advice to consumers about what help they are eligible for and how to access it. All this advice and support is available via gov.uk, the Ofgem website and the Citizens Advice website and telephone services.

We recommend the following sources of advice and support with paying energy bills:

<https://www.gov.uk/get-help-energy-bills>

<https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/information-consumers/energy-advice-households/getting-help-if-you-cant-afford-your-energy-bills>

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/energy/energy-supply/get-help-paying-your-bills/struggling-to-pay-your-energy-bills/>

Ministerial Corrections

Tuesday 30 January 2024

EDUCATION

Funded Childcare

The following extracts are from the urgent question on Funded Childcare on 22 January 2024.

David Johnston: On the funding rates, we announced the funding rates for three and four-year-olds in April last year, and for two-year-olds in November.

[Official Report, 22 January 2024, Vol. 744, c. 25.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Wantage (David Johnston).

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson).

The correct response should have been:

David Johnston: On the funding rates, we announced the funding rates for **two**, three and four-year-olds in **November** last year.

David Johnston: We set our rates by conducting a survey of 10,000 providers, in order to understand the costs they face and set the rates accordingly.

[Official Report, 22 January 2024, Vol. 744, c. 30.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Wantage.

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist).

The correct response should have been:

David Johnston: We set our rates by conducting a survey of **9,000** providers, in order to understand the costs they face and set the rates accordingly.

David Johnston: I set out in my statement the additional money that we had given to the sector in the last financial year and this one to help it to meet those cost pressures—that was anchored to the survey of 10,000 providers that I talked about.

[Official Report, 22 January 2024, Vol. 744, c. 31.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Wantage.

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Scott Benton).

The correct response should have been:

David Johnston: I set out in my statement the additional money that we had given to the sector in the last financial year and this one to help it to meet those cost pressures—that was anchored to the survey of **9,000** providers that I talked about.

David Johnston: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point about the increased cost pressures that everybody has to face. That is why we gave an additional £204 million in the last financial year and a further £400 million in the current financial year to help meet those pressures, based on the fact that we surveyed 10,000 providers in order to understand exactly what they are paying for all the things he outlines.

[Official Report, 22 January 2024, Vol. 744, c. 32.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the hon. Member for Wantage.

An error has been identified in my response to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon).

The correct response should have been:

David Johnston: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point about the increased cost pressures that everybody has to face. That is why we gave an additional £204 million in the last financial year and a further £400 million in the current financial year to help meet those pressures, based on the fact that we surveyed **9,000** providers in order to understand exactly what they are paying for all the things he outlines.

ORAL ANSWERS

Tuesday 30 January 2024

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Tuesday 30 January 2024

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PETITION

Tuesday 30 January 2024

	<i>Col. No.</i>	<i>Col. No.</i>
ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO	9P	
Energy bills support	9P	

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

Tuesday 30 January 2024

	<i>Col. No.</i>
EDUCATION	9MC
Funded Childcare	9MC

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons*,

**not later than
Tuesday 6 February 2024**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
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