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HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)

Monday 22 April 2024

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: This morning, two people were charged with offences under the Official Secrets Act 1911. One of those individuals was a parliamentary passholder at the time of the alleged offences. This matter is now sub judice and, under the terms of the House's resolution on matters of sub judice, Members should not refer to it in the Chamber. I know that hon. and right hon. Members will understand how important it is that we do not say anything in this place that might prejudice a criminal trial relating to a matter of national security.

Oral Answers to Questions

LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

The Secretary of State was asked—

Private Rented Sector

1. **Fleur Anderson** (Putney) (Lab): What steps he is taking to reform the private rented sector. [902392]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Jacob Young): The Renters (Reform) Bill will have its Report stage on Wednesday 24 April. The Bill abolishes section 21 evictions, moves the sector to a system of periodic tenancies and introduces a private rented sector property portal and ombudsman, improving the system for responsible tenants and good-faith landlords.

Fleur Anderson: Ministers first promised to end no-fault evictions five years ago. Since then, 85,000 households have been threatened with no-fault evictions, including a constant stream of residents in Putney. Does the Minister not agree that that was ample time to implement the necessary improvements and that the delay has caused immense suffering to people in the private rented sector?

Jacob Young: I agree with the hon. Lady that we need to abolish section 21 evictions as soon as possible. When it comes to the Bill, we published the White Paper in 2022, we published the Bill in 2023 and we are bringing forward the Report stage on Wednesday.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Ms Anum Qaisar (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): In 2019, the UK Government announced plans to outlaw no-fault eviction notices. However, just last week, the housing charity Shelter revealed that almost 1 million

renters in England have been served no-fault eviction notices since that announcement. While the Government seem to be unable to get the rental reform agenda past their Conservative Back Benchers, the Scottish Parliament banned no-fault evictions back in 2017. Does the Minister agree that that is yet another example of the Scottish Parliament delivering for the people while Westminster dysfunction only lets them down?

Jacob Young: As I said to the hon. Member for Putney (Fleur Anderson), we are abolishing section 21 evictions. The Bill will return to the House on Wednesday.

Cost of Public Services: Coastal Areas

2. **Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): What recent estimate he has made of the additional cost to the public purse of councils delivering public services in coastal areas. [902393]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Simon Hoare): Cornwall is one of the most beautiful areas of the country, second only to Dorset. [*Interruption.*] Thank you. It has the longest county coastline in England and, as such, its council faces unique challenges in delivering services. The Government are committed to reforming the local government funding landscape in the next Parliament to deliver simpler, fairer and longer settlements. As part of that process, the Government have previously publicly announced that they are exploring options for specific formulae for flooding and coastal erosion. We will engage councils about those options as reform progresses.

Steve Double: The Government have already accepted the additional cost of delivering services in rural areas through the rural services delivery grant, but they have not yet accepted those additional costs for coastal areas. Would the Minister consider establishing a coastal services delivery grant to ensure that coastal regions such as Cornwall, which as he said has the longest—and most beautiful—coastline in the country, get the funding that they need?

Simon Hoare: Second most beautiful, I remind my hon. Friend. He makes an important point, representing as he does his constituents and the wider county of Cornwall, and an interesting suggestion. Strong points sit behind his argument. I would be delighted to meet him to discuss that further, but he makes good points and gives me food for thought.

Sarah Dyke (Somerton and Frome) (LD): The cost of delivering services in Somerset is rising, with care costs rising by 47% between 2022 and 2023, yet urban councils receive about 38% more Government funding spending power per head than rural councils. What steps is the Department taking to address that inequality and help rural councils to deliver vital public services?

Simon Hoare: As the hon. Lady will know, the rural services delivery grant tries to reflect that as well, but if only the Lib Dem leadership of her council had got on—as Dorset did—and delivered the benefits of going unitary, rather than fiddling while Rome burns, her situation might be a little better.

Metro Mayors: Local Economies

3. **James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): What assessment he has made of the impact of Metro Mayors on their local economies. [902394]

10. **Karl McCartney** (Lincoln) (Con): What assessment he has made of the impact of Metro Mayors on their local economies. [902402]

19. **Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): What steps he is taking to increase engagement between his Department and elected Mayors. [902412]

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Michael Gove): Our Mayors play a powerful role in driving economic growth, improving public services and giving local areas a powerful voice on the national stage. I met all the Mayors as a group before Christmas, as well as Mayor Brabin, as chair of UK Mayors this year, and a number of Mayors on an individual basis. I look forward to meeting and working closely with all the Mayors, collectively and individually, after the May elections, including the three new Mayors who will be elected for the East Midlands, the North-East Combined Authority, and York and North Yorkshire.

James Morris: Since he was first elected in 2017, Andy Street has delivered £10 billion of new investment to the west midlands region, more housing—particularly on brownfield land—and much-needed investment in transport infrastructure across the region. Does the Secretary of State agree that, when voters go to the polls next week, they should support Andy Street to continue that track record of delivery for the west midlands?

Michael Gove: I agree with my hon. Friend. Andy Street has been outstanding at delivering jobs and more homes in the west midlands than in any other region, according to housing targets. He has done so despite the failure of Birmingham City Council, which was driven into bankruptcy by Labour.

Karl McCartney: Can my right hon. Friend further update colleagues and my constituents on the progress of the Greater Lincolnshire devolution deal, following the deals approved at upper tier council level earlier this year?

Michael Gove: We have been consulting and we have listened, and we will have to wait until after 2 May to say more. I am looking forward to working with my hon. Friend to make Lincolnshire great again.

Dan Jarvis: Given that after 2 May there will be 12 metro Mayors directly representing 27 million people in England, does the Secretary of State think that there should be a dedicated formal structure that will enable the metro Mayors to work more effectively with Whitehall Government, rather than the somewhat ad hoc structures that are currently in place?

Michael Gove: That is a fair point. The ad hoc structures that the hon. Gentleman described work well. All the existing Mayors work well together, and all party politics aside, it has been instructive to see the

kind words that Andy Burnham has directed towards Andy Street and vice versa. Now that the mayoral model, which has worked overall with one or two slight bumps in the road, has reached a level of maturity, his point is very fair.

Keir Mather (Selby and Ainsty) (Lab): Voters in the upcoming North Yorkshire mayoral election are facing significant economic hardship and deserve to know that their money is being spent responsibly. Does the Secretary of State share my concern that one candidate in the North Yorkshire mayoral race has made over £300 million of unfunded spending commitments for the county? Could central Government perhaps provide an assessment of the economic impact of such spending commitments?

Michael Gove: It is striking that the Conservative candidate in North Yorkshire is the only one who has a plan for growth, and a long-term plan for York and North Yorkshire's economy. When it comes to value for money for our Mayors, I should point out that the Conservative Mayors for Tees Valley and for the West Midlands, Ben Houchen and Andy Street, levy not a penny in extra mayoral taxation, unlike the Labour Mayor in London, whose spendthrift ways will see him thrown out on 2 May.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Despite that love-in, as the Mayor of the West Midlands, Andy Street has over-promised and under-delivered. Almost 70% of devolved housing funds have not been used, and he has done nothing to tackle rogue landlords. The mayoral model can work, and Sadiq Khan's affordable housebuilding in London is evidence of that. When did the Secretary of State last meet Andy Street, and did he raise those failures with him?

Michael Gove: I talk to Andy Street constantly because he is a model of what a strong Mayor should be. The right hon. Lady talks about housing. There are housing targets set at a regional level—which Mayor missed them by most? Sadiq Khan in London. Which Mayor has exceeded those targets? Andy Street in the west midlands. Sadiq Khan has failed on housing, failed on crime and failed on transport, and he will be kicked out on 2 May.

Angela Rayner: Roll on a general election. Sadiq Khan has been building a better London for everyone. If the right hon. Gentleman wants more evidence of Mayors working, he should look up north: Tracy Brabin, Steve Rotherham and Andy Burnham have been bringing transport services back under public control, giving better value for money. In the Tees Valley, we see the opposite. The review into Lord Houchen's mishandling of Teesworks found

"the principles of spending public money are not being consistently observed."

So why will the Secretary of State not give the National Audit Office the chance to investigate?

Michael Gove: I am sure the right hon. Lady is very, very keen that all sorts of matters are investigated properly by independent figures who can be trusted, but in the Tees Valley Ben Houchen has done more than

any other Metro Mayor to bring jobs and investment into his region. The thousands of jobs created in Teesworks stand in stark contrast to Labour's failure, from London to Liverpool, to bring in the jobs required. Andy Street, I should reinforce, is the single most successful Mayor in the country. That is why both Andy and Ben will be re-elected on 2 May, alongside Conservative Mayors in York and North Yorkshire, the East Midlands and, of course, London.

Fire Defects: Remediation Costs

4. Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help prevent (a) leaseholders and (b) tenants paying for the remediation of fire defects. [902395]

The Minister for Housing, Planning and Building Safety (Lee Rowley): No qualifying leaseholder in a building above 11 metres in England will be liable for cladding remediation costs. Where we are able to do so and where they still exist, we are making those who cause these issues pay to resolve them.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): In my constituency, residents are asking for transparency in their service charges. They are fearful that they are being charged for surveys for fire remediation work, which is the responsibility of the developer and not the people who live in the flats and who are not the cause of those problems. What will the Government do for people in Master Gunner Place or Grove Place in my constituency, where people are asking questions but not getting answers on why they are paying these excessive charges? In one case, there was a 107% increase in the service charge. The Government are making all the right noises, but I do not see much result at the sharp end for my constituents.

Lee Rowley: I totally agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is absolutely vital there is transparency in how, when and why leaseholders are being charged. That is why we have done one thing and been doing another thing in the past few weeks alone. Last week, on the new building safety approach for high-rise buildings, we were very clear in a joint letter about highlighting the importance of temperate remuneration and cost. Secondly, we need to continue to bring forward the reforms in the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill, which will see a transformation in transparency on service charges. The Government brought that Bill forward and it will come through as soon as the other place has concluded its observations.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): The Minister has done good work in protecting leaseholders and renters from remediation costs above 11 metres. As a leaseholder myself, I am a bit baffled as to why people are not protected when fire remediation measures are necessary below 11 metres. I would be grateful if he could explain the Government's reasoning.

Lee Rowley: When the Building Safety Act 2022, which put in place the differentiation, was going through, we were very clear and asked colleagues, on the Floor of the House, for any examples of where there were potential issues below 11 metres. If my right hon. Friend or any other Member has an issue, I would be very keen to hear from them. The reality is that, over the past two

years nearly, we have received only 160 potential issues. Of those, we can count on one hand where there has been a problem. We are working with each of those three buildings to make the progress we need to make.

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

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The Select Committee welcomed the more than £2 billion provided through the building safety fund to private leaseholders with regard to remediation due to fire safety works. On the other hand, social housing providers received only £200 million, which is about 10% of the amount going to private leaseholders. How can it possibly be fair that in a block of flats a private leaseholder gets their remediation costs paid, but in the same flat next door a social housing tenant has to pay for the total cost out of their rent? That simply is not fair. Ministers have accepted the unfairness in the past. When will they do something about it?

Lee Rowley: As my constituency neighbour recognises, there is, rightly, a substantial amount of taxpayer subsidy for remediation. We are trying to ensure that that taxpayer subsidy is then clawed back from those responsible for the problems in the first place. Where there are challenges and issues with registered providers, we are very happy to talk to them. We have done that and we have made changes where necessary.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Following a fire last summer, timber and unplasticized polyvinyl chloride cladding on 586 homes in the borough of Barnet was identified as needing remediation. A number of those homes are in my constituency. Homeowners are facing bills of £23,000. Will the Government help them with those bills?

Lee Rowley: This important issue is very much on our radar, and one that we are working through. I had meetings about it only a few days ago, and I continue to do so. Perhaps I could update my right hon. Friend separately outside the Chamber with further information about our proposed approach.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): Soaring service charges are placing an intolerable financial strain on leaseholders and those with shared ownership across the country. Among the main drivers of the eye-watering demands with which many have been served over recent months are staggering rises in buildings insurance premiums and the passing on of significant costs relating to the functioning of the new building safety regime. Given that many leaseholders are being pushed to the very limits of what they can afford, do the Government now accept that the service charge transparency provisions in the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill—and pleading with freeholders to take a temperate approach—are not enough, and that Ministers should explore with urgency what further measures could be included to protect leaseholders better from unreasonable charges and give them more control over their buildings?

Lee Rowley: The hon. Gentleman is aware that our substantial reform package sets out clearly and transparently the changes that are being introduced and what people are expected to pay. It could not be clearer than it is in the legislation, which is one of my reasons for wanting it to proceed as quickly as possible. When there are issues, we are keen to look at them and, where we can, take action, but the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill is designed to improve transparency and reduce problems, and I am sure that it will do that once it has completed its passage here and in the other place.

Local Plans

5. Dr Luke Evans (Bosworth) (Con): Whether he has made an estimate of the number of planning authorities that do not have an up-to-date local plan. [902396]

The Minister for Housing, Planning and Building Safety (Lee Rowley): At the end of March 2024, 110 local planning authorities—a third of the total—had adopted a local plan in the past five years, while 291 had plans that were more than five years old. Of those, more than half are making progress towards updating their plans. The Government have made it clear that authorities should continue to update their plans because that is the best way to deliver development that is in the interests of local communities.

Dr Evans: My Liberal Democrat-run local council is one of those without an up-to-date local plan. In fact, it has now delayed its plan until 2026, which means that places such as Burbage have housing without full protection. That puts pressure on our GP services, our school places and even our roads. What more can the Government do to persuade Liberal Democrat-run Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council to ensure that its plan is established and updated so that my residents have the required protections?

Lee Rowley: My hon. Friend has raised this matter in the Chamber before, and it is a great example of why it is so important that Bosworth has this Conservative Member of Parliament to highlight the challenges and failures of the Liberal Democrat council. Ultimately, the Government will not hesitate to take action against councils that are not fulfilling their obligations. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has done so over the past few months, and we will continue to do so, because we expect councils to do their job and put their plans in place. When Liberal Democrat councils fail to do that, we will call them out.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): York has one of the worst housing crises in the country, yet we have not had a local plan to restrain developers for 68 years. Why has it taken this Tory Government more than 14 years to deliver a local plan for York?

Lee Rowley: I am relatively clear that the Labour party has been in charge of York for a substantial proportion of the last 14 years. If the hon. Lady wants an answer to her question about why there is no local plan, she should look to her own party.

Dame Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): To help local authorities finalise their local plans, my hon. Friend and his ministerial colleagues have made significant

changes to the planning rules. As a result, Wiltshire has cut its house building by 9,000, North Somerset has reduced its house building plans by 29%, and Three Rivers and others are doing likewise, to ensure that local plans better reflect their communities. Does my hon. Friend expect all local authorities to consider whether the new rules apply in their communities?

Lee Rowley: It is vital for local councils to follow what is in the national planning policy framework. We know that where local plans are in place councils build more houses, but, most important, they build more houses in the right places, so that communities can be confident that they are being built where they are needed.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): The problem with the Government's developer-led approach to planning is that it means that we see houses built for demand, but not for local need. In a community such as the Lake District, developers will sell anything they can build, but will it meet the need of local communities? Often it will not. Will the Minister ensure that local authorities and national parks putting together local plans are allowed to designate land specifically and exclusively for genuinely affordable housing so that they can say no to the houses we do not need and yes to the ones we do?

Lee Rowley: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the planning system has a substantial amount of flexibility—it is one of the frustrations—to ensure that local councils do the right thing. Where they do the right thing, they should be celebrated; where they do not, we should criticise them and hope that they are thrown out. If the hon. Gentleman is arguing against developer-led planning—capitalism, as it is otherwise known—that is a very interesting place for liberalism in this country to go.

Community Ownership Fund

6. Dr James Davies (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): What assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of the community ownership fund on local communities. [902397]

12. Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con): What assessment his Department has made of the potential impact of the community ownership fund on local communities. [902404]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Jacob Young): Community ownership can boost local connections and pride of place, and bolster resilience. So far, we have awarded about £103 million to 333 projects across the UK. We are working with an external evaluation partner on an evaluation of the fund. We are already seeing some great examples of COF projects making a real difference to their communities, such as Grow the Glens in Northern Ireland and East Boldre community stores in the south-east of England.

Dr Davies: There have already been three worthy beneficiaries of the community ownership fund in my constituency: the village shop in Llandyrnog; the Salusbury Arms in Tremeirchion, which the Minister has visited; and Rhyl football club, which hopes to secure the future

of its ground, Belle Vue. His Department has been very helpful throughout, but what further advice and guidance can be provided for applicants in future rounds?

Jacob Young: I enjoyed visiting the Salusbury Arms with my hon. Friend and raising a glass to the community there. Ahead of round 4, we launched a brand-new expression of interest process, which provides interested applicants with an outcome within minutes. To support applicants at the fourth stage, we have also updated the prospectus and other guidance on gov.uk. We want to help as many communities as possible to benefit from the fund, spreading the benefits of levelling up nationwide.

Simon Baynes: Does the Minister agree that the recent grant of £452,700 to the Owain Glyndŵr hotel in Corwen, in Clwyd South, is a wonderful example of the hugely beneficial impact of the community ownership fund on local communities? The grant will enable this much-loved hotel to play a central role in the town again, and to benefit from the reopening of Corwen station and the other projects in Corwen arising from my Clwyd South levelling-up fund.

Jacob Young: I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting that exciting project, which seeks to secure the future of the Owain Glyndŵr hotel and develop it into a community social hub showcasing the life and history of the area. I agree that the project is a great example of what the community ownership fund seeks to do across our United Kingdom. The fund not only safeguards priceless and much-loved local assets, but supports ambition and builds opportunity in local areas. I will be visiting north Wales in the very near future and will test my diary to see whether it is possible to swing by and say, “Da iawn.”

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): The Minister mentioned pubs that have been rescued and secured for the community, but where historic local pubs, which were at one time hubs of the community, have been wrecked by absentee owners and therefore require capital investment, does he envisage the funding being used in that regard as well?

Jacob Young: The fund is open to community groups, charities, and town and parish councils. I cannot promise the hon. Gentleman that the pub to which he refers would be eligible, but I am more than happy to meet him following this session to get further details.

Sir Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Mr Speaker, I know you know that there could not possibly be a better project to receive funding from the Government than the Rhondda tunnel, which would connect Blaencwm and Blaengwynfi—I am very happy to dangle all the Ministers down the hole and into the tunnel, if they ever want to come and see it. I know the Secretary of State knows all about it, because I had two meetings with him about it several years ago. I have met lots of Ministers who have privately been very supportive and told me to apply for this, that or the other fund, but not a single penny has yet transpired. An official has recently told Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council that it should make a specific exemption for an application for money. Is that still a possibility, to ensure that the Rhondda tunnel comes to pass?

Jacob Young: I do not think that the community ownership fund is the appropriate fund. As I have just said to the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (John Cryer), the community ownership fund is open to charities, to community groups and to town and parish councils, but with regard to the hon. Gentleman's tunnel project, I would be more than happy to meet him and identify what funding opportunities are available.

Towns Fund

7. **James Wild** (North West Norfolk) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential impact of the towns fund on local communities. [902398]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Jacob Young): As part of their town investment plan, places were required to consult extensively with local communities and to evidence how this feedback shaped their plan. The impact of the towns fund on local communities is also a crucial part of the towns fund impact evaluation, to be published in early 2026.

James Wild: One success of the towns fund is the breadth of projects, which in King's Lynn include Shakespeare's St George's guildhall, a new community library and adult skills centre and a school of nursing studies. Can my hon. Friend confirm that the very welcome extra £20 million through the long-term plan for towns that Lynn has just been awarded can be used to complement those schemes as well as to secure other investment into the area?

Jacob Young: I thank my hon. Friend for his commitment to levelling up in King's Lynn and across Norfolk. Our long-term plan for towns puts power back into the hands of local people. Each town must set up a new town board, comprised of local community representatives and the Members of Parliament for the respective area, who are responsible for developing the long-term plan for their area, underpinned by evidence of extensive community engagement. This plan can include the regeneration projects that my hon. Friend has mentioned, if that is considered a local priority. I look forward to working with him and to seeing the plans when they are finally brought forward.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his answers. He will recall that I asked some time ago about the Ards and North Down Council's Whitespots project—a historical project for tourism that relates to the second world war and also to the history of mining in the area. The Minister said that when the Northern Ireland Assembly was up and running, he would be keen to ensure that the project could take place. Can he confirm that the moneys necessary for the project are there, and will he ensure that he, as Minister, does everything he can to make it happen?

Jacob Young: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that he seeks, but I can say that the £30 million that was set aside for Northern Ireland in round 3 of the levelling-up fund has been given to the Northern Ireland Executive as part of the Executive reformation fund. I was in Northern Ireland over the recess, where we were celebrating more than £435 million of levelling-up funding going to Northern Ireland since 2019.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is now approaching five years since the towns fund was launched, promising £3.6 billion of investment to level up the country. Most of it remains unspent, and the cross-party Public Accounts Committee has said that the Department for Levelling Up could not

“give any compelling examples of what had been delivered so far”. That is a damning assessment of this five years of the fund, never mind after 14 years in power—so, Minister, why are this Government such a failure?

Jacob Young: I think that is quite poor, Mr Speaker. The hon. Gentleman’s constituency has itself benefited from £11.1 million of UK shared prosperity funding and £13.4 million from the levelling up fund. Next to him I see the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), whose constituency has benefited from £24.4 million from the towns fund. Oldham is also the recipient of £10.8 million from the future high streets fund. We are levelling up right across the country, including in the hon. Gentleman’s constituency.

Government Funding: Local Authorities

8. **Helen Morgan** (North Shropshire) (LD): What assessment he has made of the adequacy of the level of Government funding allocated to local authorities. [902399]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Simon Hoare): In answer to the hon. Lady’s question, we make continuous assessment with regard to the adequacy of funding. In this financial year we have made £64.7 billion available to local government in England, an above-inflation increase for local authorities as their real-terms increase in core spending power is now up to £4.5 billion or 7.5% in cash terms. That includes the additional measures for local authorities, worth £600 million, that we announced on 25 January, having listened to the views of local government, to her views when she engaged in the consultation and to the views of hon. and right hon. Friends across Shropshire.

Helen Morgan: I thank the Minister for his answer, but we have seen Shropshire Council make £50 million of cuts this year, and we are told that there will be £60 million of cuts next year to avoid a section 144 notice. Local residents are particularly concerned about the potential closure of recycling centres and a likely increase in fly-tipping across our beautiful countryside. Does the Minister agree that rural councils are in danger of delivering nothing more than statutory services if things continue? Will he consider adjusting the way that funding is allocated so that rural councils are given an amount that reflects the cost of delivering services in their area?

Simon Hoare: The hon. Lady is right to point to the need to review the formula, which is a commitment for the next Parliament. She will probably be aware—I hope she is—of the £8.9 million extra that Shropshire Council received this year through the rural services delivery grant in order to deliver those sorts of services. Do I think rural councils have to reduce to statutory services

alone? No. All my engagement with the sector points to a vibrancy and a commitment to innovation, shaping places and improving the lives of people up and down the country, including in Shropshire.

Dame Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con): Trevor from the Drighlington memory café—Trevor has been ably supported by our fantastic Morley town mayor—Nicola from the Morley grief group, Dan from WF3 Kindness and Christine from the veterans luncheon club are just some of the amazing volunteers and community groups in my area who give up their time to help local people. Will the Minister join me in thanking and paying tribute to the unsung heroes in our communities across the country?

Simon Hoare: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We should never lose an opportunity to trumpet our thanks to people like Trevor, Christine and all our volunteers up and down the country who make such a difference to people’s lives. They work alongside councils and other bodies to make life better and happier, and to make places more pleasant to live. I thank them unreservedly.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Funding cuts are adding to the clear pressures on local government around the country. One such example is developers who come armed with substantial funds and resources to contest their planning applications. Locally, Warwick District Council had an application just last week that the planning committee was essentially advised to allow because of a fear of not having the financial resources to contest it. I have written to the Secretary of State about this issue. Should we be extremely concerned about it nationally?

Simon Hoare: Each planning authority has a quasi-judicial role to adjudge planning applications against national and local plans, and I have every confidence that planning committees up and down the country do that. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to refer to a 7.5% cash-terms increase for local government in this financial year as a cut, that is a very eccentric definition even for a Labour Member.

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): Ministers are aware that Maldon District Council was allocated £5 million of levelling-up funding. My right hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Sir John Whittingdale), the council and I have been informed that the funding must be spent on cultural projects, despite our having a local plan that will see the closure of St Peter’s Hospital. We want the money to be spent on levelling up health and wellbeing, which is one of the five principles of levelling up. Will Ministers urgently review all our representations so that we can work at pace to sort out this terrible issue and level up our health situation?

Simon Hoare: My right hon. Friend makes a powerful point, and I know St Peter’s Hospital pretty well from a previous life. The Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Jacob Young), has signalled to me that he is aware of the issue, has sympathy with my right hon. Friend and will be happy to meet her in pretty quick time to discuss further details.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): Working people are paying the price of the cost of living crisis, but is it not the truth that the Liz Truss mini-Budget did not occur in a vacuum? There is a pattern of the Tories shifting the tax burden on to hard-pressed households. Council tax bills have rocketed by almost £500 since the Tories came to power, on top of which Conservative councils charge residents almost £280 more than their Labour counterparts. As voters go to the polls on 2 May, does the Minister hope that they will somehow forget the council tax bombshell facing them? Or does he expect that more candidates will follow the lead of the west midlands campaign and ditch the toxic Tory brand completely?

Simon Hoare: The hon. Gentleman wins first prize in the brass neck of the afternoon competition; I remind him gently and politely about the situation in Birmingham. It is well known by residents up and down the land that Conservative-led councils are more efficient, deliver greater improvement at pace and are far more focused on delivering for their residents. Colleagues and I will take that proud record to the voters during this local election campaign, and I have every confidence we will triumph in it.

Community Ownership Fund

9. **Mrs Flick Drummond** (Meon Valley) (Con): What the criteria are for allocation of round 4 of the community ownership fund. [902401]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Jacob Young): Our decision-making criteria for the community ownership fund can be found in the published explanatory note on gov.uk. Round 4 window 1 has now closed and will be assessed according to those criteria. Round 4 window 2 will open in the coming weeks.

Mrs Drummond: I was delighted to hear that so many projects have received a large amount of money to take over community centres, heritage buildings, pubs and sporting facilities. The list also includes green spaces, so will the Minister confirm that if a community group wanted to buy part of a chalk stream that is for sale for the benefit of that community, that would be within the scope of the community ownership fund?

Jacob Young: I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss this matter. We have funded similar land purchases, but this will be dependent on the factors locally.

Rough Sleeping

11. **Paula Barker** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab): What progress he has made on ending rough sleeping. [902403]

13. **Will Quince** (Colchester) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to end rough sleeping. [902405]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Felicity Buchan): The Government are committed to ending rough sleeping. We published our cross-government strategy “Ending

rough sleeping for good” in September 2022, and we are investing an unprecedented £2.4 billion to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping over three years. Rough sleeping levels were 18% lower in 2023 than they were at the peak in 2017 and they were 9% lower than pre-pandemic levels.

Paula Barker: This Government and Department have presided over a litany of failures. The Conservative party has pledged to end rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament. I have to disagree with the hon. Lady, because rough sleeping numbers are yet again on the up. Instead of fulfilling their manifesto commitment, the Government have prioritised criminalising the homeless, rather than ending homelessness. Even many Conservative Back Benchers cannot support that, so when will this Department’s leadership grow a backbone and tell their colleagues in the Home Office to shelve the pernicious plans that exist within the Criminal Justice Bill?

Felicity Buchan: This Government are absolutely committed to ending rough sleeping, which is why we are investing £2.4 billion. Importantly, £1.2 billion is going into prevention, so that we prevent homelessness before it happens. I want to address the point about the Criminal Justice Bill. The Government are clear that no one should be criminalised for having nowhere to live. The Bill gives powers to the police and local authorities only where behaviour causes damage, distress, harassment or disruption. Guidance will be issued that makes it clear that outreach and support should be prioritised.

Will Quince: I welcome the fact that the Government are investing £2.4 billion on tackling homelessness and rough sleeping. Notwithstanding what the Minister just said, does she agree that we need to help people off the streets, not risk criminalising them, as is regrettably proposed in part of the Criminal Justice Bill?

Felicity Buchan: I thank my hon. Friend for his words welcoming Government expenditure on tackling rough sleeping and homelessness. The Government are very focused on helping the most vulnerable in our society, who are often rough sleepers. That is a cross-government effort. For instance, I work closely with the Department for Education on care leavers and I work closely with the Department of Health and Social Care on those who have addictions. I reassure my hon. Friend that no one will be criminalised simply for sleeping rough.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): As well as trying to criminalise rough sleepers, put them in jail and give them a hefty fine, it is crystal clear that the Government will not meet their target to end rough sleeping by the end of 2024. Rough sleeping is all too plain to see—as we walk into this place or go to any city or town, we see the tragic consequences of Government policies. Is it not now time for Ministers to do the right thing: end section 21 no-fault evictions for good—no ifs, no buts; no excuses and narratives about the courts—and build the homes for social rent at the scale the country needs? If they do not do that, we will.

Felicity Buchan: We are abolishing section 21 and building affordable homes. Where are affordable homes not being built? In London.

Planning System

14. **Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): What steps he is taking to help improve the efficiency of the planning system. [902406]

The Minister for Housing, Planning and Building Safety (Lee Rowley): We are taking significant steps to speed up the planning system. In large infrastructure projects, that is through the nationally significant infrastructure projects action plan and the “Getting Great Britain building again” policy paper. In relation to the TCPA, we are offering greater clarity through the republication of the national planning policy framework, greater consistency through instructing local councils to ensure that they discharge their responsibilities, and greater capacity through additional support for local councils.

Andrew Selous: Can I convey the extreme irritation of two parishes in my constituency that have had five locations for a mobile phone mast turned down? Given that mobile connectivity is now an essential requirement, is it not time that local authorities advised on which technically feasible locations they would be prepared to grant planning permission? Local people could then say where they were happiest for such projects to go, and we would end this stupid cat-and-mouse game that wastes time and means people do not get the connectivity they need.

Lee Rowley: My hon. Friend is right that connectivity is vital in all our communities. It is incumbent upon local councils, including his council in Bedfordshire, to ensure that they are providing the greatest clarity possible for that connectivity and that it is put in place.

Interfaith Dialogue

15. **Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): What steps his Department is taking to help promote interfaith dialogue. [902407]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Felicity Buchan): This Government are extremely supportive of efforts to bring together people of different faiths and beliefs. The faith Minister meets regularly with faith leaders to encourage these efforts, and the Department has funded a range of partners, including Near Neighbours and Strengthening Faith Institutions, to organise local level interfaith dialogue.

Kirsten Oswald: I thank the Minister for her answer, but two months ago the Secretary of State announced that he would pull funding from the Inter Faith Network, which is the largest interfaith charity on these islands. It will close next week, after 40 years. It is an astonishing decision by the UK Government to close Britain’s main forum for Jewish-Muslim dialogue now. The Secretary of State could still reverse that very poor decision, but that would have to happen this week. What are the chances of that?

Felicity Buchan: Let me explain what occurred. The closure of the Inter Faith Network is a matter for the Inter Faith Network, as an independent charity; it is not a matter for Government. We have always made it very clear to all charities that receive Government funding

that they need to have sustainable sources of other funding. In my response to the urgent question about a month ago, I made clear the reasons for the closure. To repeat, the decision to withdraw the funding was taken because of the appointment of a member of the Muslim Council of Britain as a trustee. Governments of various different hues have decided that they will not deal with the Muslim Council of Britain.

Topical Questions

T1. [902417] **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Michael Gove): SHiFT is an inspirational charity run by a visionary social entrepreneur, Sophie Humphreys. It works in order to ensure that young people at risk of engaging with the criminal justice system are diverted to better outcomes. On Thursday, two new SHiFT interventions will open in Middlesbrough and in Redcar and Cleveland, with the support of £3.9 million from my Department. That is proof that when it comes to intervening early to give young people a better life, it is a Conservative Government and a Conservative Mayor in Tees Valley who are delivering for the most vulnerable.

Patricia Gibson: The levelling-up funding awarded to my constituency three years ago for the upgrade of the B714 has still not been delivered. However, when I have raised concerns that the funding is insufficient for the upgrade, given inflationary pressures, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up told me to raise the matter with the Department for Transport, which in turn referred me back to the Secretary of State. Can I have an explanation from the Secretary of State as to how approved projects can proceed as envisaged, even if funding is delivered, when inflation is not factored into the funding?

Michael Gove: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for making that point. I can offer her, and also the Member of the Scottish Parliament for North Ayrshire and North Ayrshire Council, a meeting with me, so that we can deliver this project, because I know that she is absolutely committed to ensuring that the levelling-up fund—UK Government money—is spent effectively in her constituency. That is proof that we work better together.

T4. [902420] **Virginia Crosbie** (Ynys Môn) (Con): Ynys Môn is looking forward to hosting the fourth Islands Forum on 7 and 8 May. It is an opportunity to showcase our heritage, culture and language. It is also an opportunity for Ministers to see at first hand how the £17 million from the UK levelling-up fund is transforming Holyhead. Will the Secretary of State accept my invitation to visit St Cybi’s church, the Ucheldre centre and the Newry beach shelters to see how the UK Government are creating jobs and a brighter future for Holyhead? And will he sign up to my Aldi to Amlwch campaign?

Michael Gove: Diolch. I am looking forward more than I can say to visiting Ynys Môn. This is a fantastic example of a brilliant Conservative MP securing funding

for Wales, for the Welsh language, for Welsh jobs and for Welsh investment. May I say that Anglesey has never flourished in the way it is now flourishing with her as its MP?

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Ms Anum Qaisar (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): We know that the Tories continually prioritise their banker mates over the rest of the country. An example of that was in the spring Budget when the Chancellor announced levelling-up funding for Canary Wharf—an area that is home to some of the world's biggest banks—which will receive more than £16,000 per head in funding commitments compared with Scotland. With the Leader of the Opposition and his Labour party backing Tory tax and spending plans and U-turning on capping bankers' bonuses, does the Secretary of State agree that the Labour party offers no real alternative for the people of Scotland?

Mr Speaker: I just remind everyone that we are on topical questions.

Michael Gove: I think SNP press releases have suffered recently as a result of the travails that the chief executive of that party has been suffering, but as SNP press releases go, that has to be one of the weakest I have ever heard in this House. The Scottish Government are closing VisitScotland centres, they cannot deliver ferries, Scotland is plunging down the educational league tables, and, when it comes to delivering services in Scotland, theatres, community centres and councils are coming to us for cash. The Scottish Government are a disaster, and all the hon. Lady can do is repeat the failed talking points—

Mr Speaker: Order. Secretary of State, that is completely outrageous, after I had just said that we are on topicals. Please do not take advantage of your own Members. It is not fair to them and it is not fair to the rest of the Chamber.

T5. [902421] **Selaine Saxby** (North Devon) (Con): What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to attract long-term landlords back to small coastal towns?

The Minister for Housing, Planning and Building Safety (Lee Rowley): My hon. Friend has been a long-standing campaigner for balance within coastal communities. I know that both she and colleagues from the south-west and elsewhere are very keen to see some of the reforms that the Government are introducing on short-term lets and the changes to the planning system.

T2. [902418] **John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): In the 2019 Conservative manifesto, the Government made this commitment:

“We will continue with our reforms to leasehold including implementing our ban on the sale of new leasehold homes, restricting ground rents to a peppercorn, and providing necessary mechanisms of redress for tenants.”

That still has not happened, so either they did not believe it then, they had not thought it through, or the Minister has been nobbled by the Prime Minister. Which one is it?

Michael Gove: Our Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill is making great progress in the House of Lords. It is being debated today and I look forward to the right hon. Gentleman supporting it when it comes back here and gets on to the statute book.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Richard Bacon—not here.

T3. [902419] **Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): Given the proximity to the local and general elections, can Ministers give an assurance that the joint election security preparedness unit has all the resources it needs to do the job?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Simon Hoare): This is a tremendously serious issue. My Department and other Government Departments, led by the Security Minister in the Home Office, are spending a huge amount of time, effort and resource in ensuring the safety of candidates; the safety, security and robustness of the process; and that all those who wish to take part in our democratic functions, in whichever fora they happen to manifest themselves, can do so safely and securely. That is a very firm commitment. The hon. Member will know that we are dealing with that as a serious matter.

T9. [902425] **Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): In constituencies such as Aldridge-Brownhills, our green belt is precious; and once it has gone, it has gone forever. But in the west midlands, thanks to the leadership and vision of Mayor Andy Street and his “brownfield first” approach, we have seen 16,000 new homes built, and thousands of new jobs on brownfield land. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that clearly demonstrates that we can build the new homes we need and protect the green belt, and that it is Andy Street who is setting the pace and leading the way in the west midlands?

Michael Gove: That is spot on. It is Andy Street and Conservative councils in Walsall, Dudley and Solihull that are delivering houses and protecting the green belt. That is better for economic growth, better for the environment, and better than bankrupt Labour Birmingham.

T6. [902422] **Rachel Hopkins** (Luton South) (Lab): Over 1,000 families in Luton South are stuck in temporary accommodation, with wait times ranging from three to nine months for a one-bed property to eight to nine years for a three-bed. Across the country there has been a staggering 119% increase in temporary accommodation numbers since 2019. Does the Minister agree that that is just a direct cost of 14 years of Conservative failure on housing?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (Felicity Buchan): The Government are very focused on temporary accommodation. That is why we are investing £2.4 billion, of which £1.2 billion is specifically for the homelessness prevention grant. In the last Budget, we increased the local housing allowance rate to the 30th percentile. That is worth £1.2 billion. We have also increased the local authority housing fund.

Jane Hunt (Loughborough) (Con): Please can my right hon. Friend set out what the Government are doing to ensure that more young people can live in their own home as early as possible in their adult lives, and specifically whether greater consideration can be given

to mechanisms that result in only one affordable payment being made a month, rather than one mortgage payment and one rental payment?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We need to look to reform both the mortgage market and our planning system. We will bring forward further steps on both in the coming weeks.

T7. [902423] **Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): In communities such as Kendal, Appleby, Allithwaite and Milnthorpe, developers have used viability assessments to renege on building desperately needed and genuinely affordable homes, so will the Government give planning authorities the power to declare null and void any planning permission where the developer cannot or will not deliver the affordable homes that they had promised?

Michael Gove: I know how important it is to deliver affordable homes in the Lake district, in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. We will take a close look at the examples he cites, to ensure that we are not killing the geese that lay the golden eggs.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): Tourism is vital to Bournemouth's economy, and half our visitors come by car. A few choose to park on double yellow lines for the day, as the parking penalty is only £35, unlike here in London where it is £65, increasing to £130 if not paid promptly. Does the Secretary of State agree that it would be immensely helpful, and would ensure that emergency vehicle access is not blocked, were Bournemouth allowed to operate the same penalties as we have in London?

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend is right: antisocial parking is a blight outside London, and we need to review extending the powers that are currently exercised in London to other parts of the country.

T10. [902426] **Mr Virendra Sharma** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): Time and again, leasehold owners come to me with unfair bills for service charges. They are inflated, and they are even for undelivered services. When I get involved, they are often dropped by a third instantly. What will the Government do to ensure that developers are not trying to rip off homeowners, and instead get bills right the first time?

Michael Gove: Fair point. Frank Dobson said that he was going to reform the leasehold system in 1995. We are doing it now. The Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill, which the Minister for Housing, Planning and Building Safety, my hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley), is piloting, will bring relief to leaseholders.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): A raft of Labour councillors in Kirklees have resigned from their party, with one of them describing their leadership as a "toxic swamp," so it will come as no surprise to my right hon. Friend that the local Conservative campaign to split Kirklees and get better leadership and accountability is really gathering momentum. Does he agree that leadership needs to be locally driven, and that the best way to achieve that is to vote for more Conservative councillors on 2 May—

Mr Speaker: Order. This is not fair. Just tell me which questions you don't want, and it will make my job easier.

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we need change in Kirklees. The best way in which people can demonstrate their desire for change and the reconfiguration of Kirklees is by voting Conservative on 2 May.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Today is Earth Day. The Government introduced the zero carbon homes standard and the code for sustainable homes and then scrapped them. The future homes standard now has centralised support, but local authorities such as Leeds want to go above planning policy to reach higher standards. Why will the Secretary of State not allow Leeds to build even better zero carbon homes?

Michael Gove: We have a good relationship with Leeds City Council, and indeed with its leader and chief executive, so let me investigate.

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con): Ben Houchen has done a remarkable job of saving our airport, overseeing the redevelopment of Teesworks, and securing new jobs. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, given Ben's record of delivering and the promise of more, voters should back him on 2 May?

Mr Speaker: That is an easy one.

Michael Gove: It is an easy one! You are right, Mr Speaker: everyone should back Ben Houchen—

Mr Speaker: Let me help: it is an easy one for you to answer. Now let us move on.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I thank the Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), for his reply to my letter of 21 March. He said that a short paper on the topic of the Union was prepared by officials and presented to the UK Government in July 2020. However, a media report at the time suggested that an employee of Hanbury Strategy had provided data and helped to prepare that paper for the Cabinet. Was public money used for the insights that Hanbury Strategy prepared for that paper, and when will the public get to see them?

Michael Gove: Once again, I have to admire the sheer chutzpah of Scottish National party Members talking about the misappropriation of cash. However, as I mentioned earlier, the Scottish Government's budget has led to the closure of 25 tourist information centres and a variety of other ventures that are trying to get investment into Scotland, whereas the UK Government are providing investment in Scotland—proving once again that we are better together.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): My constituents are increasingly concerned about the number of planning applications being approved—particularly in rural areas—when the infrastructure and public services quite evidently cannot cope with the demand. What plans do Ministers have to ensure that local residents have more say in future?

Michael Gove: The new national planning policy framework, as enacted by this Front-Bench team, will ensure that local voices determine the shape of local communities.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): My constituents who live on the Abbotts Moor estate in Port Talbot are locked into paying unjustified and extortionate ground rent fees and charges for poor maintenance. Will the Secretary of State commit to strengthening the Leasehold and Freehold Reform Bill by ensuring that all leaseholders have the right to vary their lease, setting ground rents to a peppercorn, ensuring that premiums are as cheap as possible, regulating managing agents, and abolishing forfeiture?

Michael Gove: I always listen with respect to arguments made by a Kinnock, and in this case, I think the hon. Gentleman is broadly—broadly—in the right territory.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con): What steps are being taken to ensure that planning authorities and, more importantly, the Planning Inspectorate are utilising the powers in the new NPPF to protect land use in food production?

Michael Gove: The NPPF could not be clearer about that. The new chief executive of the Planning Inspectorate is very aware of how important it is to ensure that there is public confidence in the NPPF.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): My constituency has some of the highest levels of health inequalities in the country, which have been further increased by the cost of living crisis and the continual cuts to our council budgets. If the Government are serious about levelling up, why was Bradford East's bid to reduce health inequalities knocked back?

Michael Gove: The Labour leadership in Bradford Council must look to its performance. I think there is a distinction to be drawn between the Labour leaderships in Leeds and in Bradford—Bradford could learn a lot from what Leeds has done. This is not a party political point; it is a point about failure specifically in Bradford.

Tom Hunt (Ipswich) (Con): My constituents have significant concerns about crime and antisocial behaviour in the town centre. Public space protection orders can play an important role, but the local Labour council refuses to use the powers it has. We have groups of men drinking alcohol in the middle of the town centre, and the council does nothing. Does the Secretary of State agree that, yet again, Ipswich Labour should step up?

Michael Gove: It is sad, but not surprising, that Labour in Ipswich has failed again. That is why it is so important that people vote Conservative at the police and crime commissioner elections on 2 May. There are few more effective scourges of crime than the Conservative police and crime commissioner, Tim Passmore, and my hon. Friend, who does such a brilliant job in Ipswich.

Sudan: Government Response

3.35 pm

Ms Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Deputy Foreign Secretary if he will make a statement on the Government's response to the crisis in Sudan.

The Deputy Foreign Secretary (Mr Andrew Mitchell): I thank the hon. Lady for her question.

Britain is pursuing all diplomatic avenues to press the warring parties into a permanent ceasefire, allow unrestricted humanitarian access, protect civilians, and commit to a sustained and meaningful peace process. I visited eastern Chad last month, where I met with refugees who had lost everything and were fleeing conflict and hunger. I was greatly moved by what I saw, and reaffirmed Britain's steadfast commitment to the people of Sudan. Some 88% of those crossing the border were women and children.

On Monday, to mark one year of brutal conflict in Sudan, Britain announced its third raft of sanctions, targeting two entities linked to the Rapid Support Forces and one entity linked to the Sudanese armed forces. On the same day, my noble Friend Lord Benyon represented the UK at the Paris humanitarian pledging conference for Sudan and its neighbours. On behalf of the UK, he pledged £89 million, a near-doubling of UK overseas development aid for Sudan from the previous year. He delivered a strong message with international partners, which—along with Britain's sanctions—sends a clear signal to the warring parties that they must stop fighting and meaningfully engage in the peace process.

We continue to lead at the United Nations Security Council, where we hold the pen on Sudan. On 8 March, the UN Security Council adopted a UK-drafted Ramadan ceasefire resolution calling for immediate cessation of hostilities. On 20 March, we warned that obstruction of humanitarian access by the SAF and RSF is resulting in the starvation of the Sudanese people. Over the past year, Britain has provided £42.6 million in humanitarian aid to support people in Sudan, including £12.2 million to UNICEF for nutrition activities and approximately £23 million to the Sudan Humanitarian Fund for multi-sector response, including a high proportion of food security interventions.

Britain has also helped those fleeing to neighbouring countries: last year, we provided £7.75 million to support new and existing Sudanese refugees in South Sudan, and £15 million to Chad. We continue to advocate for a return to a civilian-led Government, and we urge all Sudanese stakeholders to engage in an inclusive dialogue that will deliver the peace and stability that the Sudanese people deserve.

Ms Brown: I am grateful for that answer.

The sheer horror unleashed by the generals' war in Sudan is appalling to recount. We are approaching 9 million people forcibly displaced, with evidence of systematic sexual violence and heinous mass atrocities in Darfur and elsewhere. Some 3.5 million Sudanese children under the age of five are acutely malnourished, and massive famine is now seen as almost inevitable. Some models project up to a million deaths. As the UN Secretary-General said, this is "a war...on the Sudanese people", and it must end with an immediate ceasefire.

I strongly welcome the sanctions from last week and the additional humanitarian funding, but is there going to be a dedicated high-level Sudan envoy, and what conversations are Ministers having with those who continue to fund and enable this war, because greater co-ordination has to be the priority? All states must recognise the truly disastrous consequences if Sudan collapses not just for the Sudanese people, but for the entire region.

But there is hope, because through all the horror and the destruction, despite the blocks on humanitarian access, the Sudanese people are still standing together in their own communities. The resistance committees and the emergency rooms are sometimes the sole source of relief, as famine spreads and medical access runs out for the sick and injured, and they are the undaunted spirit and hope of a Sudan free from the generals and their catastrophic war. How can we correct the mistakes of the past and back Sudanese civilians directly?

Mr Mitchell: I thank the hon. Lady very much for the eloquent way in which she has outlined the position in Sudan, and she is absolutely right. On the subject of the Sudan envoy, let me assure her that there is a very strong and very experienced envoy who covers the horn of Africa, and she focuses particularly on Sudan. The hon. Lady eloquently set out the wider effects of Sudan continuing on this path in the region, and I agree with her, and she also made clear the benefits that the emergency rooms, sometimes the only source of relief, are providing.

The hon. Lady asks about the mistakes that have been made in the past in respect of civilian rule. Britain has called—I think from across all parts of this House—for a ceasefire so that the generals take their troops back to barracks and the political space has a chance to advance. She will know that Abdalla Hamdok and Taqaddum, the civil society political grouping, have been working together, supported by Britain, in a conference in Addis Ababa and elsewhere. We are very committed to trying to work with them, so that there is one sensible but broad political offer for Sudan, as and when the chance of a ceasefire and the political track re-engaging takes place.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Intelligence and Security Committee.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Do the Government have any evidence that they can share with this House of the involvement of major foreign powers in what is happening in this terrible conflict in Sudan?

Mr Mitchell: My right hon. Friend will have seen the open-source reporting of various outlets. The point the British Government make on all occasions is that any arms supply into Sudan merely prolongs this conflict, and we urge anyone who is thinking of supplying either side or supplying either side to think very carefully and to desist.

Mr Speaker: I call the SNP spokesperson.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Last week, the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights released a detailed report on the genocide in Darfur. The report describes atrocity crimes—including massacres, sexual

violence, the burning of villages and the destruction of key infrastructure—all targeting Darfurians in the region. The authors of the report say:

“Just twenty years after the first genocide...the same perpetrators are committing the same atrocities against the same innocent groups, all while evading accountability.”

Can I ask the Minister whether he has read the report, and is his Department planning to meet the Raoul Wallenberg Centre? What is the Government's own assessment of the risk of genocide in Darfur, and how are they planning to implement their obligations under the genocide convention? Finally, has a joint analysis of conflict and stability been carried out on the situation in Sudan, and if not, why not? If it has, will he share those findings with the House?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is right to focus on what is happening in Darfur. He will know that we have funded the Centre for Information Resilience, which investigates attacks on civilians, and is monitoring and keeping records wherever possible, so that—at some point, one day—there can be accountability and no impunity. He will also be aware that the position in Darfur—he asked me this question specifically—bears all the hallmarks of ethnic cleansing. I first visited Darfur in 2005, and again in 2006 with the Foreign Secretary. It has been a significant preoccupation of this House, and rightly so. The hon. Gentleman may rest assured that we are doing everything we can to support the poor and long-suffering people of Darfur in every way we can, but he will equally understand the physical constraints on being able to do that in the way that we would wish.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): This has been described as the world's worst humanitarian crisis in decades, and the war that the world chooses to ignore. Last week, members of the all-party group on Sudan and South Sudan heard from eyewitnesses and aid workers. We heard of 5 million people on the brink of famine, of aid convoys being held at gunpoint, of aid being looted, and of 50 aid workers murdered. The war, the misery, has gone on for a year, and it is getting worse. People want to know what the UK, as the penholder at the UN, is doing to try to shift the dial and bring peace. On behalf of the all-party group, I ask: what pressure are we putting on the United Arab Emirates and Iran to stop them supplying arms? What actions are being taken to enable the aid convoys to move? What is being done to end the culture of impunity? Why have those already indicted for genocide never been held to account, and why will the UK not appoint a dedicated envoy, so we can show that we put all our diplomatic weight behind efforts to find peace?

Mr Mitchell: We always consider whether the issue of the envoy could be boosted, and as I said to my right hon. Friend, we think that the position at the moment is providing maximum effect, but we keep such matters under review. I pay particular tribute to her and the APPG for the work they do. She is entirely right in what she says: the UN issued a white note on 15 March, warning of the risk of conflict-induced famine. At least 21 humanitarian aid workers have been murdered, 8.6 million people are displaced, and nearly 18 million people are suffering acute levels of food insecurity. That is 40% of the population, and among them are 730,000 children who are facing the deadliest form of malnutrition.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): As has been said, almost 25 million people in Sudan are in need of assistance, more than 8 million people have been left displaced, and the lives of 230,000 children and new mothers are at grave risk due to famine. The United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports that \$2.7 billion is needed to meet the huge humanitarian need in the country. I note from what the Minister said that the UK has doubled the humanitarian aid that it has committed, but does the Minister agree that that still falls far short of the threshold? Ultimately, it will achieve very little if there is not a ceasefire and an end to the fighting, to allow that aid to be distributed safely. What are the UK Government doing, along with our international partners, to ensure that we achieve that immediate and lasting ceasefire sooner rather than later?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that a ceasefire is essential, with troops returning to barracks and the opening up of a political track, and that is the central thrust of the British Government's policy. He acknowledges that we have managed nearly to double aid to £89 million this year. For South Sudan—this, of course, also addresses many of the problems of Sudan—the figure for this financial year is £111 million, which is more than double what it was. That includes multilateral and bilateral spend. The fact that Britain has doubled its contribution gives it a locus, which was well used by my noble friend Lord Benyon last week in Paris at the Sudan conference, to make the point about other countries also supporting, given the desperate plight in which so many in Sudan find themselves.

Mr Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth East) (Con): I welcome this urgent question and the Government's response. We regularly talk about what is going on in Ukraine and the middle east, but we do not focus on the continent of Africa, or Sudan, which is turning into a failed state. There is every prospect of what is going on in Sudan spilling out into other parts of central Africa and the Sahel. Will the Deputy Foreign Secretary update the House on whether we have any presence in Port Sudan? He talks about peace talks. Egypt has also engaged in those, so can he update the House on the prospect of what is happening bringing the necessary parties together?

Mr Mitchell: In respect of my right hon. Friend's final point, we are hopeful that the third set of negotiations in Jeddah will take place. The Saudis committed on 15 April to that happening in early May, and we are extremely grateful to the Saudis for that and for inviting the UAE, Egypt, the African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development to be part of the negotiations. The former Chairman of the Defence Committee is right about the danger of contagion across the region. We are doing everything we can to support Abdalla Hamdok and the Taqaddum, as I mentioned earlier. In terms of our support within Sudan, the ambassador is currently based in Addis Ababa and is working energetically with all the relevant parties to try to make progress.

Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab): The Sudanese community in Liverpool, Riverside, will be decidedly underwhelmed by the Minister's response to this urgent question. He mentioned supporting people moving to

[Kim Johnson]

neighbouring areas, but he did not mention the Sudanese who have lived, worked and contributed for years to the UK bringing over family members who are fleeing the conflict, or extending student visas or protections for Sudanese asylum seekers. What will it take for the UK to provide a visa programme for Sudanese asylum seekers, similar to the Ukrainian scheme?

Mr Mitchell: The two situations are not analogous. If the Labour party wants to launch a campaign for extra visas and a special scheme matching the one in Ukraine, I look forward to hearing details of it.

Alexander Stafford (Rother Valley) (Con): My wife and I spent a wonderful holiday in Sudan a few years ago, and it was wonderful to see the amazing people there, as well as the rich cultural heritage that Sudan has to offer. There are many world heritage sites, such as the pyramids of Meroë—there are more pyramids in Sudan than Egypt—ancient cathedrals, and even Lord Kitchener's boat. We hear that fighting has spread to some of the world heritage areas. UNESCO is protecting two world heritage areas, Meroë and Gebel Barkal, under the heritage emergency fund, to which the UK Government contribute, but what further work and money can the UK put in to protect this world heritage, bolster UNESCO and protect these ancient and important aspects of our civilisation?

Mr Mitchell: My hon. Friend is right about the great heritage and deep links, including heritage links, between Britain and Sudan over many years. The truth is that we have to do everything we can, holding the pen on Sudan at the United Nations as we do, to achieve this ceasefire and the reopening of political space. If we can do that, we can focus directly on the points that he makes.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): What discussions has the Minister had with other countries to apply pressure to stop the flow of arms into this conflict, and to try to bring it to an end as soon as possible?

Mr Mitchell: These discussions are taking place in the margins of the United Nations, and at the conference that took place in Paris on Monday last week. The hon. Gentleman is right to emphasise that we need to ensure that arms do not fuel the conflict, and that is why Britain urges everyone to ensure there is no further arming of either party. The arms embargo goes all the way over Darfur, and would be over the whole of Sudan, if the Chinese and Russians were willing to sign up with the rest of us to implementing it.

Mr Speaker: I call Jim Shannon.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Mr Speaker. You have caught me off balance; I was just about to take my diabetic tablets when you called me. I thank the Minister for his answers to the UQ. He will be aware that more than 9,000 people have been killed, and nearly 6 million displaced, and Christians are facing persecution. What support are the Government offering to non-governmental organisations on the ground, such as Church missionaries, who seek to help displaced Christians not only feed children, but provide them with a semblance of an education and, most importantly, hope of a future life?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman will understand the great difficulties in helping directly on the ground; I know the matter is of great interest, both to him and to the Prime Minister's envoy for freedom of religion or belief, my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce). We must continue to find every possible way of supporting the important groups that he mentioned.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): I draw the Minister's attention to a report on the BBC website, in case he has not read it, by Zeinab Mohammed Salih, a Sudanese journalist. She recalls:

"People have told me of ethnically targeted killings and sexual violence. They remain traumatised, months afterwards."

The Minister may be aware that months before the war broke out, sexual violence and gender-based violence was being used against women. In June 2023, it was estimated that there were more than 60,000 survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Sudan, and we continue to see reports of sexual violence. What steps are the Government taking to address that really important issue, and to prevent further cases of violence, and of rape being used as a war weapon?

Mr Mitchell: I am afraid that the hon. Lady is entirely right. We have read these reports and many others with horror. That is one of the reasons why we are supporting the Centre for Information Resilience, so that we can do everything we can to deter there being any question of impunity, but it is extraordinarily difficult. As she rightly said, what is happening in Darfur bears all the hallmarks of ethnic cleansing.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The attention paid to the conflict in Sudan does not reflect the enormity of the suffering there, with millions displaced and facing famine, violence and insecurity. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group for Africa, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Ms Brown) for securing the urgent question. The Minister spoke about the limited arms embargo, such as it is. Is he aware that it is being broken on a grand scale, and that there is a pervasive flow of arms into Sudan? What is he doing to monitor that, and to try to reduce that flow of arms, which is fuelling the conflict?

Mr Mitchell: On the hon. Lady's second point, I have set out the clear message from the British Government about the supply of arms. On her first point, she is right that conflicts elsewhere in the world—particularly in Ukraine and Gaza—have to some extent taken attention away from Sudan, and indeed Ethiopia, on which, in Geneva last Tuesday, Britain was leading the effort to raise money to head off a famine. Part of the benefit of the urgent question is that we can make clear the threat, what is happening in Sudan, and what Britain is doing to try to assist.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Sudanese students at Heriot-Watt University in my constituency were desperately worried about their family members in Sudan when I met them last year at the request of the university chaplain. Many of their family members needed help fleeing to neighbouring countries, and others have sought family reunification with British citizens

already living here. What are the Government doing to help British citizens to save the lives of their relatives in Sudan?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. and learned Lady will know the steps that Britain took a year ago to help those who were seeking to leave, but since then the vast amount of migration has been across the border into Chad and South Sudan, and indeed into Ethiopia. Britain has contributed £15 million to help those whom I saw near Adré, on the border between Sudan and Chad, at the end of last month. In respect of South Sudan, where there is a significant and increased programme of humanitarian support, we have directly contributed nearly £8 million.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I recently met the community president and secretary general of the Sudanese Community Association of Greater Manchester. We discussed the horrific civil war in Sudan and the desperate need to bring about a peaceful and sustainable end to the conflict. The war may be taking place in Sudan, but it has huge implications for Sudanese communities in Britain, like the one in Manchester. What support is the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office providing Sudanese communities in Britain, who are trying to support their loved ones who are fleeing from violence to reach a place of safety?

Mr Mitchell: There is very little we can do until those people reach a place of safety. As I said, many have fled across the border into Chad and South Sudan. We are actively helping those people in the way that I described.

Claire Hanna (Belfast South) (SDLP): Sudan is experiencing the worst displacement crisis in the world. It is not so much a civil war but a war on civilians, who are losing their homes, livelihoods and lives on a scale that is hard to comprehend. The Sudanese people feel forgotten, so it is vital that both aid and political focus are forthcoming. Will the Minister work with his Home Office colleagues to support Sudanese people in the asylum system, who are beside themselves with worry about family members? Will he better facilitate reunion for those UK citizens who have family among the most affected and who are able to leave?

Mr Mitchell: We will do everything we can to assist. The hon. Lady will understand the constraints we work within, but I will note what she said. If she has any specific cases that she wishes to raise, I hope she will do so.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): Given the level of death, despair and starvation, we need an immediate ceasefire in Sudan. Cross-border and cross-line humanitarian aid access is being blocked and impaired by both sides, even though they are, in effect, starving their own people to death. What steps are the Government taking to get the Adré crossing open, and to expose the impact of RSF extortion on humanitarian aid convoys?

Mr Mitchell: I was in Adré when I visited the border between Chad and Sudan. I saw the weight of human misery crossing that border—88% of those crossing were women and children, which shows that the men had either been murdered or gone into hiding. The hon.

Gentleman is quite right about the importance of Adré. He is right about the two generals effectively waging war on their own people—starving their own people, as he said. That is why everyone is urging the two generals to desist, get their troops back to barracks and give a chance for a political track to reconvene and re-emerge.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): What assurance can the Minister give the Sudanese community in Newport—who, as others have said, feel that the conflict and its catastrophic consequences have gone largely unseen—that the Government are doing all they can to get aid in through the Adré crossing, and are trying as hard as they can to build consensus among neighbouring and regional states that the war must end?

Mr Mitchell: I hope that today's urgent question will be of some comfort in respect of what the Government are seeking to do and the role we play at the United Nations—where we are the penholder—and in the Troika, with Norway and the United States, to try to bring this awful crisis to a conclusion.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): The information that we have received via al-Jazeera and others about the situation in Sudan is truly horrendous: 8.2 million people have left their homes, 17.7 million are experiencing food shortages, and cholera, measles and other diseases are rife. Unless there is a rapid ceasefire, the planting season simply will not begin, and there will be even greater and deeper hunger, not just in Sudan but in neighbouring countries. Does the Minister have any realistic hope that the combination of the UN and the African Union—and anyone else who can intervene—will bring about a ceasefire to allow, at least, people to return to their homes and to be able to feed themselves?

Mr Mitchell: The former Leader of the Opposition makes the case very clearly. The figures he sets out show the scale of the disaster that has engulfed Sudan. When I was on the border between Chad and Sudan near Adré, I saw for myself the work that was being done by organisations such as the World Food Programme, which Britain strongly supports, but also the International Rescue Committee and Médecins Sans Frontières. The work is going on wherever it can, but it is extremely difficult because of the circumstances he set out.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): What assessment has been made of the potential levels of food insecurity and the level of response needed if the conflict goes on through the summer and disrupts the next planting season?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Lady is entirely right. The World Food Programme told me, when I was in Chad, that it effectively had supplies of food only until the end of May. That is one of the reasons why Britain has increased so substantially its bilateral aid, and why my noble Friend Lord Benyon went to the Paris meeting on Monday last week to make sure that others, too, put their money where their mouth is and supported the desperate situation she described.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): This morning I had the pleasure to meet some brilliant organisations working

[Stuart C. McDonald]

on behalf of people in Sudan who are desperate to be reunited with family here in the UK. They want answers to two questions. First, given the circumstances people are having to live in, why is it taking over a year for many applications to be decided? Secondly, why do the Government demand that these people make dangerous and illegal cross-border journeys before they will even consider their applications, because they have to enrol biometric information? That seems completely counterintuitive. Will the right hon. Gentleman give the Home Office a polite kick up the backside and urge a change in approach?

Mr Mitchell: If the hon. Gentleman would like to give me details of any specific cases, I will of course make sure they are looked into.

Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab): What steps are the Government able to take to stem the flow of resources—not only weapons, but fuel—to the RSF across the border from Libya? Are the Government monitoring the potential for onwards flow to Sudan as a result of continuing Russian supply of arms within Libya?

Mr Mitchell: We urge all parties not to supply weapons to the belligerents in Sudan. It will merely extend and continue the appalling situation that exists there. That is why Britain is so clear that we should seek to starve this conflict of any additional weaponry.

Fleur Anderson (Putney) (Lab): The Opposition welcome the Government's atrocity monitoring and prevention work in Sudan, even though it is belated. It is important to join up that work with our diplomatic efforts in support of talks in Jeddah next month that are inclusive and effective. Is there a strategy to use targeted pressure to help isolate those responsible for atrocities and bring them to justice, and to bring both warring parties to the table?

Mr Mitchell: In respect of targeted pressure, the hon. Lady will have seen the recent announcements about sanctions against both the RSF and the SAF, and the earlier steps that were taken. She is right to focus on Jeddah 3, which looks to be the best bet at the moment for progress. Britain is giving very strong support to that process.

Dame Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): On Monday, the Government announced three sanctions against businesses supplying the SAF and the RSF. What assessment has

the Deputy Foreign Secretary made of how effective they will be in the greater scheme of all the arms that are being supplied to those two warring factions?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Lady is right to focus on the sanctions. Although we do not talk about future plans on sanctions across the Floor of the House, the way these things work is that when we see that sanctions are not working as well as we had hoped, we will always seek to reinforce them. That is the nature of imposing sanctions, as we have seen in other areas. We will do everything we can, through the sanctions regime, to advance the objective that she and I share.

Sir Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): The Minister referred to the problem of food security. It does seem very likely that the planting season will be disrupted again this year. What are the implications for food security in Sudan and South Sudan this autumn and into next year? Has a target been set for the amount of international aid to be gathered to deal with that looming crisis?

Mr Mitchell: The targets that are required are the subject of continuous discussion, particularly with the World Food Programme and at the United Nations, and they helped to inform the discussions that took place in Paris last week. However, the right hon. Gentleman is right about the dangers of the harvest failing. The lean season approaches in other parts of Africa too, including Ethiopia. This is the nature of climate change and sometimes factors like El Niño, and it is extremely worrying. The effects of the harvest failing and the onset of the lean season are very serious in terms of nutrition and food dependency.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I thank the Minister for his previous engagement regarding a number of my constituents whose family members have been stuck, and affected by the ongoing conflict in Sudan. May I ask what conversations he has had with his counterparts in Egypt, who, as far as I understand, are still suspending the issue of visas to Sudanese nationals who are holding UK travel documents, with the result that people are stuck in Egypt when they could well be here with their families right now if that were not being held up by the Egyptian authorities?

Mr Mitchell: We have an extremely effective embassy team in Cairo and elsewhere in Egypt, with very close relations across the top of the Egyptian Government and in all parts of it. If the hon. Lady wishes to raise any specific cases with me again, I hope that she will do so, and I will certainly take them up for her.

Points of Order

4.11 pm

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Last week, on 15 April, I said:

“All trans children and young people deserve access to high-quality and timely healthcare and support. Around 100 studies have not been included in the Cass report, and we need to know why.”—[*Official Report*, 15 April 2024; Vol. 748, c. 65.]

I was quoting from Stonewall’s briefing. There was some fallout from that, so I have spent the weekend in conversation with Stonewall and Dr Cass. It seems that by quoting from the briefing, I may have inadvertently misled the House. As you know, Mr Speaker, I have been thrown out of Parliament for calling the then Prime Minister a liar, so it means a lot to me to be able to come back and correct the record, and practise what I preach.

I spent the weekend speaking to Dr Cass, and I am very grateful for her time. She has made it clear—not just to me, but to the trans and LGBT+ communities in a number of valuable clarifications on the radio and in other media—that all reports were included and that research of both high and moderate quality was considered as part of the evidence review. Dr Cass has also said that her report is being misrepresented and hijacked—but not by me, Mr Speaker; let me make that clear. My question to the Secretary of State for Health was about additional funding for children’s mental health services. The report is being hijacked by anti-trans groups, and that is why it is important that we can be as factual as possible about the research.

I was also concerned about the advice that Dr Cass was given about her safety, and was shocked that some people implied that I was partly responsible for—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am really bothered about this—it was meant to be just a quick correction, rather than opening up a debate. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for being honest and correcting the record; she has absolutely done that, and has made it very clear that she was correcting it. Other Members wish to speak, so I have to move on. We cannot open up a debate. The Clerk is getting very worried.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Last week, during questions to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friends the Members for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) and for Slough (Mr Dhesi) raised the issue of ticket touting. In response, the Minister for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries, the hon. Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Julia Lopez) made two claims that I believe were inaccurate.

First, the Minister claimed that legislation in the Consumer Rights Act 2015 and the Digital Economy Act 2017 dealt with some of the issues relating to bots in the secondary market. However, there does not seem to have been a single conviction specifically for bot use, and there is a great deal of evidence that bots are still being used. Secondly, the Minister claimed that measures to cap resale prices in Ireland had increased “fraudulent activity”. In fact, there is no evidence whatever that such activity has increased. Fraud was actually reported to be down 27% in Ireland in the last quarter of 2023, and the Irish Government’s post-enactment report on their Sale of Tickets (Cultural, Entertainment, Recreational and Sporting Events) Act 2021 concludes:

“This is a positive endorsement of the operation of the Act and means that the objectives of the Act are being met whereby genuine fans can attend events at affordable prices.”

I seek your advice, Mr Speaker, on how we might encourage the Minister to correct the record.

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Member for her point of order, and for notice of it. It is for Ministers to correct the record if they wish to. In the meantime, she has certainly put her points on the record for everyone to see.

BILL PRESENTED

THAMES WATER (SPECIAL ADMINISTRATION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sarah Olney presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to apply for an order for special administration in relation to Thames Water; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time Friday 21 June and to be printed (Bill 204).

Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill

Consideration of Lords message

[Relevant documents: Second Report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill, HC 435, and the Government response, HC 647.]

Mr Speaker: I can confirm that nothing in the Lords message engages Commons financial privilege.

Clause 1

INTRODUCTION

4.15 pm

The Minister for Countering Illegal Migration (Michael Tomlinson): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 3G.

Mr Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendment 10F, and Government motion to disagree.

Michael Tomlinson: It appears that I was indeed optimistic last week when I foresaw the end of ping-pong and looked forward to the time when we were not debating this particular piece of legislation. It is disappointing that we are back here again. Of course the other place should undertake its role as a revising Chamber, and of course it is entitled to ask the Government to think again, but we did think again, with the House now voting for the third time as part of ping-pong and strongly endorsing this Bill. We need to bring the process to a conclusion.

The Labour party has voted against our measures to tackle illegal migration 134 times. One hundred and thirty-four times it has told the British people that it opposes our tougher immigration legislation. Enough is enough. The Opposition have delayed this Bill for too long, and we must get on with it.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I am sure that, like me, the Minister will have read the Law Society of England and Wales's briefing on these amendments. Has he seen the polling it has reported, which shows that the majority of voters think the Government should either accept some amendments to the Rwanda policy or scrap it altogether? Only a quarter of the public think the Government should try to get the Bill through in its current form, and all the Lords amendments are supported by the majority of the public. Has he seen that polling, and will he stop trying to turn this matter into a political football and address the gravamen of the amendments?

Michael Tomlinson: I certainly will. I am very grateful indeed to the hon. and learned Lady, because she gets to the point of the amendments. She is absolutely right to say that we should address them in detail, and I will do just that.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I say this with all humility and with respect for the Minister, who I know is an honourable person: does he agree that there is a simple way out of this deadlock? It is to accept those who can demonstrate that they assisted the British

forces in Afghanistan. Does the Minister further agree that this back and forth is an example not of democratic exercise, but of democratic embarrassment? A way forward must be found before we bring this place and our procedures into disrepute.

Michael Tomlinson: I am very grateful indeed to the hon. Gentleman. As always, he engages with the substance of the matter. He and the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) have raised this point. I will turn to that specific amendment, and I hope to persuade him, through my words, that steps have been taken and reassurances have been made. I hope to reassure him personally that he will be able to support the Government in the Aye Lobby later today.

I turn to the Lords amendment tabled by the noble Lord Hope of Craighead. I want to reiterate some salient points. First, as the House knows, we will only ratify the treaty once we agree with Rwanda that all necessary implementation is in place for both countries to comply with the obligations under the treaty. Secondly, the implementation of these provisions will be kept under review by the independent monitoring committee. Thirdly, clause 9 makes it clear that the Bill's provisions come into force when the treaty enters into force.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I know that there is a problem in detaining illegal migrants at the moment under habeas corpus, but when the Bill comes into force, will it be the legal position that we can then detain people before offshoring them, because that is the only real deterrent?

Michael Tomlinson: My right hon. Friend might have heard a few words from the Prime Minister in that regard this morning, and that is exactly right. Specifically in relation to the amendment, however, I respectfully disagree with the noble Lord Hope. There is no obligation, whether in legislation or in the treaty, to send anyone to Rwanda, as my noble Friend Lord Sharpe has said. Article 4 of the treaty sets out clearly that it is for the United Kingdom to

"determine the timing of a request for relocation of individuals under this Agreement and the number of requests for relocation to be made".

Sir Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con): Before my right hon. and learned Friend moves away from the treaty, could he help with some clarity on the relationship, as the Government see it, between the Rwanda treaty and this Bill? Specifically, is an assessment of Rwanda's safety for the purposes of this Bill the same thing as compliance with the Rwanda treaty on the part of the state of Rwanda? If not, what is the difference? Does the concept of safety extend beyond compliance with the treaty, or is it solely limited to the question of compliance with the treaty?

Michael Tomlinson: As ever, I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for his engagement, both inside and outside the Chamber. He has been a regular attendee at these ping-pong sessions. The treaty is the operating legal instrument between the two international bodies, the United Kingdom and Rwanda. That is the status of that treaty. This Bill brings it into effect in law in this country. He knows about dealing with the system of dualism. In fact, he has appeared in the Supreme Court

arguing these very points, so he knows in detail the differences between a treaty and an Act of Parliament. As I set out, there is no obligation within the treaty. It is plainly written in article 4(1) that the

“United Kingdom shall not be obliged to make any request for relocation under this Agreement.”

That means that the Government would not be obliged to relocate individuals under the terms of the treaty if, for example, there had been unexpected changes of circumstances. I know that that is something my right hon. and learned Friend has been concerned about.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Would my right hon. and learned Friend also care to note that Lord Hoffman, in the case of *R v. Lyons*—in relation to a European Court of Human Rights case—was unequivocal when he said that a treaty was not the same as a statute, and that it is the statute that prevails? When a statute is made and the words are clear and unambiguous, it follows that the courts will obey what the Act sets out, which is exactly the position in this case.

Michael Tomlinson: My hon. Friend has also been a consistent member of these ping-pong sessions and he has consistently cited paragraph 144 of the Supreme Court judgment. He knows that I agree with him on this point, and that I firmly believe that this legislation, as drafted, is clear and unambiguous. I hope that that reassures him.

Turning back to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Sir Jeremy Wright), there are procedures already in place under the terms of the treaty to monitor the safety of Rwanda for those who are relocated there. I can reassure him and the House that we have already established the right mechanisms so that, should the situation ever arise, the Government will respond as necessary. This would include a range of options to respond, including, as he knows, primary legislation if required.

Implementation continues and I can now confirm that last Friday the Rwandan Parliament passed its domestic legislation to implement its new asylum system. The partnership is one important component of a much broader bilateral relationship, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) has recently reminded us. This is a migration and economic development partnership, and I would like to put on record my thanks to all officials, including those in the Government of Rwanda, for their hard work in implementing the treaty and delivering this crucial partnership.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I note what the Minister said about last Friday but, if Rwanda is truly safe, why are Rwandans excluded from being returned under this legislation? Can he give us the reasons why he and the Prime Minister refuse to accept the need to prove the safety of Rwanda as a requirement?

Michael Tomlinson: The proof of the safety is in the binding international treaty between two international partners, namely the United Kingdom and the Government of Rwanda. The treaty addresses the concerns set out by the Supreme Court, namely the concerns in and around refoulement, and I invite this House to accept that reassurance. That is why I say the amendments are unnecessary.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): The obvious reason why Rwandans are not covered by the Bill is because returning a Rwandan to Rwanda would take them to their home country, not a third country.

Michael Tomlinson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has been closely following these proceedings not just throughout ping-pong but throughout his time in this role. He knows deeply the interplay and the interrelationship between the two countries.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Michael Tomlinson: I will make some progress, as I have given way too much. I have taken criticism for the number of times I give way.

On Lords amendment 10F, as my noble Friend Lord Sharpe and I have said previously, this Government greatly value the contribution of those who have supported us and our armed forces overseas, which is why there are legal routes for them to come to the United Kingdom. There is already existing legislation, including but not limited to the Illegal Migration Act 2023, under which the Secretary of State has a range of powers to consider cases and specific categories of persons. I have already made a clear commitment on behalf of His Majesty's Government that we will consider how removal would apply under existing immigration legislation, which means that, once the review of Afghan relocations and assistance policy decisions for those with credible links to Afghan specialist units is concluded, the Government will not remove to Rwanda those who receive a positive eligibility decision as a result of the review, where they are already in the United Kingdom as of today. This is an important point, and it is a point that I emphasise to the House today.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister may have read about my constituent in *The Guardian* today: a man who was originally an Afghan, has British citizenship and served with our armed forces for 15 years. He and his family were called forward to the Baron hotel but could not get there because of an explosion, and they have been in hell ever since. His young children and wife are unable to join him here in the UK. He is not eligible for ARAP because he is a British citizen.

The Government have written to me suggesting that his children might apply to ARAP, but I believe that under-10s will probably not qualify. The Afghan citizens resettlement scheme is in tatters and will not accept them, as the Government are now trying to say that they were invited, rather than instructed, to go to the Baron hotel. If the Minister took five minutes to read the story of my constituent, who gave so much of his life to support our forces in Afghanistan, he would understand why it is not sustainable for him to stand at the Dispatch Box and say that there are safe, legal routes for those who are eminently eligible, and why amendment 10F matters.

Michael Tomlinson: This amendment is unnecessary. As I have told the hon. Lady and tried to explain to the House, there is already existing legislation, including but not limited to the Illegal Migration Act. I have confirmed that the Government will not remove to

[*Michael Tomlinson*]

Rwanda those who receive a positive eligibility decision as a result of the review. This Government recognise the commitment and responsibility that come with combat veterans, whether our own or those who have shown courage in serving alongside us. We will not let them down.

Criminal gangs are determining who comes to the United Kingdom, as vulnerable people are lured into risking their lives in unseaworthy boats. Billions of pounds of taxpayers' money is being spent on illegal migration, and our resources and services are reaching their limits. We must put an end to it. We must pass this legislation and stop the boats.

I urge the House once again to send an unambiguous message to the other place that the time has come for the Labour Lords to respect the views of this House and to let this Bill now pass.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): There is not a huge amount more to be said about this sham, this con of a Bill, that has not already been said. The plan is as unworkable as it is unaffordable. That is why Labour would instead repurpose the money that is being squandered and set aside for the scheme into a cross-border police unit and security partnership, which would go after the criminal gangs upstream and restore order to our border.

4.30 pm

Labour would create a new returns and enforcement unit to remove people from the country who have no right to be here, given that we have seen the return of failed asylum seekers collapsing by 44% under the Conservatives and the removal of foreign criminals decreasing by 27%. Our plan will end the Tory boats chaos, fix our broken asylum system and restore our border security. The Government's plan is, as the former Immigration Minister described it and as a civil servant insider has admitted, to get a few symbolic flights off the ground ahead of a general election, regardless of the wider impact. It really is tokenism and posturing of the worst sort.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op): Given that a permanent secretary has said that there is no evidence the plan will work as a deterrent, as it will account for just 1% of those crossing the channel, does my hon. agree that it is just a gimmick?

Stephen Kinnock: My hon. Friend is right: the test of such a policy is whether it will work as a deterrent. When we are dealing with people who have risked life and limb to cross continents, they are not going to be put off by a 1% chance of being sent to Rwanda. The policy fails on its own terms, and the permanent secretary was absolutely right to put that red flag on it two years ago. It is extraordinary that we are where we are today.

Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that the tokenism of the worst sort that he spoke about was carried on by the Prime Minister's announcement that 25 courtrooms and 150 judges will be available to

deal with legal challenges from asylum seekers? Given that our courts are struggling with backlogs, partly due to not having enough barristers and courts, does he agree that it would be interesting to know how the Government would achieve that?

Stephen Kinnock: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about that, although I had forgotten chapter 562 in this never-ending story. My recollection is that the Prime Minister was then slapped down by the judiciary, who said, "We have a huge backlog to get through and this is not a priority." We should thank my hon. Friend for reminding the House of yet another disastrous chapter in this story.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): In the unlikely event that we have a Labour Government, would the shadow Minister be happy if future Opposition parties, which necessarily and usually dominate the House of Lords, frustrated them? Will he advise his friends up there to respect the will of the elected House?

Stephen Kinnock: I will advise the other place to do what it is doing, as a revising Chamber: standing up for its constitutional obligations to look at every piece of legislation that we send to it from this place and take the measures that it feels strongly about. This set of amendments in no way prevents this policy from being enacted or flights from taking off; what we are seeing is simply those Members in the other place doing their constitutional duty.

The plan is not only completely unworkable, but shockingly unaffordable. It is likely to cost an astonishing £2 million per deportee. To add insult to injury, it puts the tens of thousands of asylum seekers who are deemed inadmissible and yet cannot be sent to Rwanda, because of the lack of capacity there, into limbo, in expensive hotels, stuck in a perma-backlog at a staggering cost to the taxpayer. This is a dreadful policy and it is shameful politics.

When the Bill was first introduced, the Prime Minister described it as "emergency legislation", yet the Government's management of the parliamentary timetable would suggest that the opposite is the case. Ministers had ample opportunity to schedule debates and votes on 25 and 26 March, before the Easter recess, but they chose not to do so. Indeed, there was plenty of scope to accelerate the process last week. People could be forgiven for concluding that the truth of the matter is that Ministers have been deliberately stringing this out for two reasons: first, because they thought they could make some grubby political capital from the delay; and, secondly, because they have been scrambling to organise a flight and all the other logistics that are not in place. The Prime Minister, in his somewhat whinging and buck-passing press conference this morning, admitted that the first flight to Rwanda will not take off until—checks notes—July.

Today is 22 April. We were initially told that this was "emergency legislation", yet we are now being told that there will be a 10 to 12-week delay in getting the first flight off the ground. I do not know what your definition of an emergency is, Madam Deputy Speaker, but a 10 to 12-week response time seems a bit of a stretch. Given that none of the amendments to the Bill could be seen as wrecking amendments by any stretch of the

imagination, it is difficult to see why those on the Government Benches could not just accept the amendments and get on with it. The fundamental point is that not one of the amendments that have been coming to us from the other place would prevent planes from getting into the air.

Turning first to the amendment in the name of the noble Lord Hope, this amendment simply reflects what the Government have already said: that court judgments are taken at a moment in time and that a country may well be safe at a given point, but not at another. If the Bill passes unamended, this House will, in essence, be asserting that Rwanda will be a safe country for ever more. Surely the indisputable lesson of recent times is that we live in a dangerous and turbulent world, where authoritarians are on the march and the rules-based order is under threat. Who knows what might happen in Rwanda in the future, or in any other country for that matter?

Imran Hussain: The Minister made the point that we have entered into a treaty and been told that Rwanda is safe. Does my hon. Friend agree that sets a very serious and dangerous precedent for the future, because that may not always be the case? How will we be able to work our way out of any unsafe country where we have such a treaty in place?

Stephen Kinnock: I agree with my hon. Friend. One reason we are seeing such a strong pushback from the other place is precisely that its Members are deeply uncomfortable with trying to make something true that is not true. The Supreme Court ruled unanimously that Rwanda is not a safe country, yet we are being asked to legislate to say that it is. We can legislate to say that the sky is green and the grass is blue, but that does not make it so, and that is why we have such an important point of principle in the Bill.

Paula Barker: On that point, will my hon. Friend give way?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Before the hon. Lady makes another intervention, I must draw the House's attention to the fact that we have only until 5.15 pm to debate this matter. Eight Back Benchers wish to speak and, at the moment, their speeches will be limited to three minutes, so it might not be entirely fair for the hon. Lady to keep making interventions.

Paula Barker: I withdraw my intervention.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for her courtesy.

Stephen Kinnock: The amendment in the name of the noble Lord Hope simply requires the Home Secretary to lay a statement before Parliament confirming that the Rwanda treaty has been implemented and that the country is safe. Prior to issuing his statement, the Home Secretary would presumably take account of advice provided by the Government's hand-picked monitoring committee, as specified in the treaty.

Lord Hope's amendment also allows the Home Secretary to lay a statement making clear that Rwanda is no longer safe, should the situation on the ground in Rwanda

change. This "trust but verify" approach is embedded in countless pieces of legislation that have made their way on to the statute book over the centuries. It is a perfectly fair, measured, reasonable and non-controversial proposal, and it is simply bizarre and incomprehensible that the Government are refusing to accept it.

Let me turn now to the noble Lord Browne's amendment. Frankly, I just do not know where to start with this one, Madam Deputy Speaker. It beggars belief that the Government are still insisting on being able to deport to Rwanda Afghans who have bravely fought alongside British forces against the Taliban. It really is shameful that we are still debating what should be a given. We owe a debt of gratitude to the Afghans who stood shoulder to shoulder with our troops, yet this Government are seeking to trash our reputation as a country that honours its debts. What a disgrace. Ministers should hang their heads in shame.

Over the course of the past few weeks, Ministers have deployed a variety of spurious and mealy-mouthed arguments to defend their position, but the one that they have most frequently used is that there are already safe and legal routes in place in the shape of the ARAP and the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme, but that is simply not the case. Operation Warm Welcome became operation cold shoulder when the Prime Minister torpedoed both schemes and left these Afghans stranded—shocking but true.

Court documents show that, in November 2022, the Prime Minister issued instructions to halt flights from neighbouring Pakistan for an entire year for Afghans who had already been granted resettlement rights in the UK, and only restarted them when the Pakistani Government threatened to send these heroic individuals back across the border to meet their fate at the hands of the Taliban. Let the content of those court documents sink in: the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom explicitly instructed the Ministry of Defence and the Home Office to stop assisting Afghans who had put their lives on the line for our country. What a disgrace. What a betrayal of British values. What a hammer blow to our moral standing in the world, but the noble Lord Browne's amendment is driven not only by a basic moral imperative, but by our national interest and military logic for the simple and obvious reason that the ability of our armed forces to recruit local allies to support us in the future will be severely constrained if this Bill passes unamended. It should therefore not come as a surprise to anyone that our armed forces are outraged and repelled by the Government's refusal to accept Lord Browne's amendment.

Indeed, just last weekend, 13 senior military figures signed a letter to the *Sunday Telegraph* stating robustly that

"any brave men and women who have fought alongside our armed forces or served the UK Government overseas"

must be exempt from removal to Rwanda. I urge Members across the House to join me in supporting the two amendments that are in front of us today. This whole process has been a farce, but if we just pass these amendments we can at least send the message that we are not a country that chooses to deport its military allies to a country on the other side of the world and that we are a country that cares about whether we are sending some of the most vulnerable people on the planet to a place that is safe for them. At the very least,

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we owe that basic level of respect and decency to ourselves as a nation and to the people whom this policy will affect. Unfortunately, respect and decency for anyone, whether in relation to our nation, to asylum seekers or to the British taxpayer, is not something that this Prime Minister and his Government hold in any regard whatever. That is why their time is up. They are not fit to govern. I fear that tonight, yet again, they will demonstrate that point in spades.

Madam Deputy Speaker: As I have just intimated, there will be an immediate time limit on Back-Bench speeches of three minutes.

Sir Jeremy Wright: In view of the time, I wish to focus what I say on the second part of amendment 3G(8). It is clear that Lord Hope has drawn attention to a flaw in the Bill's logic. We all understand that it is about parliamentary sovereignty, but if declaring Rwanda safe in the first instance is a matter for Parliament then why is determining whether it remains safe not also a matter for Parliament? Yet the Bill covers only the first determination of safety and provides no mechanism for Parliament to change its mind if circumstances change, save for primary legislation, which we need Government to introduce.

My quarrel with the noble Lord Hope's amendments has been that, whereas the theme of this Bill is parliamentary authority, the earlier forms of his amendments give effective authority on the safety of Rwanda to the monitoring committee, because its conclusion on treaty compliance will be determinative of the question of safety. The later versions of Lord Hope's amendments, however, would transfer authority to Ministers to determine—presumably on the advice of the monitoring committee—that Rwanda is no longer safe, and to make a statement to that effect. I do not think that is perfect either. I still think that for the Bill to have inherent logical consistency, it should be for Parliament to decide whether Rwanda remains safe in changed circumstances—not the monitoring committee or a Minister—but how much latitude Parliament would have in deciding whether Rwanda remains safe in changed circumstances rather depends on the point I raised in an intervention on the Minister.

4.45 pm

If adherence to the treaty is evidence contributing to an assessment of whether Rwanda remains safe but is not wholly determinative of the question of safety, it remains possible, if unlikely, that Parliament would consider non-compliance but none the less decide that Rwanda remains safe for the purposes of the Bill. If the only consideration on safety is the question of compliance with the treaty, Rwanda cannot remain safe if it is in breach of the treaty. We need to be clear on which of the two it is, but either way—determinative or not—if Parliament is to be the sovereign decision maker, it must know of non-adherence to the treaty, and directly or indirectly the monitoring committee is the body that can tell us.

It seems to me that we must look at Lords amendment 3G in the light of this late stage in proceedings. We cannot keep batting the Bill backwards and forwards across the building. As I said, I do not think that the

amendment is the best way to solve the problem that Parliament has no mechanism available to it to change its mind if the facts change, but with all due respect to the Minister, whom I hold in high regard, the Government have not come up with a better alternative. He leaves me little place to go other than to support the amendment, if he cannot propose a better way of resolving this deficiency.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The Minister opened by saying that he had looked forward last week to not debating the Bill. I, too, wish that we did not have to debate it; indeed, I wish that it had never been brought to this House in the first place. I wish that it had never seen the light of day. If he never wanted to debate it again, he could of course have accepted the Lords amendments last week, instead of stringing this out for even longer. The Lords have tabled perfectly legitimate amendments, but Government Members are seeking to get around the tedium of voting on amendments to render vulnerable people overseas. A text message is circulating on X in the name of the Government Chief Whip, saying:

“Dear Colleagues,

With a potentially long and historic night ahead, on behalf of the Prime Minister I would like to invite you to drinks this evening from 21.30. These will take place in the Prime Minister's office in the House of Commons.

I look forward to seeing you there.”

How absolutely heartless and despicable that Government Members will be quaffing drinks while thinking about sending people to Rwanda. How utterly without any kind of moral background. Should the Lords send back further amendments tonight and carry out the unusual procedure of double insistence, I will support them very much in that endeavour. We should use any mechanism that we can in this place to stop the Bill.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend on using every procedure available to her to state the SNP's opposition to the Bill, not least by moving amendments in the Reasons Committee last week. We in the SNP will take every single opportunity to express our opposition to this outrageous plan.

Alison Thewliss: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, and note on the record that Labour did not vote on any of the reasons that I sought to amend in the Reasons Committee. I have yet to hear any explanation for why Labour Members would not use any mechanism available to them to oppose the Bill.

We had yet another press conference this afternoon. The Prime Minister did not come to this House to talk about his gurning and his greeting that those mean old Lords would not let him have his way. I point out that the Conservatives have over 100 more Lords than Labour. Perhaps the lack of enthusiasm from their own Lords is reflective of the fact that many of them did not even show up to vote last week. The policy was not in the Conservative party manifesto. The Government have no mandate for the Rwanda plan whatsoever. Indeed, what manifesto would they put in front of people that would say, “We're going to set out to breach our international commitments and engage in state-sponsored people trafficking?” What manifesto would that be?

Let me mention briefly some of the things that the Prime Minister mentioned in his statement. He suddenly conjured up a whole load of judges to determine these cases, when they could perhaps better serve by looking at the appeals backlog that his incompetent bulk processing of asylum claims has created. He mentioned charter flights being booked, but many commercial companies, including the Rwandan state carrier, have refused to be involved in the charter flights at all, so which companies have been engaged to do that and at what cost? We still do not know.

The Prime Minister said:

“The first flight will leave in 10 to 12 weeks.”

Will that be before or after we reach summer recess—we already know how far the timescale on this has slipped for the Government—and what scrutiny will occur should they take off during recess? If the Government do manage to send anybody to Rwanda, where will they put them? We know that the Rwandans have sold off the housing that they set up to place people in. Will they be piling them up in tents? I would not put it past this Government, but that would be useful to know.

We fully support the Lords amendments, which do their very best to mitigate an absolutely dreadful piece of legislation. I cannot see what the Government's objection is to Lords amendment 3G. They are all about taking back control, but they want absolutely no parliamentary scrutiny of whether Rwanda remains a safe country. The right hon. and learned Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Sir Jeremy Wright) rightly pointed out that we in this place have no means of declaring Rwanda unsafe, so it is safe in perpetuity—forever and ever. We cannot declare it unsafe should something happen, and that is just not logical. I note also that the Irish High Court ruled last month that, in the light of these plans, the UK is not a safe country to send asylum seekers to.

I fully support Lords amendment 10F relating to Afghans. I have mentioned many times before my support for the Afghans who served and supported UK objectives in Afghanistan and how woeful the Government's response to their needs has been.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that the £11,000 it costs per person to deport to Rwanda could be used right now to rescue my constituent and his wife, who got out of Afghanistan and into Pakistan and are now stuck there waiting for the UK Government to rescue them?

Alison Thewliss: I wholeheartedly agree. I know of many cases of people who have been sorely let down by the Government.

We note that the figures that the Government brought out this morning show that there has been an increase in small boat arrivals in the past three months compared with last year. The plan is hardly any kind of deterrent if people are still coming over in small boats in their droves. Among them were 1,216 Afghans—an increase on the 1,098 who came in the same period last year. If the Minister thinks that the Afghan schemes are such a roaring success, why are so many Afghans being forced on to small boats just to get to safety? Many of them will have family in this country, many will have been unable to avail themselves of the Afghan schemes that he so talks up, and many will not have been able to use family reunion, which is an existing safe and legal route.

Given the time, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will not go into detail on the Afghan cases that I wished to mention. However, I will say this to the Government: this legislation is utterly despicable. It is state-sponsored people trafficking, it is against our obligations in international law, and Scotland wants no part of it. We will oppose it every step of the way.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): May I start by agreeing with what the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), said about there being nothing new to say? The trouble is that he then spent 14 minutes saying nothing new. He said that the amendments do nothing to stop flights getting off the ground, but the fact that we are still having to debate amendments is preventing the legislation from going through, which would allow the scheme—literally—to get off the ground. Now it is time to get the Rwanda legislation done.

On the remaining amendments, many people have had days, weeks and months to make their points. The Government have given undertakings, and we have heard further undertakings about the treatment of Afghan refugees today. The Bill does not oblige the Government to return anybody from Afghanistan; there are explicit schemes to protect them.

When it comes to declaring Rwanda a safe country, the only reason why the legislation states as such is that a court declared it not to be, based on limited and snapshot evidence. The Government have a white list of countries that are deemed not to be safe—the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office issues guidance about where it is safe to travel—but what constitutes “safe” in the eyes of those courts? Is Spain safe to a Catalan dissident who is in exile because they have taken issue with the Spanish Government? Is it safe to go back to France? Some of the refugees I have met in the Napier barracks claim that they are beaten by French police, and that it is not safe for them to go back to that country. Indeed, in the eyes of some court judgments, is London safe for a person who is “openly Jewish”?

Plenty of safeguards are given in this Bill: it will bring people back to the UK if Rwanda is deemed not to be safe or appropriate. Plenty of international legal scrutiny has now been added into the Bill. The issue of refoulement, which was the Supreme Court's major complaint, has been dealt with, and legal assessment is available for those sent to Rwanda. I will say it again: when the Home Affairs Select Committee went to Calais last year, we were told by all those who were in charge of the policing system on the beaches that when the Government announced the Rwanda scheme the previous May, there was a surge in migrants around Calais approaching the French authorities to try to regularise their position in France, because they did not want to risk being sent to Rwanda.

It is disgraceful that, time and again, those behind these amendments—the Labour party, continuing this ping-pong—have not come up with a single solution to the really important question of what we do with asylum seekers who have come to this country illegally, who have no credible case to be in the UK, but who it is practically impossible to return to their own country. It is also absolutely disgraceful that just this morning the shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for

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Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), made it quite clear that a Labour Government would abolish the Rwanda scheme, whether it is working or not. They are saying to people on the other side of the channel, “Just wait a few months, and then you can come in your droves.” That is the truth of the matter, and these amendments need to be beaten again.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Although at times I agree with quite a lot of what the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) says, the point he has just made about Labour’s policy is absolutely incorrect. I am very pleased that the Minister stated at the beginning of his remarks that the other place absolutely has the right to act as a revising Chamber and give its advice to this Chamber.

Lords amendment 3G was tabled by the noble Lord Hope of Craighead, a former deputy president of the Supreme Court. It states that

“Rwanda cannot be treated as a safe country for...the purposes of this Act until the Secretary of State has obtained and laid before Parliament a statement from the independent Monitoring Committee” confirming that the treaty provisions have been implemented. It also allows the Secretary of State to rescind the confirmation if the treaty stops being adhered to, rather than the nonsense position of claiming that Rwanda is safe for evermore. This is a sensible and measured amendment to deal with the facts, allowing that they may change.

On the day that the Prime Minister has stated that some asylum decision makers and judges have been trained, the joint monitoring committee has been set up and the president of the new appeal body has been selected, we still do not know whether all the other provisions of the treaty have been fully implemented or whether a sufficient number of officials are in place. With the Prime Minister insisting that flights will begin in 10 to 12 weeks, Lords amendment 3G provides a vital safeguard, ensuring that everyone sent to Rwanda will be protected by the implementation of the treaty provisions. I think that is entirely reasonable, and I agree with what the right hon. and learned Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Sir Jeremy Wright) said.

Lords amendment 10F, tabled by the noble Lord Browne of Ladyton—a former Secretary of State for Defence—provides an exemption for people who supported the UK armed forces overseas, or who have otherwise been agents or allies of the UK overseas. Anyone seeking to rely on that exemption would need to provide notice to the Secretary of State

“within one week of arrival in the UK”.

Ministers have sought to reassure Members that they are reviewing the position, and will consider and revisit how the Illegal Migration Act 2023 and removal under existing immigration legislation will apply to those who are determined to be ARAP-eligible. However, I must note that, when responding in the House of Lords, the noble Lord Browne dubbed that assurance to be “worthless”. We should all be conscious of the strength of feeling among those former senior armed forces personnel who support this amendment. When individuals risk their lives to support British troops overseas, we must honour our commitment to provide sanctuary, not outsource it. That is why I support Lords amendment 10F.

5 pm

Sir Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): I am mindful of time, as always, and the time is quite rightly being reduced as we deal with this Bill—in a rather similar way to how, with some sort of exotic recipe, the sauce is reduced on every occasion—and we are now down to two important amendments.

I am glad that, in his tone and his approach, my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister has at the Dispatch Box, as he should, absolutely embraced this debate, which is all about the detail and about getting it right. He knows I support this policy. We have again heard a lot of rhetoric in this Chamber, which is unfortunate and misleading. We are doing something genuinely innovative, and it is right that we should do so.

I do think that the revised Lords amendment 3G in its form now, particularly in the light of the remarks of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Sir Jeremy Wright), does actually strike an appropriate balance in making sure not only that the reality of the position in Rwanda is met by the deeming provision in law, but that there is a mechanism by which we can deal with this as a Parliament if indeed circumstances change.

With great respect to my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister, he did almost concede that, if there was to be a change in the situation in Rwanda, primary legislation would have to be at least considered by the Government. It seems to me that it would be far better to ensure against that and to avoid the need for further primary legislation by making sure we can wrap it all up in this Bill, and have a system that is not just strong when it comes to potential legal challenge, but gives this place its rightful role. So, alongside my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam, I still commend and support that particular provision.

On Lords amendment 10F, I note the comments my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister made at the Dispatch Box, with the assurances he gave about the status of people who have had an assessment and are therefore found to have satisfied the requirements of the scheme, and that is an important step forward. I do not take the view that we should regard these matters as worthless. I do regard it as having quite a lot of weight, and I am grateful to him for that.

I think that making that very clear in the Bill would probably clear up the matter once and for all, and it may well mean—not that I mind being here until the wee small hours of the morning—that we can clear up this business once and for all. I am in the market for sorting this out now, so that the Bill can become law before it is too late this evening, which is why I would commend perhaps a little further movement on Lords amendment 10F by my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): Throughout the proceedings on this Bill, my party both here and in the other place has by and large given support to the Government, even though at times we have been sceptical and concerned about the effectiveness of some of the measures. However, I have to say that we draw the line when it comes to Lords amendment 10F, on the protection of people who have served with our armed forces in dangerous situations and now find their lives being put in jeopardy.

The Minister has made the point time and again that some of these amendments are wrecking amendments or attempts to create loopholes and so on, but let us look at Lords amendment 10F. The people who would be covered by this amendment will, first, have served this country. Secondly, as a result, their lives will be in danger. Thirdly, when they arrive in this country, they must within a week immediately inform the authorities they are here, which allows for the records to be looked at, their claims to be verified and their connections with the armed forces to be ascertained. Lastly, if they have not done that, in any subsequent cases the courts can draw an inference from it.

So nothing could be more watertight than this amendment, yet the Government are refusing to accept it on the basis that there are already arrangements in place. Why is it—and my hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) has raised this time and again in the House, as have others—that people who served the armed forces in Afghanistan find themselves in danger at present? They are on the run from the police in Pakistan, and they are hiding because the police in Pakistan want to send them back to Afghanistan, where they will be in danger. Why? Because the system has not worked for them. That is why it is important that the amendment is accepted. We have a moral duty and, as has been pointed out, if we are to look to the future and recruit people in trouble spots to help the armed forces, we have a strategic duty. If the Minister really wants to get this stuff through tonight he has a political reason for doing this, because by accepting the amendment he will at least take away another leg on which the other House is seeking to stand in opposing the Bill. For all those reasons I hope the Minister will accept the amendment, to protect those who have served us, get the Bill through, and avoid any further delay.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I think this is a disgraceful Bill and I want to oppose it at every opportunity. However, to follow on from the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson), we have to accept that at some stage the Bill will go through, and it is the normal run of things in these matters that the Government will have compromised on a number of issues, usually by this time. For the life of me I cannot understand why we have not reached that compromise so far, particularly on this amendment.

As the right hon. Member said, if the system was working at the moment, we would not be finding the cases that we have got. The situation in Afghanistan in particular is deteriorating at the moment. For example, I am dealing with a woman who is now in this country but who campaigned for women's rights in Afghanistan. The Taliban are now arresting and torturing her family, just because she stood up for women's rights. If anyone is associated with the British Government in any form, that makes matters even worse. I had a constituent asylum seeker in one of the hotels whose family simply rented out property to the BBC and some of the British authorities. The family got out, but they still have a connection, and they showed me videos of the Taliban turning up and beating, almost to a pulp, the staff who were working in those premises.

The situation is deteriorating and the existing system is not working. People who are in any way associated with the British Government, and British forces in particular,

are targeted, and their families are targeted. They are not just abused; they are tortured. I think we have a debt of honour, and that compromise has to be done tonight. The amendment cannot be seen as a wrecking amendment in any way; it is simply a logical conclusion to the debate that we have had in both Houses. I urge the other place to stand firm on this amendment, because I think the British public support it. Indeed, I think that perhaps a majority in this House want to support it too. I urge the Government to think again, because this has gone beyond the normal process. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) asked what there is to gain for the Government by continuing this process. If they think it is about demonstrating their bravado and commitment, and trying to milk some publicity out of it, it is going the other way. At the moment, the general political and public mood is that, for goodness' sake, accept that when a compromise is offered we should seize it, particularly on this issue.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I hear impatience and irritation from the Conservative Benches that we are still here debating this, but I respectfully point Members towards the impatience, irritation, and even outrage on the part of my constituents at the fact that the Government are wasting vast amounts of their money on something that they know, and the Government know, will not work. If there is a one-in-200 chance that an asylum seeker might be sent to Rwanda, it will clearly not be a disincentive. What might be a deterrent would be to process the applications that we have, and remove that 25% of asylum seekers who turn out not to be genuine, but we will never know that if we do not have the competence to process them. It would also be sensible to set out safe routes, so that people are able to bypass and therefore undermine the model of the evil people traffickers.

That outrage from my constituents is also due to knowledge of what could be done with the money that has been spent on this nonsense scheme so far. It is the equivalent of 5.7 million GP appointments, if the Government had the priorities that the British people want them to have. The two amendments are entirely sensible. I do not need to repeat all the arguments for them, but we should have independent verification, rather than simply declare that a place is safe despite the lack of evidence, which is nonsense. As an aside, if Rwanda is a safe place, why would it be a deterrent? If it is not a safe place, why would any decent Government send anybody there?

I support the Lords in pushing their amendments 3G and 10F.

Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tim Farron: I will not give way, because we are about to finish and it is unfair on others.

Lords amendment 10F guarantees that those who have risked everything to protect and serve our servicemen and women in Afghanistan cannot be betrayed by this or a future Government. That is basically a simple and decent thing to ask for. Whatever motivations the Government ascribe to those pressing the amendment, it is clearly totally reasonable, and a reasonable Government would accept it.

[Tim Farron]

To finish, I will address the Conservative party's irritation that we are still here. I gently encourage Conservative Members present to imagine a time—sometime in the future maybe—when they are in opposition. Let us imagine a time when a Government of a different colour ignore the rule of law, bypass the courts, think themselves above the law and then try to use their numbers in Parliament to steamroller through something that was not in their manifesto and for which they have no mandate. An honest answer to that question would lead to this Government yielding. This is awful legislation. It is cruel, inept and expensive. We should vote to keep the amendments, the Lords should keep going, and the Government should concede.

Michael Tomlinson: With the leave of the House, may I address directly my right hon. and learned Friends the Members for Kenilworth and Southam (Sir Jeremy Wright) and for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland), who both addressed Lords amendment 3G? It does not do what they are looking for. They are looking for a parliamentary moment, and this amendment would merely produce a statement. I invite them to imagine a scenario whereby what we have been discussing would not produce an urgent question or a moment for a Secretary of State to make a statement in the Chamber of the House of Commons in any event. I repeat to them: this amendment does not meet the challenge they have set. I encourage them to be with the Government in a few short minutes.

We must get on and put an end to this. We must pass this legislation to stop the boats. Perhaps in the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), I urge this House once again to send a clear and unambiguous message to the other place.

Question put. That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 3G.

The House divided: Ayes 306, Noes 229.

Division No. 130]

[5.12 pm

AYES

Afolami, Bim	Bottomley, Sir Peter
Afriyie, Adam	Bowie, Andrew
Aiken, Nickie	Bradley, rh Dame Karen
Aldous, Peter	Brady, rh Sir Graham
Anderson, Stuart (<i>Proxy vote</i> <i>cast by Mr Marcus Jones</i>)	Brereton, Jack
Andrew, rh Stuart	Bridgen, Andrew
Ansell, Caroline	Brine, Steve
Argar, rh Edward	Bristow, Paul
Atherton, Sarah	Britcliffe, Sara
Atkins, rh Victoria	Browne, Anthony
Bacon, Gareth	Bruce, Fiona
Bacon, Mr Richard	Buchan, Felicity
Badenoch, rh Kemi	Burghart, Alex
Bailey, Shaun	Butler, Rob
Baillie, Siobhan	Cairns, rh Alun
Baker, Duncan	Cameron, Dr Lisa
Baker, rh Mr Steve	Carter, Andy
Baldwin, Dame Harriett	Cartlidge, James
Baynes, Simon	Cash, Sir William
Bell, Aaron	Cates, Miriam
Beresford, Sir Paul	Caulfield, Maria
Bhatti, Saqib	Chalk, rh Alex
Blackman, Bob	Chishti, Rehman
	Chope, Sir Christopher

Churchill, Jo	Grayling, rh Chris
Clark, rh Greg	Green, Chris
Clarke, rh Sir Simon	Green, rh Damian
Clarke, Theo	Griffith, Andrew
Clarke-Smith, Brendan	Gullis, Jonathan
Clarkson, Chris	Hall, Luke
Cleverly, rh James	Hammond, Stephen
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Hands, rh Greg
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse	Harper, rh Mr Mark
Collins, Damian	Harris, Rebecca
Courts, Robert	Harrison, Trudy
Coutinho, rh Claire	Hart, Sally-Ann
Crabb, rh Stephen	Hart, rh Simon
Crosbie, Virginia	Hayes, rh Sir John
Crouch, Dame Tracey	Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Daly, James	Heapey, rh James
Davies, rh David T. C.	Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
Davies, Gareth	Henderson, Gordon
Davies, Dr James	Henry, Darren
Davies, Mims	Higginbotham, Antony
Davis, rh Sir David	Hinds, rh Damian
Davison, Dehenna	Hoare, Simon
Dinenage, Dame Caroline	Holden, rh Mr Richard
Dines, Miss Sarah	Hollinrake, Kevin
Docherty, Leo	Hollobone, Mr Philip
Donelan, rh Michelle	Holloway, Adam
Double, Steve	Holmes, Paul
Dowden, rh Oliver	Howell, John (<i>Proxy vote cast</i> <i>by Mr Marcus Jones</i>)
Doyle-Price, Dame Jackie	Howell, Paul
Drax, Richard	Huddleston, Nigel
Drummond, Mrs Flick	Hudson, Dr Neil
Duddridge, Sir James (<i>Proxy</i> <i>vote cast by Mr Francois</i>)	Hughes, Eddie
Duguid, David (<i>Proxy vote</i> <i>cast by Mr Marcus Jones</i>)	Hunt, Jane
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain	Hunt, Tom
Dunne, rh Philip	Jack, rh Mr Alister
Eastwood, Mark	Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
Edwards, Ruth	Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Ellis, rh Sir Michael	Johnson, Dr Caroline
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias	Johnson, Gareth
Eustice, rh George	Johnston, David
Evans, Dr Luke	Jones, Andrew
Evennett, rh Sir David	Jones, rh Mr David
Everitt, Ben	Jones, Fay
Fabricant, Michael	Jones, rh Mr Marcus
Farris, Laura	Jupp, Simon
Fell, Simon	Kawczynski, Daniel
Firth, Anna	Keegan, rh Gillian
Fletcher, Katherine	Knight, rh Sir Greg
Fletcher, Mark	Kniveton, Kate
Fletcher, Nick	Kruger, Danny
Ford, rh Vicky	Lamont, John
Foster, Kevin	Largan, Robert
Fox, rh Sir Liam	Latham, Mrs Pauline
Francois, rh Mr Mark	Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Freeman, George	Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Freer, Mike	Levy, Ian
French, Mr Louie	Lewer, Andrew
Fuller, Richard	Lewis, rh Sir Brandon
Fysh, Mr Marcus	Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Garnier, Mark	Loder, Chris
Ghani, Ms Nusrat	Logan, Mark
Gibb, rh Nick	Longhi, Marco
Gibson, Peter	Lopez, Julia
Gideon, Jo	Lopresti, Jack
Glen, rh John	Lord, Mr Jonathan
Goodwill, rh Sir Robert	Loughton, Tim
Gove, rh Michael	Mackinlay, Craig (<i>Proxy vote</i> <i>cast by John Redwood</i>)
Graham, Richard	Mackrory, Cherylyn
Grant, Mrs Helen (<i>Proxy vote</i> <i>cast by Mr Marcus Jones</i>)	Maclean, Rachel
	Mak, Alan

Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, rh Stephen
McVey, rh Esther
Mercer, rh Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Dame Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mortimer, Jill
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Nici, Lia
O'Brien, Neil
Opperman, Guy
Patel, rh Priti
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, rh Chris
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
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine

Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
Simmonds, David
Smith, rh Chloe
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, rh Sir Mark
Stafford, Alexander
Stephenson, rh Andrew
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Iain
Streeter, Sir Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, rh Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, rh Rishi
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, rh Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, rh Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trott, rh Laura
Tuckwell, Steve
Tugendhat, rh Tom
Vara, rh Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
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
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Young, Jacob
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Joy Morrissey and
Mark Jenkinson

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur

Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Dame Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blake, Olivia

Blomfield, Paul
Bonnar, Steven
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Sir Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Buckland, rh Sir Robert
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Clark, Feryal
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Crawley, Angela (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Dalton, Ashley
Davey, rh Ed
David, Wayne
Davies-Jones, Alex
De Cordova, Marsha
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Doughty, Stephen
Duffield, Rosie
Dyke, Sarah
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, rh Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Edwards, Sarah
Efford, Clive
Egan, Damien
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Farry, Stephen
Fellows, Marion
Fletcher, Colleen
Flynn, rh Stephen
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Furniss, Gill
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur

Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Green, Sarah
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Dame Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
Hanna, Claire
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Johnson, Kim
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Kitchen, Gen
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lightwood, Simon
Linden, David (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
MacAskill, Kenny
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Maskell, Rachael
Mather, Keir
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McKinnell, Catherine
McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen

Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote
cast by Marion Fellows*)
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
Olney, Sarah
Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owatemi, Taiwo (*Proxy vote
cast by Chris Elmore*)
Owen, Sarah
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillipson, Bridget
Powell, Lucy
Qaisar, Ms Anum
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, rh Angela
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, rh Rachel
Reynolds, Jonathan
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Shanks, Michael
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheppard, Tommy
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Alyn

Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Strathern, Alistair
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thompson, rh Owen
Thomson, Richard
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Trickett, Jon (*Proxy vote cast
by Ian Lavery*)
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Wakeford, Christian
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa (*Proxy
vote cast by Marion
Fellows*)
Whittome, Nadia
Williams, Hywel
Wilson, Munira
Winter, Beth
Wishart, Pete
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
**Tonia Antoniazzi and
Mary Glindon**

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 3G disagreed to.

5.28 pm

More than one hour having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the Lords amendments, the proceedings were interrupted (Programme Order, 18 March 2024).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83F).

After Clause 5

EXEMPTION FOR AGENTS, ALLIES AND EMPLOYEES OF
THE UK OVERSEAS

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 10F.—(Michael Tomlinson.)

The House divided: Ayes 305, Noes 234.

Division No. 131]

[5.28 pm

AYES

Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter

Anderson, Stuart (*Proxy vote
cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline

Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, rh Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, rh Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, rh Mr Steve
Baldwin, Dame Harriett
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, rh Dame Karen
Brady, rh Sir Graham
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Burghart, Alex
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Carter, Andy
Cartledge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, rh Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Sir Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, rh Claire
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Dame Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Sir David
Davison, Dehenna
Dines, Miss Sarah
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, rh Michelle
Double, Steve
Dowden, rh Oliver
Doyle-Price, Dame Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, Sir James (*Proxy
vote cast by Mr François*)

Duguid, David (*Proxy vote
cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Sir Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, rh Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Sir Liam
François, rh Mr Mark
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 Mr Marcus Jones*)
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Gullis, Jonathan
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, rh James
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
Henderson, Gordon
Henry, Darren
Higginbotham, Antony
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, rh Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holmes, Paul
Howell, John (*Proxy vote cast
by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Howell, Paul
Huddleston, Nigel
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hughes, Eddie

Hunt, Jane
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, rh Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, rh Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kniveton, Kate
Kruger, Danny
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Sir Brandon
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig (*Proxy vote cast by John Redwood*)
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, rh Stephen
McVey, rh Esther
Mercer, rh Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Dame Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mortimer, Jill
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Nici, Lia
O'Brien, Neil
Opperman, Guy
Patel, rh Priti
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, rh Chris
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
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
Simmonds, David
Smith, rh Chloe
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, rh Sir Mark
Stafford, Alexander
Stephenson, rh Andrew
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Iain
Streeter, Sir Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, rh Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, rh Rishi
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, rh Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, rh Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trott, rh Laura
Tuckwell, Steve
Tugendhat, rh Tom
Vara, rh Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
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

Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wood, Mike
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
Young, Jacob
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Joy Morrissey and
Mark Jenkinson

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Dame Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blake, Olivia
Blomfield, Paul
Bonnar, Steven
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Sir Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Buckland, rh Sir Robert
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Clark, Feryal
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Crawley, Angela (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Dalton, Ashley
Davey, rh Ed
David, Wayne
Davies-Jones, Alex
De Cordova, Marsha
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Docherty-Hughes, Martin

Dodds, Anneliese
Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Doughty, Stephen
Duffield, Rosie
Dyke, Sarah
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, rh Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Edwards, Sarah
Efford, Clive
Egan, Damien
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Farry, Stephen
Fellows, Marion
Fletcher, Colleen
Flynn, rh Stephen
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Furniss, Gill
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Green, Sarah
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Dame Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
Hanna, Claire
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth

Jones, Sarah	Qaisar, Ms Anum
Kane, Mike	Qureshi, Yasmin
Keeley, Barbara	Rayner, rh Angela
Khan, Afzal	Reed, Steve
Kinnock, Stephen	Rees, Christina
Kitchen, Gen	Reeves, Ellie
Lake, Ben	Reeves, rh Rachel
Lammy, rh Mr David	Reynolds, Jonathan
Lavery, Ian	Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Leadbeater, Kim	Rodda, Matt
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Lightwood, Simon	Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Linden, David (<i>Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows</i>)	Shah, Naz
Long Bailey, Rebecca	Shanks, Michael
Lucas, Caroline	Shannon, Jim
Lynch, Holly	Sharma, Mr Virendra
MacAskill, Kenny	Sheerman, Mr Barry
Madders, Justin	Sheppard, Tommy
Mahmood, Mr Khalid	Siddiq, Tulip
Maskell, Rachael	Slaughter, Andy
Mather, Keir	Smith, Alyn
Mc Nally, John	Smith, Cat
McCabe, Steve	Smith, Jeff
McDonagh, Dame Siobhain	Smith, Nick
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm	Sobel, Alex
McDonald, Stuart C.	Spellar, rh John
McDonnell, rh John	Stevens, Chris
McFadden, rh Mr Pat	Stevens, Jo
McGovern, Alison	Strathern, Alistair
McKinnell, Catherine	Streeting, Wes
McLaughlin, Anne (<i>Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows</i>)	Sultana, Zarah
McMahon, Jim	Tami, rh Mark
McMorrin, Anna	Tarry, Sam
Miliband, rh Edward	Thewliss, Alison
Mishra, Navendu	Thompson, rh Owen
Moran, Layla	Thomson, Richard
Morden, Jessica	Thornberry, rh Emily
Morgan, Helen	Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Morgan, Stephen	Trickett, Jon (<i>Proxy vote cast by Ian Lavery</i>)
Morris, Grahame	Turner, Karl
Murray, Ian	Twigg, Derek
Murray, James	Twist, Liz
Nandy, Lisa	Vaz, rh Valerie
Newlands, Gavin	Wakeford, Christian
Nicolson, John (<i>Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows</i>)	Webbe, Claudia
Norris, Alex	West, Catherine
O'Hara, Brendan	Western, Matt
Olney, Sarah	Whitehead, Dr Alan
Oppurah, Chi	Whitford, Dr Philippa (<i>Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows</i>)
Oppong-Asare, Abena	Whittome, Nadia
Osborne, Kate	Williams, Hywel
Oswald, Kirsten	Wilson, Munira
Owatemi, Taiwo (<i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i>)	Wilson, rh Sammy
Owen, Sarah	Winter, Beth
Paisley, Ian	Wishart, Pete
Peacock, Stephanie	Yasin, Mohammad
Pennycook, Matthew	Zeichner, Daniel
Perkins, Mr Toby	
Phillipson, Bridget	Tellers for the Noes:
Powell, Lucy	Tonia Antoniazzi and
	Mary Glindon

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 10F disagreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83H(2)), That a Committee be appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendments 3G and 10F;

That Michael Tomlinson, Scott Mann, Dr Kieran Mullan, James Sunderland, Stephen Kinnock, Colleen Fletcher, and Alison Thewliss be members of the Committee;

That Michael Tomlinson be the Chair of the Committee;

That three be the quorum of the Committee.

That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—
(*Suzanne Webb*.)

The House divided: Ayes 309, Noes 37.

Division No. 132]

[5.42 pm

AYES

Afolami, Bim	Collins, Damian
Afriyie, Adam	Courts, Robert
Aiken, Nickie	Coutinho, rh Claire
Aldous, Peter	Crabb, rh Stephen
Anderson, Stuart (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones</i>)	Crosbie, Virginia
Andrew, rh Stuart	Crouch, Dame Tracey
Ansell, Caroline	Daly, James
Argar, rh Edward	Davies, rh David T. C.
Atherton, Sarah	Davies, Gareth
Atkins, rh Victoria	Davies, Dr James
Bacon, Gareth	Davies, Mims
Bacon, Mr Richard	Davis, rh Sir David
Badenoch, rh Kemi	Davison, Dehenna
Bailey, Shaun	Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Baillie, Siobhan	Dines, Miss Sarah
Baker, Duncan	Docherty, Leo
Baker, rh Mr Steve	Donelan, rh Michelle
Baldwin, Dame Harriett	Double, Steve
Baynes, Simon	Dowden, rh Oliver
Bell, Aaron	Doyle-Price, Dame Jackie
Beresford, Sir Paul	Drax, Richard
Bhatti, Saqib	Drummond, Mrs Flick
Blackman, Bob	Duddridge, Sir James (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Francois</i>)
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Duguid, David (<i>Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones</i>)
Bowie, Andrew	Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Bradley, rh Dame Karen	Dunne, rh Philip
Brady, rh Sir Graham	Eastwood, Mark
Brereton, Jack	Edwards, Ruth
Bridgen, Andrew	Ellis, rh Sir Michael
Brine, Steve	Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Bristow, Paul	Eustice, rh George
Britcliffe, Sara	Evans, Dr Luke
Browne, Anthony	Evennett, rh Sir David
Bruce, Fiona	Everitt, Ben
Buchan, Felicity	Fabricant, Michael
Buckland, rh Sir Robert	Farris, Laura
Burghart, Alex	Fell, Simon
Butler, Rob	Firth, Anna
Cairns, rh Alun	Fletcher, Katherine
Cameron, Dr Lisa	Fletcher, Mark
Carter, Andy	Fletcher, Nick
Cartlidge, James	Ford, rh Vicky
Cash, Sir William	Foster, Kevin
Cates, Miriam	Fox, rh Sir Liam
Caulfield, Maria	Francois, rh Mr Mark
Chalk, rh Alex	Freeman, George
Chishti, Rehman	Freer, Mike
Chope, Sir Christopher	French, Mr Louie
Churchill, Jo	Fuller, Richard
Clark, rh Greg	Fysh, Mr Marcus
Clarke, rh Sir Simon	Garnier, Mark
Clarke, Theo	Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Clarke-Smith, Brendan	Gibb, rh Nick
Clarkson, Chris	Gibson, Peter
Cleverly, rh James	Gideon, Jo
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey	Glen, rh John
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse	

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
 Gullis, Jonathan
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heappey, rh James
 Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 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
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 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
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig (*Proxy vote cast by John Redwood*)
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, rh Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Milling, rh Dame Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Nici, Lia
 O'Brien, Neil
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 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
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David

Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Sir Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, rh Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Trott, rh Laura
 Tuckwell, Steve
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 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
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim
Tellers for the Ayes:
Joy Morrissey and
Mark Jenkinson

NOES

Black, Mhairi
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Cherry, Joanna
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Fellows, Marion
 Flynn, rh Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Grady, Patrick
 Hendry, Drew
 Hosie, rh Stewart
 Lake, Ben
 Linden, David (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 MacAskill, Kenny
 Mc Nally, John
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Qaisar, Ms Anum
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Smith, Alyn
 Stephens, Chris
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thompson, rh Owen
 Thomson, Richard
 Webbe, Claudia
 Whitford, Dr Philippa (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Williams, Hywel
 Wishart, Pete
Tellers for the Noes:
Peter Grant and
Steven Bonnar

Question accordingly agreed to.

Committee to withdraw immediately; reasons to be reported and communicated to the Lords.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): That concludes consideration of the Lords message of 18 April relating to the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill. For clarity, I should say that the result of that Division means that the House has decided that the Reasons Committee should be appointed. I would normally say at that point that the Committee do withdraw immediately, but those in it have probably already gone. [*Laughter.*] The House may be called upon to consider a further Lords message later today, if necessary.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (14) of Standing Order No. 80A (Carry-over of bills), the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the names of

(1) Secretary Kemi Badenoch relating to the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill: Carry-over Extension;

(2) Secretary Michael Gove relating to the Renters (Reform) Bill: Carry-over Extension; and

(3) Secretary Michael Gove relating to the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill: Carry-over Extension

not later than one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings may continue, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Suzanne Webb.*)

DIGITAL MARKETS, COMPETITION AND CONSUMERS BILL (CARRY-OVER EXTENSION)

Ordered,

That the period on the expiry of which proceedings on the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill shall lapse in pursuance of paragraph (13) of Standing Order No. 80A shall be extended by 232 days until 12 December 2024.—(*Penny Mordaunt.*)

RENTERS (REFORM) BILL (CARRY-OVER EXTENSION)

Ordered,

That the period on the expiry of which proceedings on the Renters (Reform) Bill shall lapse in pursuance of paragraph (13) of Standing Order No. 80A shall be extended by 210 days until 12 December 2024.—(*Penny Mordaunt.*)

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF PUBLIC BODIES (OVERSEAS MATTERS) BILL (CARRY-OVER EXTENSION)

Motion made, and Question put,

That the period on the expiry of which proceedings on the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill shall lapse in pursuance of paragraph (13) of Standing Order No. 80A shall be extended by 177 days until 12 December 2024.—(*Penny Mordaunt.*)

The House divided: Ayes 304, Noes 222.

Division No. 133]

[5.57 pm

AYES

Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, rh Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, rh Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan

Baker, rh Mr Steve
Baldwin, Dame Harriett
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, rh Dame Karen
Brady, rh Sir Graham
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Britcliffe, Sara
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity

Buckland, rh Sir Robert
Burghart, Alex
Cairns, rh Alun
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Carter, Andy
Cartledge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, rh Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Sir Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, rh Claire
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Dame Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Sir David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, rh Michelle
Double, Steve
Dowden, rh Oliver
Doyle-Price, Dame Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, Sir James (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Mark Francois*)
Duguid, David (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Sir Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Sir Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
French, Mr Louie
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 Mr Marcus Jones*)
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Griffith, Andrew
Gullis, Jonathan
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Sally-Ann
Hart, rh Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heapey, rh James
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
Henderson, Gordon
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
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Jayawardena, rh Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, rh Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, rh Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kniveton, Kate
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
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark

Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig (*Proxy vote cast by John Redwood*)
Mackrory, Cherilyn
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, rh Stephen
McVey, rh Esther
Mercer, rh Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Dame Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
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
O'Brien, Neil
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, rh Chris
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
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Douglas

Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
Simmonds, David
Smith, rh Chloe
Smith, Greg
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, rh Sir Mark
Stafford, Alexander
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Iain
Streeter, Sir Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, rh Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, rh Rishi
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, rh Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trott, rh Laura
Tuckwell, Steve
Tugendhat, rh Tom
Vara, rh Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
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
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy
Young, Jacob
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Joy Morrissey and
Mark Jenkinson

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)

Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir

Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Dame Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blake, Olivia
Blomfield, Paul
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Sir Chris
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Clark, Feryal
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Crawley, Angela (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Dalton, Ashley
Davey, rh Ed
David, Wayne
Davies-Jones, Alex
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Doughty, Stephen
Duffield, Rosie
Dyke, Sarah
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, rh Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Edwards, Sarah
Efford, Clive
Egan, Damien
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Farry, Stephen
Fellows, Marion
Fletcher, Colleen
Flynn, rh Stephen
Fovargue, Yvonne

Foxcroft, Vicky
Furniss, Gill
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glindon, Mary
Grady, Patrick
Green, Sarah
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Dame Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
Hanna, Claire
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Kitchen, Gen
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lightwood, Simon
Linden, David (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lynch, Holly
MacAskill, Kenny
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Malthouse, rh Kit
Maskell, Rachael
Mather, Keir
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
McMorrin, Anna
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Moran, Layla

Morden, Jessica	Smith, Alyn
Morgan, Helen	Smith, Cat
Morgan, Stephen	Smith, Jeff
Morris, Grahame	Smith, Nick
Murray, Ian	Sobel, Alex
Murray, James	Spellar, rh John
Nandy, Lisa	Stephens, Chris
Newlands, Gavin	Stevens, Jo
Nicolson, John (<i>Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows</i>)	Strathern, Alistair
Norris, Alex	Streeting, Wes
O'Hara, Brendan	Stringer, Graham
Olney, Sarah	Sultana, Sarah
Onwurah, Chi	Tami, rh Mark
Oppong-Asare, Abena	Tarry, Sam
Osborne, Kate	Thewliss, Alison
Oswald, Kirsten	Thompson, rh Owen
Owatemi, Taiwo (<i>Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore</i>)	Thomson, Richard
Owen, Sarah	Thornberry, rh Emily
Peacock, Stephanie	Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Pennycook, Matthew	Trickett, Jon (<i>Proxy vote cast by Ian Lavery</i>)
Perkins, Mr Toby	Turner, Karl
Powell, Lucy	Twigg, Derek
Qaisar, Ms Anum	Twist, Liz
Qureshi, Yasmin	Vaz, rh Valerie
Rayner, rh Angela	Webbe, Claudia
Reed, Steve	West, Catherine
Rees, Christina	Western, Matt
Reeves, Ellie	Whitehead, Dr Alan
Reeves, rh Rachel	Whitford, Dr Philippa (<i>Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows</i>)
Reynolds, Jonathan	Whittome, Nadia
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell	Williams, Hywel
Rimmer, Ms Marie	Wilson, Munira
Rodda, Matt	Winter, Beth
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd	Wishart, Pete
Saville Roberts, rh Liz	Yasin, Mohammad
Shah, Naz	Zeichner, Daniel
Shanks, Michael	
Sharma, Mr Virendra	
Sheerman, Mr Barry	
Sheppard, Tommy	
Siddiq, Tulip	
Slaughter, Andy	

Tellers for the Noes:
Peter Grant and
Steven Bonnar

Question accordingly agreed to.

PENSIONS (SPECIAL RULES FOR END OF LIFE) BILL (MONEY) (ASYLUM AND IMMIGRATION) BILL

King's recommendation signified.

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Pensions (Special Rules for End of Life) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under or by virtue of any other Act out of money so provided.—(*Suzanne Webb.*)

International Freedom of Religion or Belief Bill (Money)

King's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the International Freedom of Religion or Belief Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenditure incurred under or by virtue of the Act by a Minister of the Crown.—(*Ms Nusrat Ghani.*)

6.12 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): First, I declare an interest as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief.

I rise to ensure that the moneys and staffing that are necessary for this measure are in place. I heartily welcome the House's decision to appoint a special envoy for freedom of religion or belief and to pass this Bill—and hopefully this money resolution—to ensure that the envoy has the staff and support necessary for this position, so that this is not simply a token gesture, but effective in securing freedom of religion and belief. I want this not just in our nation, but across the world to secure the right for people to hold and practise a Christian belief or another belief, or to hold no belief. Will the Minister confirm that this is undoubtedly money well spent in terms of our international obligations, and that the secretariat will have sufficient staff and moneys to ensure that this gigantic task that we have before us tonight will be fully delivered?

6.13 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Ms Nusrat Ghani): The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) raises some very important points. He will know, having seen the Bill pass through so many stages, that all the resources are in place. The Public Bill Committee is sitting on Wednesday and I will be taking the Bill forward. I am absolutely committed to the role and to providing the support services to enable the role to continue for as long as it can.

The language that we have used establishes this role permanently and in perpetuity. The recommendation comes on the back of the Bishop of Truro's 2019 independent review into the work of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the freedom of religion or belief brief. Furthermore, the implementation is also a manifesto commitment, so we can be absolutely sure that the support will be provided.

Question put and agreed to.

Backbench Business

Hospice Funding

6.14 pm

Sally-Ann Hart (Hastings and Rye) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the postcode lottery of funding for hospices; and calls on integrated care boards to urgently address the funding for hospice-provided palliative care in their areas.

As a member of all-party parliamentary group for hospice and end of life care, I am very happy to be co-leading this debate with my lovely friend, the hon. Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson), who applied for this debate today.

I have so much admiration for hospice and palliative care providers, and empathy for those experiencing dying, death and bereavement. Both my parents died of cancer, and I will always be grateful for the amazing care that they received. Hospice care is important to so many people and we are very lucky to have St Michael's Hospice in beautiful Hastings and Rye, and Demelza House, which offers palliative care for children—largely through outreach work.

When my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sir Sajid Javid) was Health and Social Care Secretary, he announced the legal right to palliative care for all ages. This was in an amendment to the Health and Care Act 2022, which declared, for the first time, a duty for integrated care boards in England to commission palliative and end of life care that meets the needs and demographic of the population it serves.

I could not believe that end of life care was not already a legal right. We should all want to see the best support available for those people who are nearing the end of their lives as well as their families, and excellent palliative care—support for people physically, mentally and spiritually—is vital.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): I agree with everything that the hon. Member has just said. I wish to highlight the importance of palliative care for children and the amazing support that some children's hospices are able to provide not just for the child, but for the entire family. It really is wraparound care, and so important for those parents going through that bereavement process.

Sally-Ann Hart: I thank the hon. Member for his intervention, and I could not agree more; he is absolutely right.

Anna Firth (Southend West) (Con): My hon. Friend asks why this support is not funded. In Southend we have the absolutely brilliant Havens hospice, which includes the children's hospice Little Havens. More than 80% of its funding comes from donations, so it is dependent on sky dives and cycle rides, which is fantastic, but given that we fund, on the NHS, the beginning of life with maternity care, does she not think that we should be funding the end of life?

Sally-Ann Hart: I do, and I will be coming to that a little later.

The future of end of life care is uncertain, as increasing costs and demands are putting huge pressures on hospices and care providers. When it comes to the debate on assisted suicide, it is important that people feel confident that their end of life care will protect them from pain and suffering.

Certainly, we need increased funding. More resources are needed for end of life care services, including hospices, home care and palliative care teams. St Michael's Hospice, for example, costs around £7 million a year to run and it receives about £2 million a year from the integrated care board and the remaining £5 million comes from the community in various forms. Like all hospices, St Michael's is heavily dependent on the generosity of local individuals, companies, groups and trusts. This funding model is uncertain and unsustainable and places hospices under considerable strain.

Munira Wilson (Twickenham) (LD): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way and congratulate her on this important debate. On the point that the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) made about children's hospices, I have the fantastic Shooting Star children's hospice in Hampton in my constituency, which serves a wide catchment area. The hon. Lady mentioned the statutory duty, introduced by the Government, on ICBs to commission and fund palliative care, but the problem is that there is such huge variability. Surrey Heartlands, which is one of the ICBs that Shooting Star serves, spends only a paltry £39 per child, even though the average should be about £151, and other ICBs will not even disclose the amount. Does she agree that we need multi-year contracts with ICBs to serve these hospices?

Sally-Ann Hart: I agree, and will come to that later in my speech.

Demelza receives just 10% of its income from the children's hospice grant, which ends in March 2025, and just 4% of its income from spot purchases, so 86% of its income must come from fundraising. I am concerned that neither the UK Government nor NHS England has set out whether the children's hospice grant, which is worth £25 million, will continue beyond 2024-25. The grant is a vital source of funding for children's hospices. Dependence on the generosity of members of the public to pay for vital healthcare would not be tolerated in other core areas of healthcare such as maternity services, cancer care or A&E. Hospices are the only statutory service that relies on fundraising to keep going, despite end of life care being an essential service that so many of us will need.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): What makes hospices so remarkable is their independence. My fear is that the more one demands that they be funded by the state, that independence will be curtailed and questioned. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) put her finger on the difficulty: the problem is in the difference between the policies of different ICBs. Were they funded centrally by the grants available, as they were during the pandemic, I think it would be much better.

Sally-Ann Hart: I agree. It is important to point out that most hospices do not want 100% funding from the Government because they need the flexibility to do what they want. Fundraising is a really important part

[Sally-Ann Hart]

of the local community effort, bringing people together, but when the dependence on fundraising is so vast we might need to intervene to provide extra funding.

End of life care is an essential service that so many of us will need, but the situation is made worse by inflationary pressures and rising demand. We have an excellent ICB in Sussex—NHS Sussex, led by Adam Doyle—which has highlighted that hospices are recognised as having become increasingly fragile in recent years, due to a lack of resilience in their funding model, which is heavily reliant on gifted income alongside NHS grants.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy (Streatham) (Lab): Royal Trinity Hospice in my constituency supports people across central and south-west London to live and die well. Next year it will cost it £19 million to deliver care for its around 2,500 patients and support for their nearly 1,000 loved ones—a 20% on-year increase. Meanwhile, the NHS funding that it receives will decrease in real terms to 24% of the costs of running its services. Does the hon. Member agree that the Government should commit to maintaining the funding levels that hospices such as Royal Trinity require to ensure that people receive the quality of end of life care and the dignified death that they deserve?

Sally-Ann Hart: This is the point of the debate: to work out what sort of funding models we need. ICBs also need to be given the freedom to assess the priorities in their local areas, but I take that on board.

We have eight hospices across Sussex, and in 2019 seven of them formed the Sussex hospice collaborative—partnership working to ensure that the hospices' combined resources can be used to maximise the impact, reach and cost-effectiveness of their activities. NHS Sussex works closely with that collaborative arrangement, which has supported the ability to have collective conversations. In January, the APPG on hospice and end of life care published a report on Government funding for hospices. The inquiry found that despite the introduction of a legal requirement for integrated care boards to commission palliative and end of life care, ICB commissioning of hospice services is currently not fit for purpose, and the value that hospices provide to individuals in the wider health system is at risk.

Hospice funding has historically not risen in line with inflation, which has been brought starkly to light during the periods of high inflation in recent years. Costs to keep palliative services running have increased rapidly over the past few years, but that is not reflected in the Government funding that hospices receive to deliver the services, which has increased by only 1% each year on average.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): The hon. Member is being generous, and making an outstanding speech. I congratulate her on bringing this matter to the House. St Mary's hospice, St John's hospice and Eden Valley hospice, which serve the communities of Westmorland, struggle like others to find the funding that they need to keep going. One issue is increased pay settlements in the NHS, which are good, but to compete, and to get and retain staff, they need to raise their pay to keep pace. Does she agree that one model may well be

that, rather than devolving this to ICBs, which are not elected and not directly accountable to anybody, the Government fund through the national health service pay rises at NHS pay rates directly to all our hospices, so they at least do not have to worry about that?

Sally-Ann Hart: The hon. Gentleman raises a valuable point, which I am sure the Minister will take onboard.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her excellent speech, and for securing this important debate. She comes to the crux of the matter. I am really interested to hear from the Minister, because our Mountbatten Isle of Wight hospice in Newport is much loved, and one of the core institutions on the Island. Its inflation costs in the last two years have been way above what it has been getting from the ICB.

Our ICB is in special measures. We had two meetings with the ICB last week, and it was very unclear about some of its long-term plans and how it is using its funding. Does she agree that we need to ensure that our ICBs are properly managed and run? I am delighted that she has a great ICB. For us, it is a little more complicated. We need to ensure that funding goes through to hospices, so that when there is a state element of funding—one can debate the important nature of fundraising—the NHS money gets through. Right now, it does not seem to be doing so.

Sally-Ann Hart: It is unfortunate that your ICB is not very good at all—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. It is the hon. Gentleman's ICB, not mine.

Sally-Ann Hart: Yes—my hon. Friend's ICB is not very good. Obviously, leadership structure and a clear list of priorities is essential to deliver what the public need.

The significant funding challenges are particularly concerning in the context of increasing need. Sue Ryder, a palliative and bereavement support charity, projects that the demand for specialist palliative care services in England may rise by 55% over the current decade. That rise in demand is due to several factors, including increased mortality rates and a growing desire by patients to die at home rather than in hospital. We clearly need a commitment from Government to fund a much higher percentage of total palliative care costs than at present to ensure the sustainability of the hospice sector and the vital services that hospices provide in the medium term. ICBs cannot commission specialist services without the funding to do so.

The APPG's report made a number of recommendations to Government, the NHS and local authorities. On funding, the APPG recommended that the Government produce a national plan to ensure the right funding flows to hospices, and conduct or commission a piece of work to understand the costs of providing different models of palliative and end of life care. It also called for Government funding to address immediate pressures of paying increased staffing costs for hospices, and said that ICBs must ensure uplifts to hospice contracts that are equitable with uplifts received by NHS-run services.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): We have a Marie Curie hospice in Belfast that gives excellent care to those who have cancer. Does the hon. Lady agree that, while it is important to have the financial part in place—without it, hospices cannot go on—the faith aspect is important as well? Many people need hospice care on their last journey, ever mindful that their last journey is not in this world; the next world is the one that matters. When it comes to ensuring that moneys are available, does she agree that faith is important as well, and that the faith care that the Marie Curie hospice gives in Belfast is an example of what we all need? Whatever our faith may be—Christianity or another religion—it is important to have something that looks after the hereafter.

Sally-Ann Hart: Faith is important for so many people. Even for those without a faith, there is a spiritual aspect that needs to be looked after.

My hon. Friend the Member for Darlington will cover the report in more detail. Hospices need to be able to plan and invest in their services and develop and train specialist staff, so they need to know in advance how much funding they are getting. Hospices already face issues of training and recruitment, and whether they will be able even to provide an adequate service because of funding restraints should not be another worry. My goddaughter is a young doctor who wants to specialise in palliative care, which is remarkable for a young person. We need more young people—more medics, nurses, occupational therapists and so on—in this growing area. A three-year funding cycle at least is required, as it would allow hospices and palliative care providers to plan accordingly.

I conclude my remarks with a worrying Hospice UK statistic: it estimates that the end of life care sector is on track for a £77 million collective deficit for the financial year 2023-24. That would present the worst end of year figures for the sector in around 20 years of tracking. Those losses are not sustainable, and our right to end of life care is at risk unless immediate action is taken. Our hospices, palliative care and end of life services need to be properly funded. Will the Minister outline what steps she is taking to ensure that that happens?

6.30 pm

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): I thank the hon. Members for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) and for Darlington (Peter Gibson) for securing this important debate.

Hospices do incredible work. In communities across the country, they hundreds of thousands of people every year with essential palliative and end of life care. The services that hospices deliver are absolutely crucial to improving the quality of life for people in their final weeks and days, helping to provide a dignified, comfortable and compassionate end of life. That support is vital not just to people at the end of their lives, but to their family and friends. End of life care impacts not just the patient but all their loved ones, and the specialist support that hospices provide patients in their final stages of life, and their families who are watching them pass away without suffering or pain, is immeasurable. It is why hospices are so important.

In my Enfield, Southgate constituency, we are lucky to have a facility of the incredible North London Hospice, which has been caring for people since 1984. Its health

and wellbeing centre in Barrowell Green helps to enable the best of life at the end of life for people across the boroughs of Enfield, Haringey and Barnet, providing tailored care, including physical, emotional, spiritual, wellbeing and bereavement support for patients, friends, carers and loved ones. I must also mention those in the wonderful North London Hospice photography club, who support each other and take amazing pictures, which they sell to raise funds for the hospice.

I remember hearing from a constituent of mine, Joy Watkins, who was receiving care and support at the hospice. Joy has sadly now passed away, but her words about the importance of the hospice and the care that she received were incredibly moving. Joy spoke about going to something called a death café—an informal space for people to talk about end of life, share their concerns and listen of others express their thoughts, hopes and experiences of death. She said that going to the death café enabled her to make choices about the end of her life. She could make choices about who to spend time with and about the finances that she would make use of at the end of her life. It transformed the way in which she viewed and handled the end of her life.

The way in which we talk about and approach dying matters, and Joy's words have really stuck with me. Indeed, they were one of the reasons I introduced my private Member's Bill—the Terminal Illness (Provision of Palliative Care and Support for Carers) Bill—back in 2018. Next month, Hospice UK will be promoting its campaign for Dying Matters Awareness Week, and I look forward to supporting its efforts on that important initiative. Honest and timely conversations about death and dying are essential to good end of life care, but barriers including lack of confidence, taboos around discussing death, and confusion about who should be having these conversations all too often mean that patients, carers and families may not understand what is happening or get all the information and support that they need. That is where hospices and their brilliant staff come in. More recently, a close family member of mine received support from North London Hospice, and although Gabby sadly passed away, I am so grateful for the hospice's specialist care.

Yesterday I and about a dozen hon. Members ran the London marathon. I was proud to do so to raise money for North London Hospice. When pounding the streets of London in such a wonderful festival of community yesterday, I was struck by how many runners were, like me, raising money for their local hospices. That demonstrates the sad reality of inadequate central funding for hospices. I have been trying to bang the drum for North London Hospice since I was first elected, and although it took me a few years to muster the courage to put on the running vest and put my knees on the line, as each year passes it feels as if the challenges facing hospices grow greater and more acute.

As we know, hospices are an integral part of our health and social care system. They work in partnership with local health and care systems, helping to reduce the pressure on our NHS by caring for patients who would otherwise be directly supported by NHS services. As a community, we are reliant on hospices—they are important parts of the communities that they serve—but they are also reliant on us for support, through fundraising and donations, because they are largely charitably funded. On average, around two thirds of adult hospice income

[*Bambos Charalambous*]

is raised through fundraising such as charity shops and marathons, and the figure is higher for children's hospices, which must raise around four fifths of their income.

Munira Wilson: On children's hospices, Shooting Star in my constituency, which I have already mentioned, is very grateful that the Minister has committed to the children's hospice grant for 2024-25, which comes centrally from NHS England. The problem is that that is a year-to-year commitment, which does not help hospices such as Shooting Star to plan for the long term. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a ringfence should be placed around that funding and that it should be pegged to inflation year on year so that children's hospices can plan properly?

Bambos Charalambous: The hon. Member makes an excellent point. Long-term funding is absolutely essential if hospices, particularly children's hospices, are to be able to plan ahead.

North London Hospice is reliant on donations from the community each year to fill its £10 million funding gap, as only a small proportion of its costs are funded by the NHS. Of course, the cost of living crisis continues to eat away at people's finances, which directly impacts on our communities' ability to provide the vital charitable support that hospices rely on. The reality of the current state of funding is that hospices are struggling to keep up with inflation and rising costs, which is leading to services being cut. However, demand for palliative care continues to grow—for North London Hospice, it has grown at a rate of 5% year on year. The costs of running hospice services, including energy bills and the cost of paying staff a fair wage, also continue to rise rapidly.

Hospices recruit from a small pool of staff in the NHS and care sector, but they are not provided with the same Government funding to meet NHS pay levels, meaning that many hospice staff are doing the same job as their NHS colleagues but being paid less for it. As a result, Hospice UK's figures suggest an 11% growth in payroll costs this year, which means around £130 million of additional spending that is not met by increased statutory funding. As I have mentioned, those costs are not met with additional uplifts from NHS funding or contracts, and despite a legal requirement for ICBs to commission palliative care services that meet the needs of the local population, the funding that hospices receive from ICBs varies significantly across the country and means that charitable donations make up much of their income.

Gen Kitchen (Wellingborough) (Lab): As a former hospice fundraiser—it is what I did before I came here—I am grateful to the hon. Members for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) and for Darlington (Peter Gibson) for securing the debate. Part of the problem that I faced at first hand was that when I was going out to private companies, trusts and foundations in order to raise funds to increase pay with inflation, that was often the hardest thing to fundraise for. The ICB was never very forthcoming, particularly when we would enter into conversations with it in the year prior to the year being funded.

Bambos Charalambous: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Fundraising is hard enough; inflationary costs make it much harder for fundraisers to do their

excellent job of bringing an enormous amount of money together to make sure that all our hospices are run adequately.

Many hospices, like North London Hospice, will continue to operate a deficit budget for 2024-25, with the shortfall being met from reserves. Indeed, Hospice UK estimates that the sector is on track for a £77 million collective deficit for financial year 2023-24, the worst end of year figures in around 20 years of tracking. This funding model is simply unsustainable, and will undoubtedly lead to hospices cutting back essential services for patients. The issue is becoming increasingly urgent. We need to look at how hospices are funded in this country. They provide essential support; they should not be a voluntary service that is topped up by whatever fundraising is available. An integral part of our healthcare system is reliant on charitable donations. No other services are funded in that way; it is unthinkable that it would be left up to charities to plug shortfalls in maternity services, for example, so why is end of life care reliant on the kindness of strangers? It is really worrying. We need a far more secure, long-term model of funding that protects our hospices and partners them with the wider health and care system. If we do not properly support our hospices, we are in danger of losing them.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I appreciate that funding models are different across the UK, but the hon. Gentleman has raised a point that I have a bit of concern about. There are two hospices in my constituency, one of which, St Margaret of Scotland, is the largest and oldest in Scotland. The voluntary capacity on the board of management has allowed it to develop and increase its palliative care provision. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we should maybe look at parity of esteem between the voluntary hospice sector and our different NHS structures, in order to have equity of approach and investment?

Bambos Charalambous: The hon. Member makes an excellent point. We need to look at what models work best for each region. I do not know about the model he talked about, but we need to look at the long-term funding of hospices, and what works best for each hospice and region.

I am pleased that today's debate has shown the strength of feeling on this issue, and that Members have highlighted the need for greater support and funding for hospices in the UK. That point was made clearly in the excellent speech by the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye, as well as in interventions. I look forward to hearing from the Minister on the Government's response to the challenges that have been outlined. Finally, I once again thank everyone at North London Hospice for all their amazing work in my community and beyond, and I also thank Hospice UK for all its advocacy on these issues and its excellent briefings ahead of today's debate.

6.42 pm

Peter Gibson (Darlington) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous); it is great to see him in the Chamber after his performance yesterday in the London marathon. I congratulate him on completing it.

It is a pleasure to be called to speak in this long-awaited debate, and I thank and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) for

moving the motion. I thank hospices around the country that have engaged with me in my preparation for today's debate, and I thank the Hospice UK team—Toby, Katie and Olivia in particular—for their ongoing support for me and the all-party parliamentary group on hospice and end of life care, which I co-chair along with Baroness Finlay of Llandaff.

I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests: I am a trustee of North Yorkshire Hospice Care, which operates both Herriot Hospice Homecare and Saint Michael's hospice in Harrogate. I have served as a trustee of that hospice for over a decade, and have seen the difficulties that piecemeal commissioning causes for our precious hospices. To my mind, this debate is not simply about asking the Government for more money—we know that there are serious public financial challenges post pandemic—but an opportunity to discuss on the Floor of the House solutions to the challenges that our hospices face. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for allowing us to have this debate. The number of Members who wish to speak in support of their local hospices today is testament to how much each and every one of our communities values its local hospices.

This is a matter of life and death. The hospice movement is there to deliver good deaths; that might seem a strange thing to say, but palliative care delivered in the right environment—be that a hospice, a children's hospice, or a person's home through a hospice at home service—is a truly wonderful thing. Those precious final few weeks of a person's life are imprinted into our memories, and it is right that those who are dying, and those who are loving, supporting and caring for them, do so in an environment where there is proper funding and commissioning, and where we can plan and prepare to provide continuing care.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution, as well as the Members who made the previous contributions, both of which focused to some extent on palliative and end of life care. Two hospices serve my constituency, St Andrew's in Grimsby and Lindsey Lodge in Scunthorpe; both provide an excellent end of life environment. Does my hon. Friend agree that if we are to defuse the movement towards encouraging assisted dying, we need to ensure that our hospices provide a service as an alternative?

Peter Gibson: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. I have my personal views about assisted dying, and I am sure that in the fullness of time, this House will debate that issue. This debate is not about assisted dying: it is about our hospices, and how we fund and support them. With the greatest of respect to my hon. Friend, conflating the two issues is not helpful.

Even post death, our wonderful hospice movement provides much-needed bereavement care to those who have suffered the loss of a loved one. The Health and Social Care Act 2021 made provision for the very first time for the commissioning of palliative care. That is a landmark. Integrated care boards around the country now have responsibility for commissioning palliative care to meet the needs of the community that they serve, which is a good thing. It ensures that local commissioners, working together with local providers and local representatives, can deliver the palliative care needs of their respective communities.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): This is a timely debate. Tomorrow morning, the Health and Social Care Committee will have a topical session on hospice care. My hon. Friend mentioned "ICBs", plural. I have Naomi House and Jacksplace hospice in my constituency. Its trouble is that on top of all the rising costs and inflationary pressures that it faces, it is negotiating with six ICBs for the same amount of grant. When my hon. Friend comes to summarise the recommendations of his excellent all-party group, will he recognise that challenge that many hospices face across multiple commissioning bodies?

Peter Gibson: I am very grateful to the Chairman of the Select Committee for his intervention, and for his continuing engagement with me on this important topic. He raises a really important issue. As I will come on to say, this is not simply about each ICB meeting its own challenges. We need national and Government attention to resolve the issue.

There is a very mixed patchwork picture across the country. During covid, the Government stepped up to the plate, acted decisively and provided much-needed financial support to the hospice movement. That support not only prevented many hospices from failing and collapsing, but ensured that much-needed palliative care could continue to be delivered around the country. The picture today, however, is one of immense challenges for our hospices. Many have failed to receive increased support under their contracts with ICBs to meet the rising costs of energy and staffing. At the same time, our hospitals face increased pressure for beds. It is a fact that one night in a hospice costs less than a night in a bed in hospital, and while there are reasons why a person may need to remain in hospital, better palliative care can be delivered in the more appropriate surroundings of a hospice.

Just last week, I met the chief executive of Sue Ryder, Heidi Travis, who also serves as a commissioner for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough ICB. It was interesting to learn that work is being undertaken to explore ways in which hospices can do more with the same funding, or in some cases less. However, if we are to explore creative new ways of delivering hospice care, either through hospice-at-home models or virtual wards, full and frank conversations need to be had between hospices and their integrated care boards to truly explore the art of the possible.

In the Tees Valley, I have been pleased to be able to bring together, on multiple occasions, St Teresa's in Darlington, Alice House in Hartlepool, Butterwick hospice in Stockton, and Teesside hospice in Middlesbrough. They work collectively with all eight Members of Parliament covering the Tees Valley, so that there is a collective voice for the region, and so that we can be a beacon of excellence in the provision of palliative care in the north-east. The uplift in funding for those four hospices under the North East and North Cumbria integrated care board is simply not enough, but the fact that they are working together and meeting the ICB is a sign of improving relations, and there is hope for the future.

I wish to touch on the work of our children's hospices, which a number of Members have mentioned. They are an integral part of palliative care across the country, and I am grateful for the engagement I have had in recent weeks and months with Together for Short Lives. The NHS children's hospice grant of £25 million from

[Peter Gibson]

the Government is gratefully received by the sector. However, that funding should be guaranteed for a minimum of three years to enable those hospices to plan properly and commission services, and the amount should be uprated in line with inflation each year. Furthermore, the money must be ringfenced, so that when it is passed on through regional ICBs, the entirety of the money flows to the frontline—to those children's hospices. I ask the Minister to address that point in her summing up.

In preparing for today's debate, I asked for information and evidence from Hospice UK about hospices in each of the four nations of our country. Saint Michael's, a hospice of which I am a trustee, is the local hospice care charity supporting people affected by terminal illness and bereavement across Harrogate. Each year, the vital care it provides costs almost £6 million to deliver. Of that, just 17% is funded by the Government; that equates to a little over £1 million of its total running costs. That leaves over £5 million to be raised through the generosity of its supporters and community. The rise in inflation has put additional strain on its finances, but has been met with a funding increase of just 1.2% from the ICB.

Shalom House in Pembrokeshire needs to raise around £288,000 to keep running, which is equal to £24,000 per month. It receives only £5,000 per month from its health board, and this amount has been halved in the last five years from £10,000. It has not received an uplift for at least the last four years. It anticipates that funding ending in September 2024, when the new commissioning model in Wales comes into effect. Without a cash injection, it is in danger of closing within the next 12 months, as its reserves are low. While Shalom House is small, the impact on the community, like that of all hospices, is huge.

In Scotland, Ardgowan in Inverclyde is, despite a very generous community, facing a deficit of £100,000. It expects this to rise to £172,000 for the next financial year. In the last 18 months, it has seen utility costs rise by 67% and insurance costs by 10%. It needs increased support.

In Northern Ireland, 65% of the funding for Foyle hospice in Londonderry comes purely from fundraising. It is unable to plan ahead or reconfigure services because of the uncertainty about statutory funding, including the outcome of the recent day hospice review. It has received some non-recurrent funding through the cancer charities relief fund, but may be unable to provide those highly valuable services when that funding runs out in March 2025.

We are a compassionate and wealthy country. We have a national health service that, despite some of its challenges, does incredible things, but so too do our hospices—be they based in buildings or in patients' homes. Our hospices really must be seen as an integral part of our national health service.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: I want to push the hon. Gentleman on the point I made to the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate, because I have heard this notion of symbiosis with the NHS, but they are two very distinct approaches to care. From my perspective, the palliative care sector is at its best when it is run as a voluntary local body. Would he expand a wee bit more on what he means by that kind of convergence with the NHS? There is a fear among those in the voluntary hospice

sector that what they are doing to push palliative care forward could be held back by more physical integration in the NHS.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. Before the hon. Member continues, I just remind everybody that there is quite a bit of interest in this debate. If we could ensure self-discipline in the length of speeches, that would be very helpful.

Peter Gibson: I am very grateful for the intervention, and the hon. Gentleman raises some really important points, which I am not sure I have time to go into in detail. If the Government are going to give the national health service enough money to increase the wages of everybody in the national health service and the integrated care boards are commissioning services from hospices around the country, the very least those hospices should expect is an equal minimum uplift so that they can maintain parity of wages. Our hospices are not seeking to be nationalised. They cherish their independence passionately, and it is because of their independence that they are so integrated into our community, but if we are going to rely on them to provide services, the least we can do as a society is to meet the costs of the services we are expecting them to provide.

Mr Deputy Speaker, mindful of your words, I will bring my remarks to a close in a moment. Philanthropy and charitable giving have been the foundations on which our wonderful hospice movement has been established. To my mind, hospices' charitable status has enabled them to be flexible and to develop an holistic pattern of palliative care outside the NHS. However, in the 21st century it cannot be acceptable that funding is reliant on pensioners performing skydives and communities baking cakes to fund palliative care.

Much work has been done, and much work must be done by our ICBs and the Government to map the demands and needs for palliative care across the country. We must end this postcode-based patchwork of provision. It really is time that the Government established a rapid taskforce to collaborate with the entire hospice movement and our integrated care boards to ensure that we as a nation have the best provision in palliative care, and that everybody can have a good and peaceful death.

6.58 pm

Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab): I thank the hon. Members for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) and for Darlington (Peter Gibson), as well as the APPG, for securing this hugely important debate on the Floor of the House.

In Coventry, we are extremely lucky to have Myton hospice. Like other hospices across the country, Myton is a critical part of the healthcare system and plays a vital role in providing care for people from the point at which their illness is diagnosed as terminal to the end of their life, while also supporting the needs of their families. The services that Myton provides are a crucial part of palliative and end of life care in Coventry. The work it does and the services it provides not only ease pressure on the wider health and care system in our city, but ensure that patients receive exactly the care they need when and where they need it. Without Myton, patients might find themselves unnecessarily relying on A&E or other hospital departments, which would massively increase the burden on, and costs for, the NHS.

I know at first hand how important Myton is to our city and local communities, because my husband, Ian, received end of life care there. Diagnosed with leukaemia in 2014, he had a stem cell transplant and was fighting his way back to reasonably good health when, three years later, he became ill with an aggressive secondary cancer and was diagnosed as terminally ill in 2018. He wanted to die at home, but we were advised that domiciliary end of life care was “clunky”. Those are not my words, but the words of the NHS care team who were advising and talking to us. That meant that we could not be sure of a timely home visit if my husband needed more pain relief—and he was on a lot of pain relief. He was on a pain driver and I could give him liquid morphine, but that shot, which only a district nurse could give him, might not have been there immediately and he might have had to wait an hour or two hours for the nurse to come. He decided to go into Myton hospice, which is only a stone’s throw away from where we lived, so it was very local to us. He went into Myton hospice, and I stayed with him until he passed peacefully away just one week later. It was a tranquil, respectful place, where all his needs were met, and ours. We were grateful for that real quality time together.

Just before Christmas, I went to an event at Myton hospice where I met staff, the loved ones of those who had received palliative and end of life care there, and the people who fundraise to help ensure that Myton can continue to provide its vital services. It takes just moments when speaking with people at such an event not only to understand the importance of the hospice sector, but also to recognise the huge funding challenges it faces. We know that the hospice sector’s reliance on fundraising for much of its income brings with it significant risks, and those risks have been compounded in recent years, first by the pandemic and now by the cost of living crisis. As a result, the hospice sector is facing a perfect storm, with the cost of delivering services increasing, while charitable donations are volatile and NHS funding is falling in real terms.

Take Myton Hospices as an example: just 20% percent of its funding comes from the NHS, and in real terms that is decreasing every year. That comes at a time when its costs are consistently increasing year on year. For the financial year 2024-25, its running costs will be £14.3 million, and it will need to raise £11 million of that in voluntary income. That is compared with running costs of £13.25 million and raised voluntary income of £10.5 million last year. Those funding challenges inevitably increase pressure on and access to services. I know that more people need a hospice bed than ever before, and demand for beds at Myton has increased by 25% over the last year. As a result, over 70% of people accepted for a bed at Myton will not be able to access one straightaway and will have to join a waiting list. Sadly, three out of four people waiting for a Myton bed will die before they can access one.

Although I understand the funding pressures that Coventry and Warwickshire integrated care board is operating under, that certainly raises questions about whether it is meeting the requirement to commission palliative and end of life care to meet the population’s needs. Indeed, I know that with funding for just four more nurses, Myton could open eight more beds and eliminate its waiting list completely, ensuring that everyone in Coventry and Warwickshire gets the palliative and

end of life care that they need and deserve. Those funding challenges are certainly not unique to Myton, and most—if not all—hospices are facing similar problems. This needs to change. If we are to ensure that demand for hospice care is met, both in in-patient units and in the community, and eliminate the inequality and postcode lottery of services, we need hospice funding to be sufficient, resilient and sustainable.

I asked those at Myton hospice what steps they believe need to be taken to ensure we have a thriving hospice sector, with long-term sustainability at its heart. They told me they believe there needs to be a tariff-based approach to funding that reflects the core services provided, so that funding is based on what each hospice provides against clear criteria. They also felt that essential hospice services, including doctors and nurses, should be funded by the NHS. We must ensure that all patients with a terminal illness receive the right care to meet their needs, that that care is delivered with dignity, respect and compassion, and that the end of their life is valued as much as the beginning. To achieve this, hospices must be funded fairly and sustainably.

7.6 pm

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher) and her powerful speech. I also thank my hon. Friends the Members for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) and for Darlington (Peter Gibson) for securing such an important debate, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister, who is an excellent Minister. I enjoyed working closely with her at the Department, and I know she will listen carefully and act where she can on the issues raised during the debate.

Hospices play a vital role in local communities and within the wider health and care system, providing care to those at the end of their lives, and support and comfort to their loved ones. St Helena hospice in my constituency is no different, and since its opening on 20 May 1985 it has supported countless families in and around Colchester and north Essex during their most difficult times. However, over the last two years it has been more challenging for it to carry out its vital work. St Helena has averaged a deficit of £1 million per year over the past two years due to rising demand, increasing costs, and real-terms cuts to its NHS funding. Similar to cases raised by other colleagues, only 27% of St Helena hospice’s income comes from our NHS, which means that 73% of the income needed to run it is raised through the local community. As is unfortunately common across the country, that income stream has faced its own difficulties due to the increased cost of living.

East Anglia’s Children’s Hospices also plays a hugely important role in caring for families and children in my local area. During 2022-2023 it cared for 532 life-threatened babies, children and young people, and delivered more than 72,000 hours of care and wellbeing support for families. However, every year EACH faces the ongoing challenge of generating 85% of its income from non-statutory sources. It receives only 15% of its income—about £2.7 million—from the NHS and local authorities, mainly on a year-by-year basis via grants and zero-based contracts. Having seen at first hand the impact that hospices have on local communities, and the fondness with which St Helena and EACH are thought of in Colchester and more widely in our region, I can see that it is essential

[Will Quince]

that hospices all over our country are not allowed to fail. That is not only because outcomes for patients will be arguably worse, but because, as a recent Sue Ryder report shows, adequate funding for hospices is more cost-effective than replacing services with the NHS.

As a former Health Minister I want to urge some caution in calling for national solutions for commissioning. Of course we should look at addressing postcode lotteries wherever they exist, but in doing so we must remember that every area is different. The needs of our populations are different, and hospice provision in and of itself is different in every one of our constituencies. ICBs were set up to make local, holistic, system-wide decisions based on their populations' needs and priorities, always putting at their heart the needs and outcomes of patients, but also looking at system costs, so that there is not that silo mentality in working, and ultimately at what is in the best interests—in terms of outcomes and value for money—for our NHS and the taxpayer. Having said that, I think there needs to be more consistent commissioning. ICBs should commission against service specification.

To conclude, I will make a more general observation: we are not very good at talking about death. Notwithstanding what I said about ICBs, there is a national role here. I would like to see the Government support a population approach to end of life care, involving more people in their care planning, promoting choice and dignity, and supporting community care alongside that. Many people would rather spend their last days at home around their loved ones, their pets and their families, if possible, than die in hospital. Supporting hospices and community services is a way of helping to keep people at home if that is their preference, with not just better outcomes for patients but ultimately better value for our NHS and the taxpayer. I close by thanking all those at St Helena Hospice and EACH for the amazing work they do.

7.11 pm

Mrs Paulette Hamilton (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): I thank the hon. Members for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) and for Darlington (Peter Gibson) for securing an excellent and important debate. We think of hospices as places where people go to die, but they are not; they are places where people go to live comfortably, supported and cared for while they are ill, until that moment of death and—for many of the families—beyond. I might not be the only MP in the Chamber for whom this debate has made me remember my mortality, but I think we would all agree that when we come to that time, we want to be looked after by kind, supportive staff who can give us the care and attention we need. Those staff should be able to look after patients and their families without worrying about how they will feed their own children. Rooms should be warm, and directors of hospices should be thinking about how they can support as many people as possible, not when they will have to switch off the heating or turn someone away.

Hospices across the UK provide care and support to 300,000 people every year. They are absolutely vital to our health and social care system, but unfortunately, they are facing serious financial challenges. It has now become a postcode lottery for many of our constituents.

Sarah Owen (Luton North) (Lab): I am listening to my hon. Friend's impassioned speech, and the experience that she brings to this House is valuable. The brilliant Keech Hospice serves so many in Luton North. It does amazing work, not just on end of life care, but on vital bereavement support for everyone, including children. In the past year alone, Keech's energy costs have increased by a quarter of a million pounds. That, combined with the cost of living crisis, puts financial pressures on fundraising, which makes up two thirds of its total funding. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need sustainable funding models for hospice care? Failure to provide that puts much-needed services at risk.

Mrs Hamilton: I absolutely agree with what my hon. Friend says. We absolutely need those models. As I go through my speech, I will be agreeing with what she has just said.

John Taylor Hospice in my constituency, which is run by Birmingham Hospice, does unbelievably important work to support my constituents and their families in Erdington, Kingstanding and Castle Vale. The staff work day and night to make sure people are cared for while they are ill, and I could not be prouder to support them in this Chamber today. I must add that I have worked there in the past. Birmingham Hospice cares for almost 1,000 local people with a life-limiting illness every day. Last year, it cost more than £16 million to run its services, some 40% of which needs to be recovered through fundraising income. Over the past few years, the hospice has seen a significant increase in costs, including the price of energy, food and vital medicines, and a shortfall in funding for staff pay awards. At the same time, fundraising has declined across the hospice sector with the cost of living crisis hitting poorer areas like mine the hardest.

Birmingham Hospice is currently losing £200,000 a month. With inflationary costs and falling voluntary income, the only option to keep the hospice going is to reduce the services it provides. A reduced service will increase inequality across our city of Birmingham and the country. Sadly, more people will die in hospital or A&E as a result, when they could have had outstanding care at the hospice or at home with the support of the community team.

The hospice is dedicated to ensuring that outstanding care at the end of life is available to all, but it has recently been in the difficult position of having to make essential staff redundant to maintain financial security. That is not just happening in Birmingham; nationally, Hospice UK estimates that 100,000 people in the UK who could benefit from palliative care die without receiving it each year. Hospices play a huge role in alleviating pressure on our NHS, and they do not have the ability to reset their budgets on 1 April each year, as the NHS does. Instead, their deficits continue and the valuable care that they provide to local communities such as mine is at risk of being lost. I have worked in the health service all my adult life. When we speak about hospices, we rarely mention the vital role that they play in providing respite care and support to the family of someone who is ill.

Ms Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for her wonderful contribution to the debate. Many people want to stay at home—I have stayed with four people right through to

their deaths at home—but hospices give a different care from hospitals. If you go into hospital, you might not get into the hospice. We have 10 beds in the most beautiful hospice, which is funded 71% from fundraising. If they are not in a hospice, and they do not have care at home—not everybody can do it at home; they might not have the family to provide the care they need—they can end up in a hospital for hours. Does my hon. Friend find that in her area? They can get triaged in an ambulance outside the hospital, and they do not get the palliative care and support, and their families do not get support—it is a completely different service. Do you agree that we should be looking for more hospice care, not less, but we should not be changing it to a hospital ward? It is a different atmosphere in a hospice. Do you find that is the case? That is not decrying hospitals, but hospital is not somewhere to die.

Mrs Hamilton: I absolutely agree with your sentiments and statement. As was said earlier, we need to move away from looking at individuals to look at population health and how we will support the local community. I will move on swiftly so that I can finish.

My constituency is the fifth poorest in the UK, and our communities are in some of the UK's so-called left behind neighbourhoods. For places like mine, respite care is so important to ensure that carers get the break and support they need to keep them doing the incredible work that they do.

I am a nurse, and it breaks my heart that the NHS is in the worst state it has ever been in. Throughout the 14 years of this Tory Government, I have seen doctors striking, nurses striking, technicians striking, people queuing around the block for a GP appointment, people pulling out their own teeth, the highest waiting times in history, and complete disdain for the service that quite literally serves us from birth to death. We must have a national care service and we must properly invest in our NHS. It is no longer acceptable for hospices to rely on charitable donations to try to survive. Now more than ever, our hospices and our NHS need a Labour Government.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I gently remind the House that when people use the word “you”, they are referring to me, so please try to resist that.

7.21 pm

Damien Moore (Southport) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mrs Hamilton), and I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) and for Darlington (Peter Gibson) on securing the debate. I wish to highlight foremost the significant challenges and opportunities before us in the care sector across the United Kingdom. In Southport, Queenscourt Hospice stands as a pillar of community strength, with its Star Trek night walks, which have raised nearly £100,000, annual Christmas fairs and summer balls—and who could forget the annual Santa sprint that unites our community in support of its services? Queenscourt initiatives are vital.

It was a privilege to visit Queenscourt Hospice in 2022 and meet the dedicated nursing, operations and fundraising teams. I found their passion and commitment to serving Southport and the surrounding area truly

inspiring, and I am committed to supporting their invaluable work. It is clear that the hard work of Debbie Pierce-Lawson and her team is paying off in Southport, and it is testament to the hospital's embedded role in our community.

Similarly, my visit a few years ago to Claire House Children's Hospice highlighted the immense dedication and heartfelt contribution made by staff and volunteers. Their commitment to providing care for every child is commendable. Their work brings indispensable comfort to affected children and their families during unimaginably difficult times, yet despite those immense and inspiring local efforts the recent Hospice UK briefing projects a £77 million deficit across the hospice sector for 2023-24.

Queenscourt Hospice, which needs nearly £3 million to operate each year, receives only 20% of that and has to raise the remaining amount through exceptionally hard fundraising work. That figure is not merely a statistic but a stark indication of the financial hurdles facing our hospice care system.

Hospices are cornerstones of our healthcare system, offering invaluable support to over 300,000 individuals annually. That support extends beyond patient care to providing relief and assistance to families during the most challenging times. Hospices' remarkable efforts in fundraising underscore the community's recognition of their vital role. However, the sector's reliance on charitable income highlights the need for a more structured approach to funding.

It is heartening to see the Government's commitment to palliative care, notably through the Health and Care Act 2022, which introduced a legal duty for integrated care boards to commission palliative care services. That is a positive step forward, ensuring that the needs of the local population are met. Nevertheless, despite those strides, the variability in funding across the country and escalating operational costs represent ongoing challenges.

I am proud of our Government's record in supporting hospices in the broader NHS. However, I recognise that as the demand for palliative care increases, we must continue to evolve and support the system so that it remains sustainable for the future. The anticipated growth in palliative care needs, with an estimated 130,000 additional deaths annually by 2040, underscores the urgency for developing a sustainable funding model. Such a model would empower hospices to continue their work in partnership with the NHS, providing compassionate care and support.

As I participate in the debate, I firmly believe in the Government's ability to address those challenges. I hope to hear that commitment from the Minister when she winds up the debate. By fostering a collaborative approach with the hospice sector, we can ensure that hospices in Southport and across the United Kingdom are not just sustained but supported to continue to provide critical services to those who need them.

7.25 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I welcome the debate, because it allows us to pay tribute to the wonderful work that hospices do in all our constituencies across the country, while raising the peril that some of them are in, the insecurity they are facing and the fragile nature of their funding. I am mindful of your caveat on time, Mr Deputy Speaker, so I will make just make two points, if I may.

[*Andy Slaughter*]

The first point is about adult services for my constituents. For many years, those services have been provided by the Pembridge palliative care unit, which is an adult community-based specialist palliative care unit just over the border in North Kensington. It is a fantastic place—I have visited friends who have been dying there—and I am aware of its wide range of services. Those are—or at least were—not just in-patient care but telephone advice, community care nursing and therapy teams.

As I said, there was a wonderful in-patient unit; unfortunately there is not at the moment. The ICB is consulting on various options, some of which would see that unit reopen. It closed allegedly not because of funding but because the consultant left and it was not possible to recruit a consultant to fill the post. I would have some sympathy with that were it not for the fact that it closed in 2018 and we are still waiting for the NHS to provide a consultant so that we can reopen the service, which is exactly what all my constituents want.

I note that in the latest consultation, in which there are options to reopen, the NHS said:

“We have heard there is still a strong desire for the Pembridge in-patient unit to be reopened and that options from the public for how we could reopen the unit could be more widely considered than they have been to date.”

That is putting it somewhat mildly. It is an indication of the parlous state of some services around the country, despite the hugely high-quality service they provide.

The other issue is about children's hospice services. Those for my constituency—in fact, for the whole north-west London ICB, which covers a population of 2 million people—comes from Shooting Star Children's Hospices, which the hon. Member for Twickenham (Munira Wilson) mentioned because it is based in her constituency. It wrote to me recently and said that it supports

“700 families living across Surrey, south-west London and north-west London. Our specialist care and support are completely free of charge to families and available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. It includes specialist nursing in the community, symptom management and pain relief, overnight respite stays, end-of-life care, specialist bereavement care and a comprehensive range of therapies, groups, and clinics for the whole family.”

The majority of its funding—we have heard this from hon. Members on both sides of the House this evening—comes from fundraising; approximately a third is funded from statutory channels. Each £1 received from statutory channels necessitates the raising of an additional £2 to sustain its service. I cannot imagine that happening in many other areas. There are other examples of charitable funding, such as for air ambulances, but I am pleased that that is not the norm in the health service. The plea that Shooting Star Children's Hospices makes is for

“properly funded paediatric palliative care across the UK”,

to

“create a level play field in terms of funding”.

What could possibly be unreasonable about that request or—I would rather say—demand?

On the back of that request, I attended—I think a number of hon. Members in the Chamber did—the recent meeting held here, which was organised by Together for Short Lives. I was incredibly impressed by it. At the meeting I met the chief executive of Shooting Star, Paul Farthing. At his request, I have written to the head

of my local ICB to request, in the first instance, simply that it meets, discusses and get to know the services that are better offered.

One of the problems with the majority of funding coming from the voluntary sector through fundraising—I understand why that is important and we want it to continue, as it renews links with the communities—is that there is less of a connection with the statutory sector than there would be in other respects. ICBs need to work very closely with their local hospices, even if they are not based in the same geographical area, as is the case in my constituency. They jointly need to have a plan for how to go to the Government and persuade them that we need stable and ongoing funding, lasting more than one year and covering the impressive range of services that I have mentioned. Without that, a lot of services such as Pembridge will be in doubt.

A Member mentioned assisted dying, which we are debating next week. The two things are related but separate. We want the most compassionate and clearest services for people at the end of life. Part of that is ensuring properly funded hospice services, whether for adults or for children. I again thank the organisers of the debate, the hon. Members for Hastings and Rye and for Darlington, for bringing this matter to the House's attention. I hope the Government are listening.

7.31 pm

Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) and for Darlington (Peter Gibson) on their hard work to secure the debate, and on their work on the all-party parliamentary group. I led a Westminster Hall debate on this subject on 14 June 2023. I am pleased that we are having this debate, but disappointed that no further progress has been made on the problems we expressed then, given the problems that hon. Members are expressing this evening.

As has been said, the hospice sector does a remarkable job and plays a pivotal role in our health system, providing care and the support needed to those who watch their loved ones pass away, and wonderful care in those weeks until that point. That happened to me and many of my dear friends upon the passing of my office manager Sue Hall on 30 March 2023. She passed away at the age of 57 from lymphoma, leaving her husband Jerry and her daughters Phoebe and Rosie. She was cared for fabulously by the team at Mountbatten hospice in my constituency. The family and I were able to count on the support of the fantastic staff at that hospice, who not only provided the best care that Sue wanted, needed and deserved, but gave us the wraparound support during and after that period.

Like many hospices, Mountbatten provides 24/7 in-patient and community domiciliary care to Southampton and large parts of Hampshire. It supports around 1,000 families every day. Demand for its services is expected to rise by 40% in the next 18 months. It costs £11.5 million to run every year and relies on fundraising, which equates to around 70% of its total budget. NHS contracting represents around 30% of services delivered. However, the funding models in place are inadequate, with the ICB giving only a 2.4% uplift in the contracting of services, when the real rise in costs requires an 8% uplift. For 2025-26, the Hampshire ICB has once again said that

there will be no uplift, which means that Mountbatten will need to find an extra £750,000 just to provide the same services that it does today.

Simon Jupp (East Devon) (Con): Strengthening our local hospices takes pressure off our NHS. My hon. Friend makes a good point that the benefits of fairer funding are plain to see, yet some hospices get no public funding at all from the local NHS. One such hospice is Sidmouth Hospice at Home in my constituency. Dr Sarah Wollaston, formerly of this place and chair of the NHS Devon ICB, still needs to provide a detailed idea of what funding Sidmouth Hospice at Home can get. It does not receive a penny from the NHS in Devon. That is wrong. Does my hon. Friend agree that it cannot be right that some hospice services and charities get funded from integrated care boards—something we should be proud of—while others get nothing at all?

Paul Holmes: I agree. In Hampshire we are lucky that 30% of Mountbatten's services are contracted by the NHS. The ICB—which is in special measures, as my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely) said—is not doing a good enough job of providing those services. If a hospice wants to explore getting some of that funding from the national health service, it should be allowed to do so, while recognising the independence of spirit of many hospices that choose to go their own way. My hon. Friend is right to raise the work of the hospice in his constituency, and I hope that it will be able to acquire some ICB funding.

It will cost Mountbatten an extra £750,000 just to provide the same services, while the number of people it supports will rise by 200%. The Minister will say that this Government awarded another £1.5 billion for hospice services through ICBs. That is entirely welcome, and I congratulated her on her announcement in my debate last year. But I say now what I said in that debate: the ICBs are not passing on the money for the purposes set out. ICBs—particularly mine in Hampshire—are riding roughshod over the Government's wishes and are exacerbating a problem in a system that already fails to take into account the varying nature of needs across different parts of the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely) and I had a meeting last week with representatives from our ICB. I asked how much of that £1.5 billion had been awarded to the Hampshire ICB. They could not give an answer. I asked how much of that was allocated to hospices in the region. They could not give an answer. I say what I said last June to the Minister, who is doing an excellent job: that money was very welcome but I hope we can look at a better way of holding ICBs to account, to ensure that when the Government put hard-pressed money into our health system, ICBs deliver it to the frontline services for which it was intended. That is no different in Hampshire. The leadership of Hampshire ICB needs to look at that seriously.

Mountbatten also has to compete with the NHS for its workforce. It rightly chooses to pay and award its staff along the same pay guidelines as NHS staff. This year, that represented a 4.8% rise in costs, and will represent a further 5% next year. Again, I thank the Government for awarding an extra £450,000 to Mountbatten, but that will still leave a deficit of £1 million overall this year. It is right that it chooses to pay its staff adequately,

but that will mean Mountbatten will have to lay off some of its workforce, harming outcomes for families in my constituency. That will be the case in the rest of the UK if other hospices have the same problem.

The funding instability—which in my case I blame on the ICB, which is leading a review into hospice care—seems entirely one-sided. It will end up costing the NHS more money, as hospitals will pick up the burden of care, and beds will be used by people who should be in hospices. We all know the impact that energy bills and covid had on the sector.

I do not mean to sound depressing to the House, but we must continue to look at this issue. The Government's investment is extremely welcome, but we need more. I would like to hear from the Minister how the Government and the NHS nationally intend to work together to provide a sustainable long-term funding settlement for hospice care, while retaining that independence that hon. Members have outlined. We need the Minister to review how much money ICBs are passing on to hospices, and to take a stronger line in reviewing the role of ICBs and holding them to account if they are not giving that money to the frontline.

The Government, the hospice sector and the ICBs have a clear choice: a sustainable funding model for our hospices, or more pressure on an already stretched national health service. The hospice staff I have met care and want to deliver on the challenge that many of our constituents face across the United Kingdom, but they need a level playing field in order to provide that care. Let us help them do that and improve hospice care.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I thank Members for shortening their speeches. We still have another 15 people who wish to contribute.

7.39 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate everyone who has spoken in the debate. The House has come together to highlight something that I am struggling with: when people are at their most vulnerable, they are having to beg for money to fund important services. That should not be the case, yet here we are with an NHS that is clearly not functioning and other services are also feeling the pain. The reorganisation of the NHS devolved powers to ICBs, but we must remember that it is the responsibility of the Government to ensure that the structures function. That is not happening at the moment, and our constituents are losing out. A word that keeps echoing in my mind, rolling off our lips as it always does, is the NHS: the “national” health service. Yet we are hearing about a postcode lottery, where different areas have different experiences, with different ICBs funding to different tunes and where you live accounts for how you die. Surely, we are better than that? In the words of one clinician about the extraordinary provision at St Leonard's Hospice in York:

“Having worked with people at the end of life through my career, I didn't know care like that was possible.”

However, as with all hospices, if funding is not addressed, such care will not be possible.

It was this Parliament that inferred the duty, through the Health and Care Act 2022, to address the inequality in access to palliative and end of life care, so that

[*Rachael Maskell*]

everyone can have the best clinical and holistic support possible, if the right funding is stabilised and put in place. Currently, however, we know that many people—Hospice UK says one in four—are not accessing palliative care. That is 150,000 people every year who die without the support they require. That number is set to rise 25% by 2048 and, according to Marie Curie, by 13% in the next decade. This debate cannot just be about what happens now, but what happens in the future.

In York, the hospice ran an £800,000 deficit last year. The hospice at home funding has remained static for the past seven years, while demand has doubled and the ICB has provided just a 1.2% increase. Sue Ryder believes that the real cost increase over the past year was 10%. Hospice UK figures released say there has been an 11% increase for the payroll this year to around £130 million. Martin House, the local children's hospice, costs £9.9 million to run. With a total income of £8.6 million, it had a £1.3 million deficit. Only 18% of its funding came from the statutory sources, £1.1 million came from the national children's hospice grant and £700,000 came from the ICB. Hospice UK estimates a £77 million deficit for the financial year just past—the worst for 20 years.

As demand and costs are rising, the funding is not rising to match. As of 12 April 2024, St Leonard's hospice in York did not know how much money it was getting from the ICB: left to carry all the risk and left to depend on its reserves, and that, of course, not guaranteed for the future. Martin House, which is also using its reserves to expand its services, knows that it will have only six months of reserves. It certainly does not know what is happening with its funding after this financial year.

The children's sector, yes, has received a grant, but what comes next? We cannot just run our hospices by running marathons and running charity shops. It is driving inequality. In areas of greater deprivation, fundraising is even harder and therefore the hospices are getting even less money.

Ms Rimmer: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and I thank the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) for securing the debate. It has been a wonderful and sincere debate, but does my hon. Friend agree that there should be more equality between care at home—hospice at home—and care at the hospice? There is no doubt that there is nothing better than care in a hospice—absolutely no doubt. I have nursed four members of my family at end of life, and getting clinical support at home when it was needed was always a problem—my brother had to search for morphine at night. Does she agree that staff are funded even less and are on the minimum wage?

Rachael Maskell: I am really grateful to my hon. Friend for raising those points and I will come on to the issue of hospice at home. We know it is absolutely vital that people can choose where they die. Not everyone wants to die in a clinical setting—indeed, a hospice is barely a clinical setting—but many choose to die at home and they should be able to receive the care they need. She is right. We must have integration with the rest of the NHS. A district nurse may not be able to push palliative care to the extent that a palliative care specialist would in providing pain relief and the support somebody needs at the end of life at home. We need it to

be timely and we need to ensure it is fully funded. The Health and Social Care Committee found that when it visited Royal Trinity hospice, as part its assisted dying inquiry. The point was made that we need to ensure we have the training so that clinicians have the competencies and the confidence to administer the pain relief and the palliative care that is necessary, and to ensure that the service is available universally. It is not and that must be addressed.

In York, of the 1,000 people who benefited from St Leonard's hospice last year, 50% received hospice care at home. That number will grow over time and we need to ensure those services are there as they are needed. Of course, we know that if people are not on that pathway they end up in the acute service. They are put through the trauma of A&E, costing the NHS goodness knows how much, and then they do not get the care they need. Trinity Hospice talked about what it was doing to divert people away from that pathway and into proper care, either at home or within its wider services. There is much still to secure on that front.

If I may, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will raise just one more major point before I close, which relates to inequality. We know there is real inequality at the end of people's lives. Some of it is based along socioeconomic lines, and some of it is emphasised within minority communities. We need to deal with that to ensure we have universal provision, address the death literacy of our nation, and ensure the support is there when it is needed. I am particularly concerned about the lack of comprehensive funding for our palliative care services.

I urge the Minister to look at funding staffing costs, which are 69% of all funding. It has been suggested by Marie Curie that 70% of funding come from the state, and I think that is about right. We can phase that in, but we need to ensure we address the inequality that is driven through the system. We need to put in the research that is needed, so there is better data on who is accessing care and who is not, and we need to ensure that we are pushing palliative care as far as we can. If we do not, and we debate assisted dying, I am worried that people will be fearful that they will not be able to access the care that could be possible should that service be properly funded. I really urge the Minister to make that a priority before that debate takes place. Mr Deputy Speaker, I will end on that point.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. I am going to try to protect everybody so that they can get in, so it is a seven-minute limit forthwith.

7.48 pm

Edward Timpson (Eddisbury) (Con): Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, not least for enabling me to reassure myself that I can still get out of my seat, despite my London marathon legs from yesterday—I had to find a way to get that in!

May I start with some positives? I do not want to steal the Minister's thunder, but there has been some really good support for hospices in recent times. We heard about the covid support. The Government gave around £400 million to increase capacity and to enable patients to be discharged from hospital. We saw hospices

benefiting from the Government's energy bill relief scheme until April last year and, since then, the discount scheme until March this year. As we heard earlier, there has been an increase in the NHS England children's hospice grant from £12 million in 2019-20 to £25 million in 2023-24. I believe that that has, since July last year, been committed through to 2024-25, albeit it is now allocated through ICBs rather than directly.

So why are hospices struggling? I think that the answer is best encapsulated in a recent report from the Health and Social Care Committee, which stated that funding for specialist palliative and end of life care was "insufficient and unsustainable" and was creating "inequality in access to and quality of care."

What does that mean for hospices in my constituency and across Cheshire? Let us take the Hospice of the Good Shepherd in Chester, which is just outside my constituency but serves many of my constituents. As its chief executive, Rhian Edwards, informed me, last year it delivered more than 2,000 hours of direct care per week, supporting 476 patients and their families. To do so, it used £4 million of its own charitable funds, with the ICB contributing £1 million. Over three years the ICB contribution has fallen from 22% to 20%, and is expected to fall further to 16% in the next financial year.

This is against a backdrop of running costs—80% of which are staff costs—shooting up, mainly as a consequence of the requirement to match pay awards for medics and nursing staff, welcome as they are for those workers. The impact is a forecast operating loss of just under £1 million for 2024-25, and there is a similar scenario in nine out of 10 hospices in the country. Rhian told me: "although we've always struggled to balance our books, this level of deficit is feeling very different."

Another example is St Luke's hospice in Winsford, which has been providing palliative care since 1988. It has 162 members of staff, and 95% of the workforce live and work in Cheshire. It has 700 volunteers and 10 charity shops. At the heart of this incredible organisation is a charitable purpose, and it does amazing work, but only 12% of its income is received through the NHS and the ICB, one of the lowest percentages in support packages of this kind across the country. It costs £5 million to run St Luke's, so it has to raise—I have worked this out—£8 a minute to keep its services going. Within the Cheshire and Merseyside region, it receives about £1 million less grant funding than a hospice of a similar size in Merseyside dealing with the same end of life care.

Welcome though the extra funding was during covid, the fundamental financial issues facing hospices have not gone away; they have simply been postponed. This financial year, for example, will see a £350,000 black hole in the finances of St Luke's, not helped by a staggering 60% increase in its utility costs. Neil Wright, its chief executive, explained to me:

"As a charity, we have a fiduciary duty to balance the books. This means that without progressive investment of sustainable funding, hospices will have to reduce and eventually stop services over the coming years. This will then place 100% of the financial burden of EoL"

—end of life—

"care back onto the already overstretched NHS".

So what can be done? Hospices such as St Luke's are not looking for, or expecting, 100% funding; they just want a sensible, sustainable funding formula. At present,

however, ICB funding does not reflect the true cost of clinical care. When it comes to sustainability, as other Members have said, we need multi-year contracts to give hospices the confidence to deliver their services and invest, grow and develop to meet the needs of their communities. We have the NHS long-term workforce plan, which is hugely welcome and, I believe, provides a real opportunity to assess—fully and rigorously—and deliver the palliative and end of life care services that are necessary to meet the growing demand over the coming years and decades.

It is also worth remembering that some people face greater barriers in accessing palliative care, including those who live alone, in poverty or with dementia, as well as those with learning disabilities. In the end, if we do not secure the long-term future of hospices, we will have created a false economy and a false reality. If we do, we will not only reduce pressure on NHS services and have fewer unplanned and potentially avoidable hospital admissions, but will ensure that we can deliver compassionate care for those coming to the end of their lives and for their families and loved ones, thus demonstrating that we are a society that values both a good life and a good end of life.

7.54 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I am a trustee of Harlington hospice, and have been for the past decade. I hope to stand down shortly, because we have recruited four excellent new trustees and I am terrified that someone might ask me to run a marathon or something like that.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): Together with my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Edward Timpson) and the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), I did run the marathon yesterday—on behalf of St Giles hospice, for which I raised more than £3,000. May I invite the right hon. Member to join us in that endeavour next year? Let us not allow the opportunity to pass.

John McDonnell: I set myself up for that, didn't I? I congratulate all those who did run, but running a marathon might well see me off.

Over the last year or two, our hospice has merged with the Michael Sobell sports centre. We now provide a bedded unit, daycare facilities, respite care—particularly for unpaid carers—and a hospice-at-home service. My hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) said that debates such as this allowed us to pay tribute to organisations, and I certainly pay tribute to Harlington hospice. I pay particular tribute to the volunteers, including the chairs over recent years. I hope they will not mind my naming them: Brian Neighbour, who was formerly one of our local councillors, Carol Coventry and, now, Michael Breen. These volunteers give up their time and bring their professional skills to this work. We have a wonderful medical director, Ros Taylor, and an incredibly hard-working chief executive, Steve Curry. Their efforts provide the services and have enabled us to survive, but it has been tough. Like the hospices mentioned by a number of other Members, we have just had to lay off some staff. There is nothing tougher than having to lay off staff who are so dedicated.

[John McDonnell]

The issue for us, as always—this has been reflected throughout the House today—is the need for core funding on a sustainable basis. We need something like a five-year plan that we could work to. I know that sounds a bit Stalinist, but sometimes they work; sometimes they do produce the tractors! We need consistency over a period. As Members on both sides of the House have said, including my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), if we could rely on staff funding from the state, that would lift the burden to a certain extent. We will continue the fantastic fundraising that is currently happening, but in a working-class community like mine, during a cost of living crisis, it is not that people do not want to give, but they do not have the resources to give. We have had a bit of a rough time now and again. A number of corporate organisations have helped us through, but even then, when they are looking at their margins during an economic recession, or when times get hard, there is a downturn for us as well. We just need the consistency of funding over a period that will enable us to build on our services.

At present our services are swamped, and the range of services is becoming more complex as well. We were providing a lymphoedema service at one point. The complexity of the millions with which we are dealing requires more specialists, and that in turn requires more funding. Although there have been percentage increases in NHS funding, they have gone nowhere near meeting the real costs that are challenging us at present. We have a good relationship with our ICB—we work with bids for contracts, and with other community organisations delivering on the ground—but we want consistency of approach.

We have organised a conference for 8 May. It is called “Death, Dying and all that Jazz!”, and it will bring together a range of clinicians and others, along with Hillingdon Hospital and other volunteering services, under the auspices of Harlington hospice. We will look at what we are undertaking, what is needed, and how we plan for the future. If the Minister would like to visit the conference or send representatives, we would welcome that. We want to engage in discussion. We are coming up to a general election, but I hope that this will not become a general election issue, because what we have seen in the House and in the work of the all-party parliamentary group, which I commend, shows that there is consensus on the core principles of the way forward.

If we could secure a long-term commitment on a cross-party basis, we could go back to our hospices, talk to our executives and trustees, congratulate them on what they are doing, and give an assurance that they will have a rock-solid financial base on which they can build, thereby allowing them to rise to the challenges in our communities.

My final point is about the demand that we face. Eight people die in hospital for every person who dies in a hospice, yet most of those eight people would prefer to die either at home or in a hospice. That is the challenge we face, and we have seen tonight that we have the wherewithal to meet that challenge, and ideas on how to do so.

8 pm

Dame Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): May I add my thanks to my hon. Friends the Members for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) and for Darlington

(Peter Gibson) for calling for this debate, and to the Backbench Business Committee for granting it? Above all, I thank my constituents, who have contacted me in great numbers to express their support for our hospice in Basingstoke, St Michael's. That heartfelt support has been echoed by Members of all parties. We love our hospices; they have a special place in our constituencies, our communities and our lives.

It is really important that we take a moment to reflect on exactly what hospices are asking for, because there has been a slight variety in what hon. Members have said. It is as the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) said; I may not agree with him about having a five-year plan—that is too reminiscent of tractor production—but I agree that hospices are calling for consistency of funding. One of the many constituents who wrote to me talked about the need for a national plan to ensure that the right funding flows to hospices, and so that there are national measures to support integrated care boards with their commissioning decisions—we heard about that earlier. As a result of the Health and Care Act 2022, we also need to make sure that hospices have multi-year contracts, that they are paid the full cost of commissioned clinical services, and that they see the same uplift in payment that other parts of the NHS see. We know that that is not happening in Hampshire.

My constituents are not calling for hospices to be taken over by the NHS. That is a really important point to make. It would be the wrong way forward. The amazing hospice in my constituency, St Michael's, together with Naomi House and Jacksplace, which my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Steve Brine) referred to and are in his constituency, provide support for more than 1,000 families a year in our area. They are amazing because of the people, and I thank all the staff, the volunteers and the people who help run the shops—they are an incredible army. The hospices are also amazing because they are fiercely independent charities and can, as a result of their independence, do things that the NHS finds it difficult to do “at pace”, as they now say. I give the example of the introduction of hospice at home in my constituency many years ago. It was done because there was a need in the constituency, not because that was set out by central Government or the NHS.

The other reason why we need to retain the fierce independence of our local hospices is that they involve the community. I want to mention the people I am joining on Saturday for the bluebell morning in Steventon, which is organised by Julian Pilcher. I am going there with my right hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) and others, because the walk raises thousands of pounds every year to support our local hospice. The hospice is part of our community—we help to shape it, and we absolutely help to fund it—but there needs to be a better balance in the way that our hospices are funded. The Health and Care Act 2022, which introduced the statutory duty on ICBs, forces that point. I hope that the Minister can help us understand how she will assist ICBs to do their job better, but also that she will look at the variance in funding. The hospice in my constituency receives a very small proportion of what some other hospices in Hampshire receive, and the disparity in funding is causing feelings of unfairness, particularly when costs, especially wage costs, are increasing and there is an increase in demand.

I hope that the Minister can consider three points. First, how will she support the ICB to better plan for removing the enormous disparities in funding between hospices? Hospices' needs are no different, although sometimes their fundraising capacity is a little different. More than 80% of my hospice's funding comes from local fundraising, but how can we make sure that the NHS disparities are ironed out?

Secondly, how can we make sure that as funding moves from NHS England to local ICBs, funding streams such as the children's hospice grant do not create administrative nightmares? My hon. Friend the Member for Winchester talked about that—about places like Naomi House having to negotiate with up to six ICBs to ensure that it continues to receive the same amount of funding.

Thirdly, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can touch on the situation following the introduction of the Health and Care Act 2022, because there needs to be more certainty in forward planning for hospices. There need to be multi-year contracts to provide that certainty, especially given the cost pressures that hospices face.

I draw my remarks to a close by giving additional thanks to all the organisations throughout my constituency and north Hampshire that help fund my local hospice, whether through the Sherfield Oaks golf day or the moonlight walk around Basingstoke. I thank our local furniture store and the six shops—the list goes on. People go above and beyond, giving their time, money and energy to make sure that St Michael's hospice is at the heart of our community. I do not want to see that changed, but I want the Minister's help to make sure that that fantastic organisation gets support from the NHS when it needs it, and certainty around funding.

8.7 pm

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Members for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart), and for Darlington (Peter Gibson), on securing this important debate, with cross-party support. The debate is a time for us to thank all the people who work in hospices in our local communities.

Hospices have touched so many lives in all our constituencies. St Gemma's hospice in Leeds serves my community and has a special place in my heart because my grandma, mum and auntie all received care there before passing away, and the staff did a fantastic job. It was 20 years ago last month that my mum passed away there. Looking at the St Gemma's hospice Twitter feed this evening, I saw that a friend of mine, Liam Raftery, who was a fantastic musician in a Leeds band called The Latchicoes, passed away there at the age of just 30 in 2017. I did not realise that it would have been his 37th birthday yesterday until I saw the St Gemma's hospice Twitter feed.

The work that hospices do touches all our lives, and they do a fantastic job under incredibly difficult circumstances. St Gemma's cares for over 300 people every day, and around 2,000 patients each year, but as we have heard from various speakers tonight, funding is a huge issue. St Gemma's funding from the NHS covers less than 30% of the total hospice needs, so we need core funding on a sustainable basis. St Gemma's hospice is budgeting for a deficit of over £500,000 in this financial year, which is why it has had a fundraising drive online

over the last 48 hours. If people donated to St Gemma's hospice before 8 pm tonight, their donation would be matched—in other words, it would be doubled.

I was delighted to see that, due to the generosity of people in Leeds, the hospice more than exceeded its target of raising £200,000 in just 48 hours. That shows how valued the hospice is in our community, as well as the generosity of local people. When I last went to St Gemma's hospice and met the chief executive Kerry Jackson and her team, one of the things they made clear, and are still making clear, was that fundraising drives in general are becoming harder and harder to do. That is because of the cost of living crisis. People want to give but they cannot necessarily give as much as they used to. The people who run and work at St Gemma's hospice are clear that NHS funding is not sufficient. They say that it covers less than 30% of the total hospice needs, so we need to see a change.

People have mentioned the independence of hospices, and that is important. We cannot have a situation where the people working in and running hospices in some of the most stressful circumstances imaginable, at a crucial and painful time for those who are losing loved ones, are worrying not only about how to care for people in the last moments of their life but about funding.

Ian Byrne (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab): Would my hon. Friend agree that the Government should provide an increased level of funding that is long-term sustainable to all children's hospices, including Claire House and Zoe's Place in Liverpool, West Derby, which provide magnificent and crucial support for everybody in West Derby and beyond who needs it?

Richard Burgon: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. He has spoken to me before about the hospices in Liverpool and how they serve the people of West Derby, and he is correct to say that sustainable, reliable and sufficient funding is needed—especially as we are seeing increased demand—if the hospices that Members on both sides of the Chamber have celebrated tonight are to continue to provide the service that is needed by the people in our communities.

I want to end by saying thank you to each and every person who works at St Gemma's hospice in Leeds, to the team who work there day in, day out, and also to the people in Leeds for their generosity. Even in tough times, they are donating and raising money for St Gemma's hospice. Long may it continue the fantastic work that it does, but we need to ensure that sufficient core funding is provided so that it can do that work more easily in the decades to come.

8.12 pm

Selaine Saxby (North Devon) (Con): I want to take advantage of tonight's debate to raise the specific issue of the North Devon hospice and its hospice to home service. When I last met its excellent chief executive, Stephen Roberts, last October, he flagged to me that the hospice was no longer in a position to continue its non-commissioned service after the end of this financial year. At the time, he wrote to the then Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Cambridgeshire (Steve Barclay), detailing those concerns. I instantly phoned my hospital trust, because North Devon is home to the smallest hospital on the UK mainland and it already suffers with discharge issues and an overstretched A&E service.

[Selaine Saxby]

In February when I met Dr Sarah Wollaston, the chair of the Devon integrated care board, I asked about the service and was assured that it was all fine and the money was being found. When this debate was announced—many thanks to my hon. Friends the Members for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) and for Darlington (Peter Gibson) for securing it—I contacted Stephen Roberts at the end of the recess and said that I would like to check that this was all okay. He told me that my email was timely because everything was not okay, despite having had endless meetings with the integrated care board. He asked me to share with the House tonight some of the email that he sent back to the integrated care board following a phone call with its new chief executive, in which he said:

“Thank you for your time yesterday. I thought it would be prudent to summarise in an email where we have got to as there is nothing on paper or email that corresponds to the discussions we had around your offer of £95k. As a summary as to where we stand today: North Devon Hospice’s Hospice to Home Service is dedicated to support palliative patients who are at the ‘end of life’ stage through: increasing care at home, reducing unplanned/avoidable hospital admissions, and expediting hospital discharges.”

He goes on to detail the 15 staff who deliver that vital service, which costs just £495,000 and which the North Devon Hospice charitable funds have covered for the last decade. He said:

“North Devon Hospice asked for funding support of £157,540 which represents the same level of commissioning support as our bedded unit and community nursing team receive. Devon ICB have stated that they are willing to provide £95k as a one off”

before the next commissioning review period. But he said that the hospice had to state in return:

“due to our year on year million-pound deficit, having funded the service for 10 years and propped up the cost of this service through cost management elsewhere in the organisation we are no longer able to support the service which is at its minimum establishment to be able to operate.”

The hospice has been advising the ICB of this for three years.

Peter Gibson: My hon. Friend illustrates one of the biggest single challenges for hospice at home. Hospice at home relies on transport, which in an urban community can be delivered at a relatively small cost, but in a deeply rural constituency like hers, those costs need to be addressed and met in order to deliver that care. Does she agree that the funding models need to address the cost of transport and travel in rural constituencies delivering a hospice at home service?

Selaine Saxby: I could not agree with my hon. Friend more. There are many elements of healthcare, but the rurality of constituencies like mine is not fully reflected in the funding settlements.

My hospice requested that the ICB find the additional £65,000 to get it through to the end of the year. The chief executive took this back to the board to see whether we could get that seven months of cover through. However, it has now been through a full board meeting and consultation, and this is where my email came in. He finished his email to the ICB by saying:

“I sincerely hope that the good faith you have asked of us extends to Devon ICB’s good faith in finding the extra £65k.”

The email that he sent to me at the end of the recess says that he met the ICB chief executive,

“and he asked for 8 more weeks to see if he can do something, no promises made. My Board met last night where we agreed to wait for his response before making any decisions on the service. Therefore, any pressure you can apply would be greatly appreciated. The headline is: ‘Has it really come to the point where we have to beg for £62k to stop 32 people dying in an Emergency Room?’”

That was four weeks ago, and the hospice has still heard nothing. Our ICB is also in special measures. I beg the Minister to intervene and see if we can help our much-loved hospice, as well as tackle the ever-growing issues we have with our integrated care board back home in Devon. The hospice to home service is hugely valued by families and ensures that their loved ones can spend their final days at home, not in hospital. It also helps by taking the pressure off North Devon’s much loved, very small hospital. As it says across the shops back home in North Devon for our hospice, “Your life is a story, and the ending matters.” I very much hope that there is a way to secure the future of this hospice to home service to ensure that we have many other happy endings.

8.18 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) for setting the scene so well, as well as all those who have made substantial contributions. Hon. and right hon. Members have been incredible in their joint efforts to support hospices across this great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and I want to add my bit from a Northern Ireland perspective.

There will be no Member in this House who has not had some form of contact with hospice care, either through our roles as Members of Parliament or in a more personal nature, as many of us have. I will tell the House a quick story about that. We cannot talk about hospice care without acknowledging the level of care that is provided by the world-class staff in hospices. Every one of us knows that, having dealt with those who give that care. Having seen the work that they carry out and the compassion with which they do so, I know that it is certainly a calling, because money could not pay enough to deal with the emotional toll of this work.

I knew a lady who worked as an occupational therapist in the national health service, and we got on quite well. She went on holiday to Greece one September, and she came back and went to the hospice. She was not feeling well, and the doctor told her that she had only four weeks to live—she had cancer of the liver. I remember going to see her at the Marie Curie hospice care headquarters on Knock Road, Belfast; it was my first introduction to hospice care. I said to the girl on the desk, “Would you tell Anne that I came to speak to her?” And the lady said, “Just a minute, and I’ll go and see if she wants to speak to you.” I said, “No, don’t worry about that, because it’s not important—just tell her I called.” I realised that day that Marie Curie hospice care is incredible, having seen what it did for Anne and her family.

As I said in my intervention on the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye, I believe that faith and family are important whenever our heart is breaking and our world is falling apart. The Marie Curie hospice in Belfast makes sure that people have faith to help them through those difficult times, which is important.

From offering light-hearted banter while helping people in embarrassing situations to being the scapegoat for anger or frustration, to being the last person to hold a person's hand when their family do not make it in time, being a care giver in a hospice is more than a job. From the bottom of my heart, and from the bottom of all our hearts, I thank all those who do what most of us could not do—love and serve to people's last breath, day in and day out. I thank every healthcare attendant, every nurse, every doctor, every porter and every pharmacist, and the entire team who provide the best end of life care and offer a support system to lost and grieving families.

John McDonnell: The shops that do the fundraising for our hospices have been mentioned, but an unmentioned group of heroes are the shop volunteers who provide a wonderful service in my constituency—a wonderful recycling service, as well—and funding for many of our hospices.

Jim Shannon: That is good to remember. I will mention the volunteers.

The hon. Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes) is no longer here, but he mentioned a sponsored walk and encouraged the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) to be involved. Like the right hon. Gentleman, I could not run a marathon, and I probably could not walk it, but he and I could probably dander it—that is the third category. We are danderers. I could do 26 miles, but it would be at my own pace. I am sure everyone else would be on their way home whenever he and I crossed the line—that is a story for another day.

We cannot pay hospice workers enough, but we have a responsibility to ensure that there is enough money to pay them. I do not feel we are currently doing enough, as other Members have said very clearly. The consensus is that we all want to see them paid better, and we want to see the care continue.

Northern Ireland Hospice provides specialist palliative care for more than 4,000 infants, children and adults in Northern Ireland with life-limiting conditions. The charity, which includes the only children's hospice in Northern Ireland, says that it faces a number of challenges,

“not least of which is the ever-growing cost of this service. Government funds approximately 30% of service costs”.

The hon. Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) spoke about Foyle hospice, which has to find 65% of its service costs. Well, every other hospice in Northern Ireland has to find 70%, relying on the

“goodwill and generosity of voluntary donations and other fundraising activities.”

Peter Gibson: One thing that has not yet been brought out in any of the speeches is the fact that a significant amount of the money that goes to our hospices through their fundraising and charitable fundraising comes in the form of legacy giving. That in itself, because of the size of estates and the value of properties, creates a postcode lottery. Is that part of the problem? Could we use this debate to highlight legacy giving to hospices?

Jim Shannon: I understand the issue that the hon. Gentleman highlights, and I will speak about donations.

The people of Northern Ireland are generous to a fault. Understanding Society data suggests that Londoners donate the most, with an annual average of £346 per donor.

That is due to a handful of large donors, which I understand is the issue. People from Northern Ireland donate £344 a year to charities in all sectors, not just hospice care, and last week's figures show that Northern Ireland donates more than anywhere else in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Scotland, at £282 a year, and the south-east, at £270 a year, are the next highest donors. I am proud that we in Northern Ireland are givers, but this has allowed what is tantamount to an abdication of responsibility by those whose duty it is to see this care carried out.

We all support the Marie Curie coffee mornings. They are bun fests, which is not good for a diabetic. People make their donation and drink their tea or coffee. That is what it is about. It is not about what people get out of it; it is about what they give. To me, the Macmillan coffee mornings and Northern Ireland Hospice events should be about providing additional help, not providing the foundation of their funding. We and the Government must step up.

People do not have great disposable incomes, so the coffee mornings intended to raise money for a nurse raise less than half the amount needed to pay for a nurse's pay increase. We can no longer rely on public generosity to make the difference, and I therefore believe that we must step up and see hospice care not as a charitable extra but as an integral part of the NHS. That is what it needs to be, otherwise we have failed.

I am ever mindful of the seven-minute time limit, Madam Deputy Speaker. If we cannot supply children's hospice places with specialised staff, we are failing, and we cannot afford to accept failure. The Minister is a good lady, and she believes in hospices. I know she will respond positively, but I want to ascertain how we can do better for palliative care hospices, not in the next budget round but starting here and now. There is a consensus on wanting it to happen, and I believe the Minister and the Government should ensure that it does.

8.26 pm

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) and for Darlington (Peter Gibson) on securing this incredibly important debate.

Members have been so positive in talking about the contribution of their local hospices, which ought to be regarded as a very positive, uplifting thing, even though they sometimes have a negative association. When we speak about our hospices, we ought to reflect more on their huge positive contribution to the community. That is certainly the feeling I have had when visiting Bolton Hospice, Wigan and Leigh Hospice and Derian House Children's Hospice. It is not just the institutions themselves but the staff, including the doctors, the nurses and the volunteers—so many people make a positive contribution right across the organisation. That really drives the fundraising; the vast majority of the hospice movement's funding is from the charitable sector, with people giving of themselves because they believe in their local hospice. That is immensely important and we ought not to be challenging that relationship with the local community. That takes us immediately on to the other aspect of the funding: the part that local authorities and the NHS give.

[Chris Green]

When we are going through a difficult time in the economy, it is more difficult for people to give money. Some parts of the country are wealthier and perhaps find it easier to donate to the local hospice, whereas other parts of the country are poorer and perhaps have been hit harder in recent years. Covid and the lockdowns hugely disrupted the ability of hospices to fundraise. We hear of colleagues doing a marathon, skydiving or undertaking all sorts of other activities that so many people around the country do to contribute to their local hospice, but such things were not possible for such a long time. It takes a while for coffee mornings and so many other activities that hospices do to be organised again and for people to get back into that routine of coming along to support their local community events.

That is why it is especially important for national and local government, the NHS and, since 2022, when the Health and Care Act 2022 put them on a statutory footing, the integrated care boards to play their part—this is their responsibility. As was pointed out earlier, the ICBs not supporting the hospice movement in the way they ought to in the short term, because they are under immense financial pressures themselves, will create problems for the wider system. It will create problems for not only the hospices, but the local NHS if hospices cannot continue in the short, medium and longer-term to support their local communities.

A big question that has come out of this debate is about the NHS, which is immensely important, and something that is at the heart of the creation of the ICBs: the ability to have the right care for the community that is represented by the ICB. How do we bridge that divide between the NHS and that local responsibility of the ICB—how do we meet that challenge? Can the ICBs do this or does the Minister have to intervene?

8.30 pm

Sir Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate, and I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) and for Darlington (Peter Gibson), and indeed the Backbench Business Committee, for allowing us time to debate this issue. We have heard some powerful contributions today.

Any of us with friends or family who have gone through end of life care will know exactly how the hospice movement plays such an important part in ensuring that death is dignified and dealt with properly, and that the wider family considerations are at the heart of the way in which hospices support people in that position. This is about not just the bricks and mortar of those hospices, but their work in the community; what they do in people's homes; how they offer domiciliary support; and how with a good plan, agreed between the various agencies of our local health services, death can be dignified and an experience that is entirely fitting, bearing in mind the obvious sensitivities that exist around this issue. We do not talk enough about death in modern society. We rightly talk a lot about sexuality and sex, but we seem to talk more about that than we do about death. The Victorians did it exactly the other way round, being obsessed with death and never talking about sex. We need to get the balance right and talk frankly about death.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington said, this evening is not a time to debate assisted dying—assisted suicide, as I would call it—but it is a time to talk not just about the invaluable contribution of hospices, but the future of our hospice movement and how we strike a balance between the need to maintain their independence, flexibility and character, which reflects the local community they serve, and the support that it is incumbent on the NHS and central Government to provide, especially in respect of commissioned clinical services. That is where the interplay comes between the independent voluntary sector and those vital statutory services—the clinical ones—that government has a duty to provide and the NHS has a duty to support.

I am particularly lucky as the local hospice that serves Swindon and the north and east of Wiltshire is situated almost next door to where I live in my constituency, in Wroughton. Prospect Hospice was founded in 1980, and has grown and thrived due to the generosity and good will of our local community. Some 30% of its income comes from fundraising appeals and activities. Another 31% comes from profit made by its charity shops, which exist throughout the length and breadth of our area. We have many in Swindon; in fact, a new one opened in one of our shopping centres only a few months ago that is already doing very well and serving its local community admirably. Some 11% of the income comes from legacy gifts. I am glad legacy gifts were mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson), because they are vital. Together with other investment income, the amount raised in those ways comes to about 75%, with about 25% coming from the statutory services provided by ICBs.

We have all talked about the pressure of inflation, which is a reality for Prospect Hospice as well. Costs have increased significantly and the sad challenge we have faced in our hospice is that we have had to halve the number of beds, from 12 to six, and close the day therapy unit. That unit was invaluable. We very much miss the volunteers who worked in it and the support it gave people at end of life. In common with other hospices, covid wreaked havoc on the fundraising ability of Prospect Hospice; last year, it was left with a shortfall of just over £1 million. With the best will in the world, it is getting very difficult to make up that shortfall. This debate is important not just for Prospect Hospice, but for Julia's House, the children's hospice serving Wiltshire and Dorset, based in Devizes, which I visit very often. I know the benefits for children who were my constituents.

In this debate, we are talking not just about fundraising efforts, but about the involvement of volunteers in the service. Such involvement brings huge fulfilment and allows many thousands of people to make a difference by offering their time and talent. None of us wants to lose that, but a sense of reality is needed on the funding of commissioned services. There is no doubt that the Government have moved in the right direction—we have moved leagues in the last 10 or so years. The support that the Government gave to the hospice movement during covid was admirable. The introduction of the statutory duty, which we saw for the first time in the Health and Care Act 2022, was a signal moment when the hospice movement came of age, and end of life and palliative care was recognised, quite rightly, as an integral part of the way in which we provide and commission healthcare in this country.

My local ICB has set up an end of life alliance, which is good. However, more work needs to be done to ensure that the coming together of services around patients—clients—results in an avoidance of duplication, rather than the other way around. We need an acknowledgment that without hospices, such as Prospect Hospice, we will fail thousands of people who have come to rely upon this invaluable service.

There is much more that I could say. I pray in aid the excellent submissions and remarks made by right hon. and hon. Friends and Members. We are making a unified clarion call that we want to see our hospice movement thrive. That cannot happen without the input of Government and local health services.

8.37 pm

Jane Hunt (Loughborough) (Con): I welcome today's debate on this very important issue. I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) and for Darlington (Peter Gibson) on securing this excellent debate.

Everyone should receive appropriate and dignified care, personalised to their individual needs, as they approach the end of their life. Hospices are central to delivering that care, including LOROS hospice for adults, based in Leicester West, which provides care to my terminally ill adult constituents, and the fantastic Rainbows hospice for babies, children and young people, located in my Loughborough constituency.

Since becoming an MP, I have visited Rainbows hospice on a number of occasions and seen at first hand the professionalism and dedication of its staff, who provide the highest levels of care to around 300 of the estimated 1,739 children and young people with life-limiting conditions in Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland, as well as their families. Rainbows also cares for hundreds more babies, children and young people with serious and terminal conditions across the wider east midlands area, providing support at its hospice in Loughborough, as well as in local hospitals and at home.

Rainbows is particularly concerned about the access of children and families to round-the-clock end of life care at home, provided by nurses and supported by advice from consultant paediatricians specially trained in paediatric palliative medicine. I am told that only a third of local areas in England are meeting the required standards in this area. Rainbows has informed me that in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland there is no 24-hour end of life care available at home, other than that based on goodwill provision from the Diana team. Therefore, in October 2023 Rainbows launched its hospice at home service, which it provides jointly with community nursing teams. However, there are no paediatric palliative consultants across the east midlands and no funding available to support this essential service. As such, Rainbows is currently paying for remote support from a consultant in another region.

Rainbows also funds two clinical nursing specialists working at the Leicester Royal Infirmary. In addition, it provides paediatric palliative care single point of contact, which is a pilot and is currently funded by the Paediatric Palliative Care Network, although the future of this funding is not guaranteed. Furthermore, Rainbows provides end of life care, symptom control and short breaks at its

hospice in Loughborough. Its therapists offer support in the hospital, and provide ongoing bereavement support to families.

I am told that in 2024-25 it will cost Rainbows £12.1 million to provide its services. Over the same period it will receive roughly £1.7 million in statutory funding, which works out to be around 14% of its costs—enough to keep it open for only seven weeks. It will also receive £99,000 from Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland integrated care board and £1.4 million from the children's hospice grant for all five counties. This income totals £3.2 million, leaving a shortfall of £8.9 million, which Rainbows has to try to find itself.

Furthermore, although Rainbows has been told that it will receive the children's hospice grant for 2024-25, the ICB has still not confirmed whether it will receive the funding in subsequent years. Together for Short Lives has also highlighted that, while ICBs and hospices are now clearer about their process for distributing the grant—thanks to the confirmation from the Government—it still remains unclear when and how hospices will receive the funding from ICBs and to what extent NHS England will hold ICBs to account in ensuring that the money is paid out. As a result, at the moment hospices do not have the reassurance of a long-term NHS funding plan, so I seek clarification from the Minister on those points.

Although Rainbows is fantastic at fundraising, its current position is simply not sustainable, particularly given that the number of children with life-limiting or life-threatening conditions is increasing. If we restrict the services that existing hospices provide by not supporting them with adequate funding, the provision will have to be found elsewhere, and responsibility will likely fall on the state. I therefore encourage the Government and NHS England to accept Together for Short Lives' recommendation to review children's palliative care funding going forward and to fill the £295 million annual gap in NHS spending on children's palliative care in 2024-25. This should either be met centrally by maintaining ringfenced NHS England funding beyond 2024-25, or by setting out a framework under which ICBs are required to provide sustainable funding.

If urgent action is not taken, I share Rainbows' concerns that more seriously ill children and their families will be denied choice and control over their palliative and end of life care.

In conclusion, I ask the Minister not to change a single atom of LOROS hospice or Rainbows children's hospice, because they both provide excellent care. However, I urge her please to work alongside them as much she can and to get the ICBs, in particular, to deliver on the funding that was mentioned earlier in the debate.

8.43 pm

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): Thank you for calling me to speak, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will not take up too much of your time.

I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) and for Darlington (Peter Gibson) for organising and securing this very important debate; I am hugely grateful that they have done so. It is clear from the amount of people who have taken part in the debate that hospices are held in great affection not only in our hearts, but in the hearts of our

[*Bob Seely*]

constituents, both on the Isle of Wight and across the country. Clearly they are a comfort in times of extraordinary difficulty and death, not only for those who are dying but for their families. These are very difficult times, and hospices provide succour, professional support and, probably above all, love and comfort.

On the Island we have the Mountbatten hospice. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Paul Holmes) spoke about Mountbatten. I will develop some of points he made and echo them. The Mountbatten hospice in Newport is one of our most cherished institutions on the Island. I thank all the people who work there and support it for the fantastic work that they do caring for people on the Isle of Wight. I pay special tribute to the head of our hospice, Nigel Hartley, one of the most impressive people we have on the Island and one of my favourite Islanders. He was a concert pianist before he started looking after people in the London Lighthouse clinic in the relatively early days of the AIDS pandemic. He learned to care for people at that time before moving eventually to the Island, and bringing a unique sense of occasionally eccentric but organised, highly competent and very loving leadership to that institution. We are hugely lucky to have somebody like Nigel.

On the hospice's behalf, I will raise a few issues and get some clarity from the Minister. I know that I am not the only one saying that, but for Back Benchers there is clearly strength in numbers. Many of the issues that I will raise have been raised already, but I want to put them on the record. I do not want the NHS to take over hospices. We need to respect the charitable status of our hospices because it gives them strength. They are so directly related to and engaged in our communities, but we do need the NHS to pay its way in relation to our hospices. In the last two years, the Mountbatten hospices on the Isle of Wight and in Eastleigh have had cash increases from the NHS of under 2%, if I understand the figures correctly, and under 3%. Their cost increases have been much higher.

We are putting our hospices under very considerable financial pressure, so we are having to dig deeper into fundraising or look at ways of making cuts. That is not acceptable. We are not asking for the NHS to step in, but we are asking for the NHS to pay its way and, if it is using hospices, to give them sufficient funding. Otherwise, the burden of looking after the NHS's responsibilities, for want of a better term, is falling heavily on folks in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh and on the Island. We have our major fundraiser for the Isle of Wight Mountbatten hospice on 12 May. Walk the Wight is a fantastic event. Last year it raised £460,000, but running a hospice is expensive and when it is dealing with below-inflation increases from our ICB, that is problematic.

I will raise one other issue. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh and I had two conversations with the ICB last week, one on the Isle of Wight Mountbatten hospice and the Eastleigh Mountbatten hospice, and the other a shared conversation with Hampshire colleagues about the work of the ICB. It is in special measures. We were told that somehow that was a very good thing. Clearly there is pressure on its expenditure and budget, and its management decisions in relation to that budget. I am concerned that when ICBs are in special measures,

cutting funding to hospices—as opposed to acute services, which are hugely expensive—and potentially to primary care is seen as a quick win. Yet effective spending on primary care actually eases pressure on acute services, as does effective spending on hospices.

It is about the NHS paying its way; I am not talking about it taking over the system. Giving a little more funding—near inflation increases—to hospices enables them to perform a hugely important moral and medical duty not only to those who are dying but to their families. Hospices not only support people in the hospice; increasingly now my Mountbatten hospice—I suspect this the same for the hospice in Eastleigh—looks after people as they near death in their own homes.

On behalf of my hospice, I ask that we ensure that the ICB covering Hampshire and the Isle of Wight is doing its job effectively and properly. I think it fair to say, without being ungenerous towards those people, that some of us have concerns about some of the decisions being made. Can we ensure that the ICB is managing its affairs well and that, in so doing, it is giving support to hospices both in Eastleigh and in Newport and the Isle of Wight? Our hospice, the Mountbatten hospice, so badly needs it.

8.50 pm

Chris Loder (West Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to contribute to the debate. I note that Dorset is well represented, as my constituency neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) is also here.

There are few charities more cherished by people in West Dorset than Weldmar Hospicecare. The Weldmar hospice in Dorchester must be one of the most—if not the most—respected and cherished hospices in Dorset as a whole. Most of my constituents will have had a family member or known someone whom Weldmar has looked after at the end of their life. That is why the hospice is so dearly loved not just in Dorchester or West Dorset, but across the county. The Weldmar nurses looked after my aunt in her final days some 15 years ago, and I am eternally grateful to them for all that they did for her and continue to do for friends of people I know, not just in the Dorchester hospice but through the community nursing team.

Weldmar is Dorset's largest independent charity, and it has provided specialist end of life care since 1994. Over the past three decades it has looked after 24,882 patients, both in the community and in its specialist in-patient unit in Dorchester. The care is free of charge, and last year alone 1,745 families benefited from Weldmar's vital care and support. That is undoubtedly why the community feels so passionately about our hospice and, with it, the innovations and fundraising successes of the incredible Weldmar team. However, as is the case for many hospices, in order to sustain itself and keep its services running, Weldmar needs to raise £27,200 every single day, on top of its NHS income.

In January 2024 the APPG on hospice and end of life care published its "Government funding for hospices" report. It found that, despite statutory guidance, "ICB commissioning of hospice services is currently not fit for purpose",

and the value that the services provide individuals and the wider health system is "at risk." The Government announced additional funding for hospices during the

coronavirus pandemic, and in a Westminster Hall debate on 17 January this year my hon. Friend the Minister set out the wider financial support available to hospices, including the energy bills discount scheme, eligibility for a reduction in VAT from 20% to just 5%, and the £1.5 billion of additional funding that NHS England released in 2022 to provide integrated care boards with support for inflation.

It is my opinion that palliative and end of life care needs to be given much greater priority—as it has in many other areas—in the integrated care partnership strategy. We want to ensure not only that we sustain Weldmar and other provision long into the future, but that we consider and support more end of life care. Places such as Lyme Regis, where travel to a hospice is long, would greatly benefit from additional provision.

In summary, I am contributing to the debate so that it is known and understood that we in West Dorset cannot speak highly enough of our hospice; we value the Weldmar team so much. I ask the Minister and the Government to give consideration to the matters that we have been debating this evening.

8.54 pm

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) and my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson)—who is sat beside me—on securing this debate, and it is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Chris Loder). I start by thanking all those who work in hospices; they do a remarkable job, and we should be very grateful for all they do.

In 2003, when I was reporting for BBC South Today, I was sent to the official opening of Julia's House in Corfe Mullen, Dorset. Little did I know that the first person I would meet there was my mother, who sadly died in 2019. Her instinct for caring and compassion drew her to that remarkable hospice for children like a moth to a flame. I was immediately struck by the wonderful environment that the dedicated staff had created: a desperately needed service to provide practical and emotional support to families caring for a child with a life-limiting or life-threatening condition was born.

Julia's House is one of more than 200 adult and children hospices that care for and support about 3,000 patients a year. They work hand in hand with local health and care services, taking the pressure off the NHS. As we have heard, hospices are mainly funded through charity: on average, around two thirds of the income for adult services is raised through fundraising. Alarming, for children, that figure is four fifths. In 2022, for the first time, as we have heard, the Health and Care Act introduced a legal duty for integrated care boards to commission palliative care services that meet the needs of the local population. However, a recent report by the APPG on hospice and end of life care, co-chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington—again, we have heard this in the Chamber, but I make no apology for repeating what colleagues have said—found that despite that legal requirement, funding from ICBs varies significantly across the country.

Today, the sector is under significant financial pressure: Hospice UK estimates that the sector is on track for a £77 million deficit for the 2024 financial year. Nowhere is that pressure more real than at Julia's House. Its chief

executive, Martin Edwards, said that over 90% of its annual running costs were met by fundraising; the Government's contribution remains low, at only 8%. That over-reliance on people's generosity—which is enormous—will see Julia's House face a budget deficit of £1 million this year. *[Interruption.]* If SNP Members could refrain, I would be grateful. This dire situation is exacerbated by the ending this year of a shared grant of £25 million from NHS England. At its two sites, Julia's House cares for 176 families across Dorset and Wiltshire. Mr Edwards said that it was coping with children with more complex needs, requiring more staff and putting more pressure on budgets. The care provided is intensive, with a family being supported for up to five years following the death of a child.

As one might imagine, palliative care comes with all kinds of issues, not least medical, emotional and financial. Who do you turn to for help and advice? How does the patient wish to be cared for? Who supports the carer? This is where a remarkable charity, Lewis-Manning Hospice Care, comes into play. Its chief executive, Clare Gallie, told me that its team comes to the patient's home and, in effect, responds to the needs of the patient and their family by signposting them to relevant services, from treatment to transport. Importantly, it is the need of the patient that is most significant: for example, if their wish is to die at home, everything possible is done to ensure that that happens. Importantly, this free service is proactive rather than reactive, anticipating what the patient and the family want, reducing crisis at the end of life, and saving the NHS a lot of money by freeing up GPs' time and negating the need for a hospital. A pilot scheme being run in a part of Dorset has already saved the NHS £140,000 in April alone. Imagine if this scheme was rolled out across the country; it would save the NHS millions.

Let me conclude. There is no doubt that there is a need for more Government funding for hospices, independent—fiercely so—as they are, but the funding disparities, as we have heard from virtually every speaker, must be looked at. Yes, I hear the Government say that this is another call for money and there are many other demands, but well-funded hospice care would safeguard this very effective and necessary sector, which cannot live on charity alone, and nor should it.

9 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) and for Darlington (Peter Gibson) on so ably leading this debate and setting the scene.

While it is important to recognise the great work done across the eastern region by East Anglia's children's hospices, in the Great Yarmouth and Waveney areas, as represented my right hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Sir Brandon Lewis) and me, there is at present a hospice vacuum. Throughout the rest of Suffolk and Norfolk, there are locally based hospices well embedded in and providing great services for their communities.

The good news is that plans are being carefully prepared to fill this vacuum and this void. A local partnership is evolving to build a local hospice led by St Elizabeth hospice, including the local NHS, councils, a community interest company, volunteers and fundraisers. For it to be successful, to open the hospice and then to run it, the national Government must join this partnership, and I

[*Peter Aldous*]

hope my hon. Friend the Minister, who is currently not in her place, will in her summing up accept this invitation. The Waveney and Great Yarmouth areas desperately need a hospice. We have an ageing population and pockets of deprivation, and as Chris Whitty has highlighted, there are acute health inequalities in coastal communities that a hospice can help level out and remove.

As I have mentioned, a well-researched case for the hospice has now been prepared, though it is important to recognise the work done by so many over the years in supporting those in need of end of life care and their families—from the late Margaret Chadd, who founded East Coast hospice and had the vision of building a hospice on land bought at Gorleston, to Roberta Lovick, who founded the Louise Hamilton Centre, from which such great support is provided to patients with life-limiting conditions and their families; the James Paget University Hospital, where the Louise Hamilton Centre is based; and East Coast Community Healthcare, the Lowestoft-based community interest company that, in partnership with St Elizabeth, operates six specialist beds in Beccles Hospital, as well as providing care both in people's homes and in care homes.

Building on the work of these local people and organisations, a framework is emerging through which a local hospice can be built. The cornerstone of this is, as we have heard, the Health and Care Act 2022, which sets out the legal requirement for ICBs to commission palliative and end of life care. The Norfolk and Waveney ICB has responded by carrying out a review of palliative and end of life care. This was completed last autumn, and it highlights the need for nine urgent and six medium to long-term actions. Last March, St Elizabeth hospice merged with East Coast hospice, and straightaway set about conducting a feasibility study into the viability of building up hospice facilities on the Gorleston site.

The study has just been completed, and the conclusion reached is that a hospice should be built in stages. Expressions of interest are now being invited from architects. That is an exciting landmark for which so many people have strived for many years. St Elizabeth is confident that it can successfully fundraise for a hospice capital appeal, but it is for the ongoing revenue cost of providing core clinical services for a full in-patient unit, as well as outreach community services, that national Government support is required. The Norfolk and Waveney ICB—indeed, all ICBs—need central Government support and a fundamental rebalancing of national policy, so that they can meet the projected growth in demand for palliative care.

It is good news that after so many false dawns over so many years we now have a coherent and well thought-through plan for filling the hospice void in the Waveney and Great Yarmouth area, but while we should be sanguine, we should also be realistic. We are not even at the starting point of the rest of England, as we have heard from other colleagues who have a hospice up and running—we do not. That is why the Government need to join the partnership that has evolved, and support Norfolk and Waveney ICB so that it can commission hospice services on a long-term, multi-year basis. I urge the Government to join us on that exciting journey.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call Steve Double.

9.6 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker—it is becoming a bit of a habit for me to be the warm-up act for the wind-ups, although I gather I will not get that honour this evening. It is a great privilege to speak in this debate, with heartfelt contributions from across the House, and I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) and for Darlington (Peter Gibson) on securing it.

Most of us hope we never need to experience hospices at first hand, but when we do experience them because a loved one needs their care and support, we realise how important and valuable they are. I am incredibly proud and privileged to have two exceptional hospices in my constituency. Mount Edgumbe hospice, which is part of Cornwall Hospice Care, was opened in 1980 and was Cornwall's first hospice. It has recently been rated as outstanding by the Care Quality Commission, which highlighted the caring and personal nature of the service provided by the staff, who are responsive to the needs of the patients. I did not need the CQC to tell me that. Indeed, my family and I know that first hand, because back in 2007 my mother died from cancer at Mount Edgumbe hospice. She lost her second battle with breast cancer, and the care and support that we received as a family was outstanding. I place on record my huge thanks to them.

I am also greatly privileged to have Little Harbour, which is part of Children's Hospice South West in my constituency. It opened in 2011, and its state-of-the-art facilities are some of the very best in any children's hospice in the country. Having visited a number of times, I can testify that the atmosphere there is truly amazing, and one cannot help but be moved by the place. It supports children and young people up to the age of 21, including the youngest babies who need its care. The CQC praised the staff for their personalised care and support. That reinforces the important point that it is not just about the bricks and mortar or equipment that the hospices provide; it is the staff and volunteers who work there who make our hospices the amazing places they are.

We are lucky in mid-Cornwall to have those two excellent examples out of some 200 hospices across the country. Both are supported by amazing people—volunteers, fundraisers and donors—who play such an important part in ensuring that those hospices can continue. It is not just about the care that the hospices provide to the people who are sick; we have heard many times in the Chamber today about the wraparound care that hospices provide to families and friends, which is so important and valuable.

Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a moving and powerful speech, and he makes me recall my experience at Chestnut Tree House, which provides hospice care for children across Sussex. It is striving hard to meet all the demands on services. One group that we have not mentioned is those who the hospice may yet reach. It knows that many more families would benefit from its care, and it is working hard on that. Has my hon. Friend also found that in his constituency?

Steve Double: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention; she makes precisely the point that I was coming to. It is clear that there will be a growing

need for hospice care in our country. We feel that incredibly acutely in Cornwall; our elderly population has grown by more than 50% in the past 10 years. Cornwall is at the point where almost one in four of our population is over 70 years old. That proportion will only grow in the years ahead, and it will simply mean that there is more demand for hospice care in our country. That is why it is so important that hospice care is properly funded.

I believe that it is best for our hospices to stay in the independent sector as charities. They gain most of their support from the public; I have seen that time and again for the two hospices in my constituency. Being independent from the NHS gives them a special place in our communities. People feel a great connection to them. They feel that they have a personal stake in the work that hospices do, particularly if they engage in fundraising for them. I fear that that would be lost if hospices were effectively nationalised. It is so important for our hospices that we continue that situation.

However, the Government need to better recognise the important role that hospices play. We have heard several times about the postcode lottery for NHS funding for our hospices. I tell the Minister that we need to address that. Cornwall Hospice Care, I am told, has the second lowest funding of any hospice charity in the country. Just 9% of its funding comes from the NHS, which means that 91% is raised through fundraising, donations and legacies. That cannot be right. I am all for donations playing a significant part in the funding of hospices, but the NHS should step up, particularly in Cornwall, and provide more funding to our hospices. We need to look at regional variation. Funding must be based on need for hospice facilities in each region. I urge the Minister and the Government to look at what more can be done to provide a level playing field on NHS contributions to our hospices.

We have all heard that the past few years have been difficult for our hospices, with the growing pressure of rising costs and demand. One thing we could do for the hospice sector is provide more certainty about funding through multi-year funding settlements, so that hospices can plan far better, and at least know what funding is coming from the NHS. With that certainty, they could plan accordingly.

In summing up, I place on record my huge thanks to those in every hospice in our country for the incredible work that they do—to the paid staff, the volunteers and the fundraisers. They work so hard, and are so generous in providing this vital service to our communities, particularly the two hospices in my constituency. There has been real consensus across the House this evening. Although we value and celebrate all the work that hospices do, more needs to be done to provide them with fairer funding, so that they can continue to play a vital role for our communities.

9.14 pm

James Sunderland (Bracknell) (Con): I am humbled to be called in the debate. I commend my hon. Friends the Members for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart), and for Darlington (Peter Gibson), for bringing the debate to the House, as well as the Minister for sitting through the debate and showing amazing resilience during a long evening.

Members who have spoken in the debate fall into broadly two camps. First, there are those who have had personal experience of hospices through family members who have suffered and needed those facilities. Their speeches have come across amazingly, with real pathos and depth, and I commend all hon. Members who have spoken so personally about their journeys. Secondly, there are Members like me who have not had personal experience of hospices but recognise the importance of what they do. If I may, I will talk about two important hospices for my constituency.

Thames hospice—it was first known as Thames Valley hospice—was officially opened by Her Majesty the Queen in November 1987 on Hatch Lane in Windsor. It has been serving my constituents and others in Berkshire since that time, and has shown amazing strength of character in supporting so many people.

With the Minister in her place, I contend that, as we have heard numerous times, we need to refine the funding models for hospices. In my view, the NHS needs to cough up a bit more support, but this is also about timing. Thames hospice is awaiting its funding settlement for 2024-25 from the ICB, with barely two weeks to go, so the issue is how much can be funded by the taxpayer, and about being notified of funding up front. That is really important, because it means that hospices can plan ahead for the year.

Thames hospice, having provided care for all that time, was in 2017 granted planning permission to build a new £22 million, state-of-the-art facility on a brand-new 8 acre site by Bray lake, just outside Maidenhead in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. That is important, because through the ICB, it serves many constituents in the east of Berkshire, including in Bracknell. I know of many constituents who have had fantastic care there. In January 2019, work began on construction. I visited earlier last year, when the site had been built. It was incredible, with so many fantastic staff, a café and dedicated services.

Thames hospice supports about 2,500 patients and their loved ones annually with high-quality medical and emotional support. This is all about making people's lives easier, and making sure that their remaining time on earth is as dignified as possible. We should not underestimate or put a price or value on that. That is why we have a responsibility to fund hospice care properly.

As for the future, by 2030, 15 million people in the UK will be over 65 years old. Also, the number of young people with life-limiting neurological conditions has increased by 64% in the last 10 years, and the incidence of cancer in people under the age of 50 rose by 79% between 1990 and 2019. We should think about that. Those are really serious figures, and they mean that the demand for hospice services is likely only to increase over time.

In the past year, costs at Thames hospice have increased by 9%, with no commensurate increase in Government funding. We have heard something similar from other hon. Members this evening. To put a figure on it, Thames hospice has to raise £38,000 every day to subsidise the costs of care. That will increase to more than £50,000 a day by 2030, based on a 4% increase, year on year—and that is without even considering investment for growth in the future. The picture is similar elsewhere. To put it in perspective, Thames hospice needs £18.5 million for 2,500 people every year. That is really stark. As I mentioned,

[James Sunderland]

Thames hospice is the end of life care provider for the Frimley integrated care board in east Berkshire. It is of direct relevance to my constituents. I cannot thank the staff and the directors at Thames hospice enough for what they do.

I want to mention Sebastian's Action Trust in Crowthorne, which is important because it provides palliative care for children aged between zero and 18 and supports their families. A key part of the support that the brilliant Sebastian's Action Trust provides is memory-making support for the families who use the facility. It also continues to support the families once the child goes to end of life care. Losing a child is devastating anyway, but the fact that Sebastian's Action Trust provides such brilliant support to families, even after that life event, is remarkable.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): On the issue of funding for children's palliative care, I am fortunate to have, in my neck of the woods in West Yorkshire, the Forget Me Not children's hospice and the Kirkwood hospice. I also want to highlight the Together for Short Lives campaign ask, as other Members have done. The issue is not just sustainable funding, but surety of funding—a multi-year promise and confirmation of funding beyond '24-25, so that children's hospices can plan for the future, and continue caring for children with life-limiting illnesses and their families.

James Sunderland: I thank my hon. Friend for his timely intervention. As we know, palliative care is privately funded and not formally funded by the NHS. It cannot be right that such an important function is funded in a hand-to-mouth way. To prove that point, Sebastian's Action Trust is to close its Crowthorne site, the Woodlands, later this year. A sale is expected in autumn 2024, because it cannot afford the care that it is giving to so many families, so it has to rationalise its estate and move elsewhere. In my humble view, the funding for the NHS, for our hospices and for palliative care is not enough.

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful case for the hospice movement, as all colleagues have done in this debate. Does he agree that every penny that the Government give to the hospice movement takes pressure off the national health service? Hospices are doing the job that, otherwise, the NHS would have to do. Will he join me in congratulating the Saint Francis hospice in the village Havering-atte-Bower in my constituency, which was established in 1975? It has for many years served people from the London Borough of Havering and the surrounding area. It is a magnificent organisation. The hospice movement does a fantastic job for the entire country, and it is time for the Government to do more.

James Sunderland: I commend all the staff in the Saint Francis hospice in Havering on what they do. It sounds remarkable. We have heard so many stories this evening of hospices and palliative care providers right across the country.

The message is clear: we need more funding. We must establish better funding models. We cannot rely so much on charities and donations. We must make sure that funding is provided up front. This is a life-and-death issue. Hospices take pressure off the NHS. The facilities

at Thames hospice are state of the art; we can sweat the asset an awful lot more. Perhaps the underused capacity of hospices could sometimes be hired back to the NHS.

Peter Gibson: I want to make one final point in this final Back-Bencher contribution to the debate. Many people have called for multi-year funding settlements. That is not to make life easy for the hospices; it is just more sensible, so that they can plan into the future—sign leases, buy equipment, and train, recruit and retain staff. The request for multi-year funding settlements will allow them to put plans in place to provide the care that is needed.

James Sunderland: I thank my hon. Friend and I agree completely. Nobody can plan in a vacuum, so this is about more money, earlier money and the ability to plan so we know where the delta is.

I will conclude now. Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak this evening. We need more money, Minister, and I know you will give it to us.

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

9.24 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Members for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) and for Darlington (Peter Gibson) on securing the debate and bringing this vital issue to the Floor of the House after a series of Westminster Hall and other debates.

In the context of the spring Budget, at the start of a new financial year and with a general election on the horizon, this is an incredibly timely debate. It also coincides with the publication of Hospice UK's report, which estimates a deficit across the UK hospice sector of £77 million, and for Scotland of around £16 million, for the financial year 2023-24—perhaps the worst financial outturns for the sector in nearly 20 years. The same report suggests an 11% increase in payroll costs to hospices, representing around £130 million. People who work in hospices have every right to expect a decent competitive salary that allows them to ensure that their own households are safe and warm, but that is a challenge being driven by the wider cost of living crisis, which is itself having an effect on the hospices.

Heating, food, drink and other consumables are not discretionary expenditure. Hospices must run 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They have to maintain a comfortable temperature. They have to provide nutritious, high-quality food. All that comes at a time, as the hon. Member for Bracknell (James Sunderland) just said, when the demand for such wonderful care has perhaps never been higher. People are living longer and dying at later ages. That means an ever-greater need for palliative care. The Office for National Statistics estimates that in Scotland an additional 10,000 people a year might be expected to seek access to palliative care by 2040.

We have heard some very moving individual testimonies from Members across the House. The hon. Members for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher), for West Dorset (Chris Loder) and for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) all spoke of personal experiences of the hospice movement. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mrs Hamilton)

made some very worthwhile points about hospices being a place where people can really live the final days of their lives. The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Paul Holmes) has been very passionate about the issue for reasons he explained about his former chief of staff. We echo the condolences that have been paid.

I am incredibly grateful for the love and care shown to my good friend Melanie, who passed away in the Highland hospice just over a year ago. I was proud to be one of the runners yesterday in the London marathon in her memory and in aid of that hospice. I congratulate the hon. Members for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes) and for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous), who ran for their local hospices, and the hon. and learned Member for Eddisbury (Edward Timpson) and the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince), who also took part in the debate and ran for other worthy causes. I understand that in a few weeks' time, the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) will take part in the 40-mile Keswick to Barrow walk through the Lake district in aid of St John's hospice in Lancashire. I pay tribute to the work of the Marie Curie hospice in Glasgow, which has provided care at the end for other friends, particularly some I have known through the SNP. In recent weeks, close friends have had reason to be grateful to everyone at St Vincent's hospice in Renfrewshire in very sad and difficult times.

Those personal experiences are what help to inspire the incredible generosity that allows the hospice movement to continue its work. As we have heard, around two thirds of adult hospice income comes from voluntary fundraising. At the same time, the Sue Ryder charity estimates that the hospice sector actively saves the NHS nearly £600 million a year by freeing up bed space, or even avoiding hospital admissions in the first place. The hon. Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) gave some examples of exactly how that can work.

From all the evidence we have heard today, it seems that the current model for hospice funding is increasingly unsustainable. Some have even used the word "existential". Healthcare is devolved, so it is not for the Scottish National party to determine how the Minister or her shadow on the Opposition Front Bench prioritise their spending decisions, but if the UK Government were to find new or additional funding for the hospice sector in England, that would have consequential for the budget available to Scotland's Government. The current 2024-25 budget for Scotland provides over £19.5 billion for NHS recovery, health and social care, which is a real-terms uplift despite the austerity we are facing.

The Scottish Government have also established a new strategy steering group to oversee the development and delivery of a new palliative and end of life care strategy and associated work programmes. That work aims to ensure that everyone in Scotland receives well co-ordinated, timely and high-quality palliative care, care around death, and bereavement support based on their needs and preferences, including support for families and carers, to ensure that Scotland is a place where people and communities can come together to support each other, take action and talk openly about planning ahead, serious illness, dying, death and bereavement.

There are other actions that the UK Government could take that would continue to help hospices across these islands. Energy costs remain stubbornly high, but

the Government are bringing many of their energy support schemes to an end. As I said earlier, energy is a fixed cost for hospices, not an area in which savings can readily be made. In this context, the hon. Member for Darlington spoke about the situation of Ardgowan in Inverclyde. Many of the reforms to the energy market and energy price support that the SNP and others have called for would make a difference in the hospice sector, as in many other parts of the economy and society.

Regrettably, the Government's approach to immigration is also having an impact. How many nurses, doctors and other specialists have arrived in the UK—some, perhaps, on small boats or by other irregular means—but have been denied the opportunity to work? How many more are not even coming in the first place now that the Government have decided that they cannot bring family members, or are massively increasing the costs and thresholds for visa applicants? How many might have come from Europe, or might have stayed, had it not been for Brexit? Every country in the world is having to face up to the legacy of covid and the impact of conflict in Ukraine and elsewhere, but the UK Government have been making deliberate policy choices in many of these areas that are exacerbating those challenges rather than mitigating them, and the impact of that could have long-term consequences.

If the hospice sector does have to make radical savings and scale back service provision, the costs of palliative care and supporting people at the end of life will still have to be met; they will just have to be met elsewhere, which could mean increased costs for the NHS, for social services or, worse still, for individual families and households—not just in financial terms, but in emotional and psychological terms—if they are denied that support at the end. People will always want to give and to raise funds for hospices, but if we want collectively to be able to rely on hospices to be there for individuals and families when they are needed most, we cannot expect the hospice movement simply to rely on the good will and efforts of voluntary fundraisers.

A number of important suggestions have been made during this debate, in the motion, and in the evidence given by hospices themselves and by the all-party parliamentary group about how the Government can put the sector on a more sustainable footing for the future. I hope that the Minister will be able respond positively, in the spirit of consensus that we have observed this evening, and that the Government will work with their counterparts and with service providers across the United Kingdom to ensure that the hospice sector is given the support that it needs so that everyone who works for hospices can focus on what they do best, and continue to provide love and care for those who need it at the end of their lives.

9.32 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): It is a pleasure to respond to the debate. We have had a very thorough discussion over the past few hours, so let me start by thanking not only the Backbench Business Committee for granting the time for us to debate this important issue—albeit a week later than most of us had expected—but the hon. Members for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) and for Darlington (Peter Gibson) for securing the debate; I congratulate them on their speeches.

[Andrew Gwynne]

I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous), for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher), for Birmingham, Erdington (Mrs Hamilton), for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) and for York Central (Rachael Maskell), my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds East (Richard Burdon), as well as the hon. Members for Colchester (Will Quince), for Southport (Damien Moore) and for Eastleigh (Paul Holmes), the hon. and learned Member for Eddisbury (Edward Timpson), the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Dame Maria Miller), the hon. Members for North Devon (Selaine Saxby) and for Bolton West (Chris Green), the right hon. and learned Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland), the hon. Members for Loughborough (Jane Hunt), for Isle of Wight (Bob Seely), for West Dorset (Chris Loder), for South Dorset (Richard Drax), for Waveney (Peter Aldous), for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) and for Bracknell (James Sunderland)—not forgetting, of course, the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady). I also congratulate all those who took part in the London marathon; I was not one of them.

Let me now turn to the subject that we are here to debate. End of life care is a subject that has touched the lives of most of us. It is a time when our loved ones, and the family and friends who surround them, can be at their most vulnerable and in need of the greatest support. Managed well, it can be a healing time for families to come together, but managed badly, it can leave deep and traumatic scars. I need only look at the experience of my family—the experience that I had during the deaths of my parents to know how this bears out. It was 30 years ago that I lost my mum to ovarian cancer—I was 19. Her final hours were spent at the end of an old Victorian ward with the curtain pulled around her, and she was in immense pain and suffering, which I remember vividly to this day. That was incredibly hard for our family to manage.

More recently, in 2022 I lost my dad following his own battle with cancer. Unlike my mum, he died at home, with my wife and I taking him in for the last few months of his life, and we were supported by a superb army of care staff. In fact, when the time came for my dad to decide whether he wanted to go to the local hospice, Willow Wood, or stay at home with us, the final words that he communicated to me and my wife were, “Stay here.” I come back to the point made by the hon. Member for Colchester about how we talk about death, how we deal with death and the end of life, and the fact that many people want dignified end of life services at home; we should do all we can to facilitate that.

In my dad’s case, the whole system worked. It came together in a way that, as I know from my constituency casework, it rarely does. The hospital, social services, Macmillan, Marie Curie, the GP, the pharmacy, the district nurses and Willow Wood hospice all worked together seamlessly, and my dad passed away in comfort, peacefully and surrounded by those who loved him most in the world. We have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North East and other Members that we have to get the end of life choice right for people, and hospice at home plays an important role in that.

The sharp contrast between my parents’ journeys emphasises to me, in a deeply personal way, just how impactful end of life care can be. For all of us, death should be about choice and what we want, and we should leave this planet with dignity. We talk about the integrated care boards, and the clue is in the name: they should be integrated, with both social care and other services, including hospice services. In my dad’s case, that worked, but as we have heard from Members across the House, in too many cases the integration just is not there yet. The Government have rightly devolved money to the ICBs for a specific purpose, but it is not being spent as we would want.

Hospices play such an important part in that deeply personal journey for hundreds of thousands of people and their families every year, right across the country. Working in partnership with existing local systems, hospices ensure that people receive the care that is most appropriate for them, considering all their needs. I pay particular tribute to one of my local hospices, Willow Wood hospice in Ashton, Tameside. The tireless work and dedication of its staff was a vital support when we were caring for my dad in his final days. Those staff showed hospice care at its best, and they have my immense gratitude for all that they continue to do. But they, like so many others, find themselves in a perilous financial position; Willow Wood faces a structural deficit of £750,000 this financial year. Without finding a way to plug the gap, its services will have to be reduced.

There is real pressure on all hospices to generate their own income, with Hospice UK estimating that as much as two thirds of income for adult hospices is generated through fundraising, with some, like Willow Wood, having to raise 80% of their funds themselves. Many hospices do incredible fundraising work, with armies of volunteers finding ever more ingenious ways to keep the money coming in, but with the incredibly hostile economic climate that hospices are finding themselves in, including as a result of energy costs, funds are being squeezed more than ever—[*Interruption.*] Someone put 50p in the meter; obviously the House cannot afford those costs now!

The sector as a whole is on track for a deficit of £77 million for the last financial year, the worst figures for two decades. As a result, hospices are starting to pare back some of their services. As we have heard, there is also a legal requirement placed on integrated care boards by the Health and Care Act 2022 to commission palliative care services in keeping with local need, and we need to ensure that that funding is passported down to the hospices where they need it. We know that delivery is far from consistent, leaving patients in some parts of the country without adequate services in their own community. The clear pressure on the sector shows no sign of letting up, because we are an ageing population and demands on hospice services are set to increase further, with Office for National Statistics data suggesting that a further 130,000 people will die each year in the UK by 2040.

It is clear that we need proper joined-up supportive policies for the hospice sector. We need to ensure that the money that the Government have ensured is there for the hospice sector gets down to where it needs it: at the hospices themselves. We need to focus on creating a health and care system that is genuinely joined up and has end of life care as part of the health and wellbeing

policies for each and every one of us. This can no longer be the taboo subject it once was, and the hospice sector underpins so many care pathways that have a tangibly positive impact on patients and their families. End of life care matters. This current Government will have our support in ensuring that the hospice sector is protected and supported.

9.42 pm

The Minister for Social Care (Helen Whately): I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Hastings and Rye (Sally-Ann Hart) and for Darlington (Peter Gibson) for securing this debate. The number of speeches this evening reflects the strength of feeling, and the support, for hospices across the country. As the Minister with oversight of end of life care, I share the passion of many hon. Members for hospices and for what they do, caring for people towards and at the end of life, providing respite for carers and supporting families both before and after the death of a loved one. Many hon. Members have rightly praised the work of the hospices that serve their constituents and made special mention of the extraordinary work of hospices for children and young people. I also thank the hospices for all they do, and for all they are doing right now, as their staff work around the clock.

Beyond that, I thank everyone who gives palliative and end of life care, as part of hospice teams but also working in the NHS. How you die, how your loved ones die or how you live towards the end of your life, matters. As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mrs Hamilton) said so eloquently earlier this evening, and as all of us here this evening know, that is why palliative and end of life care matters. It matters when that care is provided by the NHS, as it is for the majority of people, and when it is provided by hospices. I emphasise that point, because there is sometimes a misunderstanding, which I have heard a few times this evening. The fact is that most palliative and end of life care is provided by the NHS, whether in hospitals, by primary care or through community trusts. Alongside and in addition to that, hospices do the wonderful work that they do. Recognising the importance of palliative and end of life care, we specified in the Health and Care Act 2022 that integrated care boards must commission these services to meet the needs of their populations.

Some hon. Members have argued this evening for hospice funding to be centralised, taken away from integrated care boards and, I assume, allocated by either NHS England or the Department of Health and Social Care. While I understand their motivation in making that call, I do not agree. We purposefully set up ICBs to understand the healthcare needs of our local communities, to plan and commission services to meet those needs and, in so doing, to reduce health disparities. Our communities and their needs, and the services they already have in place, are different, and rarely is a one-size-fits-all decision made in Westminster the right answer. I stand by a more localised approach, in which there is, of course, variation.

Another source of variation is historical. The hospice movement has grown organically, and the location of hospices has not been planned to meet demographic need, for instance. There are, therefore, inequalities in access to hospice services, especially for those living in rural and more deprived areas. This variation in access to hospice care has to be taken into account by ICBs in

the decisions they must make to ensure that people have access to end of life care, whether or not they live in an area served by a hospice.

Peter Gibson: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the organic way in which our hospices have developed and emerged. Does she agree that our ICBs have the opportunity to use our hospices to address those shortfalls in certain communities by directing funding specifically to them to meet needs that have not previously been met?

Will the Minister further clarify one small point? She has made a clear distinction between NHS-provided care and hospice care, but there are many cases around the country where the NHS is funding, in full or in part, specific services from hospices. How would she distinguish between them? Is it NHS care or hospice care if it has been fully commissioned and fully funded by the NHS?

Helen Whately: I will pick up on a few of those points.

On the NHS providing palliative and end of life care, I have heard a misunderstanding in some speeches, both this evening and on other occasions, that all end of life and palliative care is provided by hospices. It is more mixed. Integrated care boards do, indeed, commission hospices to provide care, but hospices also provide care independently, and NHS services do so, too. These teams also work together collaboratively. That diversity is a strength.

In seeking to address inequalities, ICBs can look to hospices to do more in underserved areas, for instance. At other times it may be more appropriate for them to look to NHS services. It will vary by area, which is one reason why these decisions should be localised, rather than made by somebody sitting in my place saying, "This is how it should be done across the whole country."

Although I do not agree with centralising hospice funding, I am working on the transparency and accountability of ICBs to their communities and hon. Members, as representatives. That is why I have regular meetings with NHS England leads on palliative and end of life care, and it is why I am pleased to have secured NHS England's commitment to including palliative and end of life care in the topics discussed at its regular performance meetings with ICBs. It is also why I am pushing NHS England and ICBs to improve the data they collect on the access to and quality of palliative and end of life care.

NHS England has developed a palliative and end of life care data dashboard to help ICBs understand the needs of their populations and then address and track inequalities in access to end of life care. This is progress, but I want the transparency to go further so that we all have the data we need to assure ourselves that our ICBs are commissioning the care that our constituents need.

I have heard the calls for more funding for hospices and the stories of some fantastic fundraising efforts, from the "star trek" night walk and the "Santa sprint" to the magnificent marathon runners who have joined us in the Chamber tonight fresh from yesterday's London marathon. I congratulate those who ran, and particularly those who did so on behalf of hospices, which is timely for this debate.

[Helen Whately]

That said, I disagree with the hon. Member who said that people running a marathon for hospices is “sad”—it is not; it is a wonderful thing. It is a sign of the tremendous support that hospices have in our communities and that people are willing to choose to fund hospices, not just when the taxman comes along; they are choosing to have a hospice providing services to people in their area. It is a good thing because that fundraising gives hospices an independent funding stream, the freedom that goes with that to serve their communities as they see fit, and the strong ties with their communities and with all those people who fundraise for their hospices.

Caroline Ansell: My hon. Friend is so right in what she is saying. In my constituency of Eastbourne, people are not just prepared to run for the St Wilfrid’s Hospice, but they will walk over coals for it. Will she congratulate them on their outstanding work?

Helen Whately: I do congratulate those people on their fundraising efforts; although I hope their feet are all right!

As hon. Members know, the Government have provided dedicated additional funding to hospices; in the pandemic, when I played a part, we were helping them with energy bills and through the children’s hospice grant, which the NHS has confirmed will go to hospices for this financial year too.

Looking ahead, I fully appreciate the ask for longer-term certainty of funding—of course I understand that. However, funding for hospices, end of life care and many other things beyond the current financial year depend on a future spending review. I am sure that all hon. Members will understand that I cannot pre-empt such a review, and ICBs similarly will not know their funding until that review. Although committing funding beyond the spending review period is not in my power, I am pushing for our healthcare system to encourage and enable more advance planning by individuals to consider and set out what they want at the end of their life. Inevitably, some of us will die in hospital, and for some of us that will be the right place, but given a choice many people would rather die at home. We should all be setting out a plan that includes our preference of place of death and what sort of treatments we do and do not want. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland) and my fabulous health colleague my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) said, we should talk more about death and plan for it.

To conclude, there are no easy answers to the questions raised this evening—there rarely are. I do not have a pot of money otherwise going unspent for hospices; neither do ICBs and nor does NHS England. I will, however,

continue working with NHS England to ensure that palliative and end of life care is given the attention it deserves and needs so that it is considered important, just as we consider services that prolong life important, and that the NHS is held to account for doing that. I will continue to agree with hon. Members on the importance of hospices and the important work they do. I see this as a Minister, as a constituency MP and from my own family experience; I will never forget saying goodbye to my grandmother in a hospice near Yeovil, and I will always be grateful.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I call Sally-Ann Hart to wind up.

9.53 pm

Sally-Ann Hart: I thank the members of the Backbench Business Committee for granting this important debate in this House, as well as all the Members who have spoken today and Hospice UK for their dedicated work and support. I especially thank St Michael’s Hospice and Demelza, their staff and all the volunteers, as well as local people for their donations and fundraising, especially during challenging economic times. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Peter Gibson) for all his long-standing hard work and advocacy on behalf of hospices and end of life care.

Members from across the House have spoken collectively on this important issue, with a passion and consensus that shows that the funding of hospices and palliative and end of life care is not a political issue. The Government do financially support hospices through ICBs, but funding models also require closer consideration, ensuring parity with the NHS while maintaining hospices’ independence and flexibility. The Minister has heard many similar themes, mainly surrounding certainty of funding, on a sustainable basis, and better collaboration between ICBs, the NHS and hospices. I thank her for her work, her consideration and listening to the debate. Extra Government funding via ICBs can improve a localised approach. We all call for more funding to be included in the spending review.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the postcode lottery of funding for hospices; and calls on integrated care boards to urgently address the funding for hospice-provided palliative care in their areas.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY) (NO. 2)

Ordered,

That, at this day’s sitting, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until any Messages from the Lords relating to the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill shall have been received.—
(*Aaron Bell.*)

Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill

Consideration of Lords message

[Relevant documents: Second Report of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill, HC 435, and the Government response, HC 647.]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):

Under the Programme Order of 18 March, any message from the Lords in respect of the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill may be considered forthwith, without any question put, and proceedings shall be brought to a conclusion no later than one hour after their commencement. A message has been received from the Lords that the Lords do not insist on an amendment to the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill to which the Commons have disagreed, but propose an amendment in lieu, to which they desire the agreement of the Commons, and they do not insist on another amendment to which the Commons have disagreed. The Lords amendment and the Government motion relating to it are available online and in the Vote Office.

Before we move to consideration of the Lords message received today, I can confirm that nothing in the Lords message engages Commons financial privilege.

Lords message considered forthwith (Order, this day).

Clause 1

INTRODUCTION

9.56 pm

The Minister for Countering Illegal Migration (Michael Tomlinson): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 3J.

It is a great pleasure to open the debate. I start by echoing and agreeing with my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), who started his speech during the previous debate, just a short number of hours ago, by agreeing with what the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), said about there being nothing new to say, just pitying that he then spent 40 minutes saying nothing new.

I do not intend to emulate what the shadow Minister did on that previous occasion, because it is clear that amendment 3J is almost identical to the previous amendments that we debated and that this House rejected just a short number of hours ago. The amendment is in two parts, inserting when Rwanda may be treated as a safe country and when Rwanda must cease to be treated as a safe country. The amendment is not necessary.

Turning to the amendment from the noble Lord Anderson of Ipswich, I will make it clear once again that we will ratify the treaty only when all necessary implementation is in place. The implementation will be kept under review by the independent monitoring committee. Clause 9 of the Bill makes it clear when the Bill and its provisions come into force. Implementation continues at pace. I can confirm again that on 21 March the Rwandan Senate passed legislation ratifying the treaty. As I confirmed this afternoon, on 19 April—just last Friday—the Rwandan Parliament passed domestic legislation to implement its new asylum system.

In an attempt to reassure my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Sir Robert Buckland), let me say that, as we have made clear, if the monitoring committee were to raise any issues to the joint committee, standing members of the joint committee are senior officials of the Government of this country and the Government of Rwanda, and the Government will, of course, listen. I remind my right hon. and hon. Friends that it will be up to the independent monitoring committee to raise issues at any point.

There is nothing new in this amendment. Such amendments have already been rejected. Enough is enough.

10 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): For several months now, the Prime Minister has been ferociously attacking their lordships in the other place simply for doing their constitutional duty by seeking to revise and improve this Bill. Tonight, we see the evidence of why it is so important that they did just that.

I wish to put on the record my thanks to the noble Lord Browne for his tenacity in securing a significant concession—and it is a concession—which promises that Afghans in the UK who have put forward credible claims and evidence of a connection to Afghan specialist units will not be deported to Rwanda. This has not gone as far as we would want it to, but at least the Government, albeit begrudgingly, have inched towards doing the right thing by standing by some of those who so bravely stood by us in the face of the Taliban. We owe them a debt of gratitude and it is a great shame that the Government, and in particular the Prime Minister, first turned their back on those to whom we promised sanctity by cancelling flights from Pakistan. They then spent months resisting Lord Browne's efforts to prevent these brave Afghans from being sent to Rwanda despite repeatedly being pressed to do so and to do the right thing by our armed forces, and now finally they are being dragged kicking and screaming to where we find ourselves this evening.

Even this afternoon, the Minister's response to my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), who is not in her place at the moment, was revealing. She raised in detail a case of her constituent who supported British efforts, but whose family were stuck in Afghanistan, yet the Minister could not even bring himself to reassure my hon. Friend that he would meet her or even look into the specifics of that case. That is why it will be so important for us to hold the Government to account on this concession, because it is so difficult to take what Ministers say at face value.

Turning now to the amendment in the name of Lord Anderson, I find it staggering that Ministers still have not conceded on this very basic point: that this House is not just trying to legislate that Rwanda is safe now—in other words that white is black and black is white—but that Rwanda is safe in perpetuity. The noble Lord Anderson was right when he said in the other place this evening that this is a post-truth Bill. We cannot possibly legislate for something that is in the lap of the gods.

I spoke earlier about the dangerous and turbulent world in which we live and how, at any point, the situation in Rwanda could change radically, just as it could in any other country.

Bob Seely (Isle of Wight) (Con): I am aware that the only consistent thing in the Labour leadership is its inconsistency. Will the shadow Minister confirm that in the past decade Rwanda was assumed to be so unsafe that the UN safely rehoused there 30,000 refugees from other countries?

Stephen Kinnock: I thank the hon. Member for his intervention. I am very glad that he asks about what has happened in the past decade. Let us not forget that, just six years ago, 11 refugees were shot dead by the Rwandan police for protesting about food shortages, as reported by the UN. I thank him for his intervention, because he makes the point clearly for me: six years ago, 11 refugees were shot dead.

Bob Seely *rose*—

Stephen Kinnock: I would welcome the hon. Member's comments on that point.

Bob Seely: I am sorry about that incident, but 30,000 refugees have been safely rehoused in Rwanda. Rwanda is deemed to be safe by the United Nations. It is deemed to be safe by pretty much everybody apart from the Labour party. That is my point.

Stephen Kinnock: The whole point of this is that we do not have a crystal ball. The evidence of what happened six years ago should clearly give us some cause for concern. All that this amendment seeks to do is create a position whereby the independent monitoring committee, handpicked by the Government, is able to advise the Home Secretary on laying a statement, which is absolutely fair enough.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): I listened carefully to the intervention that referred to 30,000 refugees in the past decade. Is my hon. Friend aware that within the past 12 months the UK has accepted a refugee from Rwanda?

Stephen Kinnock: It was not just one refugee; many refugees are taken from Rwanda by this country, which begs the question how safe Rwanda can be. All that the amendment would do is trust but verify. It would put in place the kind of mechanism that is embedded in thousands of pieces of legislation that are on the statute book. I simply cannot understand why the Government cannot simply accept the amendment and enable the Home Secretary to lay a statement on whether Rwanda is safe or unsafe. That would provide important safeguards. It is not in any way a wrecking amendment; just like all the other amendments that the Government rejected, it would not prevent flights from taking off.

At his press conference this morning, the Prime Minister boasted about the progress that he has supposedly been making to stop the Tory small boats chaos. Yet as he stood at the lectern, it emerged that small boat crossings have increased by 24% compared with the same period last year. Next, he refused to give details about the operationalisation of the Rwanda scheme, saying that “we will not be giving away sensitive operational detail which could hinder all the progress made to date”—

or so he thought. It subsequently emerged that one of his Ministers had left behind under some chairs in the front row a secret document entitled “Official Sensitive”, which included—wait for it—operational details of how

the scheme will work. You simply could not make it up, Madam Deputy Speaker. Yet another day of chaos, empty boasts, and shambolic incompetence.

To be fair to the Prime Minister, he made one point in his press conference that Labour did agree with. In response to a question from the media, he clearly stated that the test for the policy will not be whether a few “symbolic flights” take off, as his former friend the right hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick), the former Immigration Minister, said. In the Prime Minister's words:

“Success is when the boats have been stopped.”

That is how he wants to be judged, and I assure the House that it is how Labour will judge him, and how the public will judge him too.

For two years, we have been urging the Prime Minister to stop the boasts and instead start stopping the Tory boats chaos. Sadly, he has chosen to ignore us on both fronts. Instead, we need Labour's plan—[*Interruption.*]—to redirect the Rwanda money into a cross-border police unit to smash the criminal gangs upstream, and a returns and enforcement unit to remove those who have no right to be here, reversing the decline in removals that we have seen under this Government. Only Labour's plan can fix our country's broken asylum system—[*Interruption.*]—and only Labour's plan can restore order at our border. [Interruption.] Conservative Members do not want to hear it, but that is the reality of the situation. I hope that every Conservative Member will join me in the Division Lobby this evening.

Sir Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): It was going so well, and then it descended into a Second Reading diatribe from a Labour Opposition that have absolutely nothing to say about the serious challenge of immigration. They pretend that they will do what the Government are doing, only slightly better, but they do not really approach the level of events and the seriousness of the issue. We face a blank page on the other side of the House.

Let us deal briefly with the issue that we have left. I still think that there is strong merit in what their lordships say about not just the way in which we designate Rwanda to be a safe country but the parliamentary mechanism that we have to deal with things changing in the future, if they do. It seems to me that in the absence of the amendment there would be the need for further primary legislation in the future, which I do not think is a great place for the Government to end up in. However, in the context of where we are in the detailed consideration of Lords amendments, there comes a time when the unelected House has to cede authority to the elected House. I think we are now approaching that moment.

While I in no way resile from the merits of the argument, we need to look at the bigger picture, remember the balance that we have to strike and, frankly, think ahead to what future Governments there might end up being—hopefully not of a different complexion to our own. We need to strike a balance between both Houses. I judge that now is probably the time for us to—

Sir Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Will the right hon. and learned Member give way?

Hon. Members: No!

Sir Robert Buckland: I will give way.

Sir Chris Bryant: Would not the right hon. and learned Member's argument about whether their lordships should cave in have more weight if the policy had any mandate from the people? It was not mentioned in a general election. It was not in a manifesto. It is not the will of the people.

Sir Robert Buckland: The hon. Gentleman's argument has merit, under the Salisbury-Addison convention, when it comes to the principle of a Bill. Their lordships have absolutely the leeway to deal with it in the way that they have on the basis that it was not in a manifesto—he is not wrong about that—but there is a more fundamental point about the way in which the balance between both Houses must be maintained.

This is the fourth round of ping-pong—I think the record is seven—on this short Bill. For the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill—a much lengthier Bill—we had only two rounds of ping-pong, because, in the end, the other House respected the primacy of this place. However reluctant and conflicted I feel about this issue, I think that we have reached that moment. That does not necessarily mean that I will vote against the Lords amendment, but I will consider whether I vote in favour of it on this occasion.

However, I do say this to my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister and to the Government: getting ourselves into the position of having four rounds of ping-pong on a Bill as short as this is not a great place to be, with respect to him. Had the Government made other concessions—as they have probably now done on the Afghan question, and as they did on the modern-day slavery question—perhaps we would not have had to wait this long, until this late hour, and goodness knows perhaps until a later hour, before making them. I remind my hon. Friends that Lords amendments are not about the principle of the Bill; they are about the detail of scrutiny. Given the spirit in which my right hon. and learned Friend has approached the amendments, it would have been wiser for us to reach this position slightly earlier, but that is the only criticism that I offer at this stage. The principle of the Bill is now settled, and the will of this House should prevail.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I rise again to put on the record the SNP's opposition to this awful Bill. We do not support the state-sponsored people-trafficking Bill on Rwanda, and we will oppose it in any way we can.

I was quite disappointed to hear the Labour Lords caving on the Afghan amendment. If they think that this is some kind of concession, I have some magic beans to sell them—honestly, it is pathetic. Holly Bancroft, a journalist at *The Independent* who has done so much work to expose the weaknesses of the Government's Afghan schemes, says:

“This review is already happening and is only for Afghans with links to specialist units. The Home Office is saying they won't deport the Triples granted leave to remain in the UK by the MoD, who came here irregularly. The number of people in this situation will be very small.”

Before I came into the Chamber, I was phoned by Councillor Abdul Bostani of Glasgow Afghan United. He wanted to know what was happening in this place and what protections there will be for the Afghans he is constant contact with. He wants to know what happens to the journalists, the interpreters, the people who put

their lives in danger to safeguard the UK's mission in Afghanistan, and their children and families? He says: “Those people who the UK left behind, nobody is listening to them, nobody is replying. The safe and legal routes are not there.”

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I make this point because it is important and I want it recorded in *Hansard*. My constituent Trevor Young worked for the British Army in Afghanistan, alongside his comrade and friend, an Afghan who now happens to be in Pakistan because he had to leave Afghanistan after threats to him and his wife and children. The police have removed his phone, and he faces deportation from Pakistan back to Afghanistan. This is so important for my constituent. Minister, my constituent's friend, an Afghan soldier, has been forgotten about by the British Government. I make a plea for him because he is not covered by the legislation.

10.15 pm

Alison Thewliss: I thank the hon. Gentleman—he is quite right to point that out in the way that he has. It has been further reported in *The Independent* that an Afghan intelligence analyst who worked alongside members of the RAF has been threatened with removal to Rwanda. He says,

“I call on the prime minister and the government to stand by the promise they made during the fall of Kabul. If the legal ways, such as Arap and ACRS...were actually working, people like me wouldn't have to wait for years just for a response and wouldn't be forced into taking a small boat to come to the UK... Being in limbo is nothing but a waste of the UK's resources. I have the skills to contribute to the UK's community and the tax system, but I have to rely on Home Office help, because I cannot work.”

There are thousands of people in his position.

I have also an email from a person who emails me quite regularly. I do not know whether this person ever gets a response from the Afghan relocations and assistance policy email address that he emails, or from the other people who he copies in, but I see and read those emails when they come in. It is in tribute to Sayed, who is constantly seeking some safety, that I read this:

“You caused me to miss the evacuation flights. Why should I be in this situation. It is all because of you...I can't endure it anymore. I am tired and I am faced with so many challenges. It happened several times today...that I had to stop myself with difficulty from crying in the middle of the street. Everyone was looking at me. I can't endure it anymore.”

These are the people who have been left behind by this Bill, and have now been left behind by the Labour party, which would not press the amendment further.

I now turn to the one remaining amendment of all the amendments we have had. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, am I boring Conservative Members? Do they want to pop back out to the Prime Minister's office and have some drinks, instead of listening to the important cases being put in this debate? They care so little. What we are asking—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I am just anxious that the hon. Lady addresses the amendment that is in front of us.

Alison Thewliss: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker; I am addressing the amendment that is in front of us. Lords amendment 3J seeks a very small concession to Parliament: that this place should have some kind of

[Alison Thewliss]

scrutiny over whether Rwanda remains a safe country. Conservative Members were all about taking back control, but when it comes to scrutiny of the treaties and obligations we are signing up to, it is quite clear that they could not give a hoot. All that we are asking for—all that the Lords are asking for—in this amendment is some assurances, now and in the future, that there will be scrutiny of whether Rwanda is indeed a safe country. That is not asking too much.

The Government say that they will be ready to remove people in 10 to 12 weeks, and that Rwanda will be safe when the treaty is in force. I ask the Government this: will all the matters of implementation be in force in 10 to 12 weeks? Will the policies be in place in 10 to 12 weeks? Will the staff be in place in 10 to 12 weeks? Will the judges be in place in 10 to 12 weeks? Will the lawyers be in place in 10 to 12 weeks? Will the appeals system be in place in 10 to 12 weeks? Will all those things be there? Will the accommodation be there in 10 to 12 weeks—we know that that has already been sold off—and what airline company has the Government contracted with to remove people in 10 to 12 weeks? They have been extremely unclear about whether they even have an airline company. They have not told us that, and this House deserves to know, because we are not going to get the opportunity again to scrutinise the Government on whether or not the Rwanda treaty is actually being implemented.

The very least that this House should be able to do is check whether the Government and future Governments are fulfilling the obligations they have committed to carry out. We know that even when this treaty was being negotiated, Rwanda was engaging in refolement. If that was happening when the treaty was being negotiated, is it still happening now? Can the Minister give any assurances that Rwanda is not refolement people right now? If he cannot come to the Dispatch Box and give that assurance, we should not be rejecting this Lords amendment and approving the Bill this evening.

This Bill has been very unusual in the number of Lords amendments we have had. I have never seen the like. I do not believe in the House of Lords—it is a principled position of the SNP not to send people to an unelected Chamber—but this Westminster system is broken when the supposed revising Chamber has been ignored throughout the entire process of this Bill. A revising Chamber is supposed to be allowed to revise, yet this Government have ignored every single reasonable amendment the House of Lords has made. The Bill will be exactly the same as when it was introduced when it comes out of this process.

This elected House has absolutely no mandate for this Bill. It was in no manifesto, the Prime Minister does not have a mandate for it, and this House has no business approving it. I support the Lords in rejecting it. This Bill is not a deterrent. It has not been a deterrent, and nothing the Government have done has been a deterrent. It will not work. It will pile misery on to people who have already suffered incredible trauma, which the folk crowing on the Government Benches cannot even imagine. It does not happen in Scotland's name, and we will vote against it at every opportunity we get.

Question put. That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 3J.

The House divided: Ayes 312, Noes 237.

Division No. 134]

[10.20 pm

AYES

Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Stuart (*Proxy vote*
cast by Mr Marcus Jones)
Andrew, rh Stuart
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, rh Edward
Atherton, Sarah
Atkins, rh Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, rh Kemi
Bailey, Shaun
Baillie, Siobhan
Baker, Duncan
Baker, rh Mr Steve
Baldwin, Dame Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, rh Sir Jake
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, rh Dame Karen
Brady, rh Sir Graham
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Burghart, Alex
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Carter, Andy
Cartledge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, rh Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Sir Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, rh Claire
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Dame Tracey
Daly, James

Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Sir Philip
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, rh Michelle
Double, Steve
Doyle-Price, Dame Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, Sir James (*Proxy*
vote cast by Mr Francois)
Duguid, David (*Proxy vote*
cast by Mr Marcus Jones)
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Dunne, rh Philip
Eastwood, Mark
Edwards, Ruth
Ellis, rh Sir Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Eustice, rh George
Evans, Dr Luke
Evennett, rh Sir David
Everitt, Ben
Fabricant, Michael
Farris, Laura
Fell, Simon
Firth, Anna
Fletcher, Katherine
Fletcher, Mark
Fletcher, Nick
Ford, rh Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Sir Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
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
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
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
Heappey, rh James
Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
Henderson, Gordon
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
Hunt, Tom
Jack, rh Mr Alister
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnston, David
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Fay
Jones, rh Mr Marcus
Jupp, Simon
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, rh Gillian
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Kniveton, Kate
Kruger, Danny
Lamont, John
Largan, Robert
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Levy, Ian
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Sir Brandon
Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Loder, Chris
Logan, Mark
Longhi, Marco
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig (*Proxy vote cast by John Redwood*)
Mackrory, Cheryl
Macleane, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mangnall, Anthony
Mann, Scott
Marson, Julie
Mayhew, Jerome
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl

McPartland, rh Stephen
McVey, rh Esther
Mercer, rh Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Millar, Robin
Miller, rh Dame Maria
Milling, rh Dame Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Damien
Moore, Robbie
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mortimer, Jill
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mumby-Croft, Holly
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryl
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Nici, Lia
O'Brien, Neil
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Patel, rh Priti
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, rh Chris
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
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Russell, Dean
Rutley, David
Sambrook, Gary
Saxby, Selaine
Scully, Paul
Seely, Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
Simmonds, David
Smith, rh Chloe
Smith, Greg
Smith, rh Julian
Solloway, Amanda
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, rh Sir Mark
Stafford, Alexander
Stephenson, rh Andrew
Stevenson, Jane
Stevenson, John
Stewart, rh Bob
Stewart, Ian

Streeter, Sir Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, rh Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, rh Rishi
Sunderland, James
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, rh Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, rh Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trott, rh Laura
Tuckwell, Steve
Tugendhat, rh Tom
Vara, rh Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt

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
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wood, Mike
Young, Jacob
Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Joy Morrissey and
Mark Jenkinson

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane (*Proxy vote cast by Bell Ribeiro-Addy*)
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Fleur
Ashworth, rh Jonathan
Bardell, Hannah
Barker, Paula
Beckett, rh Dame Margaret
Begum, Apsana
Benn, rh Hilary
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackman, Kirsty
Blake, Olivia
Blomfield, Paul
Bonnar, Steven
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Ms Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Sir Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Chamberlain, Wendy
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Clark, Feryal
Cooper, Daisy
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy

Cowan, Ronnie
Crawley, Angela (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Daby, Janet
Dalton, Ashley
Davey, rh Ed
David, Wayne
Davies-Jones, Alex
Debbonaire, Thangam
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Doughty, Stephen
Duffield, Rosie
Dyke, Sarah
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, rh Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Edwards, Jonathan
Edwards, Sarah
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Elmore, Chris
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farron, Tim
Farry, Stephen
Fellows, Marion
Fletcher, Colleen
Flynn, rh Stephen
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Furniss, Gill
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Green, Sarah

Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Dame Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Mrs Paulette
Hanna, Claire
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hendry, Drew
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Rachel
Hosie, rh Stewart
Howarth, rh Sir George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Johnson, Kim
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Khan, Afzal
Kinnock, Stephen
Kitchen, Gen
Kyle, Peter
Lake, Ben
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Leadbeater, Kim
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lightwood, Simon
Linden, David (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lynch, Holly
MacAskill, Kenny
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Maskell, Rachael
Mather, Keir
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Dame Siobhain
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McKinnell, Catherine
McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
Miliband, rh Edward
Mishra, Navendu
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Helen
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Murray, Ian
Murray, James
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Norris, Alex
Olney, Sarah
Onwurah, Chi
Oppong-Asare, Abena
Osborne, Kate
Oswald, Kirsten
Owatemi, Taiwo (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
Owen, Sarah
Peacock, Stephanie
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Mr Toby
Phillipson, Bridget
Powell, Lucy
Qaisar, Ms Anum
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rayner, rh Angela
Reed, Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, rh Rachel
Reynolds, Jonathan
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Saville Roberts, rh Liz
Shah, Naz
Shanks, Michael
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheppard, Tommy
Siddiq, Tulip
Slaughter, Andy
Smith, Alyn
Smith, Cat
Smith, Jeff
Smyth, Karin (*Proxy vote cast by Gerald Jones*)
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Strathern, Alistair
Streeting, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sultana, Zarah
Tami, rh Mark
Tarry, Sam
Thewliss, Alison
Thompson, rh Owen
Thomson, Richard
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Trickett, Jon (*Proxy vote cast by Ian Lavery*)
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twist, Liz
Vaz, rh Valerie
Wakeford, Christian
Webbe, Claudia

West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitford, Dr Philippa (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
Whittome, Nadia
Williams, Hywel

Wilson, Munira
Winter, Beth
Wishart, Pete
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Tonia Antoniazzi and
Mary Glindon

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 3J disagreed to.

Motion made, and Question put, That a Committee be appointed to draw up a Reason to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their Amendment 3J;

That Michael Tomlinson, Scott Mann, Dr Kieran Mullan, James Sunderland, Stephen Kinnock, Colleen Fletcher, and Alison Thewliss be members of the Committee;

That Michael Tomlinson be the Chair of the Committee;

That three be the quorum of the Committee.

That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—
(Mark Fletcher.)

The House divided: Ayes 309, Noes 41.

Division No. 135]

[10.36 pm

AYES

Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aiken, Nickie
Aldous, Peter
Anderson, Stuart (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
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, Dame Harriett
Barclay, rh Steve
Baynes, Simon
Bell, Aaron
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, rh Dame Karen
Brady, rh Sir Graham
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Bristow, Paul
Britcliffe, Sara
Browne, Anthony
Bruce, Fiona
Buchan, Felicity
Buckland, rh Sir Robert
Burghart, Alex
Butler, Rob
Cairns, rh Alun
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Carter, Andy
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Cates, Miriam
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, rh Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Sir Simon
Clarke, Theo
Clarke-Smith, Brendan
Clarkson, Chris
Cleverly, rh James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, rh Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Courts, Robert
Coutinho, rh Claire
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crosbie, Virginia
Crouch, Dame Tracey
Daly, James
Davies, rh David T. C.
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Sir Philip
Davis, rh Sir David
Davison, Dehenna
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Dines, Miss Sarah
Docherty, Leo
Donelan, rh Michelle
Double, Steve
Doyle-Price, Dame Jackie
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick

Duddridge, Sir James (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Francois*)
 Duguid, David (*Proxy vote cast by Mr Marcus Jones*)
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Dunne, rh Philip
 Eastwood, Mark
 Edwards, Ruth
 Ellis, rh Sir Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Eustice, rh George
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Everitt, Ben
 Fabricant, Michael
 Farris, Laura
 Fell, Simon
 Firth, Anna
 Fletcher, Katherine
 Fletcher, Mark
 Fletcher, Nick
 Ford, rh Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Sir Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 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
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Sally-Ann
 Hart, rh Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, rh James
 Heaton-Harris, rh Chris
 Henderson, Gordon
 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
 Hunt, Tom
 Jack, rh Mr Alister
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnston, David
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Fay
 Jones, rh Mr Marcus
 Jupp, Simon
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, rh Gillian
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Kniveton, Kate
 Kruger, Danny
 Lamont, John
 Largan, Robert
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Dame Andrea
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Levy, Ian
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Sir Brandon
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Loder, Chris
 Logan, Mark
 Longhi, Marco
 Lopez, Julia
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Mackinlay, Craig (*Proxy vote cast by John Redwood*)
 Mackrory, Cherilyn
 Maclean, Rachel
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mangnall, Anthony
 Mann, Scott
 Marson, Julie
 Mayhew, Jerome
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, rh Stephen
 McVey, rh Esther
 Mercer, rh Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Millar, Robin
 Miller, rh Dame Maria
 Milling, rh Dame Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Mortimer, Jill
 Morton, rh Wendy
 Mullan, Dr Kieran

Mumby-Croft, Holly
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Nici, Lia
 O'Brien, Neil
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Philp, rh Chris
 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
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Russell, Dean
 Rutley, David
 Sambrook, Gary
 Saxby, Selaine
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, rh Chloe
 Smith, Greg
 Smith, rh Julian
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, rh Sir Mark
 Stafford, Alexander
 Stephenson, rh Andrew
 Stevenson, Jane
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, rh Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Streeter, Sir Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, rh Rishi
 Sunderland, James
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, rh Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, rh Michael
 Trott, rh Laura
 Tuckwell, Steve
 Tugendhat, rh Tom
 Vara, rh Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 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
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wood, Mike
 Young, Jacob
 Zahawi, rh Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Joy Morrissey and
 Mark Jenkinson

NOES

Bardell, Hannah
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Callaghan, Amy (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Chapman, Douglas
 Cherry, Joanna
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dorans, Allan (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Eastwood, Colum
 Fellows, Marion
 Galloway, George
 Gibson, Patricia
 Grady, Patrick
 Hendry, Drew
 Law, Chris
 Linden, David (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Lucas, Caroline
 MacAskill, Kenny
 Mc Nally, John
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McLaughlin, Anne (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John (*Proxy vote cast by Marion Fellows*)
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Qaisar, Ms Anum
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Smith, Alyn
 Stephens, Chris
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thompson, rh Owen

Thomson, Richard
Webbe, Claudia
Whitford, Dr Philippa (*Proxy
vote cast by Marion
Fellows*)

Williams, Hywel
Wishart, Pete
Tellers for the Noes:
**Peter Grant and
Steven Bonnar**

Question accordingly agreed to.

Committee to withdraw immediately; reason to be reported and communicated to the Lords.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):

That concludes consideration of the Lords message received today relating to the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill. The House may be called upon to consider a further Lords message later today, if necessary. I am suspending the sitting to await any such message from the Lords. The Division bells will ring before the House resumes.

10.48 pm

Sitting suspended (Order, this day).

PETITIONS

Sentencing and illegal knife possession

11.45 pm

Matt Hancock (West Suffolk) (Ind): I rise to present a petition, on behalf of my constituents, about sentencing and illegal knife possession. The petition has been led by Bernice Barfield, a devoted mother from my West Suffolk constituency whose son Harley was tragically stabbed to death in Haverhill last year. He was just 16. I thank Bernice for all her time and effort in campaigning in memory of her son.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the constituency of West Suffolk,

Declares that the rising incidence of illegal knife carrying in public poses a significant threat to public safety and calls for urgent intervention; further declares that such incidents contribute

to an atmosphere of fear and insecurity in our communities; further that preventative measures are necessary to address this issue effectively; further that the petitioners are of the opinion that a mandatory prison sentence for those caught carrying a knife illegally in public, coupled with a mandatory 6-month knife awareness course for rehabilitation, will act as a deterrent to contribute to the reduction of knife-related crimes; and further that the rehabilitation program should aim to address the root causes of such behaviour and facilitate the offender's reintegration into society as law-abiding citizens.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to consider introducing measures which contribute to public safety and help address the root causes of illegal knife carrying, including introducing mandatory prison sentences for individuals caught carrying a knife illegally in public and implementing a mandatory 6-month knife awareness course for rehabilitation as part of the sentencing process.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002947]

Recommendations of the Infected Blood Inquiry

Michael Shanks (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab): I rise to present a petition on behalf of those infected and affected by the contaminated blood scandal, in particular my constituent Richard Gilmour, who was infected in 1974 through a blood transfusion. He has had to undergo multiple medical procedures since and says that he is lucky to still be alive. Like all those infected, he suffers chronic fatigue and other symptoms, and he deserves justice without further delay. The Government must act now.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the constituency of Rutherglen and Hamilton West,

Declares that people who received infected blood and who have suffered as a consequence have, along with their families, waited far too long for redress.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to implement the recommendations in the Second Interim Report of the Infected Blood Inquiry without delay.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002957]

Food Poverty Strategy

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Rebecca Harris.)

11.48 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Exactly 10 years have passed since, in April 2014, an all-party parliamentary inquiry was launched to investigate hunger and food poverty in these islands. Led by the great Frank Field—now Lord Field of Birkenhead—who at that time was a distinguished Member of this House, the inquiry's report contained a powerful rallying cry. It said:

“The simple but devastating fact that hunger stalks this country should confront each of the main political parties with a most basic and fundamental political challenge. With rising national income nobody could have predicted that in 2014 there would be a significant number of hungry people in Britain. But there are.”

In identifying the forces behind that hunger, the inquiry noted:

“Something fundamental is happening in advanced Western economies which throws into doubt the effectiveness of a national minimum below which no one is allowed to fall. It is the erosion of an effective national minimum that has led to the existence of hunger and the rise of the food bank movement in its wake.”

The fact that I will outline some of those same specific forces later in this debate, and the fact that the number of people having to use food banks has increased relentlessly since the inquiry published its report, is a shocking indictment of the UK Government's response to hunger and food poverty over the past 10 years. It is also a reminder of why an effective strategy is so necessary—to prevent yet another full decade of lengthening queues for food banks and rising levels of hunger.

The Government's family resources survey recently found that between 2019-20 and 2022-23, household food insecurity increased for the UK as a whole from 8% to 10%. Larger families with children are particularly vulnerable to this form of injustice. A survey commissioned last year by Feeding Britain found that although 3% of households with no children reported accessing a food bank, that proportion increased to 6% among those with one child and 7% among those with two children. The highest proportion—13%—was found among those with three or more children. In a similar vein, adults living in a household with three or more children were almost four times as likely to report skipping meals every day because there was not enough money for food than those with one child, and almost six times as likely than those with no children.

The Minister will know that this injustice is felt by people both in and out of paid employment. Among members surveyed by the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union, the number relying on food banks increased between 2021 and 2023 from 7% to 17%. Those relying on friends and family have gone from 20% to 34%, and those eating less have gone from 35% to 57%. Of those surveyed, 80% are eating cheaper—unhealthier—meals, 55% have been worried about running out of food and 45% have skipped meals.

Even closer to home, the Minister may be aware that food bank usage among staff at the Department for Work and Pensions increased from 8% of those surveyed by the Public and Commercial Services Union in 2022 to 11% in 2023. Perhaps she could explain why so many

staff working for the Department for Work and Pensions are only paid the national minimum wage. The Food Foundation's recent survey showed that in January, 15% of UK households were experiencing food insecurity. Among households with children, 20% were experiencing food insecurity, and 24% of households of non-white ethnicity were food insecure—1.6 times more than households of white ethnicity. Of those in some kind of employment, 15% were food insecure.

Stark health inequalities are highly prevalent, particularly in diet-related poor health. The most deprived communities are affected disproportionately by much higher rates of food-related ill health and disease, from obesity to type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and dental decay. Recent reports show an increase in hospital admissions for nutrient deficiencies. The data should ring alarm bells. The longevity of the cost of living crisis means that food insecurity has become the norm for many households who are unable to buy staple nutritious products. Anyone who volunteers for a food bank in Glasgow, like in any other asylum dispersal area, will tell of the need to assist those who seek sanctuary in the UK. Asylum seekers receive a payment of £45 a week—equivalent to what a youth trainee received 30 years ago.

How should the Government respond to those alarming figures? Fortunately, there are two recent precedents—from the Biden Administration in America and the Scottish Government under Humza Yousaf, both of whom have published strategies to eliminate hunger and food poverty within the coming years. A consistent thread running through both those strategies is a combination of specific policies to raise household income levels, improve access to nutritional support schemes and accelerate the development of innovative projects that bring affordable food to areas where people are struggling most. It is that threefold combination that I would like to propose to the Minister by way of an effective food poverty strategy that can eliminate the need for food banks in these islands by 2030.

First, the 2014 inquiry identified food bank usage as resulting from

“delays and errors in the processing and payment of benefits, the sometimes heavy-handed issuing of benefit sanctions...a sudden loss of earnings through reduced hours or unemployment, the absence of free school meals, the accumulation of problem debt or, for some, even a lost purse.”

It added:

“A further group of factors similarly exposes the vulnerability of many poor families. The poor are penalised for their poverty with a raft of disproportionate charges for basic utilities. They pay more for their energy through prepayment meters, are more likely to be charged to withdraw cash from their local machine, and often are unable to take advantage of the best mobile phone contracts—meaning they are likely to be just one bill away from needing to use a food bank.”

Today, around half of all households in receipt of universal credit are having an average of £60 a month deducted from their income, much of which is to repay the loans needed to cover the five-week delay at the beginning of a new claim. In my Glasgow South West constituency, almost a quarter of a million pounds per month was being deducted last year. At this stage, I would provide similar figures about the impact of the Government's sanctions policy in Glasgow South West, but the Government decided last year that figures would no longer be made available to Members of this House on the amount of money being sanctioned in the

[Chris Stephens]

constituencies that we represent. However, thanks to Dr David Webster at the University of Glasgow, we know that a total of 538,842 universal credit sanctions were imposed in the year ending October 2023, and 419,219 individual universal credit claimants received at least one sanction.

Food banks across these islands have identified those two policies as the two big recruiting sergeants for emergency food aid, so the first plank of a food poverty strategy must be to reform or get rid of those deductions and sanctions, which are applied so harshly as to leave people hungry. I would place the abolition of the two-child limit on social security payments in a similar category, as well as the introduction of a formal mechanism for advising the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the benefit levels that are required each year to safeguard all households from hunger and food poverty, and the payment of fair wages throughout the public sector and the economy as a whole so that a fair day's work genuinely delivers a fair day's pay to all. We need to end the scandal of those working in hospitality not being able to buy food for themselves. We need to end insecure work and guarantee workers their hours of work. We also need firm action against the poverty premium, which still results in poorer households missing out on the best and fairest deals for essential living costs.

Secondly, there are different programmes available specifically to make nutritious food available to people who are at risk of food poverty, but awareness and take-up of those programmes has never been as high as it could be. As such, can the Minister tell me whether the Government will undertake to work with all devolved Administrations and local authorities to ensure that they have the tools they need to automatically identify and register all eligible households for those programmes? That is something that featured heavily in the Biden strategy, and could extend much-needed help to hundreds of thousands of children across these islands.

Thirdly, I am proud to have set up the Good Food Scotland programme, which now runs seven affordable food larders and community shops across Glasgow, including those in Nitshill, Cardonald and Linthouse in my constituency. They serve 2,000 members with fresh, nutritious food at a low cost, helping to fill the gap between big supermarkets and food banks. That approach protects those members from food poverty with dignity and choice, and we expect to be running 10 across the city of Glasgow by the end of this year.

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making an excellent contribution on the importance of the need for a food strategy. He has highlighted the volunteers and groups across Glasgow that he works with; will he join me in also celebrating the volunteers in Midlothian who help to run the Mayfield and Easthouses Development Trust pantry, the Woodburn pantry, the Gorebridge Beacon pantry, the Newtongrange Development Trust pantry, the Steading community fridge in Rosewell, and the Food Facts Friends pantry and community fridge that I recently visited, along with the Midlothian food bank at Gorebridge parish church and various pantries run by Cyrenians across Midlothian, which all make such an amazing contribution?

Chris Stephens: I am glad to join my right hon. Friend in thanking his organisations in Midlothian. He will know, as I do, that the case studies from these organisations can be very illuminating, and I will mention one now.

Case studies from these projects show how much difference they can make. A couple using the Linthouse Larder used to do their weekly shop in Asda at a cost of £80 a week. Buying the same items in the Linthouse Larder has reduced their weekly shop to £30 a week—a saving of £50 a week. That helps many people in Glasgow South West and in the constituency of my right hon. Friend. Those are the kind of savings that can be made, and I want to thank all those community organisations in Glasgow South West and beyond, across these islands, who are tackling hunger and food poverty. On a bigger scale, and with the appropriate resources, these affordable food programmes could play an important part in eliminating food poverty across these islands.

I propose to the Minister that the Government commit as soon as possible to a cross-sector summit, with the aim of helping communities to secure the resources they need to deliver such programmes at the scale that will be necessary in the years ahead. In addition to that, much of the food required to sustain such programmes could be made available if the Government introduced the mandatory reporting of food waste and surplus in retailers' supply chains—a measure that would trigger much-needed action by those retailers to ensure that edible surplus arising in the farms and factories that supply them was recycled for human consumption rather than put to waste. When Baroness Boycott proposed such a measure in the other place in 2021, the Government rejected the idea on the proviso that voluntary efforts within the food industry should first be given a chance. I would argue that, three years on, it is surely time to reconsider that idea with urgency.

It is nothing short of shameful to have to bring to this House yet again the issue of hunger as a form of injustice that continues to blight the lives of millions of people in the UK, exactly a decade after the launch of an all-party inquiry that gave the Government a set of proposals to make it a thing of the past. Just imagine a society where no one goes hungry; just imagine a society with a proper social security system; just imagine a society where work pays; and just imagine a society where food is accessible for all and at a fair price. That should be our rallying call. We cannot afford to let even more time slip by without a strategy to achieve that objective. With the numbers of hungry people continuing to rise, now more than ever we need to tackle this emergency, and I await with interest the Minister's response.

12.3 am

The Minister for Employment (Jo Churchill): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) on securing this important debate on the potential merits of a food poverty strategy. I would like to start by saying that no one wants to see people struggling in our constituencies right across these islands, and I understand fully the passion that drives the contribution on these important subjects. I would like to add my voice to those of the hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) in extending thanks to all those charities, and more broadly to institutions such as the

Church that do lunches and so on. They not only provide food but are part of that cohesive societal network that helps people at times of need.

Food insecurity is highly complex—the hon. Gentleman explained very clearly how complex it is—covering not only my own Department but the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Business and Trade, His Majesty's Treasury and so on.

The annual statistics on incomes and living standards were published by my Department last month. They cover the year when the war in Ukraine and global supply chain pressures led to exceedingly high inflation, averaging 10% over the year. Food price inflation linked with the consumer prices index peaked during this time, reaching a high of 19.1% in March 2023. Thankfully, however, the latest figures show that it has dropped again, to about 4%, with upward forces bringing the rise in February and March to 0.2%, down from 1.1% since a similar period last year. According to statistics, food bank use during this period has remained relatively stable, although I agree that it is higher than any of us would want.

Since 2022-23, the period covered by these statistics, we have taken firm action to help families on the lowest incomes. We will spend about £306 billion in the coming financial year through the welfare system, including £138 billion on families and those of working age. The Government provided an unprecedented cost of living support package worth £96 billion during 2022-23 and 2023-24, including £20 billion for two rounds of cost of living payments targeted specifically at those who were struggling the most. That helped to shield people from the impact of inflation, preventing some 1.3 million households from falling into absolute poverty after housing costs. Since 2010 the Government have overseen significant falls in poverty, with 1.1 million fewer people in absolute low income after housing costs in 2022-23 than in 2009-10.

I am not suggesting for a minute that things have not been, and are not still, difficult for many. Food poverty is complex, as I have said, and it cannot be tackled through welfare alone. The levers for tackling this issue sit with a number of Government Departments, which is why we are not only working across Government to bring down food inflation, but meeting external anti-poverty stakeholders through our Departments and talking to other Departments about what more we can do. That includes encouraging retailers and those involved in local ecosystems.

Through regular engagement, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs continues to work with food businesses throughout the supply chain to explore a range of measures that they can take to ensure the availability of affordable food by, for instance, maintaining value ranges, price matching and price freezing. However—the hon. Gentleman would expect me to say this—it is not for the Government to tell retail outlets how to set their food prices, or to tell companies what to do. Retailers have introduced incentives for customers, such as reward cards offering small discounts, and a number of stores are offering meal deals either in-store or in their cafés. As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, many use local or national groups to redistribute food at the end of the working day, and many interact with FareShare, among other charities.

Chris Stephens: A scandalous amount of food is being wasted and going to landfill, and I think we should do something about that. It is not a silver bullet, but will the Minister ask her colleagues in DEFRA to sit down with those of us who care passionately about this subject, and discuss addressing the fact that we have food poverty on one hand and a large amount of food waste on the other?

Jo Churchill: Funnily enough, earlier today I was talking to the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow), about exactly that issue. The hon. Gentleman mentioned that there was no mandate three years ago, and I was discussing how the reporting and so on was going. We know that not only are there the benefits of redistribution for individuals but there is a significant environmental benefit for not putting that food in landfill and creating methane, so arguably there is a double win. When done sensibly, redistribution enables others to do the same as charities such as the Felix Project, which freezes food and makes it available to people.

The economy has turned a corner. Inflation has more than halved and is forecast to fall below 2% in 2024-25, while wages are rising in real terms and have done for the last consecutive nine months. Prices for food and non-alcoholic beverages rose by 4% in the year to March, easing for the 12th consecutive month. However, we recognise the financial challenges that many are still facing, which is why as inflation comes down to the 2% target we are continuing to provide support for the 2024-25 period. This includes uprating working-age benefits by 6.7%, well ahead of the current inflation rate, and uplifting the local housing allowance to the 30th percentile of local rents, which will benefit about 1.6 million private renters by, on average, £800 a year, as the hon. Gentleman indicated, alleviating financial pressures throughout the system for individuals.

Further, there is additional support for families, including free school meals, which are being claimed by some 2 million of the most disadvantaged pupils; the £40 million that the Department for Education has put into stimulating the breakfast clubs; and healthy food schemes, such as Healthy Start, which provide a nutritional safety net to more than 3 million children. I looked after the Healthy Start policy when I was at the Department of Health and Social Care, getting the uplift to £4.25 a week, so that pregnant women and children over one and under four receive £4.25 every week. For a child under one, it is £8.50 every week. This can be used to buy, or be put towards the cost of, fresh, frozen or tinned fruit and vegetables; fresh, dried and tinned pulses; milk and infant formula. I remember well meeting Daisy, who spoke to me very clearly about the difference it made having fresh produce, as the hon. Gentleman has already mentioned, come into her life and those of her children, and the nutritional benefit it gave them.

For those who still need extra help while inflation continues to fall, we are providing an additional £500 million to enable the extension of the household support fund for a further six months, including funding for the devolved Administrations through the Barnett formula, meaning local authorities in England will receive an additional £421 million to support local people, with the rest being distributed to the other nations. Independent

[Jo Churchill]

charitable organisations do fantastic work that also helps in this space, whether they are our local churches or organisations providing lunches and community pantry schemes. As the hon. Gentleman mentioned, they all help individuals and families when they are in need.

Chris Stephens: I thank the Minister for giving way again; she is being extremely generous. One concern that has been reported to us is that the Department for Work and Pensions is no longer helping with food bank vouchers. Can she confirm that that is now departmental policy? That would be a very real concern for someone who is in difficulty, having a conversation with a work coach, for example, who is now being denied that food bank voucher or discussing that sort of support that someone in absolute poverty requires.

Jo Churchill: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to put to bed completely the idea that there has been any change in our policy. We have always signposted that support. The only thing the DWP has done is brought in a new slip to replace the one used previously. There is no change to the existing policy, but the new slip allows us to improve our existing practices and to comply with our departmental responsibilities under GDPR. Our jobcentres continue to provide customers with guidance to find that additional support, including signposting to emergency food support where appropriate. We stand ready to help people when they are most in need.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the two-child policy. The latest statistic that we have for households in receipt of universal credit is that the majority of families—some 78%—have fewer than three children. Surely it is right that all families, whether in receipt of universal credit or not, should face the same financial choices when deciding whether to grow their family.

While our actions have shown that we remain committed to a strong welfare safety net—particularly during challenging economic times—we know that the best way we can help is through support to move into work. That approach is based on clear evidence on the role of full-time work in substantially reducing poverty. The latest statistics show that working-age adults in workless households were about seven times more likely to be in absolute poverty after housing costs. Children living in

workless households were more than six times more likely to be in absolute poverty after housing costs than those in families where adults work. There are now over 1 million fewer workless households in the UK than in 2010—that is 680,000 fewer children growing up in a home where no one works. That is a cause for some gratitude.

There are more than 900,000 vacancies across the UK, and through our core job centre offer we are firmly supporting people to get into work. We support them with travel costs through the flexible support fund, with face-to-face time with work coaches, and help with interviews. The voluntary in-work progression offer is in all jobcentres across Britain, providing an estimated 1.6 million low-paid workers on universal credit with access to personalised work coaches.

We have also reduced the taper rate from 63p to 55p in the pound. We provide childcare costs, capped at £1,000 for a single child and more than £1,700 a month for larger families. We can even help with the advance.

To ensure that work pays, we have put the national living wage for people aged over 21 up by over 9.8% to £11.44 an hour, as the hon. Member mentioned. That makes sure that people are rewarded for the work they do, and it means an extra £1,800 for someone working full time. We are also providing a tax cut for 27 million people by further reducing the main rate of class 1 national insurance contributions.

Our focus continues to be on providing opportunities for people to be supported and to succeed in work, based on our firm belief that this is a sustainable way of tackling all forms of poverty. At the same time, we understand the challenges that people face, and we will continue to work across Government and party to ensure food security and that the broader welfare system will support those who need it.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I wish to inform the House that the message to the Commons from the Lords is that the Lords do not insist on their amendment to the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Bill to which the Commons disagreed.

Question put and agreed to.

12.17 am

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Monday 22 April 2024

[JULIE ELLIOTT *in the Chair*]

Carer's Allowance

[*Relevant document: Oral evidence taken before the Work and Pensions Committee on 6 March 2024, on Carer's Allowance, HC 591.*]

4.30 pm

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 640062 relating to Carer's Allowance.

It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairpersonship, Ms Elliott. The petition was started by Alasdair Adam and has 13,914 signatures. It asks the Government to increase carer's allowance to 35 hours a week at the minimum wage, and specifically to increase the amount of carer's allowance to match pay for a full-time job. Unpaid carers eligible for carer's allowance receive £76.75 a week to provide at least 35 hours of care to people in receipt of certain benefits, which is almost £300 less than what someone earning the national living wage would be entitled to. Many unpaid carers must give up work to provide care, and being a carer can also have a significant impact on wellbeing and lifestyle.

The Government responded:

"Carer's Allowance is a benefit that provides some financial recognition that a carer may not be able to work full-time. It is part of a range of support based on individual needs, rather than a wage. The Government fully recognises the invaluable contribution that unpaid and family carers make in providing significant care and continuity of support to their loved ones. Unpaid carers play a vital role in the lives of their family and friends—and since 2010 we have increased Carer's Allowance by almost £1200 a year."

It is my honour to present this petition to highlight a grave concern that weighs heavily on the hearts of many across our nation. The inadequacy of carer's allowance in the UK is a concern that affects the very fabric of our society. In a society that prides itself on compassion and support for those in need, it is disheartening to witness the struggles endured by countless caregivers who selflessly dedicate their lives to caring for loved ones. The carer's allowance, intended to provide financial assistance to those unsung heroes, falls drastically short of meeting their needs.

First and foremost, let us acknowledge the monumental contributions of caregivers. They are the backbone of our communities, often sacrificing their livelihoods and personal aspirations to ensure the wellbeing of others. Their existence saves the taxpayer billions of pounds every year, yet despite their invaluable role, many caregivers find themselves living on the brink of poverty due to the inadequacy of carer's allowance. One would be forgiven for thinking that carer's allowance is some extra money for someone who pops in to check on an elderly neighbour. In the vast majority of cases, it is paid to someone who cares round the clock for a close relative.

During my research for this speech, I heard testimony from the petitioner Alasdair, as well as from carers Jacky and Katy from the We Care Campaign, which

specifically advocates for unpaid carers. All three cared for close relatives—parents, a child and a partner respectively.

Alasdair spoke about the challenges of making ends meet in circumstances that are far from black and white. His carer's allowance often needed to go on household items and supporting his father. Living month to month means that there is no money for unexpected outgoings.

Jacky told me about caring for her 28-year-old daughter. The role is 24/7. Although she is reluctant to use external carers, she is also prevented from drawing down direct payments to top up her carer's allowance. Jacky's money does not match that of her daughter's personal independence payment, so she is often left without enough money for both of them to do things such as social activities and hobbies.

Katy cares for her husband who has motor neurone disease, plus her mother and mother-in-law who both have caring needs. Katy spoke of the challenge of making ends meet, surviving only because of her husband's PIP and a small ill health-related pension. Despite caring for three people, Katy is allowed only one carer's allowance payment as per the rules. The current allowance barely covers the basic cost of living, let alone the additional expenses incurred during the unpredictable challenges of caring for someone with disabilities or chronic illnesses.

From medical bills to specialised equipment and everyday essentials, the financial burden on caregivers is overwhelming. Many are forced to make impossible choices between putting food on the table and accessing services. Furthermore, the eligibility criteria for carer's allowance are unduly restrictive, leaving out a significant proportion of caregivers who are equally deserving of support. The requirement for caregivers to provide at least 35 hours of care a week effectively excludes those who juggle caregiving responsibilities with part-time employment or other commitments. That arbitrary threshold denies assistance to individuals who are in dire need of financial relief. Perhaps the Minister will explain how the 35 hours of care criteria was arrived at.

The narrative surrounding carer's allowance is often toxic, with carers being treated as undeserving at best and criminals at worst. The recent news coverage of people being fined or charged with benefit fraud because of accidental overpayments or honest mistakes, sometimes concerning as little as a few hundred pounds, throws a spotlight on it. Such action is neither fair nor proportional. Carer's allowance is the lowest paid benefit of its kind. Those examples say something about the value put on carers and speak of a society and its Government that simply do not value care.

Support for carers should go well beyond carer's allowance. Stakeholders such as care charities and think-tanks have told me of diminishing support for carers during recent years, citing the lack of availability of respite care and training opportunities as examples of a crumbling support network. It is suggested that any reform should centre on providing support for carers to remain in work where possible. That would involve financial support and flexibility in how carer's allowance is paid to avoid a threshold cliff edge. In addition, the threshold needs to be raised and tied to the periodic uprating of any minimum or living wage.

[Christina Rees]

Across the UK, 600 carers a day give up work without having a choice. In December 2022, Carers UK highlighted that the earnings limit for carer's allowance is not keeping pace with the national living wage. It stated:

"Over the last four years, the number of hours carers have been able to work alongside receiving Carer's Allowance has shrunk from just under 15 hours a week in 2019 to roughly 13 hours and 20 minutes from...April 2023. This represents a loss of 1 hour 40 minutes a week. Over a year this amounts to a loss of 12 days of paid work."

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I congratulate my Petitions Committee colleague on presenting the petition so clearly. She talked about the carer's allowance not meeting the costs. Is she aware, as I am from my constituents, that the cost of living crisis and things such as food prices going up are actually making that acutely difficult, perhaps more difficult now than it was a few years ago?

Christina Rees: My hon. Friend makes an important point, with which I completely agree. This debate can only highlight the plight of unpaid carers.

Although carers can work any amount of hours, they must not exceed the earnings limit, which effectively limits the hours that they can work. It is important to understand that the problem of in-work support is one of implementation, not legislation. Laws exist that provide the framework for support for carers in employment, but all too often we see examples where that support is simply not implemented properly at an employer level. That said, the policy for carer's allowance needs to be far more inclusive; caring is not just about older people. The 21-hour rule on study is arbitrary and discriminatory. Financial support should be stronger, clearer and less at the discretion of grant decision makers. There is also no clarity on who is responsible for any policy failure at a civil service or a ministerial level; it is everyone and no one.

Work must be done to end the postcode lottery and level up the services available in poorer areas. There are stark inequalities across the different regions in how the carer's assessment for young carers is delivered. There are huge disparities in whether or not a GP surgery provides information on support for carers, and there is a significant gap between the number of people who identify as carers and those registered as a carer with their GP.

We need to answer the question: what is carer's allowance for? A recent survey reported that 48% of those in receipt of it say that it does not make the difference that it should. Any reforms must examine the level of carer's allowance so that it better reflects the level of financial impact of caring responsibilities, increase the earnings limit and tie it to national living wage increases, and review the 21-hour study rule. We need to aggregate the total number of caring hours if someone is caring for more than one person, so that their allowance reflects accurately their caring responsibilities, and explore the option of a sliding scale of payments depending on the level of caring responsibilities, supporting those who wish to stay in work. The reforms must also modernise carer's allowance processes to guard against accidental overpayments and treat honest mistakes compassionately, fairly and proportionately, and provide an additional payment for carers of state pension age. Such reforms would help to bridge the gap between the current state of things and how we might wish them to be.

Carer's allowance fails to adequately address the long-term implications of caregiving for the mental and physical wellbeing of caregivers. The emotional toll of caring for a loved one can be profound, leading to increased stress, anxiety and burnout. Without sufficient support, caregivers risk their own health and wellbeing, perpetuating a cycle of hardship and suffering. We cannot turn a blind eye to the injustices faced by caregivers across our nation. It is incumbent on us as a society to rectify those inadequacies and provide meaningful support to those who dedicate their lives to caring for others.

Although I appreciate the difficulties and dangers of paying carers a minimum wage, we must demand a carer's allowance that reflects the true value of caregiving. We need a fair and dignified allowance that alleviates financial hardship and recognises the invaluable contributions of caregivers to our society. Let us stand in solidarity with caregivers and advocate for meaningful change. I urge the Government and policymakers to reform carer's allowance and reinvigorate all support to ensure that it serves its intended purpose of providing genuine help for those who need it most. Together we can build a more compassionate and inclusive society where caregivers are valued, respected and adequately supported.

4.45 pm

Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Neath (Christina Rees) on bringing the e-petition to the House and on her excellent speech. I agree with everything she said.

We should begin by looking at the big-picture issues that the carer's allowance helps us to address—currently very inadequately. The first is the issue of social justice. Carers often work long hours in very difficult, trying circumstances, and they receive the lowest benefit of the lot. They are treated as if they do not matter. That has to change. We must change the value that we place on care in order to end income inequality.

Supporting care properly through the carer's allowance would make a big difference as part of a proper social justice agenda, but it is about much more than that. It is about the link between care and the NHS. Carers do such a fantastic job. Their work helps the NHS and the taxpayer, saving them billions of pounds. Were it not for unpaid family carers or carers who receive the very limited allowance, the NHS would literally fall over. We must consider this debate about carer's allowance in the context of social justice and the future of the NHS.

Another issue that I hope the Minister will look at is the link with the economic problems we are facing. We are told that the Department for Work and Pensions is looking at the need to help people to get back into work; well, there are a lot of people who cannot get back into work because they are caring. They would like to work more, but if they work more, they get penalised. This is clearly the issue of the day, and I know that the Chair of the Select Committee, the right hon. Member for East Ham (Sir Stephen Timms), will address it. If the Government are worried about work incentives and making sure there are people to do the jobs we need, they should look at the level of the carer's allowance and all the conditions and criteria around it. It is way overdue for reform.

I wanted to start by raising those general issues, before getting down into the basics, which the hon. Member for Neath rightly took us through. We need a

complete review of the carer's allowance, including the rate it is paid at, the conditions around it and how it relates to other benefits and issues. Let me give one or two examples.

One issue is age. As the hon. Lady said, people who are in education and are affected by the 21-hour rule cannot receive carer's allowance. That discriminates against young people. Young carers arguably need support more than any other kind of carer. We need to look at the interaction with education, and I would even consider those below the age of 16, because some young carers are basically doing a full-time job as well as their GCSEs and studies.

We also need to look at carer's allowance for people who are over the pension age. To give them credit, the Labour Government began to do that, but we need to take that further, because some pensioners work incredibly hard and do really stressful jobs but are ineligible for carer's allowance. We urgently need a full-scale review of carer's allowance.

On the overpayment issue, which is really worrying, there are two aspects that we have to address. One is the legacy: all the carer's allowance that has apparently been overpaid and that the Government are looking to claw back. That is a big legacy issue that we need to look at, and I would like to ask the Minister some questions about it. It is clearly an issue that we all have to face up to and try to tackle.

There is then the issue of trying to stop the overpayments happening in the first place. I have seen a number of reports and parliamentary answers on this issue, but I have never quite nailed it down to satisfaction, so I let me ask the Minister some questions. How much money does the DWP believe has been overpaid in carer's allowance and is yet to be clawed back from people? What is the figure and what is the debt? We have seen different amounts, but what is the cumulative total, going back however many years that the DWP is worried about? In other words, how big is this problem? Give us the size of it so that we can try to get a feel for it. How much is owed?

By how much were people being overpaid? I have seen figures from Carers UK and some parliamentary answers that suggests the vast bulk relates to people who were overpaid just a little bit—£2 a week—and because of the cliff edge they have to pay back the whole amount. If they have been overpaid by an average of £2 a week for a year, they are having to pay back the whole lot. The cliff-edge problem is creating a total injustice and everyone can see that on all sides. Let us have some more figures and transparency from the Government so that we can understand.

I hope the Minister can go into more detail—for example, in how many cases was the DWP aware that people were being overpaid and still did not alert them? We read in the press that the DWP is sometimes aware and, for whatever reason, does not notify people. There is something really wrong with trying to claim back money from someone who has been overpaid when the DWP was aware and they were not, and that only compounds the errors. We really need to understand some of this information—which I hope the Minister has at her fingertips—if we are to come to a view on dealing with the huge problem of the overpayments legacy. I do not think there is a single Member of this

House or the other place who thinks it is right to pursue some of these overpayments with some of these people. It really beggars belief in many cases.

Finally, overpayments are still happening on a regular, systemic basis. Because of the cliff-edge problem that the hon. Member for Neath rightly touched on, it is happening by accident every single day. As the hon. Member mentioned, the Government were warned about this—after a National Audit Office report in 2019, they admitted it was a problem and said they were going to fix it—but here we are, and it has not been fixed and it has got worse. We need to understand how the Government are going to address this issue to ensure that the problem does not just get worse and keep reoccurring. We read that it is a terribly big IT system that will cost millions to fix, but why should carers be penalised because the Government cannot get their systems right? That does not seem right to me. The Government have to sort it out and, in the meantime, treat carers fairly.

I am keen to hear the contributions of others, and hope that we can come together on this issue and realise that carers are getting a raw deal, which is bad for inequality, bad for the NHS and bad for our economy. We urgently need not only a fix to deal with the problems we have at the moment but a long-term fix so that this is sorted out once and for all.

4.53 pm

Sir Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Christina Rees) on the good way in which she opened this important debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee. It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Ms Elliot.

The Work and Pensions Committee is taking a close interest in the discussions around carers, and I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) here; she has taken a lot of interest in this issue. I have a particular personal interest in the debate because my constituency accounts for the largest number of signatures on the petition—73—so I thought it was particularly important for me to be here.

As others have said, for the best part of two decades now the Work and Pensions Committee and its predecessors have been calling on the Government to reform carer's allowance, including the rate at which it is paid. A 2008 Select Committee report, "Valuing and Supporting Carers", concluded that carer's allowance was "outdated" and

"should be radically overhauled at the earliest opportunity to recognise the contribution carers make".

Well, that "earliest opportunity" still has not arrived. Challenges raised in that report remain unaddressed 16 years later.

We know that the Department has conducted research to support policy development on carer's allowance. In the response to a 2019 Select Committee report, it promised to publish that research. It has never been published—we still have not seen it. The Select Committee is very much looking forward to hearing from the Minister about carer's allowance on Wednesday. Will she tell us when the policy development will conclude and whether the research will finally be published, as promised in 2019?

[Sir Stephen Timms]

As we have heard, carer's allowance is paid at a weekly rate of £81.90, which is less than other income-replacement benefits—jobseekers' allowance is nearly £10 a week more. In my Committee's recent inquiry on benefit levels in the UK, we heard that carer's allowance was paid at too low a rate and that as a result carers often had to cut back on food and were struggling to make ends meet.

Last month, in a one-off evidence session on carer's allowance, we heard from Terry Kirton, a full-time carer for his father. He said, of caring and of receiving carer's allowance:

"I am tired of struggling. I want to be able to look after my father. I want to make sure he does not have to go without things, and I would like to be able to have bit of a life myself without having to fight with my finances every day."

I know the Minister has substantial experience of caring; does she recognise that the rate of carer's allowance today is just not enough?

Terry is a registered nurse by profession. To retain his registration he would have to work a certain number of hours a week, but that would take him over the carer's allowance earnings limit. It is impossible for him to maintain his registration and continue to receive carer's allowance. To balance his caring role and his finances, he has had to leave the profession—to give up work altogether—and care for his father. He now just about survives on carer's allowance.

That brings me to the second challenge: the earnings limit for carer's allowance. In the same session of our Committee, we heard how the carer's allowance earnings limit acts as a disincentive for carers who would like to work, either because they would be worse off financially should they lose carer's allowance because of their work, or—this is the really big problem—due to fears that they would accidentally slip over the limit for carer's allowance, giving rise to the overpayments we have just heard about. The earnings limit effectively traps carers only in low-paid work, whatever their skills or training.

The carer's allowance earnings limit is not increased in line with the national minimum wage. As my hon. Friend the Member for Neath rightly told us, Carers UK has pointed out that the number of hours that a carer has been able to work at the national living wage while also receiving carer's allowance has decreased over the last few years. Our report called on the Government to commit to uprating the earnings threshold for carer's allowance annually. There should be a commitment to increase it every year.

A similar point was made in the 2019 report. In their response, the Government said:

"We will look at the findings from the research"—
to which I have referred—

"with an open mind, and would consider any changes to the earnings limit to be a priority."

However, since then, nothing has happened. Will the Minister tell us today whether there are plans to review an increase on the earnings limit on the carer's allowance, such as by linking increases each year with rises in the national living wage?

We have also heard that the earnings limit is just one of several eligibility restrictions. Another is the 21-hour rule, which prevents carers in full-time education—

those attending 21 or more hours a week—from claiming carer's allowance. Last month, Carers UK made the point to our Committee that a young adult carer has to

"choose between getting an education and qualifications and getting some financial support".

They added:

"That is not right. It will affect people for the rest of their lives".
Has the Department looked at the effect of that rule specifically on young and young adult carers, including on their opportunities later in life? The restriction on learning and caring is, we understand, being lifted in Scotland, with obvious advantages for young carers.

My final concern is overpayments, which we have touched on, and which have featured in recent news reports. It is not a new issue; our predecessor Committee published a report specifically on this issue in 2019. Data from the Department shows that in the year 2022-23, the Department was pursuing more than 30,000 overpayments of up to £2,000, and more than 7,000 payments of over £2,000, including 36 overpayments of over £20,000.

How has the Department allowed overpayments which, in some cases, clearly cover quite a few years, to accumulate? From real-time information from His Majesty's Revenue and Customs, the Department knows what people are earning, and it can stop payment of carer's allowance to those who are no longer eligible. Indeed, the Government's response to the 2019 report confirmed that there is an automatic notification when weekly net pay exceeds the carer's allowance earnings limit, yet the Department does nothing, instead allowing people to build up these huge overpayments, and then prosecuting them. Carrying on in that way is not right. I recognise that the Minister may not have the detailed data for 2023-24, as we have been given for '22-23, but it would be helpful if she asked her officials to provide that to the Committee in the coming weeks. I very much look forward to the Minister's response, and to her appearance before the Committee on Wednesday, when we will have an opportunity to explore these issues in further detail.

5.2 pm

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Ms Elliott. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Christina Rees) on leading this important debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee. I thank my constituents who have signed the petition that we are debating today, which calls on the Government to increase the amount of carer's allowance to match pay for a full-time job.

Unpaid carers provide vital support to those they care for, whether a family member, friend or neighbour, and they make a huge contribution to our society in general. It is therefore important that they are valued properly. The petition points out:

"Many unpaid carers have to give up work to provide care, and being a carer can also have a significant impact on carers' wellbeing and lifestyle."

Census data suggests there are around 5.7 million unpaid carers across the UK, but research from Carers UK in 2022 estimated that the true number of unpaid carers could be as high as 10.6 million. It is thought that one in seven people in the workplace in the UK are juggling work and care.

We know that many unpaid carers have faced enormous pressure on their personal finances as a result of the cost of living crisis, which has caused stress and anxiety for them, and many have been forced to cut back on essentials such as food and heating. Some have suffered extremely severe financial hardship. According to the Carers UK website, 44% of working-age adults who are providing care for 35 or more hours a week are living in poverty. Carers UK has highlighted research from Petrillo and Bennett that shows that unpaid carers in England and Wales contribute a staggering £445 million to the economy every day, or £162 billion per year. That is a huge amount of money, and as things stand unpaid carers can get £81.90 a week if they care for someone for at least 35 hours a week and that person receives certain benefits.

It is unsurprising that there are calls right across the country for a significant increase in the money that carers receive. The Carer Poverty Coalition, which was set up by Carers UK and is made up of over 130 national and local organisations who have come together to campaign to end poverty among carers, has said:

"The next Government must commission a full review into Carer's Allowance and its eligibility rules to ensure that it adequately values and supports carers."

The coalition says that such a review should include, among other things:

"Increasing the level of Carer's Allowance, so that it better reflects the level of financial penalty carers incur...Exploring different payments for people providing 20, 35, 50+ hours of care, to take account of the intensity of caring...Provide an additional payment for carers of State Pension Age...Scrapping the 21 hour study rule".

The 21-hour study rule prevents anyone who is studying for more than that amount of time a week from claiming carer's allowance. Those are all very reasonable and important measures, and they should be part of any such review.

In particular, I call for an end to the cliff-edge situation that faces carers who are in paid employment. At the moment, someone can only receive carer's allowance if they earn £151 a week or less after tax, national insurance and expenses. If they go over that amount, even by one penny, they lose their entire benefit entitlement. That is leading to a situation whereby there are carers who are unwittingly going over the limit and thus becoming ineligible to continue claiming the benefit. That is particularly the case right now, as the national minimum wage has gone up this month, so I urge carers to check their entitlement as a matter of urgency. I also ask the Minister to say what the Government are doing to ensure that all carers in paid employment are aware of this situation.

Written parliamentary questions that I tabled last week revealed that currently the Government are seeking to recover a total of 156,300 carer's allowance overpayments. That is over 10,000 more than at roughly the same point last year when I asked for this information. The vast majority of those cases—more than 58%—are for amounts up to £1,000. Three hundred cases are for amounts over £20,000.

It is shameful that the Government have failed to get a grip on this situation over the last year. They are leaving increasing numbers of carers to face mounting debts without taking the necessary action to stop that. It was revealed in the press earlier this month that

"tens of thousands of unpaid carers who look after disabled, frail or ill relatives are being forced to repay huge sums of money to the Government and being threatened with criminal prosecution after they had unwittingly breached earnings rules by just a few pounds a week."

Of course, there may be some cases of fraud, which always have to be investigated, but many, many of those cases will undoubtedly be the result of human error. Lots of people struggle to navigate the claims system, and many carers are under considerable pressure caring for someone they love. Some carers may also have their own medical issues to manage on top of their caring responsibilities, which adds pressure, causes stress and makes them vulnerable. I also remind the Minister that there are 7 million functionally illiterate adults in this country; for them, to navigate the system is nigh-on impossible.

The Government have said to me that they seek to recover money without causing excessive hardship, but the experience of many carers clearly shows that the opposite is true. There have been reports that the DWP has warned carers that they could face greater penalties if they appeal against fines, and Government officials have been accused of using "threatening and cruel" tactics in this regard. That is truly shameful, and I hope that the Minister will look into those allegations. There have also been reports of carers becoming

"severely depressed, suicidal and self-harming",

due to the Government's "abhorrent" approach, after they were ordered to pay back money after mistakenly breaching the earnings allowance. That is a completely unacceptable state of affairs. The social security system should be there to support people, not to cause them stress and push some to suicide.

It is also true that the sheer complexity of the claims system can lead carers into making honest mistakes. The judge in the case of a woman who was being prosecuted after being overpaid carer's allowance when she took a part-time job on the minimum wage said that she had "limited understanding of the offence...committed."

The cliff edge of £151 can have the effect of providing a disincentive for carers to be in work or stay in work. That is in absolutely nobody's interest at all. Aside from the financial support that such work provides, it gives people a sense of agency within their local community and a sense of identity, and it can be vital for people's mental health and wellbeing. It is also important for people who are caring for people who might be approaching the end of their life, because when the person who they care for passes away they may want to re-engage with full-time employment, and it is much easier for someone to get work when they are already in work and when their skill level has been maintained.

Clearly, that is something that needs to be included in any review, as do the long waits that carers have reported experiencing when they contact the carer's allowance unit by telephone for information about the benefit and how to make a claim. Labour has committed to reviewing the system of carer's allowance, and we need this Government to make the same commitment as a matter of urgency. Along with that, they need to review the level of carer's allowance. As things stand, too many carers are not getting the support that they need.

In summary, it is evident that there needs to be a large-scale review of carer's allowance, and that the level of payments that unpaid carers receive needs to be increased.

[Margaret Greenwood]

Work must be done to tackle the issue of overpayments. The Government should provide more staff to help clear the backlog, looking into possible overpayment cases, and to use those automated systems that are available. We need to see an end to the cliff edge that renders someone ineligible to qualify as soon as they go a penny over. Unpaid carers need to be recognised for the vitally important and selfless work that they do. They need to be supported and not punished for looking after their loved ones.

5.10 pm

Beth Winter (Cynon Valley) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Ms Elliott. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Christina Rees) for leading this important debate. It really is an important debate, which provides an opportunity to recognise the invaluable contribution that millions of unpaid carers provide to their loved ones, to our society and to our economy. It is also an opportunity to note the continued failure of the carer's allowance system to provide recompense for that.

I speak in support of some of the policy demands of the representatives of unpaid carers, including those set out by Carers UK, and to ask the Minister whether the Government will now commit to meeting those demands. If it is the case that they cannot do so, the country and the carer community will be looking to the Labour Front Bench come the next election.

Carers UK says that across the UK there are over 10.6 million people providing unpaid care. They are increasingly vulnerable to falling into poverty and financial difficulties. We have already heard that at least a third of carers are living in poverty. Those doing the longest hours are more likely to be struggling to make ends meet. Forty-four per cent of working-age adults who are providing unpaid care for more than 35 hours a week are in poverty, according to Carers UK. It is estimated that the value of unpaid care provided by carers, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) indicated, is £162 billion per year in England and Wales. The ONS estimated that in my constituency there are over 10,000 carers providing 19 hours or less unpaid care—

5.12 pm

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

5.37 pm

On resuming—

Julie Elliott (in the Chair): Order. The debate may now continue until 7.55 pm, although that depends on there being no more votes, of course. I call Beth Winter to continue.

Beth Winter: Like many other Members here, I have lots of constituents who are carers and come to me for assistance. One constituent has been a carer for his wife for more than 40 years following her diagnosis of schizophrenia. He is now a pensioner with a low income, but that impacts significantly on his entitlement to carer's allowance. Another constituent who cares for

her grandfather had her carer's allowance revoked, before we intervened, for exceeding the income threshold during a period of financial difficulty and mental health impact. The DWP confirmed that a payment should not have stopped and she received over £1,000 back. There is the issue of overpayment, but I also worry about how many carers may be being underpaid significantly without accessing support or advice. There is also a large proportion of people who do not claim the benefits that they are entitled to.

Only 71% of carer's allowance claimants in 2023 were receiving a payment, and the remaining approximately 400,000 claimants met the conditions set out above but were not receiving the benefit due to the overlapping benefits rule—including nearly all pensioner carers, which hon. Members spoke about earlier. The e-petition asks that carer's allowance be raised to the rate of 35 hours per week at the level of the national minimum wage. That would equate to £400 per week. The Government's response says that carer's allowance is

“a benefit that provides some financial recognition that a carer may not be able to work full-time.”

But should someone earn more than £151 per week, they lose all access to carer's allowance; that is the cliff edge situation that others have mentioned today. That £151 is only around 13 hours of work at the adult national minimum wage, and the number of minimum wage hours that can be worked before hitting the threshold has declined in recent years. That is completely inadequate and unacceptable, and it is in need of urgent reform. That is why the Government must commit to improving the carer's allowance.

I have previously spoken in the House about the Work and Pensions Committee's call for an increased earnings limit and the introduction of a taper. Here today is the Chair of that Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Sir Stephen Timms), who has spoken about the issue in much more detail. I have also said that the uprating of the carer's allowance needs to be synchronised with the real living wage.

Carers UK has set out a number of demands ahead of the election. It calls for an increase in the earnings limit for carer's allowance to the value of 21 hours per week at the national living wage rate and for that link to be defined in law, so that the ability of carers to earn is not eroded over time. That would take the earnings threshold to £240 from the current £151. It also calls for reform to the eligibility rules for the carer's allowance, including ending the cliff edge, giving access to a tapered rate for those working more hours each week, enabling more than one person to receive the benefit if multiple people care for the same person, and extending the run-on payments for bereaved carers from eight to 12 weeks. Most importantly, Carers UK urges the Government to carry out a full review of the link between caring and poverty across the UK and to commission an independent inquiry to explore longer-term solutions to bringing more unpaid carers out of poverty.

The Carer Poverty Coalition says the carer's allowance itself should be increased and I think that is vital, having spoken to many carers in my constituency. The current rate is undoubtedly a poverty payment, and the earnings threshold cliff edge makes a mockery of social justice. The reality is that many carers work full time as a carer and the state refuses to recognise that financial benefit to society, as well as the invaluable contribution

that carers make. The idea of earning a minimum wage for a full-time job has long been accepted, and we should do the same for those people caring.

I want to comment more generally on the demonisation of people who receive social security benefits, which are an entitlement and a right. More recently, that demonisation was demonstrated by the Prime Minister's comments about a "sick note culture", which were dangerous and absolutely disgraceful and will do nothing except exacerbate the hardship that people experience. The demonisation and stigmatisation of claimants, including millions of carers, must stop. As an example, in my constituency of Cynon Valley, we have high rates of social security claimants, including people in receipt of carer's allowance. *[Interruption.]*

Julie Elliott (in the Chair): Order. There is another Division. We will suspend for 15 minutes.

5.43 pm

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

6.8 pm

On resuming—

[JUDITH CUMMINS in the Chair]

Judith Cummins (in the Chair): The sitting is resumed, and the debate can now continue until 8.20 pm. I call Beth Winter to continue.

Beth Winter: I have spoken about carer's allowance being a poverty payment in need of fundamental reform. I want to conclude with a few general comments about social security and carers' benefits and assistance. First, the demonisation of people in receipt of social security benefits, which are an entitlement, should stop. Only last week, we had Sunak talking about a "sick note culture"—language that is inflammatory, disgraceful and very dangerous. It will only exacerbate people's hardship.

In Cynon Valley, high numbers of people are on social security benefits, including carer's allowance. That is due to our industrial legacy—dirty work, with people inheriting significant ill health associated with the industry that they worked in. With the decimation of the industries, we have high rates of unemployment. Again, that has been compounded by the cost of living crisis, which is a political choice.

We need structural and transformational change when it comes to carers. We must ensure that everybody, regardless of their circumstances, is treated with respect and dignity, and that they receive the support they are entitled to. That should include a new national carers' strategy. Apparently, we have not had a new one for 16 years, which I find quite shocking. Also, we could include being a carer as a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, enhance flexible working and introduce a statutory right to breaks for people with caring responsibilities. In addition, we should ensure that social care receives sustainable and adequate funding, and that there is a joined-up approach between health and social care so that social care stops being seen as the weak relation in many regards.

Sustainable funding would ensure that people—both the carer themselves and the person receiving the care—could receive respite care and other support services. We should also explore things such as the minimum

income guarantee and universal basic income. Without a doubt, however, the overwhelming evidence shows that, as a starting-point, carer's allowance is in need of fundamental reform. *Diolch yn fawr.*

6.11 pm

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate with you in the Chair, Mrs Cummins, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Christina Rees) on leading it.

For years, many charities, campaigners and carers have called for wide-ranging reform of carer's allowance. The petition that we are debating focuses specifically on how much carer's allowance should offer carers, so I will begin my contribution by addressing the financial pressures that carers face.

Carers UK estimates that over a quarter of carers live in poverty, which rises to nearly half of those who care for someone for more than 35 hours a week. Often, people in receipt of carer's allowance face particularly difficult financial situations. The poverty rate for people in receipt of carer's allowance has doubled in the last decade and a survey by Carers UK shows that 45% of people receiving carer's allowance struggle to make ends meet, which is a significant increase on the previous year.

The causes of financial difficulty for carers are frequently linked to their caring responsibilities. Of course, carers face additional costs, which are unavoidable, to keep the person whom they care for safe. Such costs can include vital but high-energy equipment, the costs of additional laundry and bathing needs, and transport costs for visits to medical appointments.

As we have already heard in the debate, carers also have a limited ability to earn an income. If they are in receipt of carer's allowance, they can earn only £151 before losing that benefit. This month, the earnings threshold for claiming carer's allowance increased below the national living wage, which means that carers on the lowest wages will have to cut back their hours to just over 13 hours a week or risk losing the benefit. For some, this will be the equivalent of losing 13 days of work a year, which is a substantial loss. In addition, as we have already heard but it bears repeating, there is an issue for carers in full-time education—young carers—because they lose eligibility for carer's allowance when they study for more than 21 hours a week. Therefore, many young people are excluded from support.

Those eligibility requirements and others limit the support that carers can receive through carer's allowance. Most importantly, however, around 34% of carers in receipt of carer's allowance are still in poverty. Clearly, carer's allowance is failing to give enough financial support to the people who provide unpaid care to others. It is ridiculous for the Government to claim in response to the petition that they

"recognise the invaluable contribution that unpaid and family carers make",

given that so many carers clearly do not receive the support they need.

The petition that we are debating today focuses on the amount available for carers through carer's allowance, but there are other issues that warrant our concern. A particularly worrying problem that we have already heard about is the recent reporting of overpayments of

[Barbara Keeley]

carer's allowance and the subsequent repayment penalties. As we have heard, poor systems or poor processes at the Department of Work and Pensions have resulted in 145,000 current cases of overpayments to unpaid carers, with 12,000 of those being for sums greater than £5,000. As has been reported in the press recently, that has resulted in thousands of carers running up huge debts, being given criminal records, and being forced to sell their own homes when chased by the DWP over small mistakes that officials could have spotted years earlier. For example, George Henderson, the carer of his adult son John, who has a learning disability, was overpaid £110 and ended up being prosecuted for benefit fraud by the Department for Work and Pensions, despite the Department admitting that his was an innocent mistake. He was forced to sell his house and threatened monthly with jail. Then he tried to take his own life. Mr Henderson told *The Mirror*:

"One night I'd had a drink and I put a noose up in the loft... My girlfriend rang the Crisis team and I was under them for four months. They wouldn't let me live alone. I lost four stone as I couldn't eat, I look at photos from that time and you can see my ribcage."

The repercussions of that time continue to affect Mr Henderson, and he is now waiting to undergo therapy for post-traumatic stress disorder. Sadly, there are many other carers like Mr Henderson. One carer told Carers UK:

"The whole process had my wife so stressed out that she at several points contemplated suicide. She couldn't see an end to it and as it turned out we didn't end up owing the DWP anything."

Carers have described suffering an avalanche of utter stress due to the Government's claiming back of these benefits. This is not about mistakes or misunderstandings by carers, as we have heard; this is about administrative failures at the DWP and harsh penalties for people whom the Government should be trying to support. There must be a change to the processing around carer's allowance to alleviate the acute distress and financial hardship that overpayments can cause; otherwise, we will see many more serious headlines. It is reported that one in three unpaid carers has thought about killing themselves due to the emotional and financial strain they are under. That is disturbing. It is also disturbing that it is not known how many carers have already been driven to suicide, because caring status is not part of the data collected after such a death.

It is unacceptable, in my view, that the Government have let this mismanagement of carer's allowance processes go on for so long. Both the Work and Pensions Committee and the National Audit Office warned of this situation five years ago, yet the number of overpayments today remains just as high. I am glad that Labour has committed to reviewing the system of carer's allowance and would look to reform DWP policy on carer's allowance but now that these issues are really being exposed, carers should not have to wait for a general election to see action. The Government must sort out the mess urgently so that unpaid carers are no longer penalised for the vital care they offer.

6.17 pm

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mrs Cummins. I will start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member

for Neath (Christina Rees) on bringing this debate to the Chamber, and on her excellent speech. I agree with her that carers are not only the backbone of society, but represent the best of us in the selflessness that they display. We should be championing them, and we know that is not happening.

Last week, many Members will have seen Oxfam's report on carers, which was called "Valued"—a little bit of a contradiction, because it gives case study after case study where people are not valued, and shows how little people, and society as a whole, value carers. My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) shared the costs that carers save society—it would cost £162 billion a year if we were actually able to pay carers. That is the cost they save.

I want to make a few points, many of which have already been made, on the lack of adequacy of carer's allowance—as we have already heard, a quarter of those caring for loved ones are living in poverty—and on the issue of the rules: the cliff edge, the earnings limit, and the administration of those rules and the lack of common sense and compassion. I find that unforgivable, quite frankly.

I worked very closely with young carers in my public health days. As we have heard, given the Prime Minister's statement in his speech last week about the mental health impact on so many young people, we might also have expected a message about the impact on young carers. Many of those caring for their parents or siblings are as young as eight or nine. It really is appalling.

I had a glimpse of being a carer: my mother had Alzheimer's disease for 10 years, and I provided support to my stepfather, who cared for her during that time. We were not reliant on carer's allowance, but we felt the strain, day in, day out, 24/7. This is a really significant gift that people are giving to their loved ones and society as a whole. We have heard how inadequate carer's allowance is, at £81.90 a week—its lowest level, even compared with jobseeker's allowance. Again, I refer Members the Select Committee's report on benefits in the UK. We have the lowest level of out-of-work support since, I think, 1911, so carer's allowance is even less than that in real terms. It is just appalling. We have been doing a mini-inquiry, and we have a follow-up session on Wednesday, which the Minister is attending. If she wants to hear about the experience of those caring for loved ones now, she should reflect on the evidence they gave a couple of weeks ago.

We have also heard about the Department for Work and Pensions' appalling, draconian treatment of people—the utter lack of compassion shown to those who make, often, innocent mistakes and are then criminalised by the DWP. I feel quite ashamed, to be honest, that that is happening. As we have heard, the problem with overpayment is exacerbated by the unfair cliff edge and the administration of these ridiculous rules, which really need to be reformed.

I was contacted by a medical adviser, a retired GP who is providing medical advice to first-tier tribunals for PIP appeals, who also happens to be in receipt of carer's allowance. This retired GP contacted me because she was concerned by the statement from the Department included in her bundle over the past six months, which said:

"Although (Ms X) has identified a high-level of personal restriction he/she is entitled to Carer's Allowance. To be entitled to Carer's Allowance a person must provide at least 35 hours of care to another disabled person each week. The tribunal may wish to explore this further."

Although that might not look particularly threatening on its own, given the context of the other arguments that the Department is looking to put forward, it is basically saying: “How can you be caring for somebody if you’re also disabled?” That is what it is saying, and unfortunately that was also the gist of the Prime Minister’s speech last week—“If you’re genuinely in receipt of social security, of course we’ll support you. But there’s a question mark over how many and what proportion of people in receipt of social security are genuine.” That really gets to the core of this, and it makes me quite angry. Most people have worked and are doing the right thing. To imply that they are not genuine is an absolute disgrace.

In her response, I hope the Minister or her officials can explain why those sorts of statements would be included in a bundle to a medical adviser on the first-tier tribunal, which are questioning somebody who is caring for somebody else, and who also happens to be in receipt of disability benefits?

6.24 pm

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): It is a real pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Cummins. I congratulate the hon. Member for Neath (Christina Rees) on the way she introduced this important petitions debate, in which I am grateful to be able to speak as the SNP spokesperson for disabilities and the SNP carers champion.

I have had the pleasure of engaging with disabled people, their carers and carers organisations over the last number of years, and it really has been a privilege. My engagement with them stunned me at first, as I concentrated on the disabilities aspect of my role. I then went to a drop-in in Parliament and spent an hour and a half listening to carers, and became more involved on that side of things. Carers play such an invaluable role, and the impact they have on the lives of those they care for is almost unquantifiable. They show the best of humanity and are truly altruistic people who devote much or all of their time to others, but they are not properly recompensed by this Government.

Before I get into the cold numbers and economic arguments for increasing carer’s allowance, on a human level I want to pay tribute to carers right across the UK and thank them for all they do. Carers ought to finally get the recognition they deserve, as for too long they have been unsupported, exploited and taken for granted. The work of unpaid carers is what holds society together. According to Carers UK, there are an estimated 5.7 million people in the UK who provide unpaid care, accounting for 9% of the population. I want to say a special thanks to North Lanarkshire Carers Together, Lanarkshire Carers and NL Young Carers for all the help and support they give unpaid carers in Motherwell and Wishaw, and to all the other local organisations across the UK.

Each and every one of us can, and potentially will, become a carer or be cared for by someone at some point in our lives. None of us can predict the future. Circumstances change: before we know it, we may be caring for or receiving care from a loved one. Each year, around 4.3 million people become unpaid carers. That is 12,000 people a day. Unpaid carers’ support is worth a staggering £162 billion a year in the UK. Let me repeat that: £162 billion a year. According to the Carers Trust, the value of unpaid care is £12.8 billion per year in Scotland alone. The figures are huge, and the importance

of unpaid carers in our economy is enormous, yet carers feel unsupported. Three in five are worried about living costs, 600 have to give up work every single day, and a quarter of carers have either “bad” or “very bad” mental health.

The enormous contribution of unpaid carers to the economy makes it all the more shocking that carers are under-supported in the UK. That was reflected in evidence given to the Work and Pensions Committee in March in a session on carer’s allowance. Representatives from Carers UK, Carers Scotland and the Centre for Social Justice all agreed that carer’s allowance is inadequate and each of the organisations took issue with the earnings limit. It was noted unanimously by those organisations that the UK lags behind comparable jurisdictions, most of which link the earnings limit to hours worked and not how much a person earns, thereby not confining people to low-wage work.

Ahead of today’s debate, a number of organisations were in touch with me to highlight the dire situation in which carers find themselves in much of the United Kingdom. The MND Association said that 90% of those who care for people with MND feel that the welfare benefits they receive do not meet their needs as carers. Meanwhile, in 2022, the MS Society, which is part of the Carer Poverty Coalition—this week is MS Awareness Week—conducted a report on the friends and family of those with MS and found that only 17% of respondents were in receipt of carer’s allowance.

The restrictive access to carer’s allowance, including the 21-hour study rule south of the border, is arbitrary and means that those who need support are missing out. The UK Government should follow Scotland’s lead by removing the 21-hour study rule and enacting measures like the Scottish young carer grant.

It is nonsensical that those who care for more than one person often miss out on carer’s allowance because the eligibility rules do not allow for caring hours to be combined cumulatively. Many carers who spend the equivalent of a full-time job caring cannot access carer’s allowance, which shows how broken the system is. The MS Society has outlined the horrendously low rate of carer’s allowance and the financial impact that that has on carers. Spread over 35 hours per week, the value of carer’s allowance equates to just £2.34 per hour, a whole £9 below the national minimum wage. That is horrendous. The current rate of carer’s allowance is totally exploitative.

The UK Government take advantage of the love that carers have for those they care for; they exploit their altruism and offer totally inadequate compensation in return. There is absolutely no recognition of how integral carers are to the functioning of society and the UK economy. It is essential that the UK Government increase the level of carer’s allowance to at least the minimum wage so that it better reflects the financial impact of caring responsibilities. I therefore support this important petition.

Coupled with the Carer’s Leave Act 2023, which I supported and recently came into force, a move to increase carer’s allowance to the minimum wage would demonstrate that the invaluable work of carers is finally receiving some of the recognition it deserves from the UK Government, but more should be done. The Government must increase the earnings limit to ensure that carers can work and earn if they are able to and wish to. The rhetoric from this Government always focuses on getting

[*Marion Fellows*]

people back into work and reducing economic inactivity, but they do not follow up their hollow talk by putting support mechanisms in place. Whether it is for disabled people or, as in this case, carers, there is workforce potential that is not being tapped into because of the lack of adequate support.

With the current levels of support, unpaid carers are particularly vulnerable to falling into poverty, not just because of the devastatingly inadequate rate of carer's allowance but because of carers' limited ability to earn an income and the additional costs they face, which they cannot cut back on without affecting the safety of the person they care for. Those include the costs of taking the person they care for to hospital, keeping their home at a safe minimum temperature, charging essential medical equipment for their loved one and doing extra laundry.

A perfect storm of lack of recognition, lack of proper financial support and risk of poverty while caring for a loved one leads to high levels of stress and can have a significant impact on the mental and physical health of the carer, seriously impinging on their own quality of life. In turn, that increases the carer's own need for treatment, support and services in order to help them cope.

The SNP Scottish Government took action to mitigate the substandard level of carer's allowance by introducing the carer's allowance supplement in 2018. It is paid half-yearly and is £288.60 in 2024. Some might think that is a trifling amount, but for some carers it makes a huge difference. There is also a young carers package offering discounts and opportunities for all young carers aged 11 to 18. The Scottish Government fund Carers Trust Scotland to run the Scottish young carers festival to allow young carers to take a break.

Since launching the carer's allowance supplement, the Scottish Government have made 920,000 payments, totalling around £255 million. In Scotland we would like to do more, but we are limited by the strict confines of budgetary constraints following cuts to the block grant. In an independent Scotland, more could be done to improve the lives of carers.

Despite that, the Scottish Government continue to recognise the huge contributions that carers make to society. In November 2023, we launched the carer support payment, the main Scottish social security benefit, which will replace carer's allowance in Scotland. Scottish social security treats all claimants with dignity, fairness and respect. The carer support payment has been developed to deliver an improved service, designed with carer and support organisations to meet the needs of those who use it, and to provide links to wider services to help carers access the support to which they are entitled.

Working within a fixed "pocket money" budget, the Scottish Government have continuously tried to mitigate cruel Westminster policies in order to treat carers with the respect they deserve. The Scottish Government are totally committed to carers. They are investing £88.4 million a year in local carer support through local authority funding under the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016, and have provided £8 million a year for voluntary sector short breaks since 2022-23, enabling more people, including young carers, to take a break from caring.

Carer Positive, which works with employers in Scotland, was founded 10 years ago, and I am one of its members. I believe that MPs and MSPs should do all we can to promote that excellent scheme, which helps employers to do their bit for the carers they employ and gives good advice. It is time that the UK Government followed suit with some of these initiatives and showed carers the recognition they deserve, as well as giving them the financial support they need.

We have heard this afternoon of carers being harassed and penalised for overpayments made by DWP, adding insult to injury. Will the Minister look at that? Will she also commit to responding positively to the Work and Pensions Committee reports in a timely manner, and to stopping the cliff-edge situation that carers face with benefits?

6.37 pm

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Cummins. I am grateful for the opportunity to respond on behalf of the shadow Work and Pensions team. I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Christina Rees) on securing this afternoon's debate, and by thanking the thousands of people who signed the petition that triggered it. It does not surprise me that my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Sir Stephen Timms) has the largest number of constituents in support of the petition, given the work he does as Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee.

As shadow Minister for Disabled People, I come into contact with a lot of unpaid carers. As a society, we should be incredibly grateful for everything they do. I pay tribute to them, and to the many organisations such as Carers UK and the Carers Trust that support them and stand up for their rights. As my hon. Friend the Member for Neath said, carers are unsung heroes, providing care around the clock and saving the taxpayer quite literally billions of pounds, as many Members have pointed out. As my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham so eloquently put it—I know his Select Committee has been working on this—carers simply do not get enough money to survive.

As we have already heard, there are around 5.7 million unpaid carers in the UK. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) pointed out, 72% are women, and 44% of those of working age who provide full-time care live in poverty. Carers should not be living—surviving—in poverty.

To be eligible for carer's allowance, an individual must provide at least 35 hours of unpaid care per week, and the person they care for must be in receipt of certain benefits. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) pointed out, young carers in full-time education are not eligible for carer's allowance. The main route to qualifying is now via personal independence payment—three words that strike fear into the hearts of many. I am sure everyone here will have heard PIP horror stories from their constituency casework. I could talk all afternoon and into the late evening about the problems with PIP, but I will leave that for another time. We have had many debates on it.

As others have said, this debate is especially timely given the recent stories we have seen in the press about carer's allowance overpayment. Those in receipt of the

benefit are allowed to have a second income from a job, but there is a strict limit on how much they can earn; currently it is £151 a week. If a carer's income rises above that, by working a few extra hours, for instance, they forfeit the entire benefit. That results in overpayment, which the DWP then seeks to recover. Repayments can build up an incredible amount, because even if the weekly earnings limit is exceeded by as little as £1, claimants automatically become ineligible for the entire allowance. The Committee chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham has rightly asked whether the Government can raise the earning limit. I hope the Minister will inform us of the Government's thinking.

We have all seen recent examples in the press of people who have been forced to repay thousands after breaching the income threshold by as little as a few pounds a week. Just as disabled people and those with long-term illnesses often describe feeling demonised and humiliated by the benefits system, sadly so too do their carers. The Government need to urgently investigate the overpayment issue and outline what steps they are taking to ensure this does not happen in future, including by publishing their report in full. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter) pointed out, some people are not receiving the benefits they are entitled to.

In order to ensure that unpaid carers are getting the support and recognition they deserve, we must look beyond the issue of carer's allowance. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) aptly pointed that out and shared her experiences of the strain put on families to provide essential support to their loved ones.

A Labour Government will transform social care for older people, children and disabled people. Alongside our 10-year plan for change and modernisation of the NHS, Labour will deliver a long-term plan for the reform of adult social care that will lead to a world-class national care service. Our fair deal for carers will ensure that both paid and unpaid carers are valued and supported. As set out in our new deal for working people, our priority will be care workers receiving the pay, conditions and training they need to provide great care and stay working in the sector. We will establish a new partnership with families who care for their loved ones to ensure that they do not put themselves at risk simply by looking after the people they love.

We will also support unpaid carers by introducing the right to flexible working and providing time away from work for caring responsibilities. We will join up services and support so that families do not have to battle their way around the system. We will give people in care homes a new legal right to see their loved ones.

I want to finish on something my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley tried a few times to say: we need to stop the dehumanisation of benefit claimants, such as those who access carer's allowance who we all know add so much to this country.

6.45 pm

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Mims Davies): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Cummins. It is a pleasure to respond to what has been a slightly protracted, wide-ranging e-petition debate. I thank the hon. Member for Neath

(Christina Rees) for introducing it with a characteristically thoughtful and wide-ranging speech, and I welcome Alasdair's raising the issue.

This debate is welcome. It comes at a challenging time for our carers looking after their loved ones: we are post-covid and we face cost of living pressures due to the invasion of Ukraine. It is a challenging time for all of us, but most particularly our carers. I want, like many, to begin by paying tribute to the millions of unpaid carers across this country. Very thoughtful and personal contributions have been made by hon. Members, and I duly note the queries and challenges they have raised. I have much to say in response.

First, I know that people are concerned that the Government do not recognise and value the contributions made by carers every day in providing this significant care and continuity of support to family and friends, including pensioners and those with disabilities, but it is really important to put on record that that is not my perception. That is not how I want people to see this Government. I will do my best to make that clear to those watching.

The 2021 census indicates that around 5 million people in England and Wales may be doing some unpaid care, with many of us taking on that role at some point in our lives. Like other hon. Members, I see much of the work that is done by carers in my postbag, at events in my constituency, at carer's rights days, or through engaging with my constituents in Mid Sussex. None of us is immune to the challenges of caring. Colleagues will know that this is of particular interest to me as a former carer and as part of a caring family. I pay tribute to all who do this daily. It is a difficult job—one that is the best and the worst in the world, in some ways. You will always be grateful that you have been there. It is precious and hard going in equal measure and I pay tribute to all those doing that.

Carers are fortunate enough to have some wonderful advocates. We have seen that both in the contributions of MPs to this debate and in organisations such as Carers UK, Carers Trust and the Learning and Work Institute, to name but three. Some of those have been mentioned already. I meet Carers UK regularly, and will be doing so again shortly. I was delighted that my officials were able to meet recently with a wonderful delegation of inspirational young carers who were part of Young Carers Action Day in March.

I also pay tribute to the hundreds of DWP staff, largely based in the north-west, who provide financial support to a million unpaid carers through the carer's allowance, day in and day out. I want to make sure that our approach is one of always being happy to look at mistakes or other issues and of always treating each case on its merits.

It would be misleading the House if I was not completely clear that this is a policy area that I have been hugely interested in, both as a Back Bencher through the work of the all-party parliamentary group and now as a Minister. I have been acutely interested in these matters, and I can be clear with the House that, since coming to this role, this is a matter that I have been examining. I genuinely welcome this debate.

I want to support those unpaid carers to do some of the paid work that they love, want to do and continue to do, something that they can balance alongside their

[Mims Davies]

commitments to their loved ones—the people who they are looking after. We have of course legislated to ensure that employees will be entitled to five days of unpaid care leave per year and will be supported through more flexible working in the workplace. I encourage employers listening to consider job design, have supportive conversations and be part of acknowledging this invaluable role. This is a community, employee and Government partnership.

Ed Davey: When the Minister talks about legislating for five days' leave for carers, will she mention my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain), who piloted that legislation with cross-party support?

Mims Davies: Yes, indeed. I was supportive of that myself, attending where possible to support that legislation going through. The Government absolutely welcome the cross-party work the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) did piloting that, and congratulations to her.

On the specific subject of the debate, we are spending record amounts to support unpaid carers. Real-terms expenditure for carer's allowance is forecast to be £4.1 billion in 2024-25 and by 2028-29 the Government are forecast to spend over £4.5 billion a year on carer's allowance. We spend another £685 million to support carers receiving universal credit through the carer element.

As mentioned today, patterns of care have changed significantly over the past decade. People are providing vital unpaid care to relatives and friends in a whole range of circumstances that work for all concerned, but I also recognise that none of this is easy. Nearly one million people now receive carer's allowance, and the weekly rate increased this month to £81.90. That means that since 2010 it has increased from £53.90 to £81.90 a week, providing an additional £1,500 a year to carers through the carer's allowance compared with 2010. Of course, there are additional amounts for carers in universal credit and other ways forward, and it is important that those watching and those who maybe have not had this conversation are aware of those and come forward to get the support they need. That also can be through the household support fund. We know that unexpected outgoings happen, and people should reach out through their local authority and through Barnett consequentials. I know that that has been an important support mechanism for carers.

The crux of the petition we have been debating is that we should turn carer's allowance into a carer's wage. It is important to emphasise that the carer's allowance is not intended to be a replacement for a wage or a payment for services of caring, hence some of the issues rightly raised today. It is therefore not directly comparable to either the national minimum wage or the national living wage. The principal purpose of the carer's allowance as it stands, and under successive Governments since 1976, is to provide a measure of financial support and recognition for people who are not able to work full time because of their caring responsibilities. I reiterate that I welcome the debate and the opportunity to review and understand these issues. Successive Governments have supported carers through allowances and benefits,

as well as wider cross-Government actions, rather than paying people directly for the tasks they undertake in the way that an employer would.

Barbara Keeley: I want to raise something that has not been raised in the debate and ask the Minister a question. She refuted the point that the Government do not recognise the contribution of carers, but many carers believe that the Government should have, and are missing, a national carers strategy. Such a strategy was launched by the Labour Government, with the backing of our former Prime Ministers, and was ditched by the coalition Government after 2010. Much of what we have covered is about a range of issues that would be better solved with a cross-party ministerial commitment, going up to prime ministerial level, on a national carers strategy. An excellent campaigner, Katy Styles, who has been mentioned in this debate, runs the We Care Campaign for that very thing. It is a real black hole in the Government's support for carers that there is no national carers strategy. Will the Minister address that?

Mims Davies: I thank the hon. Lady for making that point. The right hon. Member for East Ham (Sir Stephen Timms) took us back nearly two decades to 2008, the year that he was Minister of State in the Department holding the welfare reform portfolio. This is not new; this is challenging. The hon. Lady makes an important point, to which I will try to reply in my wider remarks. When we discuss this issue at the Select Committee, I am keen to get to the crux of all the challenges, but that is too wide a subject for this debate.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) talked about benefit delays and the challenge of the long-standing principle that the carer's allowance can be awarded only once a decision has been made to trigger a disability benefit to the person being cared for. Carer's allowance can be backdated, however, to the date from which the disability is payable. I believe about 100,000 people are on PIP and the carer's allowance. I hope that goes some way to answering her questions.

The hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows), with her characteristic approach, raised the work being done in Scotland. We will look fully and with interest at the evaluation of the changes that the Scottish Government make. At the DWP, we are supporting those changes, so we will engage on them. That also goes to the earlier point about looking and learning, which is exactly what we should do.

Many hon. Members spoke about young adult carers and the impact of study. We are engaging with the Department for Education and the cross-Government working group is meeting again soon. It is important that carers maintain links with the education system, so that they can receive part-time education and a carer's allowance. We rightly recognise the aspirations of young carers to not only complete their studies and build a successful career, but be there for their loved one.

That is true not just for young carers: we need to ensure that carers understand that, while caring, they have developed amazing skills that an employer will find invaluable, such as managing finances, the resilience that has been spoken about today, dealing with crisis, organisation and planning, and that level of interpersonal skills. We need to ensure that our young people in

particular get the financial support that they need while studying, so they can rightly progress into the career that they want.

On the latest data on overpayments, our most recent statistics are that carer's allowance overpayments relating to earnings and employment represent about 2.1% of our £3.3 billion of carer's allowance expenditure, which is approximately £70 million. I welcome the opportunity to discuss that further with the Select Committee later this week.

Sir Stephen Timms: Will the Minister respond specifically to my point about the Government's response to the Select Committee report five years ago? Paragraph 20 says:

"The VEP Service receives the same information Universal Credit...receives from HMRC...A notification is automatically received by VEP when the weekly net pay exceeds the CA"—carer's allowance—

"earnings limit...The VEP Service then applies a series of...rules...to determine if a VEP Alert should be sent on to the CA Unit to action."

It is puzzling that the Department knows when that is being overpaid, but seems not to be doing anything. Why is that?

Mims Davies: I was just coming on to overpayments and what has been in the press. I am not the Minister leading on the fraud side of the policy, but we will discuss that on Wednesday. I am keenly looking at it in the round and working with the right hon. Gentleman. There is a lot of interest, but there is always more to matters and more to discuss, although we should refrain from discussing individual cases.

Debbie Abrahams: Will the Minister give way?

Mims Davies: I will try to answer the point of the right hon. Member for East Ham. There is a need to balance the duty to recover overpayments with safeguards to manage repayments suitably. Claimants have a responsibility to ensure that they are entitled to benefits and to inform us about changes. We have improved customer communications to remind them of the importance of telling us about any earnings, including through the annual uprating letter.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford mentioned doing a couple of extra hours here and there. Where it can be balanced out using the process that the right hon. Member for East Ham mentioned, and where we can show a pattern, of course we will always respond to that. The right hon. Gentleman is talking about getting upstream of that, but the issue is the expenses that can be incurred; I am sure we will get into the weeds of that on Wednesday. He is right to say that there is a way of understanding that people may be in that situation, but there may be expenses too. I hope that gives him a partial answer.

Debbie Abrahams: Could the Minister respond to my query about medical advisers to first-tier tribunals, and the statements that are included in their bundles?

Mims Davies: I will take that point away. I am keen to explain more about the National Audit Office and the wider reports on Wednesday; it is quite complicated for this particular arena.

The hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Beth Winter) made a point about the overlap of the carer's allowance and the state pension—they are both paid as an income replacement benefit. The carer's allowance replaces an income where the carer is not able to work full time due to their caring responsibilities, while the state pension replaces income in retirement. For that reason, they cannot be paid together to avoid duplicating the provision for the same need. However, if a carer's state pension is less than the carer's allowance, the state pension is paid and topped up with the carer's allowance to the basic weekly rate.

Where a carer's allowance cannot be paid, the person will keep an underlying entitlement to the benefit. That gives access to an additional amount for carers in pension credit of £45.60 a week, which is just under £2,400 a year. Around 100,000 carers receive that as part of their pension credit award. It is paid to recognise the additional contribution and the associated responsibilities, and means that lower-income pensioners with caring responsibilities can receive more than the lower-income receipts of pension credit. If a pensioner's income is above the limit for pension credit, they may still be entitled to housing benefit. I would point them to the household support fund and the DWP's help to claim service.

The right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey) raised a point about young carers. It is challenging to meet the objectives in this wide-ranging area, particularly for young carers and, as we have discussed, there are many objectives that we are trying to meet in different and individual circumstances. The hon. Member for Cynon Valley also mentioned the support from wonderful organisations such as Carers UK, and indeed our constituency offices, to help people to claim. There is now an easy-to-use online claims service for carer's allowance. Some 90% of people claim that way, and nine out of 10 people are happy with the claims service.

The hon. Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) spoke about earnings limits. I appreciate that carers are busy and there is a lot going on, but they are told about the earnings limit when they claim. They also get an annual uprating letter reminding them of any changes, and we use a text reminder. I would always ask carers to engage with us if there are any changes in circumstances. We have supported hundreds of thousands of unpaid carers receiving means-tested benefits through the cost of living support, as well as through support for their fuel bills. As I have said, it has been a difficult time.

The hon. Member for Neath rightly raised the 35-hour care threshold and asked how that was decided on. It dates back to 1976, when the carer's allowance was introduced. At the time, 35 hours was the length of the average working week, and the view was that someone who was caring for 35 hours therefore could not be working full time. That was the basis on which the carer's allowance support was introduced. She also rightly raised the delivery of carer's assessments. I will ensure that Ministers in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities are aware of her concerns.

The carers strategy was mentioned. The Government rightly support unpaid carers, and some of that was covered in the social care plan, "People at the Heart of Care". Hopefully, I have spelt out today that there is a lot to look at.

[Mims Davies]

The Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee, the right hon. Member for East Ham, mentioned the research. I have been looking specifically at that research, as well as the wider policy, in preparation for this debate. We are carefully considering the right time to publish that. I found it extremely helpful and enlightening; it is genuinely helping policy thought and development.

Before I close—I am certain I am over my time—I remind Members that for many carers doing work who receive universal credit, the 55% taper rate and any applicable work allowance will help ensure that people are better off in work. Ninety per cent of those receiving the UC carer element who are declaring earnings have a work allowance. Those with a disability or, indeed, a child might be in that situation.

I note the Opposition's commitment to the reform of carer's allowance. It is the first time that I had seen that, so it is pretty recent. Prior to that, there had been a focus around earnings rules. I will look at what others are promising, because as I said, some of this dates back to 1976, and some of it back more than 20 years. We have spoken about a mixed and challenging picture.

Vicky Foxcroft: I am really glad that the Minister has been re-promoted, which we forgot to mention. I am happy to send her all the stuff that the Opposition are looking to do. Of course, we are more than happy if the Conservatives want to pinch some more of our policies in the future.

Mims Davies: That was characteristically put; I thank the hon. Lady very much. The Work and Pensions Committee Chair made the point about having an open mind about this policy, and hopefully I have shown today that I very much have an open mind.

The Government appreciate that society relies on unpaid carers. It is the most challenging, fulfilling and difficult job, and we recognise the challenges that they

face. We are helping carers to stay in paid work, but there is more to do, as I have spelt out. The opportunity to work with employers in a flexible labour market is appealing, and there is more to build on. We are spending record amounts on carer's allowance and providing unpaid carers with the help and support they need and deserve. If they are not getting that, please do come and talk to us—our team are there to support them. We will keep carer's allowance under review, as we do all benefits.

7.9 pm

Christina Rees: It is nice to see you in the Chair, Mrs Cummins. There is agreement among all speakers in this debate, including the Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Sir Stephen Timms); the Opposition spokesperson, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft); and the SNP spokesperson, the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows). I thank them all for their valuable contributions.

I hope that the Minister, who is very magnanimous, will urge her Government to review and reform all aspects of carer's allowance, as has been called for by the petitioner, Alasdair, and all speakers today. I say again how much I admire and respect all unpaid carers in the UK, and I thank them all from the bottom of my heart for what they do. I also thank the charities that support them. Carers are truly wonderful people and they deserve to be recognised, valued and better supported by this Government. I hope that this Government have listened today.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered e-petition 640062 relating to Carer's Allowance.

7.11 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 22 April 2024

EDUCATION

Early Years Foundation Stage Safeguarding and Experience Based Routes: Update

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (David Johnston): Government are delivering a brighter future for Britain, with long-term economic security and opportunity: where hard work is always rewarded; where ambition and aspiration are celebrated; where young people get the skills they need to succeed in life and where families are supported.

We are rolling out the largest expansion of childcare and early education in England's history. From this month, eligible working parents will access the first 15 hours of funded childcare each week for their two-year-olds. In September they will be able to access 15 hours each week for their nine-month-olds. From September 2025 all eligible parents will have access to 30 hours free childcare for children aged nine months all the way until they start school.

At the beginning of April, we exceeded our target of 150,000 children benefiting from the new two-year-old entitlement. As of today, this stands at over 195,000. By September 2025, the full rollout will be completed—saving parents an average of £6,900 per year.

With the action Government are taking, we will ensure that parents can benefit from more affordable childcare, making it easier to return to work or increase their hours.

Experience-based route (EBR) consultation

Last year, the Government consulted on proposed changes to the early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework. This included the introduction of an “experience-based route” for early years staff who do not have the required full and relevant qualifications, but are otherwise experienced, competent and responsible, to work within the staff-child ratios. This proposal received strong support as a means to help childcare providers make the best use of the skills and experience of the workforce so that they can deliver on the childcare expansion, and in its response to the consultation the Department noted its intention to develop this route.

Today 22 April we launched a technical consultation setting out the Department's proposals on how the experience-based route could work in practice, ensuring that high-quality education and care is maintained. The consultation asks questions on the proposed decision-making model, eligibility criteria, and process requirements.

We know that to deliver the commitments announced at spring Budget 2023, the early years workforce will require additional staff. Our strategy to support the workforce is clear—to enable providers to better utilise the skills of their existing workforce, to attract talented staff into the sector and maximise the skills pipeline into the early years workforce.

Safeguarding consultation launch

The safety of children is our utmost priority and we continually monitor and review safeguarding requirements for early years settings to make sure children are kept as safe as possible. As the early education and childcare sector expands, we want to continue to support early years practitioners to deliver high-quality and safe provision to millions of children each day.

Today 22 April, we launched a consultation on proposals to deliver changes to the safeguarding requirements in the EYFS statutory framework. This is the framework that sets the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn, develop well and are kept healthy and safe. The safeguarding proposals have been informed by extensive engagement with providers, health professionals, sector stakeholders and safeguarding experts, and using lessons learned from previous incidents.

I have seen first-hand the excellent practices that providers have in place to keep children safe. Many are already carrying out what we are proposing in the consultation in their settings. It is my intention to ensure that all practitioners have the knowledge and support they need to deliver the safest, highest-quality early education and childcare provision possible.

Through both consultations, we hope to hear from as many people and organisations as possible so we can gather a broad range of views to help the Government reach well-informed and fair decisions.

[HCWS420]

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

Energy Prices Act 2022: Energy Scheme Expenditure

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Claire Coutinho): I am tabling this statement to update hon. Members under the Energy Prices Act 2022, in line with the requirement under that Act for quarterly reporting to Parliament on expenditure incurred under it.

This is the third report on energy scheme expenditure under section 14 of the Act and covers the quarters from 1 April to 30 June 2023, and from 1 July to 30 September 2023.

Energy prices are volatile and changes will affect the outturn cost of the schemes. The Government have prioritised support for those most in need, while ensuring that we act in a fiscally responsible way.

Since Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine caused energy bills to rise, the Government have stepped in with more than £40 billion of financial support. Over £43 billion was spent between October 2022 and September 2023, the most ever provided to subsidise household bills in UK history. This was in part funded through taxing energy producers' excess profits, with the Government's windfall tax on producers expected to raise over £26 billion by March 2029.¹

Government support schemes covered nearly half of household energy bills between October 2022 and June 2023, saving households £1,500 on average.²

Expenditure incurred

<i>£ million</i>	<i>a) Expenditure incurred between 1 April and 30 June 2023</i>	<i>a) Expenditure incurred between 1 July and 30 September 2023</i>	<i>b) Cumulative expenditure incurred to 30 September 2023</i>
Energy Bills Support Scheme GB and NI	3	0	11,873
Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Funding	2	3	262
Energy Price Guarantee GB and NI	2,307	58	23,364
Domestic Alternative Fuel Payment	(27)	(3)	589
Energy Bills Relief Scheme GB and NI	1,856	108	7,522
Energy Bills Discount Scheme GB and NI	25	89	114
Energy Bills Discount Scheme Heat Networks GB and NI	1	15	16
Non-domestic Alternative Fuel Payment	5	(5)	62
Heat Networks Alternative Dispute Resolution Bodies	0.2	0	0.2

Future costs

Forecasts of FY23-24 (1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024) expenditure for the energy schemes were published by the Office for Budget Responsibility on 22 November 2023 as part of the autumn statement 2023. The forecasts provided were: £4.3 billion for the energy price guarantee, including prepayment meter levelisation; and £0.6 billion for non-domestic energy support, including energy bills relief scheme, energy bills discount scheme and energy bills discount scheme heat network support.

The costs in FY23-24 for other energy support schemes are expected to be net cash returns from suppliers and local authorities. This includes the energy bills support scheme, energy bills support scheme alternative funding, the domestic alternative fuel payment, and the non-domestic alternative fuel payment.

Separately, the forecast for heat networks alternative dispute resolution bodies funding is £0.2 million.

All forecasts are provided on an accruals basis. Ongoing work on the reconciliation of scheme costs may impact FY23-24 and FY24-25 forecasts.

To note:

Figures for expenditure incurred are on a cash basis. This includes payments made by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to energy suppliers, local authorities and other scheme operators.

Where the Department has received net cash back from energy suppliers or local authorities as part of the reconciliation of energy schemes, this is shown by a negative cash figure.

Some expenditure incurred in FY23-24 may relate to FY22-23. Therefore, forecasts for FY23-24 may be lower than expenditure incurred in FY23-24.

The energy bills support scheme in Great Britain was not made under the powers conferred by the Energy Prices Act 2022, but it is included for completeness.

Heat networks alternative dispute resolution bodies funding utilises the power conferred by section 13 of the Energy Prices Act 2022. This funding is separate from the energy bills discount scheme heat network support.

Administrative costs are not included in figures.

¹ DESNZ, Press Release, 8 June 2023

² Hansard, 13 November 2023,
<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-11-07/284>

[HCWS421]

ORAL ANSWERS

Monday 22 April 2024

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