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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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House of Commons

Thursday 25 July 2024

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[Mr Speaker *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CABINET OFFICE

The Minister for the Cabinet Office was asked—

Government Departments and Agencies: Fraud and Error

1. **Tom Rutland** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Lab): What recent estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of fraud and error in Government departments and agencies. [900065]

5. **Chris Vince** (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): What recent estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of fraud and error in Government departments and agencies. [900070]

10. **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): What recent estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of fraud and error in Government departments and agencies. [900075]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Pat McFadden): Government estimates of the amount of money lost to fraud and error vary hugely, in truth: the latest estimate is between £40 billion and almost £60 billion, which is a huge range. The public rightly expect us to do all we can to minimise fraud in the use of public funds, which is one reason why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has announced the establishment of a covid corruption commissioner, whose job it will be to track down as much as possible of the money lost to fraud during the pandemic. The Cabinet Office will work closely with the Chancellor on this to try to ensure best value for money for the public and, of course, crack down on fraud right across Government Departments and agencies.

Tom Rutland: Covid contract fraud has cost the public purse an estimated £7.6 billion, with the previous Government assigning contracts worth billions for useless personal protective equipment to those with close personal connections to Ministers through their so-called VIP lane. With the Chancellor announcing a new covid fraud commissioner this week, can the Minister please outline how his Department will work with the Treasury to support that commissioner, in order to ensure that this egregious waste of public money is rectified and the British taxpayer gets back what they are owed?

Pat McFadden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to what happened during covid, when VIP lanes and dodgy contracts ended up burning through billions of pounds, sometimes for unusable equipment. We will do everything we can to recover money that has been lost, and my Department will work closely with the office of the covid corruption commissioner to oversee that work and try to ensure the best value possible for the taxpayer.

Chris Vince: New technology must be at the beating heart of the new Government, and artificial intelligence presents an opportunity to tackle waste and error. The National Audit Office has claimed that the counter-fraud agencies are only just beginning to utilise new technologies in their fight against public sector fraud, and rely on outdated legacy systems and incomplete, time-lagged data. How will the Minister implement new technologies, including AI, to tackle fraud and error in government?

Pat McFadden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: there is potential for greater use of AI in detecting and rooting out fraud. We want the UK to be an excellent place to develop new uses of AI, both in its public sector applications and the development of private business. There is already a single network analytics platform, which is an AI-based detection tool to help public sector organisations detect fraud, but like many AI applications, we are probably only at the beginning of what can be achieved in this area. We should use every technological tool at our disposal to secure best value for money for the taxpayer.

Dr Huq: As well as Matt Hancock's pub landlord scoring a PPE contract despite having zero relevant expertise, non-covid error, fraud and waste cost the public purse £58.5 billion in the year 2020-21 alone. Could my right hon. Friend tell us how those colossal sums of money will be recovered? He mentioned a commissioner; can he also tell us how we will get rid of cronyism and nepotism, so that these things never happen again?

Pat McFadden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to the scale of the problem. The truth is that, according to the latest figures, the amount that has been recovered is relatively small compared with the scale of loss. The previous Government's own former Minister for counter-fraud described the Conservative party's record as "nothing less than woeful" and riddled with "schoolboy errors", and the shadow Business Secretary, the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), described the previous Prime Minister's handling of this issue as dismissive. We cannot afford to be dismissive: we have a duty to take it seriously and use whatever means we can to bear down on fraud, so that money meant for public services and legitimate recipients of public funds is used for its intended purposes.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): I want to highlight innocent errors where Government systems are failing to pick up overpayments and as a result people are chased. I am thinking particularly of unpaid

carers earning just a few extra pounds, which means that the Department for Work and Pensions is clawing back thousands from them in carer's allowance, because HMRC systems fail to alert the DWP when earnings have increased. What is the Cabinet Office doing to ensure that Government systems properly work to stop these things happening?

Pat McFadden: This issue has been highlighted more than once in the Chamber this week. We are of course hugely appreciative of the job that carers do, and that has to be balanced with the proper use of public funds so that those funds get to the intended recipients. Where there are overpayments, they do need to be recovered in the interests of the taxpayer, but I hope that is always done in a proper and compassionate manner.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I very much welcome the Minister to his place and wish him well in the role he now plays. This is a vastly important question right across the whole United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Does he hold statistics for Northern Ireland on the costs of fraud and error to the public purse, and what discussions will he undertake with the devolved institutions to improve financial decisions, particularly at the Northern Ireland Assembly?

Pat McFadden: This is my first but I suspect not my last exchange with the hon. Member. I have not seen a specific breakdown of this figure for Northern Ireland, but I can tell him that we take relations with Northern Ireland extremely seriously. That is why the Prime Minister went to Northern Ireland, as well as Scotland and Wales, on the weekend after the general election.

Civil Service: National Pay Bargaining Units

2. **Mary Glindon** (Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend) (Lab): Whether he plans to take steps to consolidate the number of national pay bargaining units in the civil service. [900067]

7. **Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Ind): Whether he plans to take steps to consolidate the number of national pay bargaining units in the civil service. [900072]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Pat McFadden): Yesterday, I met the civil service unions together with the new Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Queen's Park and Maida Vale (Georgia Gould). We had a very positive discussion covering a whole range of issues. I made it clear that the days of Government Ministers waging culture wars against civil servants are over. Instead, we want a civil service that is motivated, valued and helps the Government to deliver their priorities. On the specific issue of pay, the Government will have more to say on civil service pay before the summer recess.

Mary Glindon: In 14 years, the Tory Government did nothing to tackle the ludicrous situation whereby there are over 200 pay bargaining units for civil servants across all Government Departments and agencies, a highly time-consuming and inefficient process that generates unfair pay disparities between people doing near-identical jobs in different Government offices. Will the Minister take this opportunity to look again at whether pay bargaining can be consolidated across the civil service, and will he agree to meet the Public and Commercial Services Union to discuss the advantages of such reforms?

Pat McFadden: We do value civil servants, and of course we want all public servants to be properly and fairly rewarded. As with any public expenditure, what is spent on pay has to be balanced against other priorities and fair to taxpayers as a whole. On meeting the PCS, yesterday, I met the general secretary of the PCS, as well as other civil service unions. I hope for a fruitful dialogue with them. Departments do have flexibility on pay. They can direct pay towards the needs of their own workforces. As I have said, we will have more to say about civil service pay before the summer recess.

Jeremy Corbyn: I thank the Minister for the reply he has just given. Will he assure the House that he is going to make progress towards a return to full sectoral bargaining? He must be aware that many thousands of civil servants are not covered by a pay review body or any other bargaining mechanism. Will he take steps to ensure that all civil servants are bought within the purview of a pay review body bargaining unit as part of a return to sectoral bargaining?

Pat McFadden: I thank the right hon. Member for his question. I hope to have a good and fruitful dialogue with the civil service unions about pay and many other issues. It is important that we have public servants who feel valued and motivated, and who do their part on delivering the Government's objectives. On the specific issue of pay that he has raised, as I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend (Mary Glindon), the Government will have more to say on civil service pay before the summer recess.

Covid-19 Pandemic: Public Procurement Fraud

3. **Luke Murphy** (Basingstoke) (Lab): What recent estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of fraud in public procurement during the covid-19 pandemic. [900068]

22. **Ben Coleman** (Chelsea and Fulham) (Lab): What recent estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse of fraud in public procurement during the covid-19 pandemic. [900088]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Georgia Gould): As the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster set out, the previous Government allowed waste and fraud to spiral out of control. Latest estimates show £10.5 billion of estimated fraud and error in the covid-19 schemes. That waste of taxpayers' money is unacceptable and the new Government are taking action. This week the Chancellor announced that she will appoint a new covid counter-fraud commissioner. It will use every means possible to recoup public money.

Luke Murphy: I welcome the Minister and the entire ministerial team to their places. Public sector fraud underwent a massive spike during the pandemic, as

personal relationships trumped proper due diligence. With billions of pounds still in the hands of fraudsters, it is imperative that the new Government work quickly to recover what was lost. I therefore also welcome the Chancellor of the Exchequer's new covid fraud commissioner. What steps will the Government and her Department take to ensure that the money is recovered as quickly as possible, and indeed that something like this never happens again?

Georgia Gould: My hon. Friend is right that the previous Government oversaw VIP lanes that led to millions in waste, and we are still unpicking the impact of that lack of oversight. I have met the Public Sector Fraud Authority to set out my commitment to strengthening the counter-fraud approach across Government. As I have said, the counter-fraud commissioner has been introduced to support their work, and will use every means possible to recoup public money, reporting directly to the Chancellor.

Ben Coleman: In my corner of London, concerns have been expressed about a particular supplier being awarded contracts worth more than £25 million for useless PPE, after being put forward by a former Minister in the VIP lane. Could the Minister say more about how the Public Sector Fraud Authority and the Treasury will ensure that every penny that can be returned is returned to the public purse?

Georgia Gould: I am happy to meet my hon. Friend to hear more about the individual example from their constituency. As I have said, I have met the Public Sector Fraud Authority. We have set out that tackling fraud is an absolute priority for the Cabinet Office, and we will use every lever available to us to get back what is owed to the British people. The Public Sector Fraud Authority is already working closely with the Treasury on the role of the counter-fraud commissioner, and will continue to do so.

Contaminated Blood Products: Compensation

4. **Ian Lavery** (Blyth and Ashington) (Lab): How many people affected by contaminated blood products have received compensation. [900069]

The Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Nick Thomas-Symonds): The infected blood scandal is one of the gravest injustices in our history, and it is vital that we get final compensation to victims as soon as possible. As of 30 June this year, the Government have paid more than £1 billion in interim compensation to those infected and bereaved partners registered with existing support schemes. The total number of recipients of interim payments across the United Kingdom is 4,606.

Ian Lavery: I thank the Minister for that answer. Sadly, the previous Government dragged their heels with regard to this absolute tragedy—*[Interruption.]* Of course they will deny that, but the fact remains that two people per week are dying as a result of contaminated blood, without full compensation. Can he tell the House when the latest report from Sir Robert Francis on the compensation recommendations will be published?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question and pay tribute to his campaigning on this matter, including presenting a petition to this House on behalf of his constituent, Sean Cavens, back in April. I pay tribute to the work of Sir Robert Francis. Certainly the Government will publish his report ahead of laying regulations before this House. More broadly, in respect of compensation for which victims have waited far too long, this Government are committed to paying comprehensive compensation to the infected and affected victims of the scandal. Indeed, the Prime Minister said that on only his second day in office.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): May I start by offering my warmest congratulations to the Paymaster General? I offer him my sincerest good wishes in these opening weeks of a new Government. I start with deep respect for him, and I wish to support him where I can while fulfilling my constitutional responsibility.

It was the privilege of my ministerial life during my six months in office to accelerate and then deliver the legislation to set up the Infected Blood Compensation Authority. Will the Paymaster General set out what progress has been made, given the urgency of this work? Is he on track to meet the expectations of Sir Brian Langstaff and Sir Robert Francis, given the engagement he will undoubtedly have had with them already?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: First, I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his welcome. I pay tribute to the work that he did in government to push this agenda forward. When I was sat where he now is, I always sought to work on a cross-party basis, while holding the Government of the day to account. It is good to hear that he will continue to work in that spirit. With respect to the timetable that he refers to, our aim is still that final compensation payments will begin to be made by the end of this year. The Infected Blood Compensation Authority is established in law, and the team is working hard to put the operational systems in place to make sure that we start delivering final compensation payments by that target.

John Glen: When the right hon. Gentleman was sat here, he described my commitment to set out a clear timetable as "another important victory" for the victims in delivering the compensation scheme. In that spirit, will he reassure the House that the regulations I committed to by Act of Parliament on 24 May will be laid by the three-month legal deadline of 24 August? Will he report to the House at the earliest opportunity on when he will respond to the inquiry's report, which is intended by the end of the year?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: That three-month deadline was hugely important in speeding up a process that frankly had taken far too long for victims. I give the shadow Minister that commitment about meeting that statutory deadline of 24 August. I hope to update this House sooner than that on the ongoing work.

European Political Community

6. **Yuan Yang** (Earley and Woodley) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of discussions at the European Political Community. [900071]

8. **Tonia Antoniazzi** (Gower) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of discussions at the European Political Community. [900073]

The Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Nick Thomas-Symonds): Discussions at the EPC enhanced co-operation on European security and advanced the reset of our relationship with Europe. The EPC summit brought together 46 European leaders, recommitted to Ukraine's defence and announced a new call to action against the Russian shadow fleet. The UK agreed co-operation arrangements with Slovenia and Slovakia to disrupt serious and organised crime. The Prime Minister also announced an increased UK presence at Europol and an £84 million package to tackle upstream migration.

Yuan Yang: Many small business owners in my constituency of Earley and Woodley have expressed to me their strong need for smoother relationships with our closest neighbours. I welcome the fact that the Prime Minister held meetings last week with the Irish Taoiseach and the French President. Can the Minister set out how he will build on those relationships to improve trade ties and to boost British businesses trading with Europe?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I welcome my hon. Friend to her place. As our nearest neighbours and as close allies, both those relationships are of great importance to the UK and to this Government's plan to reset our European relationships. We look forward to working closely with the Irish and French Governments as we take forward our plans to improve the trading relationship to help boost businesses, jobs and economic growth.

Tonia Antoniazzi: Can the Minister outline more about the additional support offered at the European Political Community summit? What impact is that expected to have?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: In the margins of the EPC, 44 countries signed up to a UK-led call to action to tackle the Russian shadow fleet, which is using malign shipping practices to evade sanctions and the oil price cap. In addition, Ukraine signed bilateral security arrangements with Czechia and Slovenia. The opening plenary discussion focused on the need for Europe to support Ukraine for as long as it takes.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): There can be no doubt of the high regard in which the right hon. Gentleman is held by the Prime Minister given that within his responsibilities he is tasked with resetting EU relations, reforming the House of Lords and renewing the constitution as well as legislation, delivering all public inquiries and completing delivery on infected blood. But will he confirm how he will work with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and whether in effect the Cabinet Office now runs the Europe desk in the FCDO from 70 Whitehall?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I am grateful for that question and the reminder of the number of responsibilities and tasks that will require delivery over the coming months and years. The written ministerial statement issued in the Prime Minister's name yesterday clearly sets out the division between the roles. I look forward to leading from the Cabinet Office on the cross-Department and cross-Whitehall UK-EU reset. Of course, the FCDO will continue to deliver the diplomacy across Europe that is vital to that.

John Glen: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that answer, but many in the House and in the public at large will be curious as to what plans he will develop in terms of trade-offs between any changes he seeks to make on behalf of the Government with the EU. For the sake of clarity and transparency, will he describe how he expects to evaluate the benefits of any changes and how his Prime Minister's commitment to respect the referendum outcome will be meaningfully adhered to through the process? When does he expect to make a statement to the House on his progress?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: The Government's approach was set out in the Labour manifesto that was endorsed overwhelmingly at the general election. We will not rejoin the European Union, we will not return to freedom of movement, and we will not rejoin the customs union or the single market. What we will do is advance a reset in the relationship, and our test for that is for our European continent—the UK and the EU together—to be more secure, safer and more prosperous. That is what is in our national interest. It is in the EU's interest as well.

Mr Speaker: I call the Lib Dem spokesperson.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): May I welcome the new Minister and indeed the whole team to the Front Bench? I am sure that the Minister will agree that his most important role may be in repairing that broken relationship with the European Union for our security, for our defence and, most importantly, for our economy. Given the new Prime Minister's focus on mission-driven Government, and with our recent return to Horizon Europe, what discussions did he have—or will he have—about extending the youth mobility scheme to the European Union? That would give thousands of young people the chance to live, work and study abroad and increase our cultural and economic links with Europe again.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: The Government have been clear that we will not be returning to freedom of movement, but clearly we want economic and cultural ties to be far closer than they are at the moment—indeed, closer than they were under the previous Government. That is in the interests of the UK and in the interests of the EU. On the economic side, the Government have already set out their objective of a sanitary and phytosanitary agreement to achieve mutual recognition of professional qualifications to help our excellent services sector, as well as to ease the position for our travelling musicians around Europe, which is hugely important to our cultural soft power.

Government Departments and Agencies: Facilities Management Services

9. **Jon Trickett** (Normanton and Hemsworth) (Lab): Whether he plans to increase the number of facilities management services that are insourced within Government Departments and agencies. [900074]

16. **Kim Johnson** (Liverpool Riverside) (Lab): Whether he plans to increase the number of facilities management services that are insourced within Government Departments and agencies. [900082]

The Minister without Portfolio (Ellie Reeves): The Government will always aim to secure value for money in meeting their facilities management requirements. Our plan to make work pay is clear that we will call time on the previous Government's ideological approach to outsourcing and ensure that decisions are based on robust assessments of value for money, service quality, social value and, crucially, delivering the best outcomes.

Jon Trickett: I thank the Minister very much for her response and I welcome the whole team to the Front Bench. The problem with outsourcing is that, normally, the outsourcers will drive down pay and conditions for the workforce, thereby creating a two-tier workforce; they are not properly accountable to Ministers; they are exempt from freedom of information requests; and finally, there is the question of public service centres. Will the Minister confirm that we will proceed with abandoning the previous Government's ideological obsession with outsourcing?

Ellie Reeves: My hon. Friend is right that too many decisions about outsourcing were ideologically driven under the previous Government, without consideration for things such as social value or service quality. That is why we have said that we will do things differently. Social value and outcomes will be at the heart of that. Our new deal for working people will transform the world of work.

Kim Johnson: The outsourcing of facility management services roles such as cleaning, catering and security has disproportionately impacted women and black workers, who have suffered a reduction in their pay, terms and conditions. The Government have promised to bring about the biggest wave of insourcing of public services in a generation. With that in mind, will the Minister agree to examine the benefits of insourcing facilities management services, particularly with regard to performance and tackling discriminatory outcomes on pay? Will she meet representatives of the Public and Commercial Services Union to discuss this matter further?

Ellie Reeves: My hon. Friend is right that under the previous Government, too many jobs such as cleaning and security were insecure, with a race to the bottom on standards and pay. Our plan to make work pay will ensure that all jobs are secure, fulfilling and well-paid. My hon. Friend also mentioned the disproportionate impact on ethnic minorities and women; that is why we said in the King's Speech that we would introduce an equality Bill to enshrine in law the right to equal pay for ethnic minorities and disabled people, and introduce mandatory ethnicity and disability pay reporting.

Government Departments: Digital Technologies

11. **Lucy Rigby** (Northampton North) (Lab): What steps he is taking to increase the use of digital technologies by Government Departments. [900076]

13. **Josh Simons** (Makerfield) (Lab): What steps he is taking to increase the use of digital technologies by Government Departments. [900078]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Pat McFadden): Digital technologies will be vital to the delivery of the Government's missions and to effective public services. Yesterday, the Prime Minister announced the move of the Government Digital Service's central digital and data office and the incubator for artificial intelligence from the Cabinet Office to the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. The Treasury and the Cabinet Office will work closely with DSIT on this. Creating a strong digital centre of Government is intended to help drive forward innovation and ensure a better experience for the citizens who use Government services.

Lucy Rigby: I welcome the entire ministerial team to their places. The UK has the chance to become a world leader in bringing new technologies into the heart of Government. The concept of a mission-led Government provides a unique opportunity to do exactly that. What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to ensure that digital technologies are used to support the Government's missions, to deliver for my constituents in Northampton North and across the country?

Pat McFadden: My hon. Friend is right that the UK has the potential to be a leader in this area. It is all about securing both value for money for the taxpayer and the best possible citizen experience for users of public services. It is with that in mind that we are creating a strong digital centre of Government. The DSIT Secretary is in the driving seat, working closely with the Cabinet Office and the Treasury to try to achieve those twin aims.

Josh Simons: Despite significant spending of taxpayer cash, as in so many things, public sector productivity got worse under the last Government. When I worked in artificial intelligence, it was clear that so many of the barriers to harnessing technology are specific, granular and often not glamorous, such as sharing data better across organisations. Has the Minister assessed how digital technologies can be used to increase productivity in the public sector and improve public services?

Pat McFadden: I thank my hon. Friend for his question, and let me take this opportunity to thank the right hon. Member for Salisbury (John Glen) for the work he did on public sector productivity. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I suspect we are only in the foothills of the potential here. That is why we have created this strong digital centre of Government. We want to ensure good value for money and to use tech to improve the citizens' experience. The real challenge here is to reform public services to match the constant innovation that people experience in other parts of their lives. We cannot have a world where that innovation is experienced in the private sphere, but is not applied and properly maximised in the public sphere, so that is what we want to do.

Ethics and Integrity Commission

12. **Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): What progress the Government have made on establishing an ethics and integrity commission. [900077]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Pat McFadden): It is important to restore confidence in Government and public life, and to ensure the best possible standards.

This was an important manifesto commitment. We will establish a new independent ethics and integrity commission, with its own independent chair, to ensure the highest possible standards. Work has begun on that, and I will keep the House up to date as it develops.

Debbie Abrahams: I thank my right hon. Friend for his response and welcome all the team to their places. Will he expand a little bit more on exactly what the terms of reference might include? For example, will they include participative and deliberative democracy methods that might also help to restore trust in politics, which, as he knows, is at an all-time low?

Pat McFadden: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I will certainly keep her up to date with this as it goes. In truth, this is always going to be about "show, not tell". We will set up the best system that we can with the new commission. On that front, the Leader of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) is taking immediate action to tighten the existing prohibition on MPs providing paid parliamentary advice. The House will be debating that later today. We are also setting up a modernisation committee. So, on several fronts we want to get the right systems in place, but in the end it is a matter of show, not tell.

Public Procurement: Value for Money

14. **Joe Powell** (Kensington and Bayswater) (Lab): What steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help ensure value for money in public procurement. [900079]

18. **Kirith Entwistle** (Bolton North East) (Lab): What steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help ensure value for money in public procurement. [900084]

19. **Sonia Kumar** (Dudley) (Lab): What steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to help ensure value for money in public procurement. [900085]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Georgia Gould): The Government believe that public procurement is a key lever for enabling the delivery of our missions. Effective procurement will allow the public sector to deliver better services for citizens. Our ambitious programme to make work pay will drive genuine value for money in procurement, and support organisations to create local jobs, skills and wealth. The new digital centre of Government will ensure procurement drives uptake of new digital technologies to improve our public services.

Joe Powell: I thank the Minister for her answer. As she said, value for money is fundamental, but procurement can also be used strategically to ensure that growth opportunities and social benefits are felt across the country. What steps will the Government take to up the ambition in the implementation of the Procurement Act 2023, so we have the data, skills and digital tools to drive a more mission-driven and economically transformative commissioning and purchasing across the Government?

Georgia Gould: As my hon. Friend says, public procurement is a key lever for delivering improved standards in business and in achieving social value. It is one of the levers in making sure we are growing our economy and supporting good jobs, something I saw in local government where Labour councils made huge strides in delivering social value through procurement. The Government's plan to make work pay sets out that ambitious programme to value organisations that create local jobs, skills and wealth, and treat their workers well and equally.

Kirith Entwistle: I join colleagues in welcoming the ministerial team to the Front Bench. The Government have made it clear that tackling waste in public procurement is a priority and that crony relationships will no longer define the awarding of contracts. Can the Minister reassure me and my constituents in Bolton North East that contracts will be awarded based on what is most cost-effective and on what is better for the public purse?

Georgia Gould: The Government have launched a fraud commissioner, whose role will be to look at what went wrong and make sure that we are learning those lessons. The VIP lanes and the issues that we saw previously cannot happen again. The new digital centre of Government, working closely with the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, will ensure that procurement and market engagement are used as effective tools to drive the uptake of new digital technologies and protect us against the kinds of thing that we saw previously.

Sonia Kumar: As an NHS physiotherapist who worked during the covid-19 pandemic, I had the misfortune of witnessing at first hand how crony contracts resulted in wasted resources. Although those contracts may have been intended to reinforce the NHS during the unprecedented crisis, they did a disservice both to our NHS professionals and to patients. Will the Minister outline what tangible steps the Government are taking to avoid such a waste of resources in future and reassure the constituency of Dudley and the wider nation that the Government will take public spending seriously?

Georgia Gould: I thank my hon. Friend for her service during covid, and I thank all the health and care staff who risked their lives to protect us. Billions were spent on personal protective equipment that was unusable, overpriced or under-delivered. This Government are determined to learn those lessons and safeguard every pound of taxpayers' money. I have met the Public Sector Fraud Authority and have set out our commitment to driving down fraud across Government. We are determined to learn the lessons from the work of the covid commissioner, who will report to Parliament.

Sarah Dyke (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): I offer a warm welcome to the ministerial team. Constituents across Glastonbury and Somerton tell me that quality matters to them as much as value for money. Does the Minister agree that we must ensure that public procurement considers environmental and social factors as well as value for money?

Georgia Gould: Value for money is critical to this Government. We want to make sure that every pound of taxpayers' money is spent wisely. We are inheriting a

perilous economic situation, and we need to invest in public services, but we also need to deliver social value, which includes workforce standards and environmental standards. That is how we deliver good growth.

Propriety in Public Life

15. **Sarah Coombes** (West Bromwich) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help ensure high standards of propriety in public life. [900081]

21. **Warinder Juss** (Wolverhampton West) (Lab): What steps he is taking to help ensure high standards of propriety in public life. [900087]

The Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Nick Thomas-Symonds): The sleaze of the previous Government eroded trust in politics and the public's belief in our political system. The Prime Minister's commitment to upholding the highest standards of integrity in public life is clear. He met the Independent Adviser on Ministers' Interests on his first day in office. This Government are committed to ensuring high standards, including by establishing an ethics and integrity commission, reforming the business appointment rules and appropriately empowering the independent adviser on Ministers' interests.

Sarah Coombes: Just 49% of people in my constituency of West Bromwich voted in the recent election. That came as no surprise to me, because I had conversation after conversation with people who had lost trust in politicians because of the previous Government's rule breaking and scandals. What steps are the new Labour Government taking to restore trust and ensure that politics can once again be a force for good?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: This Government will restore trust in politics by delivering for the public. As I have indicated, the Cabinet Office will support the development of a new ethics and integrity commission to deliver a much-needed reset on standards in public life. We will also review and update post-Government employment rules and support the Prime Minister as he issues a new ministerial code and grants the independent adviser the powers and support that he needs.

Warinder Juss: Polling before the last general election found that two thirds of the British public did not think that the then Government had observed high ethical standards, which probably accounted for the disillusionment with politics that we saw on the doorsteps. It is therefore essential that the new Government now work to restore trust in politics and to put public service rather than self-service at the heart of everything that they do. How will the Minister ensure that ministerial standards are upheld, and how will he ensure that the Independent Adviser on Ministers' Interests has the powers to crack down on misconduct?

Nick Thomas-Symonds: My hon. Friend is entirely right: the last Government presided over appalling falling standards, which is why the Prime Minister is insisting that this is a Government of service to the public. The Labour party manifesto committed the Government to giving the Independent Adviser on Ministers' Interests the powers to initiate investigations of misconduct, but also to ensuring that the adviser has access to the evidence that he or she needs, and those changes will be introduced in due course.

Whistleblowers in the Civil Service

17. **Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): What steps he is taking to protect whistleblowers in the civil service. [900083]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Georgia Gould): The Cabinet Office provides a framework to support Departments and employees, which includes signposts on how to raise a concern, channels enabling that to be done safely, and practical support for whistleblowers. The Cabinet Office is working to capture whistleblowers' experience and ways in which to improve it, and, as was mentioned in the King's Speech, we will be introducing a duty of candour Bill which will improve transparency and accountability.

Wera Hobhouse: Good whistleblowing is good for government. Last year the National Audit Office published a report saying that the Government must do more to address governmental failures, and, even more worrying, that 50% of civil servants feel that it is not safe to challenge the way in which things are being done, and feel that their concerns are not being listened to or, indeed, that they will face negative consequences if they speak out. Will the Government establish a new office of whistleblowers to create new legal rights, and also to promote greater public awareness of whistleblowers' rights?

Georgia Gould: As the hon. Lady says, whistleblowing is critical. We have had a discussion today about fraud and about the problems that emerge when we do not have protections in place. We are absolutely committed to supporting whistleblowers, and we are looking into the statistics mentioned and what is causing those problems. We will continue to do that, because it is very high on our agenda.

National Resilience

20. **Fred Thomas** (Plymouth Moor View) (Lab): What recent progress his Department has made on strengthening national resilience. [900086]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Ms Abena Oppong-Asare): This Government recognise the importance of long-term, sustainable resilience, which is why the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will chair a dedicated Cabinet Committee on the subject. In response to the "UK Covid-19 Inquiry: Resilience and preparedness (Module 1)" report, the Government committed themselves to considering all its findings and recommendations, and announced that we would carefully review our strategic approach to improving resilience and preparation across central Government, local authorities, communities such as my hon. Friend's, and the emergency services.

Fred Thomas: I warmly welcome the Minister to her position. I also thank all the key workers in the NHS who have kept us safe during covid. When it comes to national resilience, they are the people we should be

thinking of, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley (Sonia Kumar) for what she has done in that regard.

Staff at Derriford hospital in Plymouth faced extremely difficult circumstances during the covid crisis, and the covid inquiry has found that this country was not adequately prepared. What steps will the Minister take to ensure that if we have another pandemic in this country, key workers in places such as Plymouth are not put under that stress again?

Ms Oppong-Asare: I welcome my hon. Friend to his place, and thank him for his earlier public service in the Royal Marines. I agree with the points that he has raised, and I, too, thank the key workers for all that they did to support and protect us during the pandemic.

The Government will certainly ensure that lessons are learned from the inquiry and the response to the pandemic, and we will take the necessary time to consider the inquiry's report and assess our resilience in respect of the full range of risks that the United Kingdom faces. Last week the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster announced that he would chair a committee for resilience, which will improve our health sector, increasing public trust in the Government and kick-starting our economic growth, as well as improving resilience across the UK.

Mr Richard Holden (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Resilience is incredibly important for our country, and it is key to ensuring that people in government are working towards that. The last Government mandated that every civil servant had to be in the office for at least three days a week, moving back from what we saw during the covid pandemic. What will the Government do to ensure that our entire civil service workforce is on the frontline and working closely together so that national resilience is embedded across our public sector?

Ms Oppong-Asare: I thank the right hon. Member for his question. As I said, it is important that, as a Government, we work strongly together across the UK. As the Prime Minister mentioned on day one, he will be working with his devolved Government counterparts, and he has announced a Council of the Nations and Regions. That will include our working across all civil service departments to make sure that we learn from the lessons of the past.

Cross-Government Working

23. **Patrick Hurley** (Southport) (Lab): What steps he is taking with Cabinet colleagues to improve cross-Government working. [900089]

The Minister without Portfolio (Ellie Reeves): The commitment to a mission-led Government sets out a new approach to governing that is focused on the outcomes that will make a meaningful difference to people's lives. It means a new way of doing government that is more joined-up, breaks down silos and pushes power out to communities. Earlier this week, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster sat as deputy chair on the first mission board on growth, chaired by the Chancellor. As part of our plans to deliver mission-based government, we will hold further mission boards as we approach the summer recess.

Patrick Hurley: I thank my hon. Friend for her reply. Earlier this month, the Prime Minister announced that he would personally chair new mission delivery boards to ensure that Labour's key manifesto pledges are implemented. But if we want to deliver our manifesto pledges effectively, we are going to need effective communication between central Government and devolved bodies. Could my hon. Friend tell me what steps are being taken to ensure that devolved Governments are involved in the new Government's mission delivery process?

Ellie Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for his question, and he is right to point out that we have started to deliver on our promises. For example, the Chancellor launched our national wealth fund just this week. He is also right to say how important it is that we work with the devolved Governments to deliver missions. The Government have set out our intention to work closely with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as metro mayors and local council leaders in England, to deliver the missions. One of the Prime Minister's first actions was to meet all the First Ministers on his tour of the UK. We know that meaningful co-operation will be key to delivering change across the entire United Kingdom.

Topical Questions

T1. [900090] **Andrew George** (St Ives) (LD): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Pat McFadden): My Department has begun its work on helping the Government to deliver on our manifesto, and we are focused on the first steps and missions that we spoke about during the election campaign. We will play our full part in driving forward the announcements made by the Government, such as establishing a national wealth fund, lifting the ban on onshore wind, and beginning the changes needed to get Britain building again. We have also responded to the first module of the covid report published last week, and the Minister without Portfolio, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham West and East Dulwich (Ellie Reeves), made a statement on the IT outage, which exposed the fragility of the systems we all rely on.

Andrew George: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his response. Given that it is the Department's responsibility to investigate waste, will it also investigate the impact? My inquiries have revealed that £242 million of taxpayers' money was spent on covid aid that was handed out to holiday home owners in Cornwall during that period, whereas only a fraction of that amount has been given to support those who are desperately in need of affordable homes, with many locals being displaced by the massive growth of holiday homes in the area. Will the Government please investigate the impact—be it positive or negative—of spending that kind of public money?

Pat McFadden: I assure the hon. Member that we take value for money seriously; it has been a theme of today's questions. The Government supported businesses during covid—necessarily and rightly—but it is important to ensure the best value for money in such schemes. In the end, it is all taxpayers' money, so that should have

been done. Where that is not the case, and where there has been fraud or waste, we will do our best to recover what was wrongly spent.

Mr Speaker: Can we pick up the pace of questions and answers? We are on topicals now. Rachel Hopkins will set a good example.

T2. [900091] **Rachel Hopkins** (Luton South and South Bedfordshire) (Lab): Small businesses are the lifeblood of our high streets and communities, and they create local wealth and opportunities across Luton South and South Bedfordshire. They play a vital role in providing social value by distributing growth locally, meeting environmental targets and developing social wellbeing. Does the Minister agree that it is essential to put social value at the heart of the Government's growth agenda?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Georgia Gould): Growth is a central mission of the Government. We want to use all the levers available to us, including procurement, to support good growth, jobs and local communities.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Sir Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): I begin by welcoming the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to his position. I know that he will be supported by a brilliant team of civil servants who are truly dedicated to public service. As we saw in module 1 of the covid inquiry report last week, biological threats pose potentially catastrophic risks to our nation, and those risks will be exacerbated by long-term trends such as climate change. To help to prepare us, I published the UK biological security strategy. Will he take the opportunity to recommit to its objectives and to provide an annual update to the House on its implementation?

Pat McFadden: I welcome the right hon. Member to his position. I mean that genuinely: it is not easy to step up and serve in opposition after an election defeat, so I welcome what he and his colleagues are doing. I echo his praise for the civil service and the Cabinet Office team, who have supported me and my colleagues in the best way in the past few weeks. On the UK biological security strategy, my answer is simple and short: yes.

Mr Speaker: Let us keep going in that way.

Sir Oliver Dowden: I welcome that answer and I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind words. An effective strategy must be underpinned by dedicated resources, which is why one of my final acts in the Cabinet Office was to announce that we would ringfence biological security spending across Government. Will he uphold that commitment, so that important resilience spending does not fall victim to day-to-day spending pressures?

Pat McFadden: If the right hon. Member set aside spending for his commitments, he did something pretty rare for the last Government. When we look under the bonnet, we find that that was not often the case. We will have more to say about that in the coming days.

T3. [900092] **David Taylor** (Hemel Hempstead) (Lab): I welcome the Front-Bench team to their roles. The people of Hemel Hempstead put their trust in me because they want change, particularly on issues such as healthcare, on which the last Government failed to deliver. Can the Minister update the House on the changes that the Government are planning to make for my constituents and constituents around the country?

Pat McFadden: We are getting on with our first steps, including on healthcare, which is a top priority for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. We want to make the NHS fit for the future. We did it before and we can do it again.

Mr Speaker: I call the Lib Dem spokesperson.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): This summer, we have been celebrating 25 years of devolution in Scotland. In the last Parliament, the Scottish Affairs Committee looked at how the relationship between the UK and Scottish Governments has deteriorated in the past decade and how we can improve it. Does the Minister agree that in the next tranche of devolution, we should look at how to improve relationships with the devolved Administrations and regional authorities? Perhaps we should set up a UK council of Ministers to involve Ministers from all the Administrations and regional mayors.

Pat McFadden: We intend to set up a council of nations and regions. The hon. Member is right to say that we need to improve relations. That is easier said than done because such organisations are run by political parties, but I hope that the election result, in all its facets, represents the opportunity for a bit of a reset and better relations in future.

T4. [900093] **Joe Powell** (Kensington and Bayswater) (Lab): In just over a month, phase 2 of the Grenfell inquiry will report. There will be implications for the entire Government, but what preparations have been made ahead of the report's publication? Will the Minister commit to engaging with the bereaved, survivors and the affected community before the Government respond in full to the recommendations?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Ms Abena Oppong-Asare): I thank my hon. Friend for the question; I know that the issue is close to his heart, as it is to mine. The publication of the report will mark an important milestone for the Grenfell community, and Parliament will have the opportunity to provide the full and proper scrutiny that the issues deserve. As my hon. Friend said, it is important that bereaved families are also part of that process, and we will work closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure that all those residents are part of it. The Government will do everything possible to drive the change to ensure that lessons are learned and that a tragedy such as the Grenfell Tower fire can never happen again.

T7. [900096] **Mr Richard Holden** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): In 2005, the tax gap was 7.4%; in 2022-23, the previous Government cut it down to 4.8% Is there a cross-Government mission or target to close the tax gap further?

Pat McFadden: We will do everything we can to collect the greatest amount of tax possible—that is right. We are interested in value for money and, given the legacy that we have inherited, I assure the right hon. Member that that is needed.

T5. [900094] **Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): During the pandemic, my requests to the then Government to source personal protective equipment from local, UK manufacturers were largely ignored. Will the Minister insist that any covid corruption commissioner listens to companies such as Tecman and Comtest in my constituency about what happened at that time?

Pat McFadden: All lessons should be learned about the procurement pressures at that time, including the lesson that my hon. Friend mentioned.

T9. [900098] **Richard Foord** (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): We heard at the covid inquiry that Cabinet Office structures were not designed to manage a whole-of-Government crisis. What might the Government change to better prepare for the next emergency?

Pat McFadden: The great danger is preparing perfectly for the last war. The real challenge in resilience is looking around the corner for things that have not already happened. As we respond to the covid pandemic, it is important to keep that in mind, and we will try to do that.

T6. [900095] **Sarah Coombes** (West Bromwich) (Lab): The covid-19 pandemic devastated families in West Bromwich. In our borough of Sandwell, 1,476 people lost their lives. Now the covid inquiry is exposing just how poorly prepared we were and that insufficient thought was given to how the pandemic would affect ethnic minority and deprived communities. What will the Government do to work with local government and across the board to ensure that we are better prepared in future?

Ms Oppong-Asare: The Government recognise that the pandemic had a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups and minority communities and that it will continue to affect many people. It is essential that we review the way we prepare for future emergencies to minimise disproportionate impacts. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster will chair a dedicated Cabinet Committee on resilience to oversee the work of assessing and improving our national resilience. We are putting people at the centre of the Government's missions and we will learn the lessons of covid-19.

Dame Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): On behalf of the 12% of people in my constituency who have served in the armed forces, I ask the Cabinet Secretary to explain why he is not joined by a veterans Minister on the Front Bench this morning.

Pat McFadden: That is because responsibility for veterans is being transferred to the Ministry of Defence, which is a better home for it. Looking after our veterans will be a big priority in the Ministry of Defence.

T8. [900097] **Sam Rushworth** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): In recent years, rural parts of my constituency were left without power for a week following storm Arwen, and, during covid, children in upland areas were unable to access school due to poor connectivity. Does the Minister agree that resilience requires taking into account the energy and connectivity needs of areas such as Teesdale and Weardale?

Ms Oppong-Asare: First, let me thank my hon. Friend and his family for walking across the country to raise awareness of child poverty during the pandemic.

The Government recognise the disruption to education caused by the pandemic and the different access to online learning and IT equipment. We are committed to learning lessons from the past and making improvements for the future. In the immediate term, the Government have invested in delivering nationwide gigabit connectivity as soon as possible. We are investing £5 billion as part of this project to ensure that the hardest-to-reach areas across the UK, such as my hon. Friend's constituency, receive coverage.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Further to the question of the hon. Member for Blyth and Ashington (Ian Lavery), does the Minister hold any statistics on how many individuals are due infected blood compensation in Northern Ireland and how many have been awarded it? I am happy for the Minister to send me the stats if he does not have them to hand.

The Paymaster General and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Nick Thomas-Symonds): I am grateful to the hon. Member for that question. I do not have the specific figures for Northern Ireland to hand, but if he writes to me I would be only too delighted to provide them to him.

T10. [900099] **Adam Jogee** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): The CrowdStrike outage this week showed how reliant we are on digital infrastructure. What will the Minister do to reassure people in Newcastle-under-Lyme that Britain will be resilient against cyber-attacks and hostile action from those who wish to do us harm?

The Minister without Portfolio (Ellie Reeves): I thank my hon. Friend for his question. I made a statement on the CrowdStrike IT outage in this House on Monday. There will be a lessons-learned process as a result of that, and also a Bill going before Parliament to ensure that we are resilient in relation to our cyber-security. That will strengthen our defences and ensure that more digital services than ever are protected.

Mr Speaker: I call Cat Eccles for the final question.

Cat Eccles (Stourbridge) (Lab): A constituent of mine is currently going through the process of adopting a little boy. She and her husband have one daughter already, conceived following several rounds of IVF, but, sadly, that has since been unsuccessful for them and they have chosen to adopt one of the many looked-after children looking for a loving home. My constituent runs a local business—a haberdashery and sewing workshop—that is extremely popular with local people,

but in order to integrate the little boy into her family, she has taken time away from her business to be with him at home. She has since discovered that she is not entitled to statutory adoption pay as a self-employed person and will have to take this time off unpaid.

When adopting children from care, there is a really small window of opportunity to successfully integrate the child with minimal disruption. Costs to local authorities for looked-after children are rising. Would you agree that extending adoption pay to self-employed people in line with maternity pay would provide better outcomes for looked-after children?

Mr Speaker: Order. We are all on a learning curve, but we do need to ask short, punchy questions. Also, "you" means me, but I am sure that we will not be doing that again.

Pat McFadden: On this, perhaps the simplest thing is for my hon. Friend to write to me, so that I can get her question considered by the proper Minister.

Mr Speaker: That completes questions. Before we move to the business questions, I shall let those on the Front Benches leave.

Business of the House

10.38 am

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): Will the Leader of the House provide an update on forthcoming business?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Lucy Powell): The business for the week commencing 29 July will include:

Monday 29 July—Second Reading of the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill.

Tuesday 30 July—Second Reading of the Budget Responsibility Bill.

The House will rise for the summer recess at the conclusion of business on Tuesday 30 July and return on Monday 2 September.

The business for the week commencing 2 September will include:

Monday 2 September—General debate. Subject to be confirmed.

Tuesday 3 September—Committee of the whole House and remaining stages of the Passenger Railway Services (Public Ownership) Bill.

Wednesday 4 September—Committee of the whole House and remaining stages of the Budget Responsibility Bill.

Thursday 5 September—Second Reading of the Great British Energy Bill.

Friday 6 September—The House will not be sitting.

Chris Philp: Lieutenant Colonel Mark Teeton was brutally stabbed in Gillingham near the Brompton barracks a few days ago. I know that he will be in the thoughts of all Members, and will have our best wishes for a speedy recovery.

I extend my thanks to long-serving Doorkeeper John Tamlyn, who has served this House for 36 years—four times longer than I have been a Member of this House. He has witnessed many memorable scenes over the years, and by my calculation has seen no fewer than 10 Prime Ministers come and go—well, nine come and go, and one arrive, but I am optimistic that between now and next Tuesday he may make it 10 coming and going. I am sure that the whole House will wish John well in his retirement after so many years of distinguished service. Thank you.

We do not have a timetable for the election of Select Committees and other Committees. I know that Select Committees can sometimes be troubling for the Government; during my five years as a Minister I was gently roasted—sometimes violently flambéed—by many Select Committees.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Stamford) (Con): You're welcome!

Chris Philp: I thank my hon. Friend for that. It is, however, important that we have Select Committees in place so that Back Benchers can hold the Government to account. If that is not temptation enough for the Leader of the House, let me say this: if her Back Benchers have Select Committees to serve on, they may have less time to plot rebellions. Will she confirm that all Select Committee Chairmen and members will be elected in September—and if not in September, when?

Many Members have expressed concern about the resumption of UK taxpayer funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. UNRWA stands accused of many appalling acts, including running schools using antisemitic textbooks encouraging violence, the documented involvement of at least 10 UNRWA members in the 7 October massacres, and close links between UNRWA staff and the Hamas terrorist organisation. Will the Leader of the House urgently arrange a debate on this decision in Government time, and can she guarantee that no taxpayer money will support, directly or indirectly, Hamas or any activities that encourage or facilitate terror?

The Government have sent mixed messages about plans to scrap the very reasonable two-child cap on welfare payments. Then, on Tuesday, the Government whipped their MPs to vote against scrapping it. There was a significant Back-Bench rebellion, less than three weeks after the election—not even Theresa May managed a rebellion within three weeks of an election, so it was a bit of a first. At this rate, the Government's majority will be gone by about Easter of next year. *[Interruption.]* Look, I am always happy to debate these issues. The Leader of the House and the Government will actually have my support on this issue—she may not want it or welcome it, but she will have it anyway—so can we have that debate, not least so that her own parliamentary party and Back Benchers can properly discuss this important issue?

I understand that next week the Chancellor may make a statement on the public finances. Does the Leader of the House agree with what the Chancellor said during the election: that a party does not need to be in government to open the books because of the Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts? Will the Government commit that any statement about public finances made in this House will be accompanied by an OBR forecast, since we can see from next week's business that the Government are so keen to enshrine OBR forecasts further in law?

It seems clear to me that we may be presented next week with concocted and exaggerated claims about the public finances as a pretext for tax rises, so can the Leader of the House commit that the election promises that Government Members made—that there would be no tax rises beyond those in the Labour manifesto—will be honoured in full?

Finally, the Government recently announced the closure of the Bibby Stockholm barge. Will the Government update the House on where those people will now be accommodated and at what cost? I also notice that the Government have rebranded illegal immigration as "irregular", and have said that they merely want to control it. I say to them that entering this country by small boat is illegal; it may help them to refer to section 74 of the Immigration Act 1971, as amended, if they are in any doubt. The Government's objective should be to stop illegal immigration completely, not merely to control it, so will the Leader of the House organise a debate in Government time on that?

That debate could cover what the Government plan to do in place of the Rwanda scheme that they have just scrapped. The first flight had been due to take off yesterday, 24 July, but the Government chose to cancel it. The deterrent effect that that flight would have had would have led to a cessation of channel crossings, as all the precedents in Australia and elsewhere have demonstrated. We saw it here with the Albanian cohort

last year as well. The Government needlessly cancelled what would have been an effective deterrent measure. Will the Government allow a vote on that policy?

Lucy Powell: I thank the shadow Leader of the House and join him in paying our respects to those affected by the brutal attack in Kent this week.

In our last business questions before the summer recess, Mr Speaker, I want to put on record my thanks to you, House staff, security staff and others for all your hard work in recent weeks, and I wish you all some kind of holiday over that recess. I also congratulate our new Deputy Speakers; they are breaking more glass ceilings with an all-female line-up that is the most diverse in our history. On the same theme, I also send congratulations to Baroness Eluned Morgan, who is set to become Wales's first female First Minister—that is a lot of firsts.

Finally, I put on record my thanks to the wonderful John Tamlyn, one of our fantastic Doorkeepers, who is retiring after 36 years of service. The shadow Leader of the House mentioned the number of Prime Ministers under which John served, but I think most of those came in the last few years of his time. As he said to me earlier, the last few years go a lot faster than the early ones.

I also want to address the truly shocking footage we have seen of an incident at Manchester airport. It was right of the Greater Manchester police force to refer itself to the Independent Office for Police Conduct, given the widespread concern about the incident.

This week we have heard many maiden speeches. There has been a lot of demand, shall we say, but it has been good to see the enthusiasm of many colleagues from across these Benches. Those speeches have told the stories of our nation, of people and places striving to get on, and looking after and looking out for each other; but I am not sure that I can agree that every other constituency is the best in the country, because of course we all know that the best is actually Manchester Central.

This has been a special week for us on the Government side of the House. After long years in opposition, we have finally been able to win some votes in support of our ambitious, bold, fully costed King's Speech programme. It is one to be proud of. It is the opportunity and responsibility of government made real.

The shadow Leader of the House asks about the election of Select Committee Chairs. He will know that negotiations are ongoing between the usual channels about how those Chairs will be allocated. Once those are completed, we hope to have the elections as soon as possible.

As we end our third week in government, it is clearer than ever before that the Conservatives failed in their responsibility and left the country in a state beyond our worst fears. They do not like to hear it, but they failed to take the tough and right choices. It is as if they knew that they were going to lose the election and left the really difficult decisions for us. They do not like it, but history will show it. That is not just my view. The National Audit Office found that the NHS has been left in an "unprecedented" crisis. The Institute for Fiscal Studies said that we face

"some of the toughest choices in generations".

The previous Government's Justice Secretary admitted that they ignored prisons running at 99% capacity because it would cost them votes to take action, so I am afraid that I will not be taking the shadow Leader of the House's advice on the issues that he raises.

The shadow Leader of the House talks about redefining illegal migration. I remember the former Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Braintree (Mr Cleverly), redefining the backlog under the last Government as a "queue." Far from being stopped, boats have been coming over in record numbers over the past year, so the Conservatives' plan just was not working. That is why we have already reallocated resources and started returning illegal migrants, which his Government failed to do.

The shadow Leader of the House will know that, yes, we are taking action to ensure that all fiscal statements have Office for Budget Responsibility oversight. I am not sure whether his party will support that next week. The Conservatives had their chance to govern, and they left the country in a much worse state than they found it. They did not fix the roof while the sun was shining; in fact, their whole house was built on sand. We have been left the job of rebuilding from the bottom up, on shaky foundations, with most of the materials gone and the workforce depleted and demoralised, but we are getting on with the job, and there is more to come in coming days.

Manifesto commitments realised today will turn the page on an era of sleaze and scandal. Our first Bills, to be considered next week, will bring our railways back into public ownership—putting passengers first, not profit—and will protect our economy and family finances from Conservative Trussonomics, of which the shadow Leader of the House was an author. We will legislate for Great British Energy when Parliament returns, delivering energy security and lower bills. What a contrast with the dying days of the last Government. If he will forgive me, I will not be taking his advice; I will continue realising the change that the country is crying out for.

Paul Waugh (Rochdale) (Lab/Co-op): The footage of a Greater Manchester police officer stamping on and kicking a man in Manchester airport is truly shocking and disturbing. That man is one of my Rochdale constituents, and I am meeting his family later today. Our police face a difficult job every day to keep us all safe, but they know that they are expected to demonstrate the highest standards of conduct in their duties. Will the Leader of the House make time for Members to discuss the important issue of police conduct?

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for that important question. As I said, the footage is incredibly disturbing, and there is understandably a lot of concern, particularly in his constituency, given that his constituent was affected. Greater Manchester police have said that the officer involved was immediately suspended from all duties, and a referral has now been made to the Independent Office for Police Conduct. I will ensure that the Home Secretary has heard my hon. Friend's question and is in touch with him at the earliest opportunity to discuss the matter further.

Mr Speaker: I call the Lib Dem spokesperson.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I am pleased to see that the Leader of the House has survived the first rebellion of the new Parliament. Her Government should take

[Wera Hobhouse]

advice from one of my Bath constituency's most famous residents, Mary Shelley, and her creation, Frankenstein's monster:

"Beware; for I am fearless, and therefore powerful."

I expect the Prime Minister hopes that the new group of independent MPs he has created will not become such a monster.

Scrapping the two-child benefit cap would lift around 250,000 children out of poverty. As child poverty is one of the main drivers of mental illness, it is no surprise that young people's mental health services are now at breaking point. More than a quarter of a million young people are still waiting for support after being referred to child and adolescent mental health services in 2022-23. One of my constituents, who struggles with an eating disorder, has experienced two relapses, which they attribute to severely limited CAMHS resources in their time of need. The Liberal Democrats want to ensure that when budgets are tight, support for children and young people's mental health is not pushed aside. Before it is too late, may we have a debate in Government time on the inadequacy of child and adolescent mental health services?

I also wish the wonderful John Tamlyn all the best in his retirement.

Lucy Powell: Let me be absolutely clear: we on the Labour Benches are incredibly proud of the programme laid out by His Majesty in the King's Speech last week. By any measure, it is one of the most bold and ambitious programmes of any incoming Government—tackling the challenges that the country faces, delivering on our manifesto commitments, ensuring that our mission-led Government bring about the change that the country wants, and bringing back a Government of service. It is absolutely right that Members elected on a manifesto to bring in that King's Speech should vote for it in overwhelming numbers, as they did in Parliament this week. I am incredibly proud of the huge numbers of people who supported that King's Speech programme.

The issue of child poverty has been raised a number of times in recent weeks. This Labour Government, like any Labour Government, are absolutely committed to tackling child poverty—not just its symptoms, but its root causes—whether through early education, housing support, or the Sure Start programme and other such measures. That is why we have established a cross-cutting Government taskforce to look at all of those issues, and we will come back regularly to this House to report on its progress.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): Many of us enjoyed watching the Euros in our local pubs, whose licensing hours were only just extended before this House rose for the general election. My private Member's Bill would have ensured that extensions for events of national importance would no longer be dependent on Parliament sitting. That Bill passed through this place with zero objections, but failed to make the wash-up. I know that my right hon. Friend likes sport and a good pint, so will she make time for my Bill to become law?

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. Actually, as she will know, I have become quite a lightweight—I am more of a spritzer girl than a full pint girl these days—but I know her Bill was met with wide support in the last Parliament. The private Member's Bill ballot will be coming up straight after recess, and I hope she secures a spot in it; if she does not, I am happy to talk to her about how we can take some of these matters forward in our future legislative programmes.

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): I welcome the Leader of the House to her place. This week, she will have noticed that we are celebrating county flags; Parliament Square is wonderfully decorated with the flags of the historic counties from across these islands. Will she commit the Government to continuing that tradition, and work to enhance and cherish the culture of our magnificent historic counties across our United Kingdom?

Lucy Powell: The hon. Gentleman makes a really important point. The sense of identity that many people get from the counties that they come from should continue to be celebrated and nourished. I am sure that as long as we have this Speaker, who is a great Lancastrian and very much of his county, we in this House will continue to celebrate the great contribution that our counties make.

Ms Polly Billington (East Thanet) (Lab): Coastal communities such as mine in East Thanet have been let down for far too long, with poor public services and a lack of infrastructure. That is made even worse by a shortage of high-quality, well-paid jobs. On top of that, one of those communities' biggest assets—the sea and its environment—has been trashed as a consequence of Tory neglect and chaos, making sustainable economic recovery even harder. However, that has not deterred my constituents across Margate, Broadstairs and Ramsgate from channelling their energies into enterprises in hospitality and tourism, as well as in the vital creative industries. Will my right hon. Friend arrange for us to have a debate in this House about the way that this Government's regional growth strategy will address the long-term challenges and opportunities for our coastal communities, with special consideration of how the visual and performing arts can drive economic—

Mr Speaker: Order. Business questions will be cut off at about 11.45 am. If we are to get it running, we will have to help each other by trying to ask shorter questions. I am sure that the Leader of the House will assist with quicker answers.

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for that great question. Given all the new Members in the House who represent coastal towns, I am sure that the important contribution of those areas would make a really good topic for an Adjournment or Westminster Hall debate after recess.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Iran represents the biggest threat to peace in the middle east. It controls the Houthis, who attack British shipping; Hamas, who have caused the war in Gaza; and Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah. When they were in opposition, the Government promised that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps would be proscribed in its entirety, and its assets sequestrated and used for the benefit of the Iranian people. That was also the settled will of this House, so will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate in Government time to

ensure that it becomes the policy of this new Administration, and that we get on with that job, which would be welcomed across the world?

Lucy Powell: The hon. Member is right; we raised these issues a number of times when in opposition. The Foreign Secretary has recently updated the House on a number of issues, and I know he plans to continue to do so. I will ensure that he has heard what the hon. Member has said today and provides some answers on that important point.

Carolyn Harris (Neath and Swansea East) (Lab): Resolven, a small community in my constituency with a massive heart, is today filled with pride for Dan Jervis, part of the GB swim team. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating not just Dan, but all our GB contestants at the Paris Olympics? They fill us with pride and joy, so will she join me in congratulating them all?

Lucy Powell: I strongly support what my hon. Friend has said. We all wish Team GB the very best in the forthcoming Olympics in Paris, particularly Dan and the rest of the swimming team. We wish all our competing athletes all the very best.

Sir Roger Gale (Herne Bay and Sandwich) (Con): When in opposition, the present Administration made some efforts to criticise the then Conservative Government's record on animal welfare. The King's Speech, of which the right hon. Lady indicates she is so proud, contains not one word relating to animal welfare. Was that a deliberate omission, or a careless and uninterested oversight, and when might we have a Bill to outlaw the proceeds of trophy hunting?

Lucy Powell: I am glad to answer that question. The right hon. Member will be aware that outlawing trophy hunting was absolutely in our manifesto, which we have been resoundingly elected to deliver. We have set out our King's Speech for this first Session; it is not for the whole Parliament. Given how much we need to do, we have had to prioritise what we are doing in this Session, especially to deliver on our missions and those first steps we promised the country we would deliver, but I am sure that will come forward in due course.

Ian Lavery (Blyth and Ashington) (Lab): St Bartholomew's church in Newbiggin-by-the-Sea in my constituency is a grade I listed building. It is a beautiful church, but it is in serious danger of sliding into the North sea because of coastal erosion. Sadly, the last Government allowed funding for sea defences only to protect residential properties. Can we have a debate in Government time to discuss how to change that rule before this lovely church and some of its former residents slide into the North sea?

Lucy Powell: I am sorry to hear about that historic church in my hon. Friend's constituency. He is right that coastal erosion is one of the key challenges that his community and many others face, and it is one of the issues that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is prioritising in his work on the flood resilience taskforce and on coastal community resilience, so I will ensure that my hon. Friend's comments have been heard and that he gets a full reply.

Dave Doogan (Angus and Perthshire Glens) (SNP): The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero is trumpeting that 76% of the electorate are right behind GB Energy, and why would they not be? Why would they not want a state-owned energy company such as Ørsted, Vattenfall or Equinor delivering for people across these islands? But it is not that, is it? It is a cynical, snake oil exercise to gift-wrap a Department that already exists, and it will not deliver energy across these islands at all. Can we have a debate in Government time about why GB Energy is nothing short of smoke and mirrors?

Lucy Powell: I strongly disagree with the hon. Member's question. Great British Energy is not only very popular, but very popular for a reason. It will transform our ability to produce clean energy, which is much needed in this country, so that we are no longer reliant on imported fossil fuels, which are subject to global energy spikes, as we have seen. We are leading a transformation to being a clean energy superpower by 2030, and Great British Energy is absolutely core to delivering that mission. He will be aware that there will be a debate on this issue tomorrow. We will have the Second Reading of the Bill when we return, when I am sure he will hear how wrong his conclusions on Great British Energy are.

Jake Richards (Rother Valley) (Lab): In the past month, two men in my constituency have taken their own lives. Both had families, both were well known and respected figures in their communities, and both will be sorely missed. Will my right hon. Friend guarantee a debate on mental health services for men, and on how the NHS can work with local groups such as those in my community, Andy's Man Club in Maltby, the Learning Community in Dinnington, and Better Together in Kiveton Park?

Lucy Powell: Sadly, men are three times more likely to die from suicide than women, and it is a great killer of young men in this country. That is why such a big chunk of the King's Speech was about tackling mental health, including modernisation of the Mental Health Act 1983. We are bringing forward a cross-cutting mental health approach, which I am sure the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care will update the House on shortly.

Paul Holmes (Hamble Valley) (Con): I welcome the Leader of the House to her position. On the day of the Dissolution of the last Parliament, the previous Government awarded millions of pounds of funding for accessibility at our more remote train stations, including Swanwick and Hedge End in my constituency. Will she confirm that that funding will remain in place, and may we have a debate about accessibility at our more remote train stations?

Lucy Powell: As one of the few Labour Members present on that day, I remember that well. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the economic inheritance of this Government is a lot more challenging than we had feared, and some of the commitments made by the previous Government were not funded. We obviously

[Lucy Powell]

take very seriously the commitments made to local communities, and I am sure that there will be updates for the House as soon as they are available.

Rachel Blake (Cities of London and Westminster) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Leader of the House acknowledge the risk of falling school rolls in the Cities of London and Westminster? She will be aware that the Cities of London and Westminster have some excellent local primary schools, many of which are just a few minutes' walk from this place. The sustainability of local primary schools is at risk due to London's housing crisis, so will she allow a debate on the long-term sustainability of local primary schools and their vital importance to central inner-city communities?

Lucy Powell: I welcome my hon. Friend to her place as the Labour MP for where we are today. She raises an important matter that should be covered by the children's wellbeing Bill that was announced in the King's Speech, which will look at admission and place planning, and giving local authorities a greater ability to do that than they currently have. The next Education questions are due not long after we return from the summer recess, so she might want to raise this important matter then.

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): I welcome the new Financial Conduct Authority rules on access to cash. One key thing that they set out is that banks should not close their branches before an assessment has taken place and new alternatives have been put in place. In Cupar, we have already seen the closure of the Bank of Scotland, and problems over the summer regarding the replenishment of the remaining cash machines. May we have a debate in Government time about the FCA rules, and how we ensure that communities that have already lost those services get the replacement assessments they are supposed to get?

Lucy Powell: I thank the hon. Lady for that important question. Having sat through business questions many times in the last Parliament, I know that she raised this topic consistently. The disappearance of banks from our high streets was raised with many of us during the election campaign, which is why this Government are committed to having banking hubs across the country, and to a coherent plan for town centre regeneration. I will consider her request for a debate and pass it on to the relevant Minister.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): It is the end of the school year, and I wish to place on the record my thanks to all the teachers and governors, not just in Warwick and Leamington but across the country, for the work they have done in what has been a really tough year. At the beginning of the academic year, certain schools were hit by the issue of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete, which impacted greatly on the education provision for so many in our communities. May we have a debate on the impact of RAAC and asbestos on children's education, and on what mitigations can be offered?

Lucy Powell: I join my hon. Friend in thanking teachers right across the country for what they have done this academic year. Given my new duties, I missed my child's very last day at primary school on Tuesday—[Hon. Members: "Aww."]—so I would particularly like to thank his teachers, who I did not get a chance to see that day. I am a really bad mum, I am afraid; it just goes with the terrain. My hon. Friend makes an important point about the RAAC that remains in our schools. It is one of the scandals of the previous Government that was not dealt with. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education is looking incredibly closely at these issues and will update the House in due course.

Mr Speaker: Let us have another mother.

Alicia Kearns (Rutland and Stamford) (Con): May I start by saying what a joy it is to see the Leicestershire flag flying outside Parliament? I secured that for my county after a thousand years without one. Moving on to Lincolnshire—I represent three counties—the Government are right to build more houses, but in that process it is crucial that we make sure that councils hold developers and water companies to account. In Corby Glen in Lincolnshire there has been a stink for well over a year, yet the Labour-run rainbow council at South Kesteven refuses to meet the parish council or members of the local community. May we have a debate in Government time on how, with all the new house building, which is absolutely right, we will ensure that house builders and developers are held to account by councils and that we stop the stink in Corby Glen?

Lucy Powell: The hon. Lady raises an important matter. She will know that this Government are unashamedly pro house building, but that is not a free pass for developers. We want to see local plans that are developed locally, that are holistic and strategic, and that consider all issues—not just housing, but the infra-structure that sits alongside it. It is local plans designed by local people that we want to see sped up, and hopefully that will resolve some of the issues with the stench that she has in her constituency.

Rosie Wrighting (Kettering) (Lab): I welcome the Leader of the House to her place. I recently visited Kettering General hospital and had the privilege of meeting the staff there. During my visit, I was informed that the maternity ward has RAAC and that patients who give birth have to be transported outside to another wing of the hospital. Will she make time for a debate on RAAC in public sector buildings?

Lucy Powell: As we have just heard, this is an important issue for a number of colleagues across the House. We are extremely concerned about the dire state of the NHS estate. RAAC is at the top of the priorities of the Department of Health and Social Care. My hon. Friend will be aware that once the presence of RAAC is confirmed at a hospital site, it joins NHS England's national RAAC programme, which has a considerable pot of money. I will ensure that she gets an update on her hospital and that this House is updated on RAAC in NHS hospitals in general.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I welcome the Leader of the House to her place, and may I say initially that I am sure she is a very good mum, actually?

When the Government abandoned the plan to process illegal migrants offshore, they offered no real practical alternative, as my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House has said. I know that many of those arriving are genuine asylum seekers, and they need to be treated accordingly, but many are not. The British people are sick and tired of people arriving here illegally—not irregularly, but illegally—and not being dealt with appropriately. Will the Leader of the House tell us when the Government intend to act? What is their timescale? What are the numbers they intend to change? Enough is enough. The British people have had enough of their borders being breached with impunity.

Lucy Powell: My daughter, who is here today, might have a different view on whether I am a good or bad mum, but that is another point.

With great respect to the right hon. Gentleman, it is a bit rich for Conservative Members to ask us these questions today, given that they presided over the worst rise in illegal migration that this country has ever seen. We have already established the border security command, reallocated resources and made use of the plane to return to Vietnam those who are here illegally. He will know that more than £700 million was allocated to the Rwanda scheme, and all they managed to do with that amount of money was get four volunteers to Rwanda. We have a plan to tackle the criminal gangs and get these numbers down, and we are getting on with delivering that plan.

Liz Twist (Blaydon and Consett) (Lab): First, can I take the opportunity to thank voters in the new constituency of Blaydon and Consett for putting their trust in me? It is truly a privilege. One of the exciting things about the boundary changes has been getting to know the fantastic small businesses and community organisations on the County Durham side of my constituency, including Glenroyd House, the Foundation for Good, the Hub and St Mary Magdalene church, to name just a few. Could we have a debate in Government time on the vital contribution of community organisations to our local communities?

Lucy Powell: I congratulate my hon. Friend on her re-election. I am sure that her new constituents will be as delighted as her old ones were with how assiduous a constituency MP she is. The topic that she raises would make for a good Adjournment debate or Westminster Hall debate, and I wish her the best in getting that through the draw.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): I congratulate the Leader of the House on her new position. Could she ensure that a statement is brought forward on the International Criminal Court and International Court of Justice decisions relating to Israel and Gaza, and on whether the UK Government will withdraw their objections to any rulings they have made so that they can go ahead and be part of international law? The Prime Minister has said that the current UK Government are fully signed up to all aspects of international law and, of course, the European convention on human rights.

Lucy Powell: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that question. He is absolutely right. The Government are completely clear that our commitment to international law is resolute, and we are following the necessary processes in that regard. The Foreign Secretary has made it clear that he is undertaking a comprehensive review of Israel's compliance with international humanitarian law. He has also made it clear that he will update the House as soon as that process is complete. I hope that that will be soon.

Kim Johnson (Liverpool Riverside) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House grant a debate in Government time to consider the civil rights situation in Bangladesh, where violent crackdowns on protests have led to the killing of hundreds and a draconian communications blackout that is causing immense concern to my Bangladeshi communities and the wider community?

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. The Government are deeply concerned by the violence in recent days in Bangladesh. The loss of life is unacceptable, and the right to protest must be protected and restored. I will ensure that the Foreign Secretary has heard her question and is able to update her and the House at the first opportunity.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Can we have a debate early in this Parliament on trust in politics and politicians? Newly minted Ministers are already hopping on and off the Airbus A321: the same plane that was condemned in 2022 by the then Opposition as "obscene", "brazen" and "disgusting". In that debate, will the Government be able to explain how that jaw-dropping show of double standards and hypocrisy is compatible with restoring trust?

Lucy Powell: I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman raised that point, because this afternoon we will have a debate on restoring trust in politicians and politics as the Government bring forward their manifesto commitment to take action on the sleaze, scandal and cronyism that we saw in the last Parliament. We want to turn the page on that decisively, as we are beginning to do today. He will know that the Prime Minister's travel arrangements are security matters, and I am sure that he will respect that.

Antonia Bance (Tipton and Wednesbury) (Lab): Many residents in Tipton, Wednesbury and Coseley are sick of the noise and disruption of illegal off-road motorbikes. During the election campaign, we promised to change the rules so that the police could crush illegal off-road bikes that they seize within 48 hours—something that the Tories failed to do in 14 years. Can the Leader of the House update us on when those measures may be brought forward and when Members may have an opportunity to discuss actions to cut anti-social behaviour?

Lucy Powell: What a fantastic question. I know from my own constituency that noisy off-road bikes speeding around local streets and intimidating residents are a nightmare. That is particularly prevalent in the Friar Park area of my hon. Friend's constituency. As she rightly said, the Government are committed to giving the police the powers that they need to crush nuisance dirt and quad bikes within days of their being seized. That legislation will be brought forward in due course.

Martin Vickers (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): Tomorrow, I will visit Scunthorpe steelworks, where hundreds of my constituents work, and many more

[Martin Vickers]

hundreds rely on the supply chain throughout northern Lincolnshire. I am aware that the previous Government undertook negotiations, and I know that the new Secretary of State will want to reassure the workforce, who are very anxious about their future employment situation. Could the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State to come to the House before the recess to provide that reassurance?

Lucy Powell: I thank the hon. Member for that question. This Government are committed to UK steel production, particularly in Scunthorpe, Port Talbot and other parts of the UK. He will know that we have a big plan for the green transition of steel, and we are bringing forward the industrial strategy council measure and others that will support the long-term future of British steel in this country. The next questions for the Department for Business and Trade are shortly after we return from recess, and I am sure that he will want to raise the issue then.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): May I associate myself with the remarks of my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Paul Waugh), about the appalling incident at Manchester international airport yesterday?

I congratulate the Leader of the House and her team on their appointments. Could we have a debate in Government time specifically on the cross-Government mission to reduce the appalling health inequalities that we have inherited, which are particularly prevalent in my constituency?

Lucy Powell: I welcome my good friend and constituency neighbour to her place. I am sure that she will be a regular contributor to these and other questions—I think she topped the league in my region as the Member who contributed most in the last Parliament. She will be vocal on a number of issues. She is right; reducing health inequality is core to our health mission. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care set out some of those priorities at Health questions earlier this week. We will have further debates on that matter in due course.

Nick Timothy (West Suffolk) (Con): Around three years ago, two of my constituents, Paul and Joanne Snodden, bought a new home in a residential park. The park turned out to have no licence and now, unable to sell apart from to the park owner, they stand to lose £100,000. Park owners often impose punitive increases in pitch fees, and there are complaints of basic maintenance failures. Could we have a debate on how to toughen laws and enforcement on residential parks?

Lucy Powell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that important question on behalf of his constituents. I am sure that many colleagues across the House will share similar stories. That sounds like a good topic for a Westminster Hall or Adjournment debate. I am sure that he would have lots of support if he wanted to put in for that.

Jacob Collier (Burton and Uttoxeter) (Lab): It is easier to find a needle in a haystack than it is for my constituents to find an NHS dentist. Many have told me that they have to travel miles just to get an appointment, are forced to go private or simply do not bother at all. Could the Leader of the House tell me when the Health Secretary will update the House on his work to solve this crisis?

Lucy Powell: I welcome my hon. Friend to his place as the new MP for Burton and Uttoxeter. He raises a significant issue that is of importance to other colleagues. For many of us, access to dentistry came up all the time in the general election campaign, which is why this Government are committed to providing 700,000 additional urgent NHS dental appointments. My own dentist is very positive about the mood music coming from this Government and their action on dentistry.

Sarah Dyke (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): I congratulate the Leader of the House and welcome her to her position. The Olympic ceremony is happening tomorrow and soon we will be inspired by the athletes' amazing feats. I congratulate two of my constituents who will be representing Team GB. However, too many girls face barriers to accessing sport, so may we have a debate in Government time on how we can encourage teenage girls to access sport and continue that into adulthood?

Lucy Powell: I thank the hon. Member for that question and of course we wish Team GB well. I did wonder whether her party leader, the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey), might enter some of the water sports—or all sports, really. I am not sure how well he would fare, but I am sure he would give it a good go. Getting more young girls involved in sport is absolutely critical. One of the first actions of the Government has been for the Secretary of State for Education to ask for a curriculum review to ensure there is more access to sport and PE for every child across their time in school. There will be further measures coming forward in due course.

Kim Leadbeater (Spen Valley) (Lab): Like many constituencies, in Spen Valley, we are intensely proud of our many towns and villages, all with their own unique identities. My constituents and I want to preserve the amenities at the heart of those communities, such as the town hall in Cleckheaton or the libraries in Mirfield and Kirkheaton. Does the Leader of the House agree that, as part of the very welcome devolution revolution that this Labour Government will deliver, we must ensure that every corner of our country is included in that mission of national renewal?

Lucy Powell: I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend's point. Every town and village contributes greatly to the life of their local communities. It is about not just libraries or banking facilities, but a whole range of services and tackling issues such as rural and village crime. That is why the Government are committed to looking at all those issues, but also giving local communities the power to determine the future of their own towns and villages.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Leader of the House for the opportunity to ask a question regarding the necessity of safeguarding freedom of religion or belief. As I indicated to her, I would like to

turn our attention to Mexico. In April, more than 150 Baptist Protestants in Hidalgo state in Mexico were forcibly displaced after their electricity was cut off, their church vandalised and access to their homes blocked. The inaction of local government officials has prolonged the suffering of the families, who currently face exorbitant fines based on their conversion to Protestantism. Will the Leader of the House join me in condemning those violations of freedom of religion or belief in Hidalgo state, and will she ask the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to raise the issue with its counterparts in Mexico?

Lucy Powell: I am pleased to see the hon. Gentleman in his place today. I would expect nothing less. I was also pleased to see that, during his Adjournment debate this week, he was intervened on many times. I have heard him many times in this House and at business questions raise the issue of freedom of religion or belief. He will know that the Government are committed to continuing to support those measures and that we will continue to champion them in government.

Blair McDougall (East Renfrewshire) (Lab): My constituency is almost unique in having both a large Jewish and Muslim population living side by side as friends, schoolmates, workmates and neighbours: a sign of hope in pretty troubled times around the world. However, many constituents from both communities have been in touch about the rising tide of antisemitism and Islamophobia and the impact on them. Will the Leader of the House make time available so this House can make clear our opposition to the hatred that stains too many of our communities?

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for that important point. The Government absolutely stand steadfast against all hatred, antisemitism and Islamophobia, which unfortunately we have seen on the rise in recent months. He will be aware that Home Office questions, a good place to raise these matters, will take place next week. He might want to raise them with the Home Secretary then.

Alex Ballinger (Halesowen) (Lab): Town centres in constituencies such as mine have increasingly struggled over the last 14 years, so I was pleased to see measures in the King's Speech to support our high streets. Businesses in my constituency are also interested in an update on the levelling-up fund for Halesowen town centre regeneration, which was promised by the previous Government, so can we have a debate on how we support our high streets?

Lucy Powell: I am sure that my hon. Friend's constituents will thank him greatly for raising the matter. The Government are giving careful consideration to a number of levelling-up grants that we are keen to follow through on. He will be aware, though, that the difficult economic situation that we have inherited is much worse than we foresaw. The funding was not actually there for a number of the previous Government's commitments, but this Government will do our very best to support places like Halesowen with the additional funding that they need.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): In recent days, there have been protests in Rome, in Paris, in my right hon. Friend's city of Manchester and in Trafalgar Square over what has been going on in Bangladesh. A three-figure number of student protesters have been killed; we do not know how many, because the internet has been turned off. May I press again for an urgent Government statement on our position, because I was not successful in the ballot for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office questions on Tuesday? We have a historic, unique role in this situation.

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend raises an important point. We are deeply concerned about the violence of recent days. The loss of life is unacceptable. The right to protest must be restored and access to the internet should also be restored. We urge all sides to have restraint in this regard. I know that the Foreign Secretary and Foreign Office Ministers will want to update the House; we are running out of time ahead of the recess, but all possible steps will be taken to ensure that those important updates are brought before the recess.

Perran Moon (Camborne and Redruth) (Lab): The previous Government's performance in the roll-out of electric vehicle charging was woeful, and we are way behind where we need to be. Will the Leader of the House consider a debate about how we can remove the bureaucratic barriers to the roll-out so that we can get where we need to be and remove as many petrol and diesel vehicles as possible from our roads?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend raises an incredibly important point. He is absolutely right that this Government's mission to achieve a transition to a clean energy superpower by 2030, which is incredibly ambitious, will be limited by the roll-out of the necessary infrastructure for electric vehicle charging. There will be a debate tomorrow on these matters, and I hope that he will have the opportunity to raise the issue then.

Deirdre Costigan (Ealing Southall) (Lab): Under the last Labour Government, every single ward in my constituency had six dedicated police and community support officers keeping people safe on the streets, but after 14 years of a Conservative Government we now have 10,000 fewer police officers on our streets. In my constituency, that has led to an open drugs market on Guru Nanak Road in Southall and similar issues with crime and antisocial behaviour on west Ealing Broadway. Will the Leader of the House make time for a debate on how we can bring forward as quickly as possible this Government's very welcome plans to recruit 13,000 extra police and community support officers and bring back neighbourhood policing, so my constituents can feel safe again on their streets?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend asks a very important question. She is absolutely right: bringing back neighbourhood policing is a key task for the Home Secretary. Part of our manifesto and of our "first steps" commitments to this country was that we would recruit an additional 13,000 neighbourhood police officers; steps towards that have already been taken. It is also a key plank of the crime and policing Bill, which was announced in the King's Speech and will come before the House in due course.

Sarah Edwards (Tamworth) (Lab): Greenacres school in my constituency is sinking. Five years ago, it applied to the risk protection arrangement scheme after concerns

[Sarah Edwards]

about drainage. It has been closed since March, and pupils and parents are rightly worried about the school's future. May we have a statement about what the Government are doing to review whether such schemes are fit for purpose and whether the rest of our school buildings are at risk from reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete and other conditions?

Lucy Powell: I am really sorry to hear that the school in my hon. Friend's constituency is in such a state of disrepair. I am afraid it is a familiar story. Our schools estate is in a very poor state and is in need of serious investment, for which I am afraid sufficient funding is not available at the moment. I know that these matters are of concern to the Secretary of State for Education; my hon. Friend may wish to raise them at Education questions, which are coming up after the recess.

Catherine Atkinson (Derby North) (Lab): Derby is the latest victim of a trend in the publication of unflattering depictions of towns or cities for clickbait. May I invite journalists to visit, with me, the Museum of Making, the Quad cultural hub and the Déda creative centre for dance, take a boat trip up to Darley Abbey, have lunch at Birds and dinner at Darleys, and see the progress that the Labour council is making on the Becketwell performance venue, Derby market hall and the Guildhall theatre? I think that when all that regeneration work is done, *Which?* should repeat its survey of UK cities in the interests of fairness. May we have a debate about city centre regeneration?

Lucy Powell: Derby North sounds like a thoroughly lovely place to visit, and I look forward to doing so at some point soon. My hon. Friend has made a strong case, and I think that the issue of town centre regeneration, which has come up many times today, would be a worthy subject for a forthcoming Westminster Hall debate or a general debate in this place.

Mr Adnan Hussain (Blackburn) (Ind): I have been inundated with messages of concern and upset from my constituents following the horrific images from Manchester airport, and I myself am deeply concerned about what can only be described as a complete abuse of power. Will the Leader of the House join me in declaring, to reassure the general public, that we should never have to witness such scenes of violence in a country such as ours where no authority is above the law, and that all necessary measures must be taken to investigate how and why such an incident arose?

Lucy Powell: As a Manchester MP myself, I too was extremely disturbed by that footage, which has understandably caused a great deal of public concern. It was truly shocking to see. Other Members have raised the same topic this morning, and, as I said earlier, Greater Manchester police have said that the officer involved was immediately suspended from duties and a referral has now been made to the Independent Office for Police Conduct, which was absolutely the right thing to do. Let us hope that we do not see scenes like that again.

Chris McDonald (Stockton North) (Lab): Johnson Matthey, in my constituency, has joined other firms in the UK metals sector in creating the "Back British Metals" initiative, which is intended to attract more private sector investment in the sector. Might my right hon. Friend be able to find time for a debate on that initiative, and on how we can attract further investment?

Lucy Powell: I know from my previous work with my hon. Friend, who I am sure will make a fantastic contribution to the House as the MP for Stockton North, that he is extremely committed to these issues. The Government will look forward to working with him on the "Back British Metals" campaign, which I hope he will take forward in the coming weeks.

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South and South Bedfordshire) (Lab): People in my new constituency have told me that they feel let down by the lack of local bus service provision, be it in Wigmore in the east or Caddington and villages in the west. Will the Leader of the House provide time for a debate on the Government's exciting plan to give local leaders new powers to franchise local bus services and lift the ban on municipal ownership?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am afraid that local bus services are woeful in most parts of the country because, in many cases, they are privately run and desperately underfunded. That is why this Government were so committed to ensuring that the bus reform Bill was included in the King's Speech. It will be introduced in due course, and I think that it will revolutionise bus services in my hon. Friend's constituency and across the country.

Jo White (Bassetlaw) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House allow time for a debate on the failure of Conservative-controlled Nottinghamshire county council to build the desperately needed expansion of Outwood academy Portland, a secondary school in Worksop, despite the £4.5 million of community infrastructure levy money I received in April last year when I was Bassetlaw district council's deputy leader?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend raises a very important matter. Building new schools, and meeting schools' needs in her local area, is absolutely critical to this Government's mission of making sure that there is opportunity for all, which is the priority of our Education Secretary. I am sure that my hon. Friend will take every opportunity to raise this issue in Education questions, which is coming up. If not, I will make sure that she gets a good reply from the Minister.

Anneliese Midgley (Knowsley) (Lab): Given the recent tragic shooting that took place on the streets of my constituency, can the Leader of the House confirm that there will be time to debate the issue of violent crime, with a real focus on the root causes in order to tackle gun crime in our society?

Lucy Powell: I welcome my hon. Friend to her place, and I am sorry to hear of the tragic circumstances in her constituency. This Government are committed to tackling issues around firearms—not just the symptoms, but the root causes, as she says—and there will be ample

time to discuss these matters. Of course, there will be Home Office questions next week, where she may want to raise these matters further.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Hundreds of thousands of people will be visiting my fantastic city of York over the summer. However, many of them will be staying in short-term holiday lets, with one in 10 properties in the city centre being Airbnbs. Can we have a debate about how this Government will not just register Airbnbs, but license them, so that local authorities can control their housing stock?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend raises an important issue that affects many cities, such as my own and hers. This Government have a manifesto commitment to look at these issues and take action as soon as we can, and I am sure that she will be able to raise them with the Housing, Communities and Local Government Secretary in oral questions as soon as we come back on 2 September.

Alex McIntyre (Gloucester) (Lab): One of the biggest issues facing my residents in Gloucester is the crippling cost of living crisis, which is the legacy of the last Government. We have sky-high energy bills, low-paid jobs and eye-watering mortgage hikes. Will my right hon. Friend make time for a debate on what the new Government will do to tackle the cost of living crisis and deliver the change that my residents in Gloucester voted for?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In the last Parliament, we saw living standards fall for the first time in our history, which is why many people voted Labour at the election. They want change, and they want their living standards restored. We have a wide range of policies to that end, and he might want to raise some of these issues next week, when we will debate the fiscal responsibility Bill. Of course, it was the last Government, in which the shadow Leader of the House was the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who crashed the economy and sent mortgage rates sky high.

Alistair Strathern (Hitchin) (Lab): From Stotfold to Shefford, parents, pupils and schools alike have been let down by my council's failure to deliver a long-promised three-tier to two-tier school transition. Given the challenges that the council is clearly having in delivering that on its own, will the Secretary of State for Education make a statement about how the Department can best support the council to finally get it over the line?

Lucy Powell: I will arrange for the Secretary of State to address that very important matter, which relates to my hon. Friend's constituency and the transition from a three-tier to a two-tier education system.

Dr Beccy Cooper (Worthing West) (Lab): May I ask the Leader of the House to find time for a debate on the long-overdue need to update gambling regulations? The most recent legislation is from 2005, which was long before the growth of online and mobile opportunities. I recently met representatives of Gambling with Lives in my constituency and heard some heartbreaking stories about people who have lost their loved ones to the terrible illness of addiction. The law should protect children and vulnerable adults, with more effective regulation. Will she please allow a debate in Government time on this issue?

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for her important question. I, too, have met many of the families from Gambling with Lives, and their stories are utterly tragic. We are committed to redoubling our efforts to reduce gambling-related harms, and she will be aware that the previous Government proposed a number of measures, which we are looking at taking forward.

Chris Webb (Blackpool South) (Lab): Last week, Plan International UK launched a report that revealed that Blackpool is the second toughest place for girls in the UK. The report detailed that the place-based inequalities facing girls aged 16 to 24 include sexual assault, child poverty, health and academic attainment. Going forward, I will champion tackling these issues, as they are at the heart of gender inequality and deprivation. Will the Leader of the House allow a debate in Government time to discuss how we can support girls and young women in Blackpool and across our country?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend is right to raise the difficulties that young women in his Blackpool South constituency face. The Government are committed to several measures that I hope will ensure that, over time, they no longer face such difficulties. We want to halve violence against women and girls; we have a taskforce on a child poverty strategy across Government; and our opportunity-for-all mission will drive opportunity for everybody in every part of the country, including Blackpool South.

Natasha Irons (Croydon East) (Lab): Knife crime and youth violence are a disease that has cast a devastating shadow on constituencies such as mine in Croydon East and on communities across the country. With 49,000 recorded offences involving a knife last year, the Government's commitments not only to get those lethal blades off our streets by finally banning zombie knives, which the previous Government refused to do, but to tackle the complex causes of violent crimes by introducing a Sure Start-style service for teenagers are welcome now more than ever. Can the Leader of the House allow time for a statement to outline the work as it begins and how grassroots organisations can plug into it?

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for that important question. We have committed to tackle knife crime by banning zombie knives and other matters, but she is right that we need to tackle the root causes and the symptoms, which is why we have plans for a Young Futures programme. The Home Secretary and the Mayor of London discussed that and all knife crime-related issues yesterday. My hon. Friend may want to be present for Home Office questions next week when I am sure she will get an update from the Home Secretary.

Jess Asato (Lowestoft) (Lab): Areas such as mine in Lowestoft and Beccles have become so-called dental deserts in the last 14 years. We have one of the lowest numbers of dentists in the east of England, and none were accepting new patients in 2022. I welcome the range of measures that the Health Secretary has outlined, but I ask for a debate on this pressing topic.

Lucy Powell: I welcome my hon. Friend to her place. She and I were involved in Young Labour together—only a few years ago, I feel—so it is great to see her finally in this place where she belongs. She raises the important matter of NHS dentistry and the difficulty that people have getting an NHS appointment, which is particularly acute in Suffolk. That is why the Government are committed to a rescue plan and to providing another 700,000 NHS dentist appointments, which I hope will relieve that acuteness in Suffolk.

Adam Jogee (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): I send my best wishes to John as he approaches his retirement. I first met him in 2009 as a Member of the UK Youth Parliament—now I am here and he is leaving.

Newcastle-under-Lyme is home to many veterans and their families. They are courageous and good people. Can we have a debate on how we can give our veterans the support that they deserve and the appreciation that they have earned?

Lucy Powell: I join my hon. Friend in thanking John again, who has sat through business questions one last time as a Doorkeeper. My hon. Friend raises an important issue about supporting veterans. He will know that the Veterans Minister has moved back into the Ministry of Defence, which has Question Time after recess. I hope he will be able to raise the matter then.

Mr Speaker: I call Amanda Martin for the final business question.

Amanda Martin (Portsmouth North) (Lab): I welcome the Leader of the House to her place as she takes the reins from my predecessor. In my constituency of Portsmouth North, there are houses in multiple occupation where family homes have been turned into nine or sometimes 10-bedroom houses. As one of the most densely populated cities in Europe, turning family homes into HMOs is a sticking plaster for the urgent need for affordable, social and council homes in our city. Can the Leader of the House look into when we can have a debate on planning reform to give more powers to local government to stop family homes being turned into HMOs?

Lucy Powell: I welcome my hon. Friend, the new Member for Portsmouth North, to business questions. We had a different Member for Portsmouth North at the Dispatch Box in previous sessions, so I warmly welcome her. She raises an important matter that will be of importance to other hon. Members. Local authorities have planning powers to limit the proliferation of HMOs, but I know from my constituency how difficult those powers are to exercise. She would be well within her rights to raise that with the Deputy Prime Minister, who I think will be in the Chamber before recess to give an update on some of these issues.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Order. I know that some Members will be disappointed not to get in. That is why it is better if we can speed up questions and answers. It is a little while until the next business questions, but I have a list of those who did not get in, so please rest assured that we will try to look after everybody.

BILLS PRESENTED

GREAT BRITISH ENERGY

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Edward Miliband, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Angela Rayner, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Jonathan Reynolds, Secretary Peter Kyle, Secretary Hilary Benn, Secretary Ian Murray, Secretary Jo Stevens, and Secretary Steve Reed presented a Bill to make provision about Great British Energy.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed (Bill 5).

HIGH SPEED RAIL (CREWE-MANCHESTER)

Presentation and resumption of proceedings (Standing Orders Nos. 57 and 80A)

Secretary Louise Haigh, supported by the Prime Minister, Secretary Angela Rayner, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Secretary Steve Reed, presented a Bill to make provision for a railway between a junction with Phase 2a of High Speed 2 south of Crewe in Cheshire and Manchester Piccadilly Station; for a railway between Hoo Green in Cheshire and a junction with the West Coast Main Line at Bamfurlong, south of Wigan; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First and Second time without Question put and committed to a Select Committee (Standing Order No. 80A and Order, 20 June); to be printed (Bill 6) with explanatory notes (Bill 6-EN).

Business without Debate

SUPPLY AND APPROPRIATION (MAIN ESTIMATES) BILL

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 56), That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Question put forthwith, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

Criminal Law

11.51 am

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Shabana Mahmood): I beg to move,

That the draft Criminal Justice Act 2003 (Requisite and Minimum Custodial Periods) Order 2024, which was laid before this House on 17 July, be approved.

Following my announcement on Friday 12 July and an oral statement to the House last Thursday, Members will know that our prisons are in crisis. The male prison estate has been running at around 99% capacity for 18 months. We now know that my predecessor warned 10 Downing Street of the perils of inaction, but rather than addressing the crisis, the former Prime Minister called an election and left us a time bomb, ticking away.

If we do not act now, and that bomb goes off, our prisons will reach full capacity and the justice system will grind to a halt. The courts would have to stop holding trials and the police would be unable to make arrests. With criminals free to act without consequence, the public would be put at risk. If we do not act now, this nightmare will become reality by September.

We have explored all the options available to us. In the precious little time we have, we cannot build more prisons or add more prison blocks, and we cannot fit out an existing site to make it secure enough to hold offenders. Although we are deporting foreign national offenders as fast as legally possible, we cannot do so quickly enough to address the crisis. Although we must make progress on the remand population—those who are in prison while they await trial—such measures take time we do not have. That has left us with only one option to avert disaster.

The statutory instrument that we are considering today will change the law so that prisoners serving eligible standard determinate sentences will have their automatic release point adjusted to 40% rather than 50% of their sentence. That will mean that around 5,500 offenders will be released, in two tranches, in September and October. They will leave prison a few weeks or months early, to serve the rest of their sentence under strict licence conditions in the community. Thereafter, all qualifying sentences will continue to be subject to the new 40% release point.

Let me turn now to the detail of this legislation, the sentences that qualify for this measure, and those that do not. First, this change applies to both male and female offenders. This is a legal necessity and addresses the pressure in both the male and female prison estate. Although this measure does not apply to those serving in the youth estate, where capacity pressures are less acute, it does apply to a few individuals serving sentences under section 250 of the Sentencing Act 2020. Most of those serving these sentences are serving long terms that are excluded from the measure, as I will go on to explain. However, a few are in scope, and are included because they are likely to end their term in the adult estate.

The provision also includes those on a detention in a young offenders institution, and 18 to 20 year-olds who are held in adult prisons. As such, both contribute to the capacity crisis. As the measure must balance addressing the crisis in our prisons alongside the need to protect the public, certain sentences will be excluded. The worst violent and sexual crimes, which are subject to a 67% release, will not be eligible. Neither will violent offences subject to a sentence of four years or more under part 1 of schedule 15 to the Criminal Justice Act 2003. Sexual offences will be excluded, including offences related to child sexual abuse and grooming. We will exclude a series of offences linked to domestic abuse, including stalking, controlling or coercive behaviour and non-fatal strangulation.

National security offences under the Official Secrets Acts and National Security Act 2023, and offences determined to have been carried out for a foreign power, will also be excluded, as will serious terrorism offences and terrorism-connected offences, which remain subject to a 67% release at the Parole Board's discretion. So too will terrorism offences, which are currently subject to a 50% release.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for her statement. I clearly understand the Government's predicament and the reason for bringing forward these legislative changes, but one matter that I and other elected representatives in this House have had to deal with in recent years is the predicament that victims face of meeting the perpetrator of a crime out on the streets, which brings back enormous trauma. I welcome what the Minister says about some conditions taking precedence in relation to those being released, but can she reassure the victims who are worried about what is happening? We need to have that reassurance on the record in this House. Those people are worried and they want to be reassured.

Shabana Mahmood: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He raises an incredibly important matter. I have had the feelings of victims very much in my mind as I have been forced to make this decision. Nothing in relation to the victim notification scheme or the victim contact scheme will change as a result of these measures. All the usual arrangements will apply and I shall detail some of those a little later in my speech.

Returning to the offences that are excluded, in each case we have excluded specific offences, rather than cohorts of offenders. That is a legal necessity. It is only possible to make this change in law, with reference to qualifying sentences.

In addition to these exclusions, there will be stringent protections in place around any early release. This change to the law will not take effect until September, which gives our hard-working Probation Service a crucial six-week implementation period. Probation officers will therefore have the time they need to assess the risk of each offender and prepare a plan to manage them safely in the community. All offenders released under this policy will be subject to stringent licence conditions. Where necessary, multi-agency public protection arrangements will be put in place to protect the public, as will multi-agency risk assessment conferences, which ensure that victims can be protected.

Victims eligible for the victim contact scheme or the victim notification scheme will be notified about releases and developments in their cases. Offenders will be ordered to wear electronic tags where required. Exclusion zones and curfews will be imposed where appropriate. Crucially, if an offender breaks any of the conditions imposed on them, they can be returned to prison immediately.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith and Chiswick) (Lab): I am sure that the whole House will be pleased to hear of the safeguards that the Lord Chancellor is putting in place. Is she confident that, by the time the changes to the scheme come into effect, both victim notification and probation—and, indeed, police and accommodation services—will be in a position to pick up those being released?

Shabana Mahmood: That is precisely why we have ensured that we have an implementation period for this policy change. That work will continue at pace over the summer, so that the Probation Service has the time to prepare proper release plans for offenders who will be released as a result of the changes and to ensure that all our obligations to victims and the wider public are fulfilled.

Let me also be clear that this change is not permanent. We will review this measure within 18 months of implementation—at the very latest, in March 2026. At that point, we believe that the situation in our prisons will have stabilised and that we will be able to reverse the measure, returning the automatic point of release to 50% of a sentence.

I want to directly address a question raised during the oral statement in the House last week. We have not included a specific sunset clause within the legislation that would end it automatically. We have pledged to be honest about the challenges in our prisons and the changes that we put in place to rise to them; that is a marked difference from the previous Administration's approach. Given the scale of the crisis that we have inherited, placing an artificial time limit on this measure would be nothing more than an irresponsible gimmick. We have taken the very deliberate decision not to reverse this measure until we are certain that prison capacity has stabilised. The last Government allowed our prisons to fall into crisis. We will not introduce legislation that could force us back there again.

Finally, we will introduce a new, higher standard of transparency. Every quarter, we will publish data on the number of offenders released, and we will make it a statutory requirement for a prison capacity statement to be published annually, introducing that legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows. We are clear that this is the only safe way forward. The House does not have to take my word for it: we have heard senior figures in the police, prisons and probation all warning of what will happen if these measures are not taken. We have even heard my predecessor as Lord Chancellor come out in support of this measure.

Thanks to the action—or rather, inaction—of the last Prime Minister, our predecessors ran the prison estate to within days of disaster. As a result, they were forced to introduce a series of emergency measures, such as Operation Safeguard, which turned police cells into prison overflow, and Operation Early Dawn, a daily triage system that managed the flow of prisoners from police cells to the courts. They even came perilously close to triggering Operation Brinker, which is effectively a one-in, one-out measure in our prisons. It is the very last, desperate act available to forestall, by a matter of days, the total collapse of law and order in this country.

The last Government also introduced the flawed end of custody supervised licence scheme. When this new legislation takes effect, it will be my pleasure to end ECSL. With next to no implementation period, ECSL released offenders with only a few days of warning, and sometimes none at all. That gave the Probation Service no time to assess the risk of offenders, and next to no time to plan how they would be managed safely in the community. This new legislation, with its longer, eight-week implementation period, gives the Probation Service the time that it needs to prepare. The last Government's early release scheme did not have the same exclusions that this new legislation has. Most notably, it provided no exclusions for offences linked to domestic abuse. That meant no exclusions for stalking, for strangulation, for controlling or coercive behaviour, or for breaches of restraining orders, non-molestation orders and domestic abuse orders, all of which are excluded in the legislation presented to the House today.

Perhaps worst of all, this quick fix was carried out under a veil of secrecy. A number of extensions were made to the scheme, which first released offenders up to 18 days early, then 35 to 60 days early, and finally up to 70 days early. That last extension was implemented without any announcement at all. Throughout, no data was ever published by the previous Government on the numbers released; it fell to this Administration to reveal the true scale of the ECSL scheme. Only now do we know that more than 10,000 offenders were rushed out under that veil of secrecy by the previous Administration.

Our approach will be different. Unlike under the previous Government, those sitting on the Opposition Benches will never have to chase me around this building to get hold of the numbers. The numbers will be put in the public domain for all to see and scrutinise, as they should have been all along. ECSL was one of a series of decisions that this Government believe must be examined more fully. That is why I have announced a review into how this capacity crisis was allowed to happen, which will look at why the necessary decisions were not taken at critical moments. We will shortly be appointing an independent chair for the review, which will conclude by the end of this year.

Let me be clear: the crisis in our prisons is not over. The prison population remains within a few hundred places of collapse. Last week, we temporarily closed HMP Dartmoor, taking around 200 places out of the prison estate. Although we were able to withstand that loss of capacity, any further changes—be they a further loss of supply or an unexpected increase in demand—could tip us into crisis. The measures that I have set out will take effect in September, giving probation officers the precious time they need to prepare. During that time, we will continue to monitor the prison population closely and we will be ready to introduce further emergency measures such as Operation Early Dawn or Operation Safeguard if required.

Lee Pitcher (Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme) (Lab): I have three prisons in my constituency. Will the Secretary of State explain how bad the situation will be if we do not act today?

Shabana Mahmood: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. If we do not act today, we face a total collapse of law and order in this country. If we are forced to enact Operation Brinker, it will be a one-in, one-out system and we are then days away from the total collapse of the criminal justice system. It is a shocking state of affairs that the previous Government

are entirely responsible for, and it has fallen to our Administration to start to put these matters right with the decisive action we are taking. This is the only option on the table. I remind the House again that we have no choice other than to pass this measure to deal with the crisis we have inherited.

Even once we have passed the measure, we will not yet be out of the woods. Our prisons are still in crisis. The last Government ran the prisons system on the basis of luck. They hung on by their fingernails until they could hang on no longer, and then they called an election. This Government will never run that risk. We will always take the necessary action.

Emily Darlington (Milton Keynes Central) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for her reassurance on the exclusion of sexual and domestic violence sentences. While prisons are about punishment and keeping our communities safe, one of the main ways we can keep our prison population down is through rehabilitation, rebuilding lives and reducing reoffending. Does she agree that education is central to that rehabilitation, and will she meet me and Milton Keynes college, the biggest provider of education in prisons, to discuss how we can take it further?

Shabana Mahmood: My hon. Friend is right that, ultimately, one of the long-term solutions to the capacity crisis must be to reduce reoffending; I am just coming on to that point in my speech. I will happily arrange for her to meet the Prisons Minister and I will take a close interest in what is happening in Milton Keynes.

Let us be under no illusion. The measure I have set out today is not a silver bullet. It does not end the prisons crisis. It is not the long-term solution. Instead, it buys us the time we need to take further measures that can address the prisons crisis not just now, but in the future. Later this year, we will publish a 10-year capacity strategy, which will outline the steps that the Government will take to acquire land for new prison sites and will ensure that building prisons—infrastructure that we deem to be of national importance—is a decision placed in a Minister's hands.

We must also drive down reoffending. Currently, all too often our prisons create better criminals, not better citizens. Nearly 80% of offenders are reoffenders. A stronger Probation Service will be crucial to driving down reoffending, and we will start by recruiting at least 1,000 new trainee probation officers by the end of March 2025, bringing forward an existing commitment to address the immediate challenges we face today. We will also work with prisons to ensure that offenders can get the skills they need to contribute to society on release, as well as bringing together prison governors, local employers and the voluntary sector to help them into work, because we know that having a job makes offenders less likely to reoffend.

The last occupants of 10 Downing Street left our prisons in crisis.

Rachel Blake (Cities of London and Westminster) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State will be aware that Cities of London and Westminster has some of the highest levels of rough sleeping in the country, with 2,050 rough sleepers every night in Westminster and 482 in the City of London. St Mungo's has highlighted that 68% of people released from prison into rough sleeping will reoffend within the year. It is simply essential that a planning process and needs assessment take place before people are released. Local authorities with the responsibility of preventing homelessness simply do not have the resources or working processes to ensure that that planning takes place. Will those processes and resources be in place before the legislation is implemented in September?

Shabana Mahmood: The point about homelessness, and what it means for recall into prison, is incredibly important. The implementation period allows probation time to prepare plans for every offender who will be released. That is different from the previous Government's ECSL scheme, which gave no time at all. Some of these issues will be mitigated by that implementation period. Offenders leaving prison can access transitional accommodation for up to 84 nights if they are at risk of being homeless. Those provisions will continue as this scheme is rolled out.

Mark Ferguson (Gateshead Central and Whickham) (Lab): I am sure that many of us will have been appalled by the comments of the former Lord Chancellor, who said that the measure that this Government are taking was not taken by the last Government because

"you have to win votes."

How does the Secretary of State respond to that?

Shabana Mahmood: The public made the decision for the previous Administration by voting them out of office in such a stunning manner. We do have to win votes—it is a democracy, at the end of the day—but we must also govern the country in a way that does not risk the total collapse of the criminal justice system. It is a sign of the Tory party's collective nervous breakdown in government that the risk of running the criminal justice system into the ground, with the total collapse of law and order in this country, was allowed to happen in the first place. This new Administration will never take such a risk, and we are taking these measures today to start putting things right and clean up the mess that we have inherited from the Tory party.

The last occupants of 10 Downing Street left our prisons in crisis. They left our criminal justice system at the point of collapse. They were the guilty men; I know the historical weight of those words, but they are apt. The last Government placed the country in unconscionable peril. This Government's legacy will be different: a prison system brought under control, a Probation Service that keeps the public safe, enough prison places to meet our needs, and prisons, probation and other services working together to break the cycle of reoffending. Today's measure is not the long-term solution—I am not pretending that it is; there is a hard road ahead of us—but it is the necessary first step.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): I call the official Opposition spokesman.

12.13 pm

Matt Vickers (Stockton West) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and congratulations on your new role.

[Matt Vickers]

I am grateful for the opportunity to debate the Criminal Justice Act 2003 (Requisite and Minimum Custodial Periods) Order 2024, following the Lord Chancellor's statement on prison capacity last week. This statutory instrument is significant, so it is right that we have the opportunity to scrutinise, challenge and call on the Government for clear answers to a number of vital questions. Although the SI is comprised of only five paragraphs and a schedule, its impact should not be underestimated. It reduces the automatic release point for criminals on standard determinate sentences from 50% of their sentence to 40%, subject to limited exclusions.

As the shadow Lord Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Melton and Syston (Edward Argar), has set out, we recognise the challenges and significant pressure facing prisons and the criminal justice system, as well as the need to ensure that they continue to function effectively. Those pressures were well known to the then Opposition—they are not sudden news.

In government, in order to protect society, we took the decision to toughen sentences for those who commit the worst crimes. In parallel, we set in train the biggest prison-building programme since the Victorian era, with thousands of additional places delivered, and five of the six new prisons either built, in construction or with planning permission granted. However, what had a huge impact on the prison population was our taking the right decisions not to mass release prisoners in the pandemic, and not to scrap trial by jury during the pandemic, meaning that the number of remand prisoners awaiting trial or sentence increased from around 9,000 to around 16,500. Those decisions, which, if I recall correctly, were not opposed by the then Opposition, were the right decisions, and the now Government cannot credibly claim they did not know about them.

Public protection must always be central to what the Lord Chancellor does. We have grave public protection concerns about the Government bringing forward this statutory instrument to reduce capacity pressure in prisons. When the shadow Lord Chancellor pressed the Lord Chancellor on a number of our key concerns last week, the Lord Chancellor was unable to provide the reassurance and commitments that we sought. Today, as we debate the detail of the instrument, I must press her again, and I hope that she will respond in her wind-up.

By way of context, can the Lord Chancellor confirm the number of places available in the adult male estate as of this morning—I believe that the figure was around 700 when she made her statement—so that the House might understand the rate of attrition in prison places? She failed last week to set out her criteria for ending the effect of the statutory instrument after 18 months. More importantly, why does the statutory instrument not contain a sunset clause? I realise that she touched on that, but given the significance of the powers, surely it is reasonable to sunset such a measure. Rather than us giving her a blank cheque, she could always return to the House to seek its agreement to renewing the measure, if needed. The SI and supporting documents suggest that the Lord Chancellor has not put in place any exclusions to prevent the worst, persistent repeat offenders who receive shorter sentences from benefiting. Is that correct?

The SI sets out that prisoners may benefit from the changes if their sentence is under five years. Is she aware that under the sentencing guidelines, a section 20 grievous bodily harm wounding offence under the Offences Against the Person Act 1861—a serious offence—would attract a sentence of up to five years? Would those who have committed that offence benefit from her prisoner sentence reduction scheme?

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Matt Vickers: There will be an opportunity to respond to me later.

As we know, many offences linked to dreadful domestic abuse and domestic violence do not appear to be among the Lord Chancellor's exclusions, as the offence prosecuted would be, for example, a section 20 GBH or common assault. What does she say to victims of domestic abuse who are worried that the way in which the measure has been drafted risks allowing their attacker to benefit from her early release scheme? What percentage of those who are released when 40% of their sentence is served, rather than 50%, will be recalled back into prison for breaches? What steps is she taking to mandate the imposition of GPS tagging or other strict conditions on those who benefit from the measures? Again, there is no detail in the SI.

What additional resources are being made available to probation by September, when this early release scheme is due to start, over and above what was already put in place by the previous Government? The Lord Chancellor stated her plans for next March, but what about this September, when her scheme comes into play? How many additional staff will be in place in offender management units by September, to meet the demands of sentence and release-point recalculation? What additional funding is the Ministry of Justice making available to local authorities and other housing providers to meet the short to medium-term increase in demand for suitable accommodation in the coming months?

Last week, the Lord Chancellor confirmed her intention to fully close HMP Dartmoor temporarily. Where does she intend to find the places lost? More broadly, she asks the House to support the open-ended measures in the SI, but is yet to set out any detail of a long-term capacity plan—either how she will pay for and build more prison places over and above those we already committed to, or whether she will reverse the changes we made to toughen sentences for dangerous criminals. Which is it? What is the plan?

While we recognise the need to address immediate pressures in the prison system, we are deeply troubled by the lack of detail in this statutory instrument and its supporting documents, and by the huge gaps that appear to exist, which I have set out. A blank cheque is being asked for, and there is no sunsetting of this significant measure, and no ability to amend the instrument to include a sunset provision. I have highlighted examples of serious offences that appear not to be excluded, offences that can often be linked to domestic violence or wounding. The absence of such measures, and of clarity, mean that this instrument is drafted in a way that is deeply troubling. I look forward to the Lord Chancellor's response and reassurances during her winding-up remarks.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): I call Bambos Charalambous.

12.20 pm

Bambos Charalambous (Southgate and Wood Green) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I congratulate you on your election and welcome you to your place as Deputy Speaker.

I welcome this motion from my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor, who is taking the only realistic action open to her to deal with the critical issue of prison capacity, with our prisons projected to be overflowing by September. This is another failure by the former Conservative Government, the result of their continuously kicking the can down the road, rather than dealing with the issues at hand.

The current situation cannot come as a surprise to anyone who has been following the developments in criminal justice over the past 14 years. Prior to the election being called, I had the pleasure of serving for a second time on the Justice Committee, and on 22 May this year, in one of his last statements as Chair of the Committee, Sir Bob Neill KC said that

> "Prisons are simply running out of space. My committee has long since warned of the dangers of successive Governments ignoring the rise in jail numbers, set against a workforce recruitment and retention crisis and a crumbling Victorian prison estate. Ministers and society must be prepared to invest in prison capacity and proper rehabilitation programmes as the current situation is unsustainable".

That is the Conservative former Chair of the Justice Committee speaking. The warning signs were there a long time ago, but the failure to invest has meant that we are now reaping this bitter harvest. I welcome the prison building programme and the renewal programme mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor, but in addition to the measures proposed in this motion, I would like to suggest some further measures that may reduce the prison population over a longer term.

The first measure is addressing court delays. In its report "Reducing the backlog in the Crown Court", published in May this year, the National Audit Office found that at the end of December 2023, the outstanding Crown court caseload was 65,573, and 18,000 of those cases had been outstanding for a year or more. It also found that it took an average of 683 days from offence to completion of a case in the Crown court, and that a staggering 16,005 people were on remand as of the end of December 2023. One third were awaiting sentencing, and the remaining two thirds were awaiting trial. The remand population is the highest it has been in over 50 years. Those figures are truly shocking, and the issue of remand prisoners needs to be addressed urgently. The maxim that justice delayed is justice denied is certainly apt, and we should remember that delays in cases going to trial also have adverse impacts on the victims and witnesses.

One of the causes of the delay is a shortage of criminal barristers and duty solicitors, whose numbers have been in decline since 2018. In part, that has been due to a serious under-investment in our criminal justice system over the past two decades. I hope that we will soon see the investment we need in the criminal justice system from this Government. On court dates and the listing of trials, I very much hope that His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service gets smarter in how it uses time and space for court hearings.

The second point I wish to make is about reoffending, an issue that my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor has touched on. According to the Ministry of Justice's own figures from the last quarter for which stats are available, 33.4% of adults released from custody will go on to reoffend. That figure is way too high. As reoffending is so high, it should come as no surprise that a large number of people are being remanded for non-violent offences due to their repeat offending. Many of those repeat offenders will have underlying vulnerabilities, such as drug abuse, homelessness and mental health issues, which will not have been properly addressed. Unless there is a co-ordinated approach to tackling the causes of reoffending, we will see this endless revolving-door cycle in our criminal justice system that gives courts no option but to remand repeat offenders into custody. I know that my right hon. Friend is serious about taking action to address those issues, and I ask her to co-ordinate work with other Departments to help stop reoffending.

The final point I wish to focus on is imprisonment for public protection prisoners, who account for approximately 3,000 of the prisoners in our prisons. In its report on IPP prisoners, the Justice Committee said:

> "Our primary recommendation is that the Government brings forward legislation to enable a resentencing exercise in relation to all IPP sentenced individuals…This is the only way to address the unique injustice caused by the IPP sentence and its subsequent administration, and to restore proportionality to the original sentences that were given."

On previous occasions, I have made the point that dealing with IPP prisoners who have spent more time in prison than they should have would not only help reduce the prison population, but would right a wrong.

In conclusion, I very much welcome this motion as a short-term measure to deal with the overcrowding in our prisons. I also welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment to an annual prison capacity statement, which will allow us to see what effect this measure and other measures have on the prison population. In addition to building more prisons, we need an investment in our criminal justice system, and greater recruitment and retention of barristers, solicitors, prison officers and probation officers. I was delighted to hear that my right hon. Friend has committed to recruiting 1,000 more probation officers. That will certainly help to address issues that arise among people who are on licence after serving half of their sentence. We need to clear the backlog of cases in the Crown court to allow remand prisoners to be dealt with sooner, and we also need to address the root causes of both offending and reoffending. Finally, we need to deal with IPP prisoners, and see what can be done to release those who are over tariff.

I hope that the motion will pass today; it is a very good start to tackling the Gordian knot that we face. Still more work needs to be done, but I have every confidence that the Lord Chancellor and her team will deliver.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

12.27 pm

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I congratulate you on your election, as well as the other Deputy Speakers, and welcome you to your place.

I would not go so far as to say that I welcome the measures that have been outlined today and what is being proposed, but I and the Liberal Democrats recognise

[Wendy Chamberlain]

that this is probably the only step that the Government can take to deal with the situation. We are looking to relieve pressure on prisons against a backdrop of concern that the prison population is rising beyond the operational capacity of the prison estate. Indeed, as of July 2024, the prison population in England and Wales was measured at 87,453, whereas operational capacity is 88,864. As Members have highlighted, reoffending rates remain high, with 75% of ex-inmates reoffending within nine years of release, and 39.3% reoffending within the first 12 months. It is estimated that reoffending costs our society more than £18 billion a year.

We should also recognise that violence against prison staff has soared as they cope with these capacity issues; an average of 23 attacks were recorded every day last year across England and Wales. Issues with staff recruitment and retention have persisted, with English prisons running red regimes due to falling below minimum staffing levels at least 22 times in 2023. It is right to recognise that the problem is partly due to the backlog in our criminal courts, which skyrocketed under the previous Conservative Government. I found the official Opposition's response today quite stunning. We want to work as a constructive Opposition, so that we can help deal with issues around prison overcrowding, so for them to press the Lord Chancellor for answers when they know the answers—they knew them before the last election—is quite something. As of March 2024, remand populations have risen by 84% to a record high of over 16,000 people, accounting for almost 20% of the total prison population. It is quite clear that we need to take action on that issue. Back in November 2023, the previous Administration recognised the issues around prison overcrowding and introduced their own emergency measures, so surely they should recognise today that further measures are necessary.

This is about our criminal justice system as a whole, and trust in our criminal justice system as a whole is at an all-time low. The new Government talk about being a Government of service. I was a police officer for 12 years, and I consider that to be part of the public service I have given. I want to mention the shocking footage from Manchester airport yesterday. As a former police officer, I was deeply disturbed by what I saw. I also want to share my concern and thoughts for the families of the two police officers and the members of the public who were seriously injured in a car accident on the M8 outside Glasgow yesterday.

The issues facing the Lord Chancellor are not limited to England and Wales. Indeed, the Scottish Human Rights Commission has today published a report criticising the Scottish Government's "glacial pace of change" in tackling overcrowding, suicides and mental health provision in our prisons. Only last month, the Scottish Government were making decisions similar to those being made by this Government in relation to releasing prisoners earlier. Although, as with this Government, there are exceptions to that overall approach, I absolutely understand the concerns of victims in seeing the early release of those who have offended against them, and that is something we must continue to recognise.

Although the Government have outlined that there will not be a sunset provision in the SI, and that they are looking to bring this to an end in 18 months' time, I would appreciate some clarity from the Lord Chancellor on reporting to this place on the progress being made. This House can estimate whether the situation continues to be an emergency only if we have the data and are aware of the effect of what is being proposed today.

We need to ensure that what the Government are doing is the right thing, but we also need to know what further steps they are taking. We must address the systemic issues in the criminal courts, because these failures are failing victims on convictions in the first place. The Probation Service is also a critical part of this. I want to add that I watched the maiden speech in the other place of the new Minister for Prisons, Parole and Probation, and I was encouraged by what I heard. The Liberal Democrats are clear that cutting reoffending must be at the heart of the Government's plans to end the prison crisis.

We know that prisons are in crisis—they are overcrowded and understaffed, and they are failing to rehabilitate offenders—but in order to prevent and reduce reoffending we need to ensure that we are improving the provision of training, education and work opportunities in prisons. We should be considering a through-the-gate mentorship programme and introducing a plan to improve the rehabilitation of people leaving prison. The Liberal Democrats want to implement a presumption against short sentences of 12 months or less to facilitate that rehabilitation in the community.

As the Minister in the other place recognised yesterday, if we do not have the right conditions in our prisons, we are only making our prisons a place where people learn how to reoffend, rather than preventing it. We need the Probation Service to have the resources it needs. We need to improve and properly fund the supervision of offenders in the community, with far greater co-ordination between the Prison Service, Probation Service providers, the voluntary and private sectors, and local authorities, and that will achieve savings in the high costs of reoffending.

The Liberal Democrats recognise that this is the only option the new Government can take. As I say, I would not go as far as to say that I support what is being proposed, but I recognise on behalf of my party that it is the only option left to the Government at this time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): I call Andy Slaughter.

12.33 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith and Chiswick) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to see you in your new and much-deserved place.

I rise to support this difficult proposal from my right hon. Friend the Justice Secretary. I made a speech in the King's Speech debate two days ago on the subject of prison conditions, including overcrowding. I do not intend to repeat the whole of that speech, although it is tempting to do so, especially for the bits I had to leave out, but even by the standards of this place that would probably be pushing it. However, I would say that my right hon. Friend and her team—including the new Prisons Minister in the other place, Lord Timpson—have set out with a clear and serious intent to solve the problems left by the previous Government.

I am afraid we saw from the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Stockton West (Matt Vickers), exactly why the Conservatives got us into this mess.

There was no attempt to be accountable—he did not allow one intervention during that speech, which I think is almost unknown—and we can understand why. It is because there are no answers to the questions that can be put to the Opposition. They have left our prisons in an absolutely disastrous state: at 99% capacity for the past 18 months. It is a complete dereliction of duty. There are acute capacity pressures, and the impact assessment says that if we continued without taking this action,

"prisons would shortly run out of places and the justice system would no longer be able to function as intended, e.g. the police would be unable to make arrests and the judiciary may not be able to impose immediate custodial sentences."

What an indictment of any Government.

Dr Kieran Mullan (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): If the hon. Member thinks that the Labour Government are now going to have to release 5,000 prisoners they would not want to release, how would he describe the fact that the previous Labour Government had to release 80,000 prisoners they did not want to release?

Andy Slaughter: If that is really the best the Opposition have got, I understand why the shadow Minister did not take any interventions. The Conservatives had plenty of money for the Rwanda scheme and other gimmicks over the past 18 months, but they had no money, no resources and no intent to deal with this, and we have heard the reason for that: they thought they would win votes by leaving prisons in a crisis situation. I am afraid that was another miscalculation.

It is true that this is not an easy decision. I was reassured by what my right hon. Friend the Justice Secretary said and by the SI's supporting documents, in that recall will continue as before, the length of sentences will not change, sexual and serious violent offences are excluded, and the intention, contrary to what the Opposition allege, is that this will run for no more than 18 months. Those are all important safeguards.

It is also true that, although there will of course be cost savings, this will put pressures on the Probation Service. The explanatory memorandum states:

"There is a package of measures to alleviate Probation pressures including limiting Post-Sentence Supervision to non-Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements…eligible offenders."

So there are consequences here. There are consequences for post-custody accommodation services, as we have heard, which are not working terribly well at the moment. There are also consequences for the police if there are situations of reoffending or recall that need to be dealt with.

This will mean a reduction, from September onwards, of a minimum of 5,000 prison places for a period of time, and that is simply necessary. That is not really debatable, and I think that is probably why the Opposition have not debated it today. It is not possible for this to continue. I hope this short-term measure will be successful, and I think it will be. I hope the safeguards will be in place and will be secure. I am also encouraged by what my right hon. Friend said about the longer-term prospects. We have to address the prisons crisis over the longer term in this country. We have to reduce the number of people in custody by reducing reoffending.

It is good that we are building modern prisons to modern standards, but I would like to see those modern prisons not supplementing but replacing some of the disgusting and disgraceful Victorian prisons, such as Wormwood Scrubs, which until a few weeks ago was in my constituency. I advise all Members who do not have a prison in their constituency or who do not regularly visit prisons, irrespective of their interest—if they are attending this debate, they must have some interest—to go and look at the conditions that persist, because they are inhumane and intolerable. That is not just a matter for staff, inmates and others who work in prisons; it is a matter for all of us as citizens, because we are not rehabilitating prisoners, but letting them out on to the streets to reoffend without any support.

The need for today's SI is an indication of just how low the previous Government have brought the system. This is a national crisis. I have no doubt that it was one of the reasons for the previous Prime Minister calling an early election, because they simply could not face the consequences of their own actions. Thank goodness we now have a Government who will grasp these nettles firmly and resolve the issues.

I say to my right hon. Friend the Justice Secretary, who I know is passionate about this, that this is not about just a short-term fix; this is about a long-term change in how we use the criminal justice system in this country, all parts of which are in crisis at the moment. If we can get into a virtuous spiral, rather than the downward spiral we have been in for the last 14 years, there is hope to improve the courts system, access to justice, and the service provided, including for victims, and to deal with the crisis in our prisons.

12.40 pm

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): It is a genuine pleasure to see you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker—congratulations on your new role. I welcome the new Front Benchers to their positions, including the Lord Chancellor, whom I have known for a number of years. I congratulate her on taking up the post, as well as the Opposition Front-Bench team.

It is right—this has marginally been touched on—that the first duty of any Government is the protection, safety and security of the public. The state has to manage many measures, sentences and crimes, and collectively we have a duty to ensure that the British public are protected. Alongside robust measures on counter-terrorism and backing our armed forces, we also have amazing intelligence services that form part of the matrix that the Lord Chancellor will now become familiar with, as well as keeping our streets safe by investing in the police and the criminal justice system. Part of that means that the most dangerous, harmful, serious, persistent offenders should be in prison and kept off the streets in order to keep the public safe, and it is important that we have the right deterrent.

Those on the Government Front Bench are clearly making a great deal of play about the role of the previous Government and the decisions made in the last Parliament, but it is telling that one of the first pieces of legislation that this Government are seeking to pass is one that basically considers the early release of 5,500 prisoners in a matter of weeks. I have looked at the impact assessment—the Lord Chancellor will be familiar with it—and I note that it gives option 0 and option 1. I understand the situation that she has been asked to look at, but in her closing remarks I would like to hear what alternatives were considered, other than the blanket scheme.

[Priti Patel]

The Lord Chancellor touched on the previous Parliament, and for the record, in the previous Parliament we saw Labour MPs campaigning to block the removal of foreign national offenders from being deported from our prisons. We saw them oppose the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and the tougher sentences that were introduced for sexual and violent offenders—I will come on to the release of some of those offenders shortly. Labour Members opposed life sentences for people smugglers in the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, which we know is making a difference. The release of 5,500 prisoners, and reducing the time that most offenders stay in custody from 50% of their sentence to 40%, will cause concern for the public, particularly victims of crime.

I would like to ask the Lord Chancellor about some specific areas. She has touched on them, but I would like her to expand on them. In the early release provisions, clear offences such as sexual or domestic abuse offences have been listed in the schedule. She has outlined community orders and tagging, but it is important, particularly for women who have been victims, to know and understand what provisions will be put in place for them. There are also offenders responsible for racially aggravated assaults, and the real harm that comes with offenders with past convictions for sexual offences or perpetrators of domestic abuse, who might be serving time in custody for other offences and who could be freed early.

What we know—the Lord Chancellor will know this—is that those types of perpetrators do not just offend once; they have a whole litany of historical aggravated offences. We cannot simply release those people out into the community, because those blanket offences cause problems. She is well aware of the cross-party nature of the debate on support for victims over the past decade. I have spoken about a victims Bill, as has she, and it is about how we can work to achieve that.

There will of course be impacts on wider services—this has already been raised, in particular by the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain)—and I would like to ask about the impact on our police, probation and housing services. There is no clear plan in the impact assessment. The Lord Chancellor said in her statement that that will come and that officials are working "at pace"—I have no doubt that Opposition Members will hear a lot of that term from those on the Government Benches. The papers published with this order give no indication of how local authorities, and which local authorities, will be particularly affected by the early release scheme. It is important for local authorities, and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in particular, to publish that information with the Ministry of Justice.

The Lord Chancellor has spoken passionately about the transparency she will bring on data releases and numbers, and I urge that we should have that information sooner rather than later. A Labour Member also mentioned homelessness that results from this measure, particularly in the City of London, and we see that already. That is a local authority duty, and statutory duties are in place where we know such things need to be managed. There will be, and already are, pressures on housing stock, and asking the Government to publish a list of local authorities that will be affected is vital. There are also implications for families and individuals on housing registers who will now be worried about the implications for them while they have been waiting patiently on housing lists.

There will be pressures on other parts of the criminal justice system. What resources will we put into the criminal justice system? Will resources be redirected? What about police officers who will now be tied up monitoring offenders on early release, and dealing with those who reoffend? The right hon. Lady has already spoken about reoffending and breaches of conditions that will mean someone going back to prison, but how will that be managed when police officers will be taken away from policing activities? Perhaps I may politely say that clarity is required on such specificity for local authorities and police forces, and our police and crime commissioners will also want to know more about this.

I would like to press the Lord Chancellor on the timings around this decision. It has been touched on already, and the impact assessment states:

> "The Lord Chancellor announced her intention for this change to be temporary. This change will be reviewed after 18 months to ensure it is still necessary."

It would be helpful to be indicative about the concept of the sunset clause—she is familiar with sunset clauses; we have all debated such legislation—and to be clear that this measure will not be permanent. The public, as well as Members of this House, need to be assured on that. Indeed, all Members who are voting today need assurance on that important point.

I wish to ask about the reduction in the prison population by 5,500. The impact assessment considers a period over 10 years, and states:

> "The Central scenario assumes there will be 5,500 fewer prison places required than would otherwise be needed in steady state… Over a 10-year period, the average annual savings for HMPPS due to reduced prison running costs are estimated to be £219.5m per annum (2024/25 prices)… Over the ten-year period, there would be a transitional benefit of reducing the additional number of prison places that need to be constructed, with an estimated benefit of"

over £2.2 billion. That is significant money, and will clearly have an impact on the prison building programme.

When the Lord Chancellor made her first speech on prison capacity and the strains, she spoke from the new Five Wells prison in Wellingborough, which was built and delivered under the last Government. It would be useful to hear more about the implications of that £2.2 billion. We heard during the general election that the Government were to continue with the prison building plans and programmes put in place, and change the planning laws, but the impact assessment assumes that there will be a permanent reduction in the prison population of 5,500. I would like to hear more about the modelling of future prison places and numbers. Will there be an expansion of existing prison sites? There were plans for a super prison in Lancashire. Will that be expanded?

Alongside that, we need to understand more about the financial impact of this policy and how the Ministry of Justice, the Treasury and the Office for Budget Responsibility will be scoring this measure in the accounting. The impact assessment suggests a saving of more than £2 billion by reducing the number of prison places to be constructed, as well as more than £200 million a year of savings by reducing the number of offenders in prisons. It is a balancing act, but for clarity, when it comes to law and order, the Government's direction of travel on

keeping our streets safe and the points I have made, we need to know from the Lord Chancellor whether these savings will be banked for the forthcoming fiscal forecast from the Ministry of Justice, the Treasury and the OBR, especially with the Budget and the comprehensive spending review coming in the autumn.

The Government have afforded the House 90 precious minutes to debate the early release of 5,500 prisoners. From where I stand, the prison building programme, just by this impact assessment, looks as if it is being reduced and cut. I am worried that will put the public in grave danger, and it is right that we continue throughout debates—probably post recess, now—to discuss this matter. This is one of the first legislative acts of this Government. It will have implications for public confidence in law and order. I do not need to expand on that; the Lord Chancellor is well versed in all this. We have to be cognisant of the impact and what this measure means for victims. We should focus on that and the wider functioning of the criminal justice system.

The Lord Chancellor will know that in the previous Parliament, Operation Soteria in particular looked at the integration of policing, the criminal justice system, the court system and the prison system to give confidence to victims of the most abhorrent sexual abuses. Will this proposal have a knock-on impact on some of those key programmes? I would like to have some answers from the Lord Chancellor. Transparency is important, and she has spoken about it in this debate. I have grave concerns, as I know do others on the Opposition Benches, about public safety and security, as well as the wider implications for housing, prisons, probation, the police, law and order, and public safety.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): I call Naz Shah.

12.52 pm

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): May I congratulate you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on taking your place, even more so as a female Muslim of Kashmiri heritage? It gives me great pleasure and pride to see not only a female Muslim Deputy Speaker of Kashmiri heritage, but a Lord Chancellor who is the first female Muslim of Kashmiri heritage in that role. I am sure the whole House and the whole country shares our pride in celebrating Britain, the House and democracy at their best.

I am grateful to the Lord Chancellor for all her work to address this issue, picking up the mess left by the previous Government. I would welcome a bit of humility from the shadow Minister. The reason we did not vote with his Government's policies was precisely because they did not have a plan and they did not know what they were doing—otherwise, we would not have to clear this mess up on their behalf. The people recognised that, and that is why we are having to deal with it.

I make a request to the Lord Chancellor that, during her review, she accepts an invitation to visit Bradford West, and the Muslim women in prison project, which supports Muslim women in prison and their return out into the community. We all recognise the disparity of services and rehabilitation when it comes to people of ethnic minority heritage. That is an open invitation.

Once again, I thank the Lord Chancellor for giving huge consideration to the sentences she is proposing to reduce and for making sure that we are still protecting the public, which the previous Government failed to do, by ensuring that we keep serious offenders out of that category and are doing the best we can do for our country.

12.54 pm

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I welcome you to the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have only three brief points to make.

First, we need an honest debate in this place about the purpose of prison. It is true that prison exists to protect those who otherwise might suffer harm—we incarcerate people because they are dangerous—but prison also matters for the reason of punishment. To incarcerate somebody who has done something wrong is to deprive them of their liberty to punish them. We should be straightforward that most of our constituents believe in just retribution. They do not spend their time, like so much of the liberal establishment, agonising about the circumstances of criminals; they are more concerned about the circumstances of victims. Prison works for that reason above all else. It is a deprivation of liberty, endured by those who deserve to endure it. My constituents, and I suspect those of Members from all parts of the House, will be outraged by the idea that some of those people will now be let loose on our streets.

I accept that there are exceptions set out in the proposals before the House, but I have to say that had the previous Government introduced this measure, I would have voted against it, and I will vote against it today. I tabled amendments along with the former Home Secretary, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fareham and Waterlooville (Suella Braverman), and many other colleagues that would have further altered these provisions. I will not go into those in detail, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I suspect you would not allow me to do so, but I advise the new Lord Chancellor to take a look at them to see what further steps can be taken to mitigate this unfortunate circumstance, for that is the least we can do.

My second point is about the specifics of this proposal. It has already been said that the way of dealing with the prison population is twofold in essence. One is to reduce the number of people on remand by improving the throughput of people from arrest to trial. The second is to reduce the population by dealing with foreign national offenders. Remand prisoners represent about 20% of the population. Foreign national offenders now number, as the Lord Chancellor will know, in the many thousands. We can take people out of the system by doing those two things, and we can also build more prisons. I accept that the previous Government should have done more, but this Government should look at urgent prison building. We were able to build Nightingale hospitals at a stroke, so why can we not have Fry prisons built as at least a temporary measure to accommodate people who would otherwise commit further crimes?

My final point, which has been made repeatedly—I am being brief, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I know you will want me to be so, and I want to support you as much as I can in your new role—is simply this: if this is a temporary provision, as the former Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) just said, why is there no sunset clause? It is all very well saying there will be a review in 18 months, but a sunset clause would mean that the measure had

[Sir John Hayes]

to come back to this House for further consideration. That is the difference between something written in the legislation and something promised in the form of a review.

I have no reason not to believe the promises of the Lord Chancellor—I take them at face value—but let us have some substance around those promises by building a sunset clause into the legislation. That would, at the very least, show the good faith that is a necessary component of good governance. Prison works. Let us build more prisons and say to our constituents that we will no longer pander to the predilections, preoccupations and prejudices of the liberal establishment, but will instead speak for them, for what they believe is what I believe: many more wicked people should be incarcerated for much longer. That is what they would say on the doorstep in any constituency; it is about time that it was said here, and I am delighted that it now has been—by me.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): I call the Lord Chancellor to make her closing remarks.

12.59 pm

Shabana Mahmood: With the leave of the House, I will respond to the debate, but let me begin by saying what a pleasure it has been to do my first piece of legislation in this House under your chairmanship, Madam Deputy Speaker. You are a fellow Small Heathan Brummie, and it is no doubt a great first for the community from which we both come.

I was astonished by the shadow Minister's remarks. He said that he was deeply troubled by the measure, but he and his party, who formed the previous Government, were not troubled enough to prevent the crisis from occurring in the first place. He knows full well that they have left no other option on the table but that which we are taking, and anyone with access to a newspaper can tell that, until about three weeks ago, this was their own plan. I am afraid to say that that is the modern-day Tory party: opportunistic, cynical and unfit to govern.

The shadow Minister asked a number of questions, most of which I had addressed in my opening remarks. Let me remind him—he should know—that our prisons are at over 99% capacity. The exact number will fluctuate on a daily basis, but everyone who works in criminal justice knows that our prisons will overflow by September unless we pass this measure.

On the sunset clause and exclusions for domestic violence-linked offences, I will take no lessons from the Tory party. It brought forward the end-of-custody supervised licence scheme, and that had no exclusions for domestic abuse. I raised that issue many times when I was sitting on the Opposition Benches, and the then Tory Government simply stonewalled and did not give any answers whatsoever. I am pleased to see that Opposition Members have finally discovered that we should treat victims of domestic abuse differently from how we have previously, but they should have applied that to the measure that was their Government's policy until just three weeks ago.

I will also take no lessons from the Tory party on the sunset clause. I remind them that the end-of-custody supervised licence scheme not only did not have a sunset clause but was in fact extended by the previous Tory Government from 18 days to 35 days and then to 60 days. We then had the ignominy of the increase to 70 days that came without any announcement whatsoever. So when I say that the Government will be different from the last one, I mean it. We have already been far more transparent than the previous Government ever were or could have dreamed of being, and that is the vein in which we will continue.

I was pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Southgate and Wood Green (Bambos Charalambous) raised reoffending, which was also brought up by the Liberal Democrat spokesperson, the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain). It is critical that we get the rates of reoffending down.

Let me turn to the right hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Sir John Hayes). I am slightly perturbed that I found myself in agreement with his first point—I agree that prisons are about punishment—but when 80% of offenders are reoffenders, something is going horribly wrong within our prisons. Every time we have somebody coming out of our prison estate who is a better criminal than they were when they went in, that creates more victims, and we are letting our public down if we do not get the rates of reoffending down. Cutting reoffending is a strategy for putting victims first and cutting crime as much as it is about helping those prisoners become better citizens. I hope that he will take my comments in the spirit in which they are intended, which is a good-faith response to his remarks, and reflect on the necessity of the country finally getting its shocking rates of reoffending down and putting the public first.

I return to the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Southgate and Wood Green. IPP prisoners are not included within this measure. I know that he and others in the House have supported the possibility of a resentencing exercise, which we did not support in opposition. That is not the Government's policy, because while I do want to make progress on IPP prisoners, we cannot take any steps that would put public protection at risk. It is a delicate balancing act, but we will start with the measures passed by the previous Government in the Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 on the changes to the licence period and the action plan, which we will publish as soon as possible. Where possible, I want to make progress where IPP prisoners are concerned.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Chiswick (Andy Slaughter) made a really important point on the costs. There is a cost to the action that we are taking today, but there would be a much bigger cost to inaction. If we fail to take this measure today, we will face the total collapse of the criminal justice system. That catastrophic disaster has to be averted at all costs.

Let me turn to the comments of the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel). I am pleased about how she has approached the debate. Let me assure her, particularly on matters of national security such as they touch on my responsibilities as Lord Chancellor, that we will always take a cross-party approach and look to work together in the national interest.

The right hon. Lady raised important points about the join-up between different service providers, whether that is police, local authorities or others. I have already chaired a criminal justice board and we already have an implementation taskforce that will work over the summer to ensure that all the different agencies are working together so that the roll-out in September is successful. My Ministers will be working with Ministers in the

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to ensure that join-up occurs. That is an important point, and I will be taking a close personal interest in the implementation.

Priti Patel: Could the Lord Chancellor expand—probably not in this debate but over the summer or even in September—on the local authorities? The point about prison building will not go away. I believe that we need more prisons, we should be building more prisons, and that should come forward from the previous prison programme. There is the issue about finances—the £2.2 billion that I referred to—but will she commit to publishing a list of the local authorities she is proactively working with, which may be those from the previous prison building programme, where we will see more prisons?

Shabana Mahmood: I will happily return or write to the right hon. Lady in respect of specific local authorities. The impact of prison capacity is uneven, but it is also in flux on a daily basis. On money and the long-term supply of prison places, we will be publishing a 10-year prison capacity strategy, which will deal with the long-term plans that our Government have to increase supply of prison places.

Mr Paul Kohler (Wimbledon) (LD): We do indeed need to build more prisons, because, as was said, the present stock is not fit for purpose, but if we build more prisons to increase capacity, we will just end up with more prisoners. All the evidence suggests that prison population is a supply-led industry, and more prisons means more prisoners. I remind the Lord Chancellor that her colleague in the other place has made it clear that a third of prisoners should not be there. What will she do to look at alternatives to prison for the sad and wretched, not the cruel and dangerous?

Shabana Mahmood: Let me be clear to the hon. Gentleman and the House. The Government will ensure that we have the prison places that we need so that we can protect the public and deal with the supply-side issues we have inherited from the previous Tory Government, who did not build the 20,000 places that they said would be ready by next year; they delivered only 6,000. In addition to providing the prison places that the country needs, we will deal with the problem of reoffending, because we are determined to ensure that we do not keep creating more and more victims. That is a strategy for cutting crime and for putting victims first.

The Government have taken action where before us came inaction. Once this action takes effect from September, we will be able to end the immediate crisis in our prisons, giving us time to introduce desperately needed long-term measures. This has been welcomed by voices from across the criminal justice system, from senior police officers to my predecessor in this role. It is the only safe option available to us, and to choose to act otherwise would leave our country in a state of unconscionable risk; one that I am not willing to take. For that reason, I commend the draft instrument to the House.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 323, Noes 81.

Division No. 5] **[1.8 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Jack
Abrahams, Debbie
Akehurst, Luke
Alaba, Mr Bayo
Aldridge, Dan
Alexander, Heidi
Al-Hassan, Sadik
Anderson, Callum
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Arthur, Dr Scott
Asato, Jess
Asser, James
Athwal, Jas
Atkinson, Lewis
Bailey, Mr Calvin
Bailey, Olivia
Baines, David
Baker, Alex
Baker, Richard
Ballinger, Alex
Bance, Antonia
Barker, Paula
Barron, Lee
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
Baxter, Johanna
Beales, Danny
Beavers, Lorraine
Begum, Apsana
Bell, Torsten
Billington, Ms Polly
Bishop, Matt
Blake, Olivia
Blake, Rachel
Bloore, Chris
Bonavia, Kevin
Botterill, Jade
Brackenridge, Sureena
Brash, Mr Jonathan
Brickell, Phil
Burgon, Richard
Burke, Maureen
Burton-Sampson, David
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, Ian
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Campbell, Irene
Campbell, Juliet
Campbell-Savours, Markus
Carling, Sam
Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
Charters, Mr Luke
Chowns, Ellie
Clark, Feryal
Coleman, Ben
Collier, Jacob
Collinge, Lizzi
Collins, Tom
Conlon, Liam
Coombes, Sarah
Cooper, Andrew
Cooper, Dr Beccy
Costigan, Deirdre
Cox, Pam
Craft, Jen
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Ms Stella
Crichton, Torcuil
Curtis, Chris
Daby, Janet
Dakin, Sir Nicholas
Darlington, Emily
Davies, Jonathan
Davies, Shaun
Davies-Jones, Alex
De Cordova, Marsha
Dean, Josh
Dearden, Kate
Denyer, Carla
Dickson, Jim
Dixon, Anna
Dixon, Samantha
Dollimore, Helena
Downie, Graeme
Duncan-Jordan, Neil
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eccles, Cat
Edwards, Sarah
Egan, Damien
Ellis, Maya
Elmore, Chris
Entwistle, Kirith
Fahnbulleh, Miatta
Falconer, Hamish
Farnsworth, Linsey
Fenton-Glynn, Josh
Ferguson, Mark
Ferguson, Patricia
Fleet, Natalie
Foody, Emma
Fookes, Catherine
Foster, Mr Paul
Foxcroft, Vicky
Francis, Daniel
Gardiner, Barry
Gardner, Dr Allison
Gelderd, Anna
Gemmell, Alan
German, Gill
Gilbert, Tracy
Gittins, Becky
Glindon, Mary
Goldsborough, Ben
Gosling, Jodie
Gould, Georgia
Grady, John
Griffith, Dame Nia
Hall, Sarah
Hamilton, Paulette
Hardy, Emma
Harris, Carolyn
Hatton, Lloyd
Hayes, Helen
Hayes, Tom
Hazelgrove, Claire
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hinchliff, Chris
Hinder, Jonathan
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hopkins, Rachel
Hughes, Claire
Hume, Alison
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hurley, Patrick
Hussain, Imran
Ingham, Leigh
Irons, Natasha
Jameson, Sally
Jermy, Terry
Jogee, Adam
Johnson, Kim
Jones, rh Darren
Jones, Lillian
Jones, Louise

Jones, Sarah
Josan, Gurinder
Joseph, Sojan
Juss, Warinder
Kane, Chris
Kane, Mike
Kaur, Satvir
Khan, Afzal
Khan, Naushabah
Kirkham, Jayne
Kitchen, Gen
Kumar, Sonia
Kumaran, Uma
Kyrke-Smith, Laura
Lamb, Peter
Lavery, Ian
Law, Noah
Leadbeater, Kim
Leishman, Brian
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewin, Andrew
Lewis, Clive
Lightwood, Simon
Long Bailey, Rebecca
MacAlister, Josh
Macdonald, Alice
MacNae, Andy
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, rh Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Martin, Amanda
Maskell, Rachael
Mayer, Alex
McAllister, Douglas
McCarthy, Kerry
McCluskey, Martin
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Chris
McDonnell, rh John
McDougall, Blair
McEvoy, Lola
McIntyre, Alex
McKee, Gordon
McKenna, Kevin
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
McMorrin, Anna
McNally, Frank
McNeill, Kirsty
Midgley, Anneliese
Minns, Ms Julie
Moon, Perran
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Morris, Joe
Murphy, Luke
Murray, Chris
Murray, rh Ian
Murray, James
Murray, Katrina
Myer, Luke
Naish, James
Naismith, Connor
Narayan, Kanishka
Nash, Pamela
Newbury, Josh
Niblett, Samantha
Nichols, Charlotte
Norris, Alex
Onwurah, Chi
Opher, Dr Simon
Osamor, Kate
Osborne, Kate
Osborne, Tristan
Owatemi, Taiwo
Paffey, Darren
Pakes, Andrew
Patrick, Matthew
Payne, Michael
Pearce, Jon
Pennycook, Matthew
Phillips, Jess
Pinto-Duschinsky, David
Pitcher, Lee
Platt, Jo
Powell, Joe
Powell, rh Lucy
Poynton, Gregor
Prinsley, Peter
Quigley, Mr Richard
Race, Steve
Ramsay, Adrian
Rand, Mr Connor
Ranger, Andrew
Reader, Mike
Reid, Joani
Reynolds, Emma
Rhodes, Martin
Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
Richards, Jake
Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
Rigby, Lucy
Robertson, Dave
Roca, Tim
Rodda, Matt
Rushworth, Sam
Russell, Mrs Sarah
Rutland, Tom
Ryan, Oliver
Sackman, Sarah
Sandher, Dr Jeevun
Scrogham, Michelle
Shah, Naz
Shanks, Michael
Simons, Josh
Slaughter, Andy
Slinger, John
Smith, Cat
Smith, David
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Nick
Smyth, Karin
Snell, Gareth
Sobel, Alex
Stainbank, Euan
Stevenson, Kenneth
Stewart, Elaine
Stone, Will
Strathern, Alistair
Strickland, Alan
Sullivan, Kirsteen
Sullivan, Dr Lauren
Sultana, Zarah
Swallow, Peter
Tami, rh Mark
Tapp, Mike
Taylor, David
Taylor, Rachel
Thomas, Fred
Thomas-Symonds, rh Nick
Thompson, Adam
Timms, rh Sir Stephen
Toale, Jessica
Tomlinson, Dan
Trickett, Jon
Tufnell, Henry
Turley, Anna
Turmaine, Matt
Turner, Karl
Twist, Liz
Uppal, Harpreet
Vaughan, Tony
Vaz, rh Valerie
Vince, Chris
Wakeford, Christian
Walker, Imogen
Ward, Chris
Ward, Melanie
Webb, Chris
Welsh, Michelle
West, Catherine
Western, Andrew
Western, Matt
Wheeler, Michael
Whitby, John
White, Jo
White, Katie
Whittome, Nadia
Williams, David
Witherden, Steve
Woodcock, Sean
Wrighting, Rosie
Yang, Yuan
Yasin, Mohammad
Yemm, Steve
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Gerald Jones and
Keir Mather

NOES

Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Atkins, rh Victoria
Badenoch, rh Mrs Kemi
Baldwin, Dame Harriett
Bedford, Mr Peter
Blackman, Bob
Bool, Sarah
Bowie, Andrew
Brandreth, Aphra
Braverman, rh Suella
Burghart, Alex
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Cleverly, rh Mr James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Cocking, Lewis
Cooper, John
Coutinho, rh Claire
Cross, Harriet
Davies, Gareth
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Sir David
Dewhirst, Charlie
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Fortune, Peter
Fox, Sir Ashley
French, Mr Louie
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Glen, rh John
Griffith, Andrew
Harris, Rebecca
Hayes, rh Sir John
Holden, rh Mr Richard
Holmes, Paul
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hunt, rh Jeremy
Jenrick, rh Robert
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Jopp, Lincoln
Kearns, Alicia
Lam, Katie
Lamont, John
Mak, Alan
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Robbie
Morton, rh Wendy
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Obese-Jecty, Ben
Patel, rh Priti
Paul, Rebecca
Philp, rh Chris
Raja, Shivani
Rankin, Jack
Reed, David
Robertson, Joe
Rosindell, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
Simmonds, David
Smith, Greg
Smith, Rebecca
Snowden, Mr Andrew
Spencer, Patrick
Stafford, Gregory
Stephenson, Blake
Stride, rh Mel
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Thomas, Bradley
Tice, Richard
Timothy, Nick
Tugendhat, rh Tom
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Whately, Helen
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wild, James

Tellers for the Noes:
Mike Wood and
Joy Morrissey

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Criminal Justice Act 2003 (Requisite and Minimum Custodial Periods) Order 2024, which was laid before this House on 17 July, be approved.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (TODAY)

Ordered,

That at today's sitting the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Lucy Powell relating to (i) Code of Conduct and Guide to the Rules and (ii) Modernisation Committee not later than two hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order, or at 5.00pm, whichever is the later; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings on those Motions may continue, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—*(Jeff Smith.)*

Code of Conduct and Modernisation Committee

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): Before we come to the motions in the name of the Leader of the House, I remind the House, in relation to motion no. 4, of the requirement for hon. Members to declare any relevant interest or benefit that might relate to the proceedings in which they are participating.

I must draw attention to the fact that the motion on the code of conduct and guide to the rules appears on the printed Order Paper with a small error. Paragraph 2(a) of chapter 4 to the guide to the rules refers to

"advice about public policy and current affairs",

which appears incorrectly as

"advice about public policy and public affairs."

That has been corrected online and a corrigendum has been issued.

The motion on the Modernisation Committee will be debated with this motion. I inform the House that Mr Speaker has selected amendments (b), (c), (d) and (e) to the Modernisation Committee motion as listed on the Order Paper. I shall call Members to move their amendments formally and explain proceedings further at the appropriate time.

Standing Order No. 22C requires the Clerk of the House, as accounting officer, to set out the expected financial consequences of motions that have direct consequences of additional expenditure of at least £50,000. I should inform the House that a memorandum on the financial consequences of the Modernisation Committee motion is available in the Vote Office.

I call the Leader of the House to move the first motion, on code of conduct and guide to the rules, in the form it appears online.

1.23 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Lucy Powell): I beg to move,

That, with effect from 25 October 2024, paragraph 2 of Chapter 4 of the Guide to the Rules relating to the conduct of Members be amended to leave out:

"a) advice on public policy and current affairs;

b) advice in general terms about how Parliament works; and".

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we shall discuss the following:

Motion 5—*Modernisation Committee*—

That—

(1) There shall be a Select Committee, to be called the Modernisation Committee, to consider reforms to House of Commons procedures, standards, and working practices; and to make recommendations thereon;

(2) The Committee shall consist of not more than 14 Members, of which 4 will be the quorum of the Committee;

(3) Members shall be nominated to the Committee by a motion in the name of the Leader of the House;

(4) Unless the House otherwise orders, each Member nominated to the Committee shall continue to be a member of it for the remainder of the Parliament;

(5) The Committee shall have power to send for persons, papers and records; to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House; to adjourn from place to place; to report from time to

time; and to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the Committee's order of reference;

(6) That this Order be a Standing Order of the House until the end of the present Parliament.

Amendment (b) to motion 5, in paragraph (2), leave out "14" and add "18".

Amendment (c) to motion 5, in paragraph (2), after "Members" insert—

"which shall include the chairs of the Procedure Committee, the Committee of Privileges, the Committee on Standards and the Administration Committee; the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards may take part in proceedings of the Committee, may receive Committee papers and may give such other assistance to the Committee as may be appropriate;".

Amendment (d) to motion 5, in paragraph (2), leave out ", of which".

Amendment (e) to motion 5, after paragraph (4) insert—

"() The Committee—

(a) when it announces an inquiry, shall consider relevant reports from the Procedure Committee, the Committee of Privileges, the Committee on Standards and the Administration Committee and shall invite those Committees to report on the issues within the terms of reference of the inquiry;

(b) shall not consider matters that fall within the functions of the House of Commons Commission, as set out in the House of Commons (Administration) Act 1978; and

(c) shall seek the views of the Speaker on matters within its order of reference;

() The recommendations of the Committee shall be subject to a motion in the name of the Leader of the House;".

Lucy Powell: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. I congratulate you on your election as Chairman of Ways and Means. I look forward to working with you in the coming weeks.

Over the past two weeks, it has been fantastic to watch so many new Members hit the ground running in representing their constituents, and it has been a pleasure to see returning Members resume their business, bringing their considerable experience and wisdom to the Chamber.

This new Parliament offers a chance to turn the page after the sorry and sordid record of the last. We face a crisis of trust in politics, politicians and Parliament. As we know, it is a great privilege to sit in this House: to be an MP represents an opportunity to change the country for the better. Underpinning that privilege is a set of solemn responsibilities. Chief among them is the responsibility that we all have to embody the highest standards of public service. Those standards are articulated in the seven principles of public life, which apply to all those who operate in public life and that inspire and inform the code of conduct for MPs. It is perfectly reasonable for a constituent to expect that when they cast their vote in a general election, their candidate will be sent to this House to serve them, not themselves. An MP's first priority, therefore, must be to their constituents, and the rules of this House must reflect that obligation.

This Government were elected with a mandate for change and the Prime Minister pledged to return us to a politics of service. Today, we take our first steps to deliver that. In line with the Government's manifesto commitment, I am proposing a tightening of the rules on second jobs for Members of this House in the first instance. Under current arrangements, Members must not provide, or agree to provide, paid parliamentary advice. They must also not undertake services as a parliamentary strategist, adviser or consultant. The rule prohibits Members from advising, in return for payment, outside organisations or persons on, for example, how they may lobby or otherwise influence the work of Parliament. However, the guide to the rules contains exemptions. The exemptions mean that advice on public policy in current affairs, and advice in general terms about how Parliament works, are not considered parliamentary advice.

Mr Luke Charters (York Outer) (Lab): During the election campaign, I made a solemn promise to my constituents that I would not take on a second job, apart from being chief of staff to my two-year-old son. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is time to end public policy and current affairs advocacy roles, so that we all have time to spend on the greatest job of all—representing our constituents?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. That is exactly the purpose of the motion. I hope he has time to do his other job of being a great parent.

The exemptions potentially act as loopholes, allowing a Member to use their privileged position and knowledge for personal gain. That may encourage not only a potential conflict of interest but a conflict of attention, with too much of a Member's time and energy spent on things other than constituency or parliamentary business. I am very grateful to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards for his advice on this matter and for the diligent provision of guidance to all Members on adherence to the code of conduct.

The motion puts an end to the exemptions. It sends a clear signal to the public that an MP's first priority is to their constituents and to the country. It is a first step. These changes shall come into effect three months from the date this motion is passed, which will allow Members the chance to make any necessary changes to existing contracts or arrangements.

Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): I welcome the statement that the Leader of the House is making. Does she agree that being an MP is an honour and a privilege, and should be a full-time job; and that the problem of second jobs goes wider than the limited issues she is addressing in her motion today? An example of the sort of behaviour that in my view should not be permitted would be an MP acting as managing director of a financial services company headquartered in a tax haven, in which case they might have a conflict of attention, potentially assisting people to avoid tax when of course we should all be serving the public interest. Will she act urgently to put forward further measures to prevent the type of behaviours that I have drawn attention to?

Lucy Powell: The hon. Lady makes a really good point. Absolutely, this is about conflicts of interest and conflicts of attention. As I have made clear, and will further make clear in my opening remarks, this is a first step. We need to look at some of those other areas to give our constituents confidence that this will eradicate the kind of behaviour that she describes.

This House has considered such issues before. Most recently, the Committee on Standards reviewed the code of conduct in the previous Parliament. The independent

Committee on Standards in Public Life also looked at the matter several times, issuing recommendations in 2009 and in 2018 on MPs' outside interests. I thank them for their work. Today's change forms part of an ongoing conversation that I trust will continue as we begin to rebuild public trust in this institution.

We will go further. The other motion before the House will establish a new Modernisation Committee of the House of Commons, fulfilling another manifesto commitment. The Committee will be tasked with driving up standards and addressing the culture of this House, as well as improving working practices.

Max Wilkinson (Cheltenham) (LD): I am one of many newcomers to this Chamber. I first spent time in the Chamber on Friday afternoon, when some irregular things happened. Does the Leader of the House agree that it is the conduct of Members in this Chamber, as well as issues around second jobs and conduct outside, that has given politics and all of us here a bad reputation? If we are to solve these problems, we should recognise that when people turn on the television or watch Parliament live, they want to see people listening respectfully—not heckling, shouting out or calling names.

Lucy Powell: The hon. Gentleman makes a really important point. Part of what we are beginning today is about restoring respect for one another, both in Parliament and in politics. I have been really encouraged by the enthusiasm that new Members like the hon. Gentleman have for this agenda. I hope he will continue to be involved.

The Modernisation Committee will also look at reforms to make Parliament more effective, bringing recommendations and responding swiftly to the views of the House. It is intended to bring a more strategic lens to these matters and, where necessary, address the pace of change. This is not to cut across the important work of existing Committees, but to highlight interdependencies and facilitate closer working. I describe it as a clearing house, drawing on all the good work of other Committees.

The Government want to build consensus for any reforms, and bring the House together by consulting widely. The deliberations of the Committee will be transparent and published, so that the thinking that has informed any recommendations for change is made clear to Members—a very important aspect of the Committee. I intend to listen to colleagues, regardless of their party affiliation, as we take this work forward, drawing on the diverse range of views and experiences represented in this House.

I turn to the amendments on the Order Paper. I hope that I can provide reassurance to Members about some of their concerns. The existing Committee structures in this House—including the Procedure Committee, the Committee on Standards, the Committee of Privileges, the Administration Committee and of course the House of Commons Commission—will have a vital role to play in the work of the Modernisation Committee. Indeed, it will draw heavily on their work and their recommendations. However, the pace of change that we have witnessed in recent years demonstrates the value that a Modernisation Committee will have when it comes to enacting recommendations. The risk-based exclusion of Members, improvements to the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme and the introduction of proxy votes to cover serious long-term illness or injury are prime examples of the glacial pace at which we often move.

The purpose of the Modernisation Committee is not to duplicate the important work carried out by existing Select Committees, but rather to highlight and consider their recommendations in the round. As the Standards Committee noted in its May 2024 report, the standards landscape in Parliament brings together an array of actors and regulatory bodies whose arrangements are often considered in isolation from one another. My hope is that the Modernisation Committee will be able to bring a broader perspective to these issues, and will work closely with the existing parliamentary Committees whose reports and evidence will shape its work. The new Committee will have the ability to collect evidence, and for Chairs to guest on it where relevant. I will be sure to rely on the expertise and experience of all Members.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend explain the relationship between the Modernisation Committee and the ethics and integrity commission that is being set up?

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend, who has done much good work in this space over the years. The Government's ethics and integrity commission will focus more on Government members, Ministers, civil servants and others, whereas the work of the Modernisation Committee will focus particularly on the House of Commons. There may be a relationship at times, but they will have a different remit and scope. I hope that answers my hon. Friend's question satisfactorily.

As the proposed Chair of the Committee, I reassure the House that my door will always be open to Members and staff across the House. I see it more as a task and finish Committee—that was a good comment that the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) made to me the other day—that will take a strategic look at recommendations from other bodies and Committees, but not duplicate their work.

I note amendment (a), tabled by the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman), which is about the engagement of smaller parties and their role on the Modernisation Committee. I hope that I have gone some way towards providing reassurance on aspects of that issue. I want to be clear that I want Members across the House to be heard, but the Committee also needs to be an effective body that delivers change. If the Committee is to work swiftly and generate momentum behind proposals for reform, it needs to be of an appropriate size. If each party were represented, as the hon. Member's amendment requires, the Committee would have to grow considerably. That would not be proportionate with other Committees of the House, which I do not think is reasonable.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Given the likely breakdown, does the Leader of the House understand that only three parties will be represented on the Committee? It would be possible to flex that slightly, and have voices from more than just three parties on the Committee, while still keeping it relatively small.

Lucy Powell: I understand the hon. Member's concern. It is an unfortunate case of the mathematics that apply across all Select Committees. On other occasions, in past Parliaments, her party has benefited from the formulas that are used. Beyond formal membership, however, I reassure the House that I want to commit to regular

[Lucy Powell]

and meaningful engagement with any and all parties represented in this House and with Members who want to contribute.

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Reform): This, to me, seems a little bit unfair. A political party that is represented in this House and got over 4 million votes at the last election will have no representation whatsoever on these Committees, yet a party that got 3.5 million votes will have plenty of representation on them. Does the Leader of the House think that is fair?

Lucy Powell: As the hon. Gentleman knows, his party has four other Members in this House; the House is considered in terms of its Members, not in terms of the popular vote. What he describes is a consequence of formulas that are long-standing and have brought about effective representation on many Select Committees.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I understand the mathematics—one party has over 400 Members, another has more than 120, another has 72, and so on—and I understand how Committees are made up, and how the Government and the Opposition work. However, when it comes to more parochial things, and while I am ever mindful that the Government have the right to a majority, does the Leader of the House agree that the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, the Scottish Affairs Committee and the Welsh Affairs Committee should include more representation from regional areas?

Lucy Powell: Perhaps there is an opportunity for a wider debate on the make-up of Select Committees. I can see some of the issues, but I reiterate that the Modernisation Committee needs to strike a balance between being effective and making fast progress. It needs to be representative, but not too big. I reiterate to the smaller parties my commitment to having ongoing, meaningful engagement, and to having them come regularly to the Committee to give evidence and views. Of course, the proceedings of the Committee will be fully transparent; we will have calls for evidence, and our deliberations will be regularly published for the whole House to see.

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): My hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) has just made a very good case, and has asked you a specific question: is it fair? From your lack of reply, I think it is implicit that you agree that it is not fair. You have it in your power to change that, as a matter of fairness and of listening to smaller parties. If you do not agree with that, I think constituents all over the country will find it absolutely astonishing.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): Order. Will Members refrain from using the word "you"? You are speaking through the Chair.

Lucy Powell: What is fair is that this House is made up of Members of Parliament who are elected by their constituencies, and Select Committees or Sub-Committees are made up of proportions of those Members. That is fair, and it has always been the case. As an incoming Government with a clear mandate for change—a clear mandate to rebuild trust in politics and restore respect for Parliament—and with a very large majority in the House, we could have proceeded without trying to take the House with us, not setting up a Committee but simply tabling various motions on a diktat basis, but I did not want to take that approach. I wanted to take the House with us and to represent Parliament as a whole—all parties and all Committees. That is why I commit myself again to enabling the smaller parties to have regular, meaningful engagement with the Modernisation Committee on issues of particular concern to them.

Ellie Chowns: Given that this is a Select Committee that you are setting up—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry. Given that the right hon. Lady is setting up the Committee specifically through a motion on the topic of modernisation, is this not an opportunity to demonstrate a tiny bit of that modernisation by ensuring that the smaller parties—not necessarily one member of each of them—are represented in its make-up? Would that not serve as an indication of good will towards the concept of modernisation?

Lucy Powell: As I have said, the Committee will engage with the smaller parties regularly and meaningfully. Let us say that there was one more place for a representative of a smaller party. Who would that place go to? Would that Member represent the various views of all the smaller parties? Would they represent Reform, the Greens, the Scottish National party, or the Democratic Unionist party? Everyone would have strong and differing views about that. When it comes to representing properly the range of views across the smaller parties, the commitment to ongoing, meaningful engagement, regular dialogue and inviting all the smaller parties to address the Committee on a regular basis reflects that range of views far better than having one representative on the Committee.

I also want to reassure the traditionalists among us. As I have said previously, this is not about altering the traditions and customs of this place; rather, the Modernisation Committee will build on the work of its namesakes, appointed in earlier Labour Administrations. Those predecessor Committees achieved great reforms in the way in which the Commons works: the introduction of Public Bill Committees, the arrival of Westminster Hall debates, and changes in sitting hours and recess dates. All those reforms improved scrutiny, and helped to make Parliament a more inclusive and family-friendly place of work. I would welcome suggestions from Members of further changes that it might be useful for the Modernisation Committee to consider in order to make Parliament a more effective, modern working environment that better reflects the country that it serves, and to help the public understand better the work that we do and the fact that we are here to serve them.

Let me turn to the Committee's initial work. I hope that, as one of our first steps, we will look further into the question of Members' outside employment. We will aim to consider, in conjunction with the Committee on Standards and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, whether any more changes to the rules or the code are necessary, particularly changes intended to ensure that a Member's private or personal interests do not impede his or her principal duties to the House.

However, the scope of the Modernisation Committee will extend further than second jobs. Beyond reforms of the standards system, the Committee will consider the culture, procedures and working practices of the House.

Parliament's ability to hold the Government to account is essential. Our goal should be to maximise the time available for scrutiny of the Government's legislative programme, while also ensuring that Back-Bench voices remain prominent and effective. Our constituents are best served when parliamentary time is spent both on robust scrutiny of legislation and on debates in which the issues that matter most to Members and to our constituents can be raised. I look forward to hearing the views of all Members when assessing how we can best achieve that, and whether changes are required.

Making Parliament accessible to all Members is of paramount importance. Over the years, good work has been done on seeking to tackle the inappropriate and wrong behaviour that we have all heard about and suffered from. The Speaker's Conference in the last Session did important work on the conditions for Members' staff. I am also grateful to Paul Kernaghan for his recent review of the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme, and to Alison Stanley, whose reviews preceded his. We will look at taking his recommendations forward. As recently as May this year, the Committee on Standards produced an excellent report on the standards landscape in Parliament, bringing together analysis of, and recommendations on, all elements of the standards system. Those pieces of work are essential, and they cannot be considered in isolation; we need to take a strategic approach to these issues, so that gaps in the system do not develop.

Today we have an opportunity to set out, clearly and firmly, the standards to which we should all aspire in this House—the standards that the public expect of their elected representatives. We have an opportunity to put politics back to service, and signal an immediate end to the politics of self-interest through a tightening of the rules on second jobs. We have an opportunity to establish a body that will examine the House in the round and bring it up to date. I look forward to this debate, and I am grateful for the huge amount of interest that the Modernisation Committee has already garnered.

1.46 pm

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): It is a great pleasure to address you by your new title, Madam Deputy Speaker. You and I were first elected in 2015, and it is a real pleasure to see the first of the 2015 intake assuming the Chair to preside over our proceedings. I am delighted to be at the Dispatch Box for your first appearance in the Chair—the first of many over the coming years and, I hope, the coming decades—and I congratulate you on your well-deserved election.

As the Leader of the House said at the beginning of her eloquent and detailed speech, standards and integrity are critical to this House of Commons. We are the crucible of our nation's democracy. Our constituents have sent us here to represent them, and they are entitled to expect the very highest standards of behaviour from us as Members of Parliament. We are fortunate that our standards in public life are higher than those in many other countries, but there is no room for complacency and we should strive constantly to improve and perfect the standards met in this House. That is a duty we owe the public.

I broadly welcome the initiative taken by the Leader of the House, but I want to make a couple of general points before turning to some of the specific matters before us. First, it is very important that these reforms, or indeed any reforms, command public confidence and are seen to be conducted for the best of reasons. It is important for us to proceed on a cross-party basis, because that will show that the measures are being taken not for party political reasons but for the best of reasons—as I am sure they are—and will ensure that they stick. If there is a broad cross-party consensus, whatever reforms are made will endure and survive beyond any change of Government in the future—hopefully the near future from my point of view, but not, I suspect, from the point of view of the Leader of the House.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): With that in mind, and given the need to involve all parties—we are talking not just about this Parliament, but potentially about Parliaments for decades to come—does my right hon. Friend agree that amendment (b), in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, is entirely reasonable and, indeed, addresses some of the issues that have been raised by the minor parties, because it would potentially bring them into scope?

Chris Philp: My right hon. Friend makes an excellent point, based on his long experience of the House. Amendment (b) does indeed address some of the points made in earlier interventions.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Leader of the House for the consultations we have had in the past three weeks following our appointments. She has been collegiate and constructive in our conversations, and I look forward to those conversations continuing in that spirit. But I might be permitted one very small grumble: the motion we are debating today was laid relatively late on Tuesday evening. Under the rules, it could have been laid later, so I appreciate that it was laid a little in advance, but we did not have a lot of time to discuss potential amendments between the two of us, or indeed with other parties.

I will make a request for the future. If we are considering motions that touch on these issues and seeking a cross-party approach, it would be really helpful to have some more time so as to be able to hold discussions between the Leader of the House, me and other parties to see whether we can improve the motions. I know that we have discussed this in general terms, but it is only when we see the detail of the motion in black and white—for example, the one on the Modernisation Committee—that we can discuss it in proper detail. I would appreciate having a bit more time in future, so that we can discuss that between us. That might avoid the need to table amendments, and it would enshrine the consensual approach that I hope she will take.

Let me turn to motion 4, which is listed on page 7 of today's Order Paper under "Business of the Day". As the Leader of the House has said, the motion removes two exemptions that exist in paragraph 2 of chapter 4 of the guide to the rules, which means that Members will not be able to be paid for providing advice on public policy or current affairs, or general advice about how Parliament works. That is a broadly reasonable proposition that we are happy to support.

I have two questions asking for clarification, which perhaps she will address in her summing up. First, if a Member is pursuing a paid activity that is not specifically to do with offering advice of the kind mentioned—for

[Chris Philp]

example, they might be a lawyer or doing work with a trade union on a paid basis—and the thrust of the work is not to do with that sort of activity, but they briefly undertake activity that might fall into the definition, how would the Leader of the House view that? Is there an absolute and complete prohibition, or is there some sort of materiality test that she would expect the Standards Commissioner to apply? It would be useful if she could provide clarification from the Dispatch Box.

My second question was raised by a colleague. On occasion, Members may be paid for a party political position or a trade union position, in the course of which they might give advice. To give a specific example, it has been the case in the past that the chairman of the Conservative party has been paid not as a Minister, but by the Conservative party. Would the new rule preclude that person, or indeed someone being paid by a trade union—probably on the Labour side—from offering the Conservative party or a trade union advice on public policy matters? I would be grateful if the Leader of the House could shed some light on how she envisages that working. Broadly, however, we support the changes and will not be opposing them—in the new spirit of cross-party working, which we are nervously embracing.

For complete clarity, it is worth mentioning that there is a third exemption in the rules that the Leader of the House did not refer to: limb (c) of the relevant provision, which is contained in paragraph 2 of chapter 4. Limb (c) allows Members of Parliament to be paid for making media appearances, journalism, writing books, and delivering public lectures and speeches. For the sake of complete clarity, it is worth saying that the motion before us does not make any changes to that third limb—the Leader of the House will tell me if I have got this wrong—so Members will continue to be able to be paid for those activities. She might just confirm that, but it seems a fairly clear consequence of the fact that only limbs (a) and (b) are being deleted, and not limb (c).

I will now move on to motion 5, on the Modernisation Committee, which appears on page 7 of the Order Paper. In principle, the Opposition will work constructively with the Leader of the House and her colleagues to achieve some of the objectives that she set out in her speech—we have no objection to the principle of the new Committee. Of course, we want to ensure that whatever proposals it brings forward are carefully scrutinised.

On holding the Government to account, there are lots of things about the way this House operates that are very important for Opposition parties big and small, but also for Back Benchers, including Government Back Benchers. I am sure that Labour Members have heard a bit about private Members' Bills, which provide a really good opportunity for Back Benchers on both sides of the House to bring forward what are typically quite specific Bills to bring about a change that the Government might not have time to legislate for. Back Benchers can bring forward a Bill to do something that is important to them, and I think we all want to ensure that is protected.

Similarly, the Backbench Business Committee sets out the business for Thursdays. Government and Opposition Back Benchers can go before the Committee and organise a debate on a particular topic, which I did as a Back Bencher a few years ago. It is a really good way of making sure that an issue that matters to Back Benchers gets aired not in Westminster Hall or on the Committee corridor, but right here in the Chamber. I remember organising a debate on the persecution of Christians around the world, which would not necessarily have been debated on the Floor of the House; using that mechanism, it was debated.

Westminster Hall also provides a great opportunity to raise issues of concern to a Member or their constituency. Opposition day debates are very important as well, because they offer Opposition Members a chance to hold the Government to account. There are a whole load of areas that we want to ensure are protected for Government and Opposition Back Benchers, and for Opposition parties big and small. I am sure that it is not the Leader of the House's intention to undermine the effectiveness of the existing mechanisms, but if they are considered by the Modernisation Committee, we will collectively need to ensure that the rights of Back-Bench Members of Parliament and Opposition parties are properly protected.

I want to speak to the amendments tabled in my name and those of my right hon. Friends, and I hope that the Leader of the House can offer some assurances that go beyond those she has given already. If she is able to offer such assurances, I will not move the amendments, but if her assurances are insufficiently robust, I will move the amendments and we will vote on them. I should tell Members that, typically, business of the House like this is not whipped. We will not be whipping Conservative Members, who are free to vote according to their conscience. I hope the Government are adopting the same approach and allowing Government Back Benchers to exercise their conscience. It is a long-standing tradition that the business of the House, which this is, is not whipped. We are each voting on the motion as individual Members of Parliament and not, I hope, according to a party political direction handed out by the Whips Office. That is the approach we are taking, and I hope it is the approach the Government are taking as well.

To be clear, the purpose of the amendments is not to impede or frustrate in any way the objectives that the Leader of the House set out in her speech, which we accept. In principle, we support them and will work constructively with her and her colleagues, but some concerns have been raised by my colleagues—some of whom may speak later—who have previously served on some of the Committees, such as the Committee on Standards. In the last Parliament, the Committee on Standards was chaired by the former Member for Peckham, Harriet Harman. She was the Mother of the House, and a very distinguished and highly respected Member for many years. The Committee has done a lot of work in this area, and it is quite complicated. The way that the standards regime operates is not straightforward, and the questions are complicated. When Harriet Harman chaired the Committee, she spent a lot of time thinking about this issue and published the report to which the Leader of the House referred.

Various existing Committees are relevant here, particularly the Procedure Committee, the Privileges Committee, the Standards Committee and the Administration Committee. They are all important Committees of the House and have all done important work in this area. They are all elected by the House, and at least one of them, the Standards Committee, has external members—I think one of them is a retired chief constable. The Committees

have an element of independence, and I am concerned that the establishment of the Modernisation Committee might replace, cut across or in some way supersede or impede the work of the other House Committees, which are highly independent.

With the amendments, I have tried to make a couple of things clear, so I am looking for explicit assurances from the Leader of the House on the following points. The first assurance that I am looking for is that if the Modernisation Committee is going to consider a particular matter, it will consider all the previous work done by the four Committees that I have mentioned—the Procedure, Privileges, Standards and Administration Committees—and will commission the relevant underlying Committee to do a fresh report on the matter in hand and report up to the Modernisation Committee. I think that is what the Leader of the House has in mind, and it is what she said to me privately, if I understood her correctly, but I would be grateful if she could be explicit and make it clear on the record that that is how she intends it to work.

The second important assurance is that the views of the Speaker will always be sought and fully taken into account on matters that are relevant to the work of the Committee. The Speaker is elected by all of us—unanimously, as it happened—and his views and the views of the Deputy Speakers are important.

The third assurance is that matters that would ordinarily fall to the House of Commons Commission will not be usurped, as it were, by the Committee. The Leader of the House said to me previously that the functions of the House of Commons Commission are not defined, but they are in the House of Commons (Administration) Act 1978.

In amendments (b) and (c), I propose that the Chairs of the Procedure, Privileges, Standards and Administration Committees be added to the Committee so that it has 18 members rather than 14. That would make sure that there is an opportunity for a smaller party to serve in that capacity and that the expertise of those Chairs comes directly to the Committee.

In addition, I propose that the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards attends the Committee. They would not be a member, because they would have to be a Member of Parliament to be a member of a Select Committee, but an attendee or an observer, so that the commissioner could offer his or her opinion on the matters before the Committee, receive papers, and give other assistance as required.

All those amendments are designed to ensure that the existing Committees are properly taken into account and involved, and that their voice is heard, because they are important Committees with a lot of experience. If someone looks at some of these issues at first blush, such as second jobs, they might think that they are quite straightforward, but often they are not. There are all kinds of questions about people who have family businesses or a farm, or people who practise medicine or are doctors, that require careful thought. I do not want the work that has been done previously and that will be done in future to be lost.

I am asking the Leader of the House to give explicit assurances. In her opening speech, she gave general assurances that those Committees have a vital role, and that the Modernisation Committee would draw heavily on their work and not duplicate what they do, but I am asking for the specific assurances that I have just set out. If she can give all those assurances, or a substantial amount of them, I will not move the amendments, because I want to proceed in a spirit of cross-party harmony if at all possible. The Opposition stand ready to work constructively on these issues to ensure that Parliament's reputation remains the highest of any Parliament anywhere in the world.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Ghani): Harmony is in all of our gift.

2.3 pm

Ian Lavery (Blyth and Ashington) (Lab): It is great to see you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is my first time in the Chamber with you in the Chair and I wish you all the best for the future.

I welcome this Government motion—it is great being on the Government side for the first time in 14 years—which fulfils another manifesto pledge within only a few days of the election. The introduction of a Modernisation Committee has already caused a lot of interesting discussion about its make-up, who should or should not be on it and why. Its introduction is important because standards and integrity in public life are important. Trust in politics is at an all-time low and trust in politicians is at rock bottom. We need to change that. The introduction of the Committee, together with other elements in the Labour party manifesto, will make a huge difference.

I will focus on second jobs. We should never forget the responsibilities and obligations that come with being an elected representative—a politician and Member of Parliament—in this mother of all Parliaments in the mother of all democracies. We should never forget what the general public put into us and their belief that we are their representative and voice in here. Many people who do not have a voice, particularly in deprived areas, put everything they have into the fact that their MP represents them fairly and justly in the Commons. That is important.

Being an MP is not a hobby; it is not something that people can just fancy doing. Perhaps people want to come on a Monday afternoon or a Monday night and leave as soon as they can, and they plead with the Whips to get away, but this is a full-time job plus. If it is not a full-time job plus for people, my view is that they are not doing the job. If someone is elected as a Member of Parliament with 70,000-odd constituents, that is a full-time job. I cannot understand how other people have been able to take up other jobs and occupations, and see being an MP as something that tops up their massive salary elsewhere, but that is what has happened and continues to happen.

I am sure hon. Members present will agree that when we were knocking on doors during the election campaign, people would often answer—99.9% of them were very polite—and say, "You're all the same." I was told a few times, "You're all liars. Whatever you say beforehand, once you get into the Commons, you're all liars." I took great exception to that, but that is the general public's perception. They think that MPs are greedy, they are liars, they are all the same, they want to make as much money as they can, and they are not bothered about the people they represent. That is what we have to try to clean up. I plead with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to make that a priority of the Modernisation Committee. We have to clean up politics.

[Ian Lavery]

We are not all the same. The vast majority of people in the Commons and who are elected are genuine, decent people who are there to represent their constituents and make life better, even though that is difficult at times, but there is a huge lack of faith in politicians and politics.

Many people feel as though Members of Parliament have a decent wage, but Members with second jobs allow the perception and the narrative that MPs are selfish and greedy to continue. I am sure there are MPs who are greedy, but the general perception is that everyone is the same. When I was working at the pit, I never in a million years thought that I would be on a salary of £91,346. It is a fortune—an absolute fortune—and we have to work for it and for our constituents. The average UK salary is £35,828—in the north-east, where I live, it is under £30,000—so £91,346 is a fortune. We are paid fortunes, man! We are nearly millionaires. I know that is not true, but I make the point.

In areas of greater social deprivation, no matter what we say or do, where we perform or where we do not, how many surgeries we hold and how much casework we have, we are seen as "just one of the MPs in London", who do not care once we get that train, bus or car to the House of Commons; it is as if we become different people. In 2023, the Office for National Statistics deemed 51% of households in Northumberland to be suffering some form of deprivation. Last year, Sky News reported that MPs earned £17 million from second incomes. That is a lot of money when many people we represent use food banks, claim in-work benefits and are suffering greatly as a consequence of the cost of living crisis, caused by 14 years of destruction by the Conservative Government. The figure of £17 million from second incomes is enormous.

The former Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, earned £4.8 million from writing speeches in his last year in the previous Parliament. I have a simple question: how can someone make £4.8 million during a parliamentary year, when they are supposed to be meeting constituents? What spare time might they have? I conclude that, in many ways, such an elected representative is not doing what they should be. Another former Prime Minister, Theresa May, made £2.5 million in the last year of the previous Parliament. Exactly the same issue arises. A former Conservative Minister earned £6 million as a commercial barrister since being elected to Parliament. People should not be making fortunes as lawyers when they are supposed to be in the House, determining legislation and representing their constituents. Members of Parliament should be in the House representing the people who voted for them, whether on education matters, employment or the cost of living crisis. There is enough to fill five days a week from 9 o'clock in the morning till 10 o'clock at night. Where any MP can find spare time is beyond me.

I hope the Leader of the House can guarantee that cleaning up politics is the motion's No. 1 priority. As I have said, I believe that most people who are elected to the House are here for the right reasons. By the way, MPs have to have skins like rhinos because we get hammered right, left and centre, regardless of what we vote, or do not vote, for.

The motion is a great way forward and I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has tabled it. It will address the issues I have raised. We lost credibility through the sleaze that happened, particularly during covid. People believed that all MPs were making but not obeying the rules. We must change that perception. The Modernisation Committee, along with other measures in the Labour manifesto, will go a long way towards restoring trust with the general public. It is much needed.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

2.14 pm

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair—congratulations on your election.

It is important to be here today to debate what we can do to improve politics. The public who sent us here expect that. We know that something needs to be done and I hope that the Government will live up to their aspiration to offer change. Last week, the Leader of the House was kind enough to mention our previous work together on the exclusion ban. I am pleased to confirm that I, too, look forward to continuing those cross-party efforts in this Parliament. My hon. Friend the Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord) will speak about second jobs later, so I will focus my remarks on modernisation and the Modernisation Committee.

The Modernisation Committee that the previous Labour Government set up was not uncontroversial and we should recognise that the Committee will not have an elected Chair; it will be chaired by the Leader of the House. However, as an Opposition party member, I have had positive engagement with the Leader of the House. It is important to ensure that the Committee acts in the best interests of the House and does not supersede the remit of other Committees, such as the Committee on Standards, which has lay members at its heart.

The motion is about restoring trust in this place and in our system. We know that that is needed just by looking at engagement in the recent general election. Voter turnout overall was only 59.8%—only six in 10 registered voters either thought it was worth engaging with our democratic system or could do so. In many constituencies, the proportion was even lower—in some, it was as little as four in 10. It is not hard to see why, when we look back at the last Parliament.

I was a new Member in 2019. We came in straight off the back of the divisions of Brexit. Normal life and Parliament were then paused during the height of the pandemic. Just a matter of weeks after we were back in this place following the second lockdown, the former Member for North Shropshire, Owen Paterson, was found by the House to have breached the rules on lobbying, and the then Government tried to change the rules in relation to House business to allow him to escape censure.

Following that, I secured an emergency debate on standards under Standing Order No. 24. For new Members' information, in order to secure an emergency debate, 40 Members must stand up in support of the application. I am pleased to say that, given the increase in Liberal Democrat numbers, I could muster the numbers from my own party now, but in 2021 I was pleased that MPs from the now Government as well as from the Opposition supported my application for a debate on standards. Looking back at that debate in preparation for today, I saw that I closed with the following remarks:

"This is about trust. It is about trust in the Government that they will represent the House and not the Government in House business, and it is about trust in us as our constituents' representatives.

That trust, once eroded, is very difficult to regain. Trust in our politics has been eroded in this past week. That includes all of us here in this House. On behalf of all our constituents, we must do all in our power to do our best to rebuild that trust as we take the next steps on standards." —[*Official Report*, 8 November 2021; Vol. 703, c. 81-2.]

Sadly, that did not happen, despite our best efforts. Personally, I am proud that my amendment to our Standing Orders to stop MPs voting on their own censure motions, as the former Member for North Shropshire did, was passed. With the support of the Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Birmingham Yardley (Jess Phillips) and the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy), who is in her place, the amendment to the exclusion motion was passed earlier this year. I hope that that decision by the House sent a message about the seriousness with which we in this place view safeguarding. Despite some improvements, we still had rule breaking—and, indeed, law breaking, bullying, sexual harassment, and a string of serious questions about conflicts of interest. It is important to recognise that we are all tarnished by that brush.

The Government's proposal is also about making this place a modern workplace. It is easy for people to forget that this is not just a place where politics and policy happen, but a place of work—not just for us here in the Chamber, but for hundreds if not thousands of MPs' staff, as well as the House staff who support us. Indeed, as we start this new Parliament with a new intake of MPs, the churn of staff will be significant.

Websites advertising political vacancies are currently overflowing with opportunities, but I cannot help but wonder after the past few years whether people will want to work here. Can this be seen as an attractive workplace, where people can be not only safe, but secure, and where they can forge a meaningful career? I am sure that we all know people who we think were capable—in fact more capable than ourselves—of being effective MPs, but who took the decision not to put themselves forward for election. On that, I hope the Leader of the House will agree, perhaps as part of the Committee's work or just generally, to implement the Jo Cox Civility Commission recommendations in relation to the abuse of elected representatives.

I have the pleasure of being Chief Whip to 71 MPs, having welcomed 57 new colleagues to these Benches. I know that the bad behaviour of some caused a lack of trust in all of us. I was pleased to hear the Leader of the House commit the Modernisation Committee to implementing the independent review of the ICGS published in May. I want to draw the House's attention to the third recommendation, which says that if someone makes a complaint to a party about something that falls under the remit of the scheme, the party has to pass it on to the ICGS to be dealt with, rather than attempting to resolve it internally.

I am very aware that the violins for Whips are very tiny, but those Whips do have a difficult role to play in providing pastoral care and looking at discipline. For me, it makes perfect sense to ensure that, where there has been inappropriate behaviour, there is a guarantee of an independent review. I am pleased to say that what is proposed in this recommendation is already part of the new Liberal Democrat parliamentary party standing orders, and I would be happy to sign a public declaration accordingly on that basis.

I also urge the Leader of the House to commit to implementing the next steps recommended by the Speaker's Conference, which reported last year. I had the privilege of sitting on the Conference and can attest to the time and cross-party work that went into that report. These packages of changes together would create something much closer to a modern human resources system, which will benefit staff and MPs. I think the public accept that MPs are different, in that we are not employees, but they also expect us to adopt modern HR practices where possible.

The underlying point for me, and something that I hope our new MPs can take on board among the excitement and honour of being in this place, is this: our jobs are unusual, but that does not make us special or different when it comes to upholding basic standards. I say that as a former police officer who was also not an employee during that time. It does not give us free rein to treat others poorly. We must not break the rules; in fact, we ought to be aspiring to a higher standard—to be exemplary—because of these unusual and wonderful jobs that we get to hold and do for our constituents.

We also need to look at the practices and support in place to allow Members to carry out their work effectively. I was disappointed to hear, for example, that the nursery in Parliament can offer places only from 2026. Given that increasing numbers of new Members with family responsibilities are coming here, we need to ensure that we give people the support to carry out that really important job to the best of our abilities.

Let me return now to the motion and the question of what the Modernisation Committee should be considering. Modernisation is not just about standards and behaviour and making this a 21st-century workplace, but about making this a modern system fit for policy decisions to be made for the benefits of our constituents. We want a workplace that ensures that democracy works.

The first proposal that I ask the Leader of the House to consider might not be in her party's best interests as it wants to power through its first 100 days, but in the spirit of putting our democracy first, I urge her to be open to revisiting the Wright reforms and reviewing the determination of House time. The 2009 report recommended that a House Business Committee, made up on a Cross-Bench basis, be able to decide how much time is given to scrutinising Government legislation. That may sound boring and technical, but it could be revolutionary. The Government would still be able to set the agenda and bring forward their manifesto and their legislation, but they could not tell us in the Opposition how much time we should take to properly scrutinise things. The Wright reforms were aimed at ending sleaze and making Parliament and the role of Parliament more meaningful. Those goals remain ever more relevant today.

Implementing this last change from the Wright reforms would make MPs more powerful in representing their constituents. It would connect us in a meaningful way, and allow the public to see that MPs are working on their behalf. It would certainly improve debate—something that I am hoping will improve in this new Parliament. It would make us more open and allow the public to truly understand the nuances and difficulties that have to be handled in legislation. Indeed, in that way, it would also benefit the Government. A modern Chamber of representatives also needs to be fairly elected. How many times have we heard someone sigh on the radio or in the

[Wendy Chamberlain]

pub and moan that politicians are all the same—that nothing ever changes, and that one candidate will inevitably win, so there is no point in even engaging?

There has been so much optimism in Parliament since the general election and new Members have been returned. I want to ensure that we spread that optimism out to each and every voter—a sense that they matter and that politics and Parliament are for them. A fair voting process is the absolute basic step that we need to take. I heard the comments of the hon. Member for Ashfield (Lee Anderson) earlier in the debate. I assure him that the Liberal Democrats have, for the first time ever, delivered a number of MPs that reflects the vote share that they had in the general election. We will await the outcome of the Electoral Commission's report on the most recent election before we draw any conclusions, especially when it comes to voter turnout.

In conclusion, my party and I look forward to engaging further with the Modernisation Committee, and urge the Leader of the House not to narrow its remit. Modernising this place is a big job, but it is surely a worthwhile one. If we can get that right, we rebuild the trust that underpins our democracy, and make the laws and policies that come from this place all the better for it.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I now call Jack Abbott to make his maiden speech.

2.26 pm

Jack Abbott (Ipswich) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak. Let me say congratulations and welcome to your place.

I have been moved and inspired by so many contributions over the past few days, and it is an immense privilege to be making the first maiden speech of today. I also offer my best wishes to the hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Patrick Spencer), who will also be making his maiden speech today. Not only is he my neighbour, but he is representing a place that is really close to my heart.

I am incredibly proud to be making my maiden speech as the new Member of Parliament for Ipswich. However, this is not my first contribution in this House. Yesterday, I asked a question at PMQs, highlighting the huge potential that Ipswich possesses but saying that, after 14 years of neglect, we desperately needed Government support to help revive our town centre.

However, corners of social media instead focused on a very gentle joke I had made, when I pointed out that my home county of Suffolk once again had a premier league football team, unlike our friends north of the border in Norfolk. One keyboard warrior in particular took umbrage at that. His name is Ed Balls, and apparently he used to work here. He said that Norwich has had a 15-year unbeaten run in the Old Farm derby—a run that will now, sadly, be extended due to Ipswich being promoted to the premier league and Norwich getting knocked out in the play-offs last season. I am sure that that will be a bitter pill for Town fans to swallow as they visit Anfield, the Tottenham Hotspur stadium, the Etihad and Old Trafford next season. Ed's tweet also represented my most significant celebrity beef on social media since Steve Brookstein—yes, the first winner of "The X Factor" nearly a decade ago.

Ipswich has a rich and long history—so rich and long, in fact, that I am going to use this as an opportunity to settle an old score. Now that Colchester has vacated its town status, I am laying claim to Ipswich being the oldest continuous town in England. No, I have not checked that with the House of Commons Library, as I might have been given an answer that I did not want to hear, but two minutes of searching online tells me that I have a decent chance of being right—and I presume that, as I am now stating it as fact in Parliament, it now becomes true.

Thomas Wolsey is arguably Ipswich's most famous son, and we in Ipswich have been celebrating his legacy throughout the past year through the Wolsey 550. Wolsey does not always get the praise he deserves. Climbing the greasy pole will not win you many friends—something to which Members of this House will attest, I am sure. However, his story, rising from humble beginnings to becoming one of the most powerful statesmen in England, was remarkable, and he left his imprint on our town too.

Ipswich can also lay claim to Ralph Fiennes, Constance Andrews, Thomas Gainsborough, Jean Ingelow, Brian Eno, Edith Cook and even Richard Ayoade, to name but a few. My job over the coming years will be ensuring that kids growing up in Ipswich today get their chance to make their dreams a reality, so that when my successor comes to make their maiden speech, they have a few more names to mention too.

I would also like to mention my predecessor, Tom Hunt. While an MP, Tom often spoke about being neurodiverse, and was open about challenges that he faced growing up. He looked to tackle some of the stigma that still exists, and that is an incredibly powerful thing for a Member of Parliament to do. On election night, Tom charitably mentioned our shared commitment to improving the lives of children with special educational needs and disabilities, an issue that I have campaigned on for many years in Suffolk. I will now use my role to fight for those families here in Westminster.

The SEND crisis is a national issue, and I know many colleagues from across the House will have heard countless stories about the struggles that families have had to endure to access the services that should be theirs. In Suffolk, we have had a decade of the most grotesque and repeated failures. I remember five years ago, after another damning report, the front page of our local paper, the *East Anglian Daily Times*, showed the faces of just some of the children and families who had been so badly failed by a broken system, with the heartbreaking, desperate headline, "We must be heard".

As ITV's report shows today, so little has changed half a decade later. Those children and their families have still not been heard. This is not just about the educational impacts on children, immense though they may be. It is also about the exhaustion, desperation and isolation that families suffer, day in, day out; the months—years, even—battling for an education, health and care plan; the time spent waiting by the phone, or checking emails, hoping that they might finally get some positive news; and the energy they have to find just to try to navigate this broken system, fight through tribunals, and submit mountains upon mountains of new documentation and information, all while trying to care for their family.

As a Labour Government, we cannot let the suffering of vulnerable children and their families continue. It will be my personal mission in this place to fight this inequality

and injustice. If I can make one final plea on this issue, as a former teaching assistant and proud GMB MP, I urge that when we talk about the crisis in retention and recruitment of teachers, we include specialist and support staff in the conversation. They are crucial to breaking down barriers to opportunity, too.

I would like to touch on another subject that is incredibly important to me: the energy transition. This is not just an environmental necessity but an economic imperative. It can boost our economy, reduce bills, ensure greater security and deliver the well paid jobs that we need. With GB Energy, we will be able to achieve that. If Britain is to become a world leader in this area, as the Labour party has pledged, I want Ipswich and Suffolk to be right at the heart of this national renewal. Why should we not be? Over the coming years, thousands of jobs will be created in new nuclear at Sizewell, in offshore wind and in solar. I am unapologetically ambitious for our town and our county. I do not want those jobs and that investment to drift away elsewhere. I want kids growing up in Ipswich, or people looking to retrain and upskill, to get those secure, well paid jobs. I want local businesses to benefit from the billions of pounds that will flow out of these projects, and I want our area to be the centre of national excellence. That is our future, if we are brave enough to grasp it.

As a Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament, it is particularly welcome to me that our commitment to community energy sits at the very heart of this mission. The greatest-ever expansion of community energy projects, delivering a million new owners of energy, will be genuinely transformational, and as a proud Co-operative party MP, I will champion the growth of such projects, so that local people will benefit from our green transition too.

Many of us are just a few weeks into our new role, and as this debate is about second jobs, I will be honest in my contribution and say that I have no idea why or how any Member of Parliament would have a second job. We all know what I am talking about. To be the Member of Parliament for Ipswich is the greatest privilege of my life, but to be frank, it is not like any other job. I think about Ipswich, and its beautiful, award-winning parks; its waterfront looking absolutely glorious on a sunny day; the music festivals that we have now, which I would have loved to have been to as a teenager—I am only slightly older now than I was then—and the fact that our town once again has a premier league football club. I might have mentioned that already.

I think about Suffolk too, the place I moved to 25 years ago. I still hang out with my friends from Debenham high school. I still play for the same cricket club, the mighty Eye and District cricket club—my batting just as terrible, and my bowling just as slow, if not slower. I still want to walk around Fram castle, and along the beaches of Southwold, Aldeburgh and Dunwich. I still pop into Coes, a family business founded nearly 100 years ago, and I love nothing better than eating at the Lighthouse restaurant, or drinking an Adnams or an Aspall in the Woolpack or the Greyhound. I am still surrounded by my friends, my family and my neighbours, not to mention a million happy memories, having been shaped and inspired by them for nearly a quarter of a century. I have no doubt that I will make some mistakes along the way, and I know that there will be some times when my constituents disagree with me, but know that everything that I do here will be out of service, friendship and love for my home, Ipswich and Suffolk.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Lincoln Jopp to make his maiden speech.

2.35 pm

Lincoln Jopp (Spelthorne) (Con): I join others in welcoming you to your place, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you for giving me the chance to make my maiden speech, and to contribute to this important debate on second jobs, speaking for the people of Spelthorne. I pay tribute to all Members who have made their maiden speeches, in particular my immediate predecessor, the hon. Member for Ipswich (Jack Abbott). He is clearly going to be a fearsome and fearless advocate for his constituents, based purely on the fact that he is prepared to risk the opprobrium of the people of Colchester, the people of Norwich, and perhaps most impressively of all, Mr Ed Balls. I congratulate him.

I thank the House staff for the impeccable welcome that they gave us all as new Members. I was, for quite a long time, a soldier, so I was brought up on the mantra that two minutes early is three minutes late. It was therefore no surprise that at five minutes to 7 on the Monday after the election, I was the first in the queue at the top of the ramp. I saw two armed police officers, but there was also a Doorkeeper, resplendent in his uniform of morning coat and gold badge, and his beard. Not knowing what to expect, I approached him. He said, "Good morning, Mr Jopp." I was beyond impressed. He continued, "You might not recognise me under this beard, sir, but I'm Matt, and I was with you in the Scots Guards in Afghanistan." I went from being impressed to being deeply touched.

Having had the chance to listen to a large number of maiden speeches, I have noticed that when the name of the Member and their constituency flashes up on the screen, that is sometimes met with a knowing smile and sometimes not, depending on the name of the seat. It is like that excellent episode of "Yes, Prime Minister" when Jim Hacker and Sir Humphrey Appleby start discussing somewhere called St George's Island. Both of them suggest that they have some form of superior insight into St George's Island, but it quickly becomes apparent that neither of them has any idea where on earth it is. Lest my maiden speech become something like that, I thought that I ought to tell the House where Spelthorne is.

Spelthorne is everything south of Heathrow airport until the Thames. We are in the administrative county of Surrey and the historic county of Middlesex. We are inside the M25 but not in London. Crazily, you can use an Oyster card to take a London bus there, but not the train. We are outside the clutches of the Mayor of London's dreaded ultra low emission zone charge, but according to the Church of England, we report to the Bishop of Kensington. Hon. Members might think that all those special circumstances would give rise to something of an identity crisis for the people of Spelthorne, but not a bit of it, because no one who lives there actually calls it Spelthorne anyway. Instead, people say they live in Staines, Stanwell or Stanwell Moor; in Ashford, Shepperton or Laleham; in Halliford, Charlton Village or Sunbury.

By the way, all hon. Members sitting in Parliament today are here thanks to a notable resident of Stanwell: Thomas, later Lord, Knyvet. It was he whom the King

[Lincoln Jopp]

dispatched to search the cellars beneath Parliament, resulting in the capture of the treacherous gunpowder plotters. Clearly, Lord Knyvet's ability to navigate this place was a great deal better than mine.

I pay full tribute to my immediate predecessor as Member of Parliament for Spelthorne, Kwasi Kwarteng, who had represented the constituency since 2010. Hon. Members will not be surprised to hear that his name came up frequently on the doorstep in the last general election. Kwasi was a much-respected Back Bencher and Minister, as well as being a charismatic performer in this Chamber. A strong advocate for small businesses in Spelthorne, he instigated the Spelthorne business plan competition, now in its 10th year.

Spelthorne people are some of the hardest-working people in the country, so it is appropriate that I should be making this speech in a debate on second jobs; many of my constituents have them. I too have had a selection of jobs. As a friend of mine recently remarked, "Blimey, Lincoln, 25 years in the Army and 10 years in private equity. Where did you see more violence?" Now I am in Parliament, with the huge honour of representing the people of Spelthorne, and I am struck by just how important that is, particularly at the moment. I am sure that all Members want to be a strong voice for their constituents and a local champion for their area, and I do too, passionately.

However, we are also here to fulfil our second jobs: to make thoughtful contributions to the national and international debate on issues of great moment, none of which is more important, in my view, than the defence of the realm, given that the world is the most dangerous it has been since the end of the cold war. We are having a defence review, which will take time; but time may be running out, and the right course of action—increasing defence expenditure—is all too clear now, let alone in 12 months' time when the review reports. I gently suggest to all Members of this House that to govern may be to choose, but it is also to act, and that the answer to autocracy is rarely more bureaucracy.

To finish on a lighter note, I hope that hon. Members now know a little bit more about Spelthorne. They are welcome to visit any time, whether to hear about the work of BP's global technology centre as it seeks to decarbonise the world, or to see the largest film studios in Europe and the second biggest in the world after Hollywood. They might instead be interested in a flutter on the horses at Kempton Park—not that we on the Conservative side of the House are allowed to bet any more—or maybe just to potter along the Thames like "Three Men in a Boat".

Madam Deputy Speaker, I said I would finish, and I do not make promises I cannot keep. I made one promise to the people of Spelthorne. It was that if they elected me, we would move to the constituency. Thanks solely to the efforts of my amazing wife Caroline, we picked up the keys to our new home in Spelthorne on Tuesday, and will have moved there by the end of the weekend. That is the first promise I have kept to the people of Spelthorne. I look forward, as I serve them, to there being many more.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Shaun Davies to make his maiden speech.

2.43 pm

Shaun Davies (Telford) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a real privilege to make my maiden speech with you in the Chair, and a delight to follow the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Lincoln Jopp) and my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Jack Abbott). I cannot promise that my speech will be as witty as theirs, but I do support a proper premier league team in Manchester United—*[Interruption.]* I have lost the House already.

It is an honour to make my maiden speech in this House as the very proud MP for my home town. Telford is where I was born and raised, and where I am now bringing up my own family. I am Telford and proud. I begin by talking about those MPs I follow. My predecessor, Lucy Allan, worked on many notable causes. I particularly pay tribute to her tireless work in respect of the Post Office scandal, and to her constituency team, who have supported the residents of Telford over the past nine years. I would also like to mention and thank my friend and mentor, my immediate Labour predecessor David Wright, who served our town and this House with passion for 14 years.

I also want to pay tribute to the first person to hold the job of MP for Telford, a great supporter and crucial adviser to me, who now sits in the other place, Lord Bruce Grocott. Lord Grocott led me on a tour of this House in 1997, when I was just 11 years old—right hon. and hon. Members may be forgiven for thinking that I look too old to have been 11 in 1997, but that is what 14 years in local government does to you.

Telford is a new town in Shropshire, one that has grown significantly since its designation as a new town in 1963. A town with a proud history and strong local identity, we are home to the west midlands' only world heritage site, the Ironbridge Gorge, the true birthplace of the industrial revolution. We have long-established communities such as Madeley, Oakengates and Dawley, which were recorded in the Domesday Book, and other proud communities too. I am of course a son of Telford, but also of Dawley, the birthplace of Captain Matthew Webb, who in 1875 become the first man to swim the English Channel. His monument in Dawley High Street says, "Nothing great is easy." Telford is great, but over recent years we have certainly not had it easy.

Despite the challenges it has faced, just like our own world champion boxer Liam Davies, Telford has continued to punch above its weight. We have delivered housing growth and economic growth. We have outstanding education, with outstanding primary schools, first-class secondary schools, and we are home to the Thomas Telford school and to state-of-the-art further and higher education facilities, with Telford College and Harper Adams University in the centre of Telford.

We have a record number of green and protected spaces. In fact, if hon. Members would like to visit Telford, joining the 3.2 million people who do so each and every year, they will notice just how green we are. We are home to millions—and I mean millions—of trees. We are known as a forest city.

In Telford we are also incredibly proud to be home to some of the biggest defence companies. Right now, Telford residents are working on tanks destined for Ukraine and distributing essential equipment, from uniform to morphine, that will be deployed across all parts of

the world to our brave armed forces. Our relationship with the armed forces is deep and strong. We are home to over 8,000 veterans—my own family have served in all three services—and our council became one of the first authorities to be awarded a Ministry of Defence gold accreditation for our work on the military covenant.

For the past eight and a half years, I have served as leader of Telford council, and we have done a lot over that time. We have regenerated our town centre, with the creation of Southwater. We have been a business-winning and business-supporting council: we are home to Besblock, which provides bricks to almost every house building company across the country, and to Aviramp, which provides airports across the world with boarding ramps; and we also provide wheelie bins to most households across the country. We have kept our council tax among the lowest of all councils in England. We have supported children with outstanding children services, delivered exceptional adult services, and been leaders within our sectors.

As well as being a council leader, I have led Labour in local government. I have chaired the cross-party Local Government Association. Indeed, I am proud to be the first former chair of the LGA to sit in this House rather than in the one down the corridor. I welcome to the House hon. Members and Friends who have served as councillors and council leaders.

In Telford, as in the rest of the country, poverty and child poverty are increasing. It is heartbreaking that almost one in four children are living in poverty. For me, that is not an academic issue; it is personal. I was in poverty as a child. I remember switching the lights off in our council house and laying on the floor as debt collectors banged on our door. I remember the embarrassment of queuing for a blue free school meal ticket as many of my friends got their paid yellow ones. That deep-down imposter syndrome remains and is very much with me today.

For too long, towns such as Telford have had their contributions to housing and job growth banked, but the investment and support that is so desperately needed to break the cycle of poverty has not arrived. Despite our housing growth, we have not had the investment needed over the past 14 years—the closure of our A&E and the relocation of our consultant-led women and children's unit being examples. I say to my constituents that I will never stop fighting to bring services back to Telford. I pay tribute to Telford Crisis Support, which works with the community and provided 238,624 meals last year—up by almost 21% on the year before. It also provides clothes, nappies and the very basics of life, offering a vital lifeline to families.

Families come in many different shapes and sizes. From the age of 11, I lived with my nan, Betty, who is and was my guiding star. Although I lived with my nan from such a young age, my parents have always been there for me, too. I was lucky to have people like my great aunty Dil, who provided me with the financial support that meant I could be the first person in my family to go to university, where I read law and qualified as a solicitor. I am so lucky to have my own family now. I am a proud dad and stepfather to Evan, Millie and Owen—my wife Elise and I see no distinction in our family.

Part of the role of councillor is to be a corporate parent. Those in state care should be considered part of all our families. In Telford, 423 young people are in our care, and we support 249 care leavers. When I was the chair of the LGA, I described the local government sector as the corporate uncles and aunties of those in care and those who have left care. What, then, is this House? What are Members of Parliament to those children in state care? Maybe we are the corporate great aunties and uncles with resources, influence and wisdom—just like my auntie. What more can we do to support our children in care? To children living in council homes, in temporary accommodation or in our care, who are picking up free school meals, food parcels and avoiding debt collectors, I say this: "If I can get here, so can you."

To provide a better future to all our children, we must reform our public sector. Yes, for some that is a dry subject, but it is the only way to fix our broken system. Reform is vital and prevention is key. The longer-term approach to investment—investing a pound now to save hundreds of pounds many times over—will be important. Investing in and focusing on the first 1,000 days of a child's life can lead to better life outcomes and massive savings to the public purse.

We must always ask ourselves how public services can best serve the public. The answer is so often with the users of those services and those who work in them. When those who have skin in the game are empowered and trusted, the results are always better. We know that so well in Telford, after the recent work of Holly, Scarlett and Joanne. For too many, our country does not work for them. Not only are they disconnected, but they feel a million miles away from this place. That allows others to exploit the void—to divide us. We—all of us—should work together, despite our political differences, to help connect this place to our citizens, so that democracy does not just survive, but thrives. I hope that I can work on that nationally in the coming months and years.

I thank the people of Telford for trusting me with the incredible honour and privilege of representing my home town. I will stand up for Telford and for them. I know that we have a long road ahead of us, but I am committed to the challenge. After all, nothing great is easy.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Right hon. and hon. Members will be conscious that a number of people still wish to get in, so unfortunately I am going to have to put a six-minute time limit on speeches from the next speaker. Obviously, Members making their maiden speech will be exempt from that limit. I call Alberto Costa.

2.54 pm

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I welcome you to your new position. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Telford (Shaun Davies) on an excellent and very detailed maiden speech. No doubt he will represent his constituents very successfully.

I am the only Member in the Chamber today who served on both the Standards Committee and the Privileges Committee in the 2019 Parliament; all of the other MPs, bar one, are no longer in the Chamber. The amount of work that we had to deal with in the last Parliament was substantial, onerous and unprecedented. As such, I welcome the comments that the Leader of the House has made and broadly support the motions that she has

[Alberto Costa]

brought before the House. However, I would like to make a couple of points that I hope she will take in the spirit of assistance in which they are intended.

In the time allocated to me, I will briefly turn first to the motion on curbing some elements of second jobs as they relate to parliamentary advice. The Leader of the House may not be aware of the background to that proposal and where it first came from. In November 2021 the Standards Committee published a report—the fourth of the Session—and annex 7 of that report contained comments made by the then Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. The Committee—myself and my colleagues—thoroughly looked at the matter on a cross-party basis and concluded that we probably wanted to recommend the banning of paid parliamentary advice or consultancy.

We looked at the wording in the House of Lords, because that is the wording that the then commissioner first looked at. That wording is broadly identical to the wording that we currently have, so in our May 2022 report we came forward with the proposal that the banning of paid parliamentary advice should align with the House of Lords code. My question to the Leader of the House is this: is it her intention to ensure that the code in the other place is amended, so that we do not have an oddity where, for instance, a Labour peer could carry on with the activities that she proposes to ban, but an MP in this House would be unable to do so? That was not the objective of the Standards Committee when we first made our proposal, so it would be very helpful if, in her summing up, she could confirm that the appropriate mirrored changes will be made in the House of Lords.

I will now turn briefly to the other, much more substantial motion. I am sorry that there is a time limit, because I had many things to say about this motion, but given that I have a very short period of time in which to speak, I will restrict my comments. As the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) touched on, we as a House should remember that the Standards Committee is unlike any other Select Committee of the House of Commons, because half of its members are lay members—people who are not Members of Parliament. The total membership of 14 means that, if we take out the Chair from voting, the lay members have a substantive jurisdiction on that Committee. Many of those lay members will undoubtedly be watching this debate.

I cannot believe that it is the Government's intention to create a Committee that will be looking at standards—even at a strategic level—that excludes lay members. When the Leader of the House was on the Opposition Benches, she was a strong believer in having lay members on the Committee, so will she look again carefully at her proposal, not only taking into account the balance of political parties but, importantly, ensuring that this new Committee has lay member representation, at least when it is discussing standards issues? My proposal is that the seven current lay members of the Standards Committee could elect one from among their number to sit on that Committee.

The other points I wanted to make were made by the shadow Leader of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), and I do not propose to rehearse them again. Suffice it to say that the Leader of the House said that the Chair of the Standards Committee, the Chair of the Administration Committee and so on would be guested on to the Committee, but if the Committee is to be an effective body that can deliver change, as she hopes, we must ensure that these people are not simply guested but that experience and knowledge is somehow brought in, perhaps with ex officio members instead of full voting members. I suggest she looks again at that proposal, and perhaps makes some welcome comments at the end.

To conclude, the proposal is a welcome one, but I urge the Leader of the House to look carefully at bringing lay members on to the Committee.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Chris Murray to make his maiden speech.

3 pm

Chris Murray (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a great honour to make my maiden speech as you take your first day in the Chair following your election. It is also a great honour to follow the excellent maiden speeches we have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Jack Abbott), the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Lincoln Jopp) and my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Shaun Davies). They have made excellent and intimidatingly good maiden speeches. Keeping up with them will be a full-time job.

The constituency I represent, Edinburgh East and Musselburgh, is geographically small but extremely diverse, comprising city centre, suburb, town and village. It stretches from the historic centre of Edinburgh along the Forth coast, and is unrivalled in both its natural and architectural beauty. It encompasses Niddrie and Lochend, hard-working communities of people who contribute much but whose talents and industry would offer yet more if opportunity allowed, held back as they are by a lack not only of work but of secure working conditions—there are lots of second jobs there! Organisations such as the Greenhouse Pantry in Craigmillar help people keep their heads above water in the cost of living crisis.

The constituency is also home to the diverse, vibrant communities of Abbeyhill, Southside and Leith Links, full of excitement and ambition but held back by a housing crisis. Edinburgh has seen the sharpest rent increases in Europe. Through Duddingston and Craigentinny, the seat stretches to Portobello and Joppa, Edinburgh's seaside, where groups such as the Porty Water Collective are fighting the scandal of sewage in our seas. I also represent Musselburgh, the honest toun—perfectly sandwiched between capital, countryside and coast—where last weekend I attended the kirkin' and sashing of this year's honest lad and lass, Billy Innes and Eilidh Bonthron.

My constituency is home to two universities: the University of Edinburgh at one end and Queen Margaret University at the other. This makes the seat both intellectually dynamic and young. Students and recent graduates make their home there, and their ideas, skills and energy make them the engine for my constituency's enormous potential.

I have been struck by the contribution of these young people. When the pandemic came, they were the group least at risk from the virus, but they unhesitatingly sacrificed so many moments in their lives to protect others. Arguably no generation has given up so much for another since the war, but to my mind their sacrifice has not been adequately acknowledged, never mind

compensated. In this Parliament, we must secure for them well-paid, interesting jobs in the industries of the future; decent affordable housing; and a climate that is not disintegrating before their eyes.

In the past, events in my constituency have ricocheted out across the world. The fiery debates of the reformation and the rational arguments of the enlightenment were incubated in my seat in centuries past. Nevertheless, I am convinced our best days lie ahead, because my community has all the raw material for a vibrant, dynamic century. The universities and their research spin-offs, in fintech and biotech, innovative start-ups in their hundreds, and huge opportunities in the energy transition and green technology are all to be found there. If we are to have the economic growth the Government are aiming for, my constituency could be a powerhouse of it.

Incorporating, as it does, the historic old town of Edinburgh, culture, hospitality and tourism form the economic backbone of my constituency, not least in August, when it plays host to the Edinburgh international festival and fringe. Am I correct, Madam Deputy Speaker, in thinking that the convention is that MPs must inform another Member when they visit their seat? In that case I expect my mailbox to melt down when everyone comes to the Edinburgh festival next month. Of course, everyone is most welcome. The Edinburgh fringe is well known for its world-class performances, but also for amateurs trying to get attention by saying something shocking—the Conservative leadership contenders will fit right in.

While my constituency has many castles, theatres and museums, the most important building in the seat, indeed in Scotland, lies at the foot of the Royal Mile in the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood. That is where the lifeblood of the Scottish political heart beats, and that is why it is fitting that I make my maiden speech as we discuss how to modernise Parliament. It is safe to say that relations between this Parliament and that one have not been good these past 10 years. That must change. I was heartened to hear in the King's Speech an agenda that will address that, just as I was when the Prime Minister's first visit was to my constituency. That speaks to a new era in Scottish politics of respect, constructive engagement and delivery, and I look forward to playing my part in it.

As society changes, so the Parliaments that represent it must change too, both in their Members and their practices. This Parliament is breaking new ground in how it represents modern Britain, not just in having the first woman Chancellor, a woman Deputy Prime Minister, and 190 Labour women MPs, but in having more minorities, more LGBT representatives, and more state-educated MPs. I am glad that in the latter two I am adding to the tally.

My generation grew up with Scottish devolution. Having two Parliaments is a fact of life for us. With the Scottish Parliament now 25 years old, there is much that this place can learn from Holyrood, and reciprocally there are things Holyrood can learn from here. No Parliament has a monopoly on modernisation; it is something to which we must all continually strive. I am pleased to see the Member of the Scottish Parliament for the Lothian region, Sarah Boyack, in the Gallery. I have learned much from her, and will continue to do so. Let our two Parliaments co-operate and learn from each other, so that they make each other better in synergy and symbiosis, rather than with rancour and anger. Let us remember as we modernise here, that this is one of several Parliaments and Assemblies in this land.

While I am discussing Scottish politics, let me pay tribute to my predecessor. Tommy Sheppard was an assiduous and dedicated constituency MP, and for that he is held in high regard by many in Edinburgh. In this place he was a dedicated champion of peace and justice in the middle east, and although he and I may take different views on constitutional questions, I hope my constituents will find continuity on both those scores. I also pay tribute to his predecessor, Sheila Gilmore, who has been dedicated to improving the lives of the people of Edinburgh, particularly the poorest, for many decades, including five years in this House. Her commitment to the community, even years after leaving office, is astounding, and rarely has a new Member been so supported by a predecessor as I have been by her.

The coming years will be critical for my constituency. If we can generate economic growth by attracting the jobs of the future, if we can ensure that people who work hard get good wages and decent conditions, and if we can seize the opportunity of the energy transition, bring opportunities for the young and take our place as a global cultural capital, then we can achieve our potential. For all its attributes, and given the challenges we face, my community needs a Government focused on its priorities. In fact, it needs both its Governments and both its Parliaments to do that. It needs both Parliaments to modernise to meet the demands of today and to not be distracted by the arguments of decades past, and Members of both Parliaments to learn from each other's practices and to spur each other on. It needs both Parliaments to compete in claiming credit for improvements in people's lives, not in casting blame for what has gone wrong. For my part, I mean to be an MP for use and not for show. Everything I do in this place will be aimed at deploying the power of government to unleash the untapped potential of my constituency.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Blake Stephenson to make his maiden speech.

3.10 pm

Blake Stephenson (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con): I congratulate you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your election and for taking your place. I thank the House for the warm welcome to the Chamber. I am grateful to be called to make my maiden speech in this debate on second jobs and the modernisation of Parliament. It is a tricky, but important subject, so in preparation I thought I would flick through "Erskine May". I popped into the Library the other day and did so, and swiftly fell asleep. I came to the swift conclusion that a bit of modernisation in this House would not go amiss. Members will find that I engage in that debate constructively and thoughtfully as we think about how this Parliament and future Parliaments should progress.

I first congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh East and Musselburgh (Chris Murray)—I have probably not pronounced that correctly, and I apologise not only to him, but to all his constituents—and thank him for that whistlestop tour of his constituency. I think I should take up the offer and go to Edinburgh in August over recess. I thank Members for all the excellent maiden speeches that have come before us. Members have set a high bar, which bodes well for this Parliament.

[Blake Stephenson]

I am sure that all newly elected Members feel as I do that we have been given a great honour in being elected. I feel that most strongly because Mid Bedfordshire has been my home for 10 years, so I am deeply grateful to the electors who placed their faith in me at the ballot box. Prior to being elected, I had a 15-year career in the City, where I was responsible for compliance and conduct, keeping overenthusiastic traders and lightning-sharp minds in check and ensuring that they stuck to the rules—although perhaps not with your aplomb, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Within the constituency, many people are doing fantastic work in public service, running businesses, farming and investing for the future in their community or their family, or both. I am here to support them all in their aspirations by championing our dynamic economy and opportunities for all.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, who is now the hon. Member for Hitchin (Alistair Strathern). He is a Bedfordshire lad who returned from London last year to win the long and hard-fought by-election in our county. After working as a maths teacher and at the Bank of England, the hon. Gentleman became the first Labour MP to represent Mid Bedfordshire. He should be very proud of that achievement, and of course I will be very proud if he remains the last Labour Member of Parliament for Mid Bedfordshire.

Except for that recent interruption, Mid Bedfordshire in its various guises has been represented in this place by Whig, Liberal and Conservative MPs. I have some big shoes to fill. Lord Boyd, who represented the constituency from 1931, was a leading advocate for decolonisation and served in Churchill's post-war Government. Stephen Hastings helped create the circumstances that led to the first steps towards the independence of Zimbabwe. More recently, Lord Lyell, who I believe is still the longest-serving Government Law Officer, was a Member up to 1997. Samuel Whitbread even represented part of the constituency, although I believe he may be more famous for founding a moderately successful brewery.

Many people pass through Bedfordshire on one of our major roads or railway lines—sadly, without a second's thought for the county. Though lying within one of the smallest counties in England, Mid Bedfordshire has in its borders a beautiful and varied landscape. The outstanding chalk escarpments of the Sundon hills, the Sharpenhoe clappers—I do not know what a clapper is—and the Pegsdon and Barton hills offer stunning views across the county. The Greensand ridge, stretching for 40 miles, offers spectacular high level walking, and in the community forest of Marston vale—one of only 13 in the UK—trees are being planted in the pits dug to supply clay to the nearby Stewartby brickworks: a great example of how we can restore and enhance our local and natural environment.

While commuters may blink and miss it, constituents are deeply passionate about our beautiful countryside, our communities and our heritage. That is why proposals to build thousands of homes on green-belt land near Barton-le-Clay, Silsoe and Gravenhurst have been met with stiff resistance from local action groups, as have proposals to concrete over Steppingley road field, a site on the edge of Flitwick that is home to skylarks, deer, badgers and hares and sits alongside semi-ancient woodland. Similar concerns exist throughout Mid Bedfordshire, whether in the green belt or not, and those communities have my full support. Let us remind ourselves that the green belt is a Labour policy, and one that I am happy to support, but not if, in the words of Lord Prescott, it is one that they intend to build on.

As beautiful as Mid Bedfordshire is, it is not a sleepy hollow. It is within easy reach of Cambridge, Oxford and London. We host the world-class Cranfield University, numerous start-up technology companies, a Nissan research and development site, the Millbrook proving ground—for those who fancy a nice trip on a wobbly road—and Lockheed Martin, which is a significant defence partner working hard to keep us all safe at night. We are home to a vibrant high-tech economy and boundless opportunities to get on. I hope to spend time in this House and at home ensuring that our economy is working for young people from modest backgrounds like mine.

Let me conclude my tour of Bedfordshire by mentioning our county's son, John Bunyan. He was the legendary puritan evangelist—not quite a man after my own heart—who was famous for writing "The Pilgrim's Progress" in the 17th century while incarcerated for preaching without a licence. After the Bible, his novel is said to be the most published book in the English language—a record that perhaps one former Member for Mid Bedfordshire is intent on challenging. No doubt, if a ban on second jobs for Members comes to pass, those on both sides of the House may find that they also have a natural flair for writing similarly successful fiction.

We are a large intake of new Members. We have an opportunity to challenge the status quo and to breathe fresh life into our politics. Modernisation must be thoughtful, reflecting a consensus, which certainly emerged in my election campaign, that our politics must improve. But we must recognise that this place needs the experience and knowledge that comes from working in industry, commerce, law and, yes, even in politics, lest we become a House of politicians interested only in the next election, the next poll and the next headline. That is not what the people out there want. They want a competent Government to address the issues that they are concerned about and an effective Opposition to hold that Government to account. I will play my full role in scrutinising the plans that come forward to ensure that the Parliament that I am so proud to be a Member of embodies the standards in public life that the people of Mid Bedfordshire and across the country expect.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Alex Barros-Curtis to make his maiden speech.

3.20 pm

Mr Alex Barros-Curtis (Cardiff West) (Lab): I welcome you to your place, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you for allowing me to make my first contribution to the House in this important debate. In my previous role I was proud to play my part in changing the Labour party, so it is apt that I should give my maiden speech as we discuss changing and modernising this House. I associate myself with the comments of my hon. Friends and other Members and congratulate all those who have made their maiden speeches, both today and in the past few days.

It is a privilege to stand here as the newly elected Member of Parliament for Cardiff West. It is not an exaggeration to say that I stand in the shadow of some

impressive individuals when it comes to my predecessors. I am the fifth individual since world war two to have the honour of representing Cardiff West; of my four predecessors, three stood under the Labour banner and went on to forge formidable careers here in Westminster. One served as Speaker of this House. Rhodri Morgan, my predecessor but one, served in this House for nearly 14 years before beginning his next act as First Minister of Wales, serving in that role for over nine years. Rhodri was a political giant, and very much loved and missed by my constituents.

As for my immediate predecessor, Kevin Brennan, as well as serving in a number of ministerial roles in the last Labour Government, his single biggest impact in this House might be his membership of the parliamentary rock band MP4. So we have a Speaker, a First Minister and a lead guitarist—for me, the pressure really is on. In all seriousness, Kevin served Cardiff West with distinction for 23 years, and he is a quality act to follow. That quality was clearly spotted by the House when Kevin gave his maiden speech, on 20 June 2001. After finishing it, Peter Bottomley, the last Parliament's Father of the House, commented that Kevin

"will be one of the stars of the Parliament. He has the sort of speaking talent that probably guarantees his joining the Whips Office and being shut up for a bit."—[*Official Report*, 20 June 2001; Vol. 370, c. 129.]

Mr Bottomley was prescient because, following the 2005 general election, Kevin was indeed appointed an Assistant Government Whip. I want to place on the record my thanks to Kevin and his wife Amy for their generosity, advice and support.

Having listened to a number of maiden speeches over the past few days of debate, I believe it has become a tradition to refer to one's constituency as the most beautiful in all the land. As this place is steeped in tradition, with perhaps a sprinkling of modernisation to come, I would not want to disappoint, so I can confirm that Cardiff West is indeed the most beautiful—or, as we say in Welsh, prydferth or hardd.

Until this election, Cardiff West existed entirely within the boundaries of the city of Cardiff, but following the most recent set of boundary changes, the ward of Pontyclun in Rhondda Cynon Taf now forms part of it. Cardiff West's gain is Pontypridd's loss, as Pontyclun is a vibrant community, full of good people and a thriving high street that we must strive to maintain. On that note, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Alex Davies-Jones) for her work representing Pontyclun in the last Parliament.

Moving east, there is a diverse, prydferth and hardd constituency. In one corner is Llandaff, a city within a city that houses the beautiful Llandaff cathedral, one of two cathedrals in Cardiff. In St Fagans, we find the St Fagans National Museum of History, one of Europe's pre-eminent open-air museums. In Canton there is a thriving cultural scene, including Chapter arts centre and the Corp.

Cardiff West also regularly punches above its weight when it comes to sport. It is home to Glamorgan cricket, Sophia gardens, the athletics stadium at Cardiff international sports stadium and Cardiff City stadium, the home of Cardiff City football club and the Welsh national team. Cardiff West also houses Riverside, Pontcanna, Fairwater and Pentrebane, Pentyrch, Radyr and Morganstown, Gwaelod-y-Garth, Ely and Caerau, to name but a few. Each area is defined by its own unique character, but the common thread that runs through them is a proud community, replete with families, local activists, sports clubs, volunteers and faith leaders, all committed to serving the communities they call home. That became clear to me during the election campaign. As their newly elected Member of Parliament, I will work with anyone who genuinely seeks to support Cardiff West.

In the past few days, the Labour Government have set out their plans to deliver on the commitments we made to the British people at the election. Throughout that election campaign I met countless constituents who demanded change, but not just for change's sake. They wanted change with a purpose: change that would improve their lives by making work pay, by delivering a new deal for working people, by rebuilding their broken public services, by making their streets safer, by offering a more inclusive and tolerant discourse, and by making an offer of a future for our country that is more positive, more hopeful and more honest.

Of course, for us to deliver that change we must embody that change, and we need only look around the Chamber to see that. In this Parliament, 263 women were elected, representing a record high of just over 40%. This is also the most diverse Parliament by race, and this Parliament includes the largest cohort of LGBT+ Members of any Parliament in the world. Progress does not always move in a straight line, but if one looks around this Chamber and considers the tenor of maiden speeches we have heard in these last few days of debate, we see that there are indeed reasons for hope. At the outset of this new Parliament, that deserves special mention; while we can disagree in politics, we should always strive to do so with decency, honesty and respect. Doing so is not a sign of weakness, but of confidence in ourselves.

Being elected has been both thrilling and humbling in equal measure; I am sure that many of my colleagues across both sides of the House have experienced not dissimilar thoughts and feelings. However, I am not so blinded by the excitement of being elected to this great place to forget that this is not about me. It is about what I can and will do to repay the trust of my constituents and to fight for the causes that matter to them—causes such as defending our arts and culture, particularly the cuts that threaten the existence of the Welsh National Opera; supporting our Welsh and Westminster Governments to cut the levels of child poverty, recruit the new teachers we need and cut NHS waiting times; unlocking our green energy potential to deliver cheaper and greener energy; and making work pay by delivering on that new deal for working people. Ultimately, of course, it is not just about what we each say; it is about what we do. For so long as I am here, I will work hard for a stronger and fairer Cardiff West.

Finally, I want to thank those people but for whom I would not be here giving this maiden speech. The first thanks go to my family: my Mum, my Dad and my sister. My family have inspired my values of public service and have made me a better person. The other thanks go to my husband, who is up in the Gallery with my sister. We celebrated our six-year wedding anniversary during the final days of the campaign, but we actually met more than 12 years ago at a time when I was still struggling to acknowledge, let alone accept, that I was gay. Through all that, he had the love and patience to support me in accepting who I was and to be honest about that. I truly would not be here without his love, support

[Mr Alex Barros-Curtis]

and friendship. As a proud Welshman and a proud gay man, I am excited to play my part in the Government's programme of national renewal. In so doing, I will endeavour to represent Cardiff West to the very best of my abilities.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Ellie Chowns.

3.27 pm

Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I welcome you to your place. I pay tribute to the very moving and passionate maiden speeches we have heard from across the House today. I probably do not have time to go through all the details in them, but I shall remember not to fall asleep in the Library. I recognise the passion with which many people spoke about defending their constituents' interests and, in particular, tackling child poverty.

I would like to speak to the formal topic of the debate: the modernisation of the House. I very much welcome the initiative by the Leader of the House in setting up the Committee and I look forward to feeding into it in whatever way possible, including through this debate. Modernisation should be about how we can become more efficient and effective as a House, and therefore more productive in our roles as MPs. That is what we have been elected to do. As I mentioned, I hope the Committee can be as representative as possible. It strikes me that as more than half the MPs are now newbie MPs—as, indeed, am I—there is perhaps an opportunity to ensure that the Committee is balanced in that way, so that the voices of new MPs, who are able to draw on a wide range of experience and perhaps have fresh eyes and fresh insight, which I think was mentioned in one of the maiden speeches, are represented.

From my perspective as a newly elected Member, I would like to offer observations on three elements of how the House operates, to feed into the deliberations of the Committee. I would like to speak about sitting, speaking and voting—very day-to-day activities. I have spent only three weeks in this House, but I know from conversations in the corridors that my observations are shared by other Members in all parts of the House.

My first point is about sitting. We are in a Chamber that is far too small to fit us all. I know that is not a novel observation, but as a newly elected MP, I find it really striking; it is quite extraordinary. I have served as a councillor for several years, and I have served as a Member of the European Parliament. In each of those chambers, we would have our own seat and our own desk, and we could plug in our devices, so that we could work off electronic materials. It seems extraordinary that we do not have space in this Chamber for each of us to sit and speak. Indeed, I was amazed to discover that there are seats in this Chamber on which we can sit, but from which we cannot speak. That seems an extraordinary limitation on the ability for everybody to participate in our debates. Would it not be wonderful if we all had somewhere to sit?

The limitations on space also lead to some frankly rather ridiculous behaviour, such as the practice of queuing up at the opening of the Chamber to place a prayer card and book a seat. At times of great demand, such as the King's Speech or Prime Minister's questions, that leads to a contestation over space that simply would not happen if we had enough space for everybody.

While I am on the topic of prayers, there is a practice in this place of having Christian prayers. As the daughter of preachers, I am very familiar with those, but I suggest that in this day and age, in a country of all faiths and none, it might be time to consider an approach a little more like Radio 4's "Thought for the Day", with a moment of reflection at the beginning of the day and an opportunity to hear views from people from a range of faiths, and indeed with none.

I will move on to speaking. I am glad that a time limit has been introduced for speeches today; I am used to speaking in chambers with a time limit. Time limits aid the democratic process, because they mean that everybody gets a fair crack of the whip and an equal chance to have their voice heard in the Chamber. If we had more time limits, there would be more opportunities for people to participate, and perhaps MPs would be keener to participate in debates. There is also the process of getting a slot. I have been busy bobbing up and down to attract your attention, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I did for five solid hours last week without managing to attract the Speaker's attention. In recent days, a number of Members have wanted to make a maiden speech but have not been able to do so. The practice of bobbing might be good for the glutes, but I suggest that it is not so good for democracy. Perhaps we could find a more efficient way of allocating speaking time.

While we are on the topic, I note that the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) spoke about the processes for Government or non-Government control of speaking time. An initiative to increase Back-Bench influence over the allocation of speaking time would be very useful.

My final point on speaking is about the culture in this House. In the few short days that I have spent in this Chamber, I have witnessed everything from excessive deference to, frankly, braying. As other Members have said in their maiden speeches, we really need to clean up politics. We really need to show that we are all here to debate in as positive a spirit as possible, as the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Mr Barros-Curtis) said.

It is extraordinary to me that we do not have electronic voting. We have a semi-system. While I have been here, I have participated in five votes, which has taken at least an hour and a quarter. If we add up all our votes, it basically comes to a month of MP time. It is an utter waste of time and totally unproductive. We could be getting through far more. Let us get rid of the voting Lobbies. We can double the physical size of the Chamber if we get rid of them—that is a genuine, practical suggestion. We can take the opportunity of the decanting process and having newbie MPs to really modernise how we operate here.

Finally, if we want to be a truly modern House of Commons, we need proportional representation.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Sureena Brackenridge to make her maiden speech.

3.34 pm

Sureena Brackenridge (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): May I offer you my congratulations, Madam Deputy Speaker, and also thank you for giving me the

opportunity to make my maiden speech and, in particular, to make it during this fundamentally important debate, which will ensure that we are not just a Government of service but a House of service. In my speech I will mention many people who have done precisely that—served others. It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Ellie Chowns), and to hear such excellent maiden speeches from Members on both sides of the House.

It is an honour to serve the community where I was born, raised my family, and worked in local secondary schools as a science teacher and then a deputy headteacher. I pay tribute to my predecessors, Jane Stevenson and—given parliamentary boundary changes—Eddie Hughes as well. I thank them for their faithful service to our communities. I also wish to honour the late Ian Brookfield, former leader of Wolverhampton city council, who sadly passed away at the age of 57 after a short illness. Ian filled any room, and was a political giant. His legacy of celebrating the diversity of our city and fighting for the vulnerable will not be forgotten.

Take a mere glance at the roll call of previous MPs who have served Wolverhampton North East, and you soon realise that there are big shoes to fill. Jennie Lee, who when first elected was too young to vote, was instrumental in establishing the Open University. Ken Purchase, who served for 18 years, was a deeply respected constituency MP. Ken played a pivotal role in the campaign to save our beloved Wolverhampton Wanderers football club. Losing our club would have been devastating for the local community, not only in economic terms but in terms of our identity, as a city that truly loves our football club. A returning Member, my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Emma Reynolds), was a Minister in the last Labour Government, and I know that she will serve tirelessly in this Government.

The long and rich history of my constituency is a fascinating story of how a small village established in 985 AD grew into the wonderful, diverse city it is today. It is a history carved out of wars, plagues, and economic booms and busts; a story of determined perseverance, progress and community cohesion. These values are a testament to what makes any place great: its people. The dawn of the industrial revolution brought factories and canals to Wolverhampton and Willenhall. We were ideally located to become one of the major regions involved in coal and metal production, especially the production of locks, keys and enamelware. We saw growth in manufacturing, with companies such as Guy Motors, Goodyears, and the Chubb and Yale lock makers. We were at the heart of the "workshop of the world". If it was mechanical, we built it.

My journey to stand here today started with my parents migrating from Fiji as young adults. I was born and raised on a council estate, Ashmore Park, watching my father work all hours in demanding jobs. Times were tough back then, but they should not be that tough today. I encountered such challenges directly when I was honoured to serve as mayoress of Wolverhampton as we emerged from covid restrictions. I met extraordinary community groups and many remarkable people, including the first official freewoman of the city, Lisa Potts. Lisa protected her students at a primary school nursery from being attacked by an armed intruder. Selflessly, she placed herself between young students and the attacker, suffering horrific, life-changing injuries in the process. A George Medal recipient, Lisa remains in close contact with many of the students almost 30 years after that horrific day. With her humility, courage and compassion, she is the very definition of a hero.

Wolverhampton and Willenhall take great pride in showing our gratitude to those serving in the British armed forces, and to veterans. We have extraordinary veteran community groups and volunteers, such as Anne Partridge, a regimental sergeant-major, from the Staffordshire Regiment Association, a true leader known for getting things done. I was privileged to be part of the unveiling of the magnificent Saragarhi monument, commemorating the brave last stand of 21 Sikh soldiers from the British 36th Sikhs regiment and one Muslim cook who valiantly fought for the British Army. Unity is strength, and we see a wonderful example of that when the Guru Nanak gurdwara and St Thomas' church work together for Wednesfield in Bloom; they have amassed several gold awards.

I saw at first hand the struggles that families face every day in my former role as a deputy headteacher. I could not believe the normalisation of hardship. Schools have become daily support hubs for families who are desperate in so many ways, facing challenges that should be consigned to the dustbin of history. It is these experiences that have inspired me to stand and fight for better. I want every child to be able to take a seat at any table, regardless of their background.

This Labour Government will break down barriers to opportunity, with free breakfast clubs in all primary schools, a reformed secondary curriculum that values creative subjects, a focus on the skills needed by the future workforce, and a children's wellbeing Bill, so that children are safe, healthy, happy and treated fairly. Considering the high levels of deprivation in the schools where I worked, I cannot speak highly enough of the dedicated staff, incredible students and supportive parents. I have a message for my students: "I miss you, and I am proud of you. Remember to find what you love, and go for it with everything you have".

Finally, my humble thanks go to the electorate of Wolverhampton North East, who put their trust in me. To those who did not vote for me, please know that I am here to serve you as well. The damage done will not be fixed overnight, but the work has started. I will serve all constituents to bring the change they deserve.

3.41 pm

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Congratulations to you and your colleagues on your new roles, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wish you the very best of luck in dealing with all of us in our time here.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Sureena Brackenridge) on her excellent maiden speech, and particularly on her passionate message to her students, who I am sure miss her very much too.

I want to speak about the motions on the Order Paper. There is a huge amount I could say about the ways in which this House should be modernised; I have been speaking and thinking about it for years. I am probably one of the few Members who has spent many hours poring over the Standing Orders, considering how they could best be changed to improve this House. Not many people are quite as geeky about that as I am. However, I will not focus on that. Instead, I want to talk about the motions in front of us.

[Kirsty Blackman]

Motion 4 has been badged as a "second jobs" motion. It relates to paid employment, but it does not include the paid employment that constituents think of when they think about second jobs. They think about the Members appearing on GB News weekly, but that is not covered in the proposed changes. As has been said, constituents think about the people doing work for a financial institution, but again, that is not included in the motion.

The changes to the rules are good, but the motion should not be badged as relating to second jobs. What it does is increase the transparency and restrictions on Members of Parliament who seek to use their privileged knowledge to get paid employment. We all have knowledge of parliamentary procedure because we are MPs, and the motion prevents us from using that to get money. That is a laudable aim, but it is not the change that the House needs in order to fix the issue of second jobs. I will support the Government's changes, but they need to go far further.

I have several concerns about the motion on the Modernisation Committee, beginning with its incredibly woolly remit, which is:

"to consider reforms to House of Commons procedures, standards, and working practices; and to make recommendations thereon".

Its remit is not to modernise the House of Commons, which I would have been more supportive of. If we gave the Committee an understanding that it needs to drag the House into the 20th century—never mind the 21st century—by increasing the amount of modern working practices and the ability of MPs to represent their constituents in Parliament, that would be helpful, but the remit is not there. It is just "to make recommendations", so I am disappointed that the Government have not gone further on that.

The issue of the make-up of the Committee is significant. It is not just about the smaller parties that are not the first, second or third in the House wanting to have a voice, but about the way that the Government have chosen to arrange the Committee and the number of Members they have chosen to have on it, which mean they have guaranteed that it cannot have a Northern Ireland Member. The membership will be divvied up between the Labour party, the Conservatives and the Lib Dems, so there will never be a DUP Member or anyone making decisions on the Committee who is struggling with the geographical challenges that are unique to Northern Ireland Members.

The SNP would have liked a seat on the Committee. I was pleased to hear what the Leader of the House said about trying to ensure that all voices are heard, but have liked the shadow Leader of the House, I would liked to have had more conversations with her beforehand about it, so that we could have suggested our views on the best way for our voices to be heard. If she really wants to work collegiately, we are happy to do that, but unfortunately this has not got off to the most collegiate start. The Government should consider the best way to do that, because I am concerned about the geographical issue.

The Leader of the House spoke specifically about the experience of all Members in this place. I would like the Committee to consider hearing from former MPs who also have significant experiences. It may be that we do not currently have MPs with certain disabilities, or who have experienced the proxy voting system, but we did formerly.

During covid, I did a huge amount of work with the Procedure Committee, which met online almost every day in the early days of lockdown. We considered every possible way to make the House covid-compliant and made a huge number of recommendations to the Government, some of which could be incorporated to make the House more modern as time goes on.

I am pleased that the Leader of the House committed that the Modernisation Committee will take evidence from those other Committees, but there will still be no SNP voice to feed into the Modernisation Committee, because we are unlikely to get a seat on any of those Committees. It is all well and good taking advice from those places, but the smaller parties are again being restricted in how they are being heard. I am happy to support the creation of the Committee, but I would appreciate it if the Leader of the House tried to work in a more collegiate way than she has so far.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Neil Duncan-Jordan to make his maiden speech.

3.48 pm

Neil Duncan-Jordan (Poole) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech in this debate. I congratulate you on your recent election, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East (Sureena Brackenridge) on an excellent address. I look forward to hearing many more such passionate and powerful contributions from her in future.

I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to the parliamentary staff who have provided such excellent support and guidance to me, and I am sure to many others, over the past two weeks. I am sure that you can recall, Madam Deputy Speaker, what it was like when you first arrived here. Having the support of those staff has made the transition to Westminster much easier.

As a newly elected MP, I have to say that this is unlike any other workplace I have ever attended. That is why I wholeheartedly support the proposal from my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for a Modernisation Committee that will look again at the culture and working practices of the House. I hope to support its work in whatever way I can.

I would also like to express my thanks to my predecessor, Sir Robert Syms. He and I share a pride in representing the constituency of Poole. He served the House and his local residents for 27 years. Even in defeat, he was generous enough to offer me his assistance in acclimatising to parliamentary life, and for that I am very grateful. I also owe him an apology. After an exhausting three recounts, which lasted until 11 o'clock on the morning of 5 July, I forgot to thank him properly for his service. I hope I can rectify that today and wish him well for the future.

Having listened to a number of maiden speeches over the past few days, I am aware that new Members wax lyrical about how beautiful their constituency might be, and I will not deviate from that format. Anyone who has visited my constituency as a tourist knows that the beaches at Branksome Chine and Sandbanks are world

class. Poole Park is a superb example of Victorian municipal pride, winning awards for its well managed green spaces, which are much needed in today's busy world. The park borders Poole's magnificent harbour. The harbour area has been inhabited since the iron age. It became a major trading centre with Newfoundland in the 16th century, and by the 19th century nine out of 10 workers were involved in some kind of harbour activity. We even had the odd pirate.

The link to the sea played its part in world war two, when Poole was the third largest embarkation point for the D-day landings of Operation Overlord, and the local Marine base played a key role in the Falklands conflict. Today, the marine industry continues to play a significant role in the town, whether through the manufacture of yachts, the fishing industry or associated tourism.

Of course, the most famous nautical connection is the headquarters of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, which is celebrating its 200th anniversary. I was happy to add my name to the early-day motion, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Helena Dollimore), on the RNLI's anniversary, and to pay tribute to the men and women who have volunteered over the years to save others, irrespective of who they are or where they come from.

You will know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that a rising tide raises all boats. It is important for Members to understand that not everyone in Poole is a multimillionaire. Although the most expensive land in the country, known as Sandbanks, might be home to footballers and celebrities, nearly 7,000 residents in Poole struggle to cover essential costs from their monthly income, according to Citizens Advice. One in three of those are in work. In Poole, like the rest of the country, that got worse during the years of austerity and then the cost of living crisis.

That is why I want to pay tribute today to people such as Mel Meadowcroft and her team of volunteers, whom I have had the pleasure of meeting, who run the community food store in St Gabriel's church in Hamworthy. It offers local families a chance to buy the things they need at very low cost but, importantly, in a way that retains their dignity. Without that work, many more families would be in severe financial difficulty.

That is why I welcome the King's Speech and the commitment to make work pay, as set out in the employment rights Bill. As a former full-time trade union official used to negotiating with employers and representing members, I am well aware of the need to reset the balance in the workplace to enable working people to organise as a way of improving their terms and conditions, as well as making the improvements needed to address low pay and inequality in the workplace. Banning zero-hour contracts, ending fire and rehire, and giving day-one rights on parental leave, sick pay and protection from unfair dismissal will be significant achievements of this Government and will bring about lasting change that will benefit millions of working people, including those in my constituency.

I will close by thanking some significant people who put me here today: the residents of Poole for having the confidence to vote for a Labour MP for the first time in the history of the seat; my wonderful Poole Labour family for their commitment to the cause and a tremendous sense of camaraderie; and my wife Helen for believing that this was possible. There is a great sense of pride in being here today and I will do whatever I can over the lifetime of this Parliament to repay the faith that the people of Poole, my party and my family have shown in me.

3.56 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure, Madam Deputy Speaker, to speak for the second day running with you in the Chair. May I say what a pleasure it is to follow the hon. Member for Poole (Neil Duncan-Jordan). I wish him well, along with all the others who made their maiden speeches today. This House is enriched and blessed by the contributions of Members from all parts of the House. It augurs well for the future. We all benefit when everyone brings their knowledge and their expertise of other subject matters to the Chamber.

In the very short time that I have, I wish to refer to the important conversation that needs to be had about MPs and double jobbing. As MPs and elected representatives, our three main priorities are accountability, scrutiny and representation. There are ways to be critical and compassionate in relation to this subject. For instance, we should consider those who may have had established businesses before they came to this House.

A report in 2015 indicated that 26 MPs declared more earnings from directorships, paid employment and shareholdings than they did from their parliamentary salary. That puts a question in my mind.

On the other hand, I have never made any secret of how grateful I am to be able to carry on with my role. I dedicate so much of my time, as do others, to doing my job to the best of my ability. But we have seven Sinn Féin MPs who are elected but do not take their seats. They do not get a wage, but they can claim for office expenses.

Undoubtedly, there are issues in relation to double jobbing that need to be addressed, but many of those are down to individual circumstances. I do not know everybody's circumstances, but an MP who is elected to this House could be here for five years—for one term—and, at the end of it, they will still have a mortgage to pay. What about the job or even the opportunity that they may have had before they came here? I just pose that as a question. I was a councillor and a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly before I became an MP. Once I was elected, I gave up my council job and my role as an MLA. I gave the business that I owned to my son. That is what we can do, but consideration should be given to both sides of the argument. However, my stance is clear. My No. 1 priority is doing the job that I was elected to do, which is to represent the people of Strangford, to scrutinise Government legislation, and to be held accountable to my constituents. The other issue that I wish to speak to is modernisation. I can well remember coming to this House, sitting on these green Benches, and feeling the overwhelming weight of responsibility on my shoulders. I am innately aware of what it means to have the honour of representing my constituency in the greatest seat of democracy. Although I noted the difference in the way that things were handled when I was first elected in 2010 and struggled to come to terms with some of the traditional aspects of the House, I now treasure those traditions. There are those who express the other point of view and want to see lots of change, and then there are those who, like me, see the traditions as something to hold on to.

[Jim Shannon]

I agree with the rationale behind these timeless traditions, which is something that I am afraid we will lose if we blindly modernise. Mr Speaker said to hon. Members, "If you want to catch my eye, wear a tie." Well, everybody who can and should wear a tie is wearing one today. I support the rationale behind that. I think it is the right way to do things.

If we do not move with the times, then the times will move without us; however, I urge caution. We should ensure that not one thing is changed simply because we can rather than because we should. Not all modernisations are welcome. There are now rules in place that preclude me from being an officer of more than six all-party parliamentary groups. That has been difficult, as I am letting some of those groups down. I put that forward as a point of view; obviously others will take a different view on that.

Some modernisations are necessary. The overhaul of financial claims was a vital tool in restoring public confidence. Modernisation of the voting system was necessary for functionality during covid, and I am thankful that the flexibility was there, but we need to be incredibly careful, if we consider changes to Commons voting, that they do not result in more absenteeism and remote voting. Some have suggested that we change the voting system; I suggest that we do not. Modernisation of the maternity system was long overdue, and I am thankful for that. We need modernisation, but it must be for a clear purpose and not for ease of operation.

The traditions of this place should not be dismissed as mere traditions; there is wisdom behind many of them that must be protected. I urge the House to ensure that such protection is in place. I am all for modernisation as necessary, but I feel strongly that it must be done with wisdom and sensitivity, and that our centuries-long traditions should not be abandoned to give an appearance of modern society. Yes, I would love to speak first in every debate, but I am not going to. I would not be allowed to do so; it would not be the right way of doing things. I respect the convention that would prevent it as ancient but necessary. Every single issue discussed must be considered in that way.

Just because something has aged does not mean that it ceases to be of use. That must be the premise of any discussion on modernisation in this great House, in this United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—better together. With all the culture, history and traditions from all parts of society that we have here, we can work together to make changes in the right way—not change for change's sake, but the changes that are necessary.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call Gordon McKee to make his maiden speech.

4.2 pm

Gordon McKee (Glasgow South) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I congratulate you on your election and welcome you to the Chair, although it feels a bit weird to welcome anyone here, given that I have been here for about two minutes. I follow on from the excellent contributions made by my hon. Friends the Members for Poole (Neil Duncan-Jordan), for Cardiff West (Mr Barros-Curtis), and for Edinburgh East and Musselburgh (Chris Murray) among others. I praise in particular my hon. Friend for Edinburgh East and Musselburgh, both because he gave an excellent speech and because his mum is one of my constituents.

As I start this new job, I have been thinking a lot about my family; I was doing so while preparing my remarks today. I was thinking in particular of my grandpa, who was a coalminer in the coalfields of Lanarkshire, just outside Glasgow. When I was a wee boy, he would tell me of the conditions that he worked in: "Darkness," he said, "so black that you could hold your hand right in front of your eyes and still not be able to see it." In that darkness, he would toil away, unable to imagine his own future, let alone that of his grandweans, as he would say. All the while he toiled, he was inhaling fumes so toxic that later in life he would have lung cancer, and live the rest of his life with just one lung.

My dad, a welder, is here today—off during the Glasgow fair—along with my mum, who runs her own business, to watch me from the Gallery. My career so far has been very different from that of my parents and grandparents. For a start, they have a proper job, whereas I am now doing this for a living, but it has been different for two related reasons. The first is the Labour party—both in the sense that it has helped to provide me with a new job, and in the protections that it has delivered for working people. Health and safety legislation, delivered by Labour and built by the trade union movement, have ended the kind of conditions that my grandparents worked in. The second reason my career has been different is technology. I suspect that today in Britain there are more bitcoin miners than coalminers, and that is ultimately a good thing. Coalmining was difficult, hard, laborious work.

As a kid I spent many long hours in front of my computer and, while much of that was spent playing FIFA against my wee brother Mark, some of it was more productive, because I taught myself to code. I watched YouTube videos and over weeks, months and years I learned how to build software. I developed iPhone apps that were used around the world, meaning that code written on my laptop in Glasgow could be pushed out to devices around the world in seconds and that this 19-year-old kid in his childhood bedroom could run an app servicing people from Los Angeles to Dubai.

If it can do that, technology can reform our public services too. Technology might even help to reform this House, as we are debating today. I hope and know that high-growth, innovative businesses in my home city of Glasgow will be a key part of that.

Much has been said and written about Glasgow over the years, but one thing sticks with me in particular. Anthony Bourdain was not a man known for his parliamentary language, so let us just say that he described Glasgow as the most unpretentious place on earth—an "antidote" to the world, in his words,

"so unapologetically working class and attitude-free".

I think he was right because, of all the things I love about Glasgow, it is our people and our humour that I enjoy most. If someone ever gets a wee bit too big for their boots, returning home to Glasgow will soon put an end to that—something I am sure will be increasingly useful the longer I spend in this place.

Unlike many Glaswegians, my admiration even extends to some of Glasgow's politicians. It is customary in speeches such as this to praise our predecessors, but I know that for some that will be done through slightly

gritted teeth at the end of a long and bitter-fought election campaign. In my case, I talk about my predecessor with genuine warmth and admiration. Stewart McDonald served the people of Glasgow South diligently and built an enviable reputation in this place. He was particularly respected for his long-standing support for the people of Ukraine, something that saw him awarded the Ukrainian order of merit. If I leave this place having done half as much as he did for people around the world fighting for democracy, I will leave a happy man.

Before Stewart, there were Labour predecessors. There was Tom Harris, who has been personally kind to me; John Maxton, now Lord Maxton, whose son taught me modern studies in high school, believe it or not—although I will leave it up to others to decide whether he did a good or bad job of that—and of course Teddy Taylor, who is still remembered fondly by many of my constituents.

I would also like to mention two other Members of this House who had a big impact on my life, both from Glasgow. The former Member for East Kilbride, Adam Ingram, grew up in the east end of Glasgow and was one of the first people I ever spoke to in the Labour party. His advice and wise counsel has been a constant source of support to me over the years, and I am incredibly grateful. The other is a southsider, my friend and the former Member for Glasgow Central, Anas Sarwar. I had the great privilege of serving as the director of Anas's successful leadership campaign to become leader of Scottish Labour. Three and a half years ago, as we sat beginning that campaign, it was hard to imagine what the future might hold, but even in our most optimistic of moments, I do not think we would have predicted this. I stand here as one of 37 Scottish Labour MPs.

Having praised three Glaswegians, I will do something unusual for a Glasgow MP and praise someone from Edinburgh. My right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) has been a friend of mine for many years, and he deserves enormous credit for his long and lonely shift as the sole Scottish Labour MP, and for being someone who recognised that the Labour party had to change if it was to earn people's trust once again. It gives me enormous pleasure and pride to see him in his rightful place as the Secretary of State for Scotland.

That brief interlude aside, we return to Scotland's real capital city. I am privileged to represent Glasgow's southside, a place that has had something of a renaissance in recent years, boasting the trendy tenements of Shawlands, the tree-lined avenues of Newlands and the beautiful conservation village of Carmunnock, among others. My constituency contains many of Glasgow's beautiful parks, of which Linn Park, Queen's Park and Pollok Country Park are just a few. In the latter, hon. Members will find the Burrell collection, which was awarded the Art Fund's museum of the year award after its reopening last year.

Like many parts of the city, however, we are not without difficulties. Castlemilk is an area with enormous spirit and the kindest people anyone will ever meet, but it also remains an area with challenges. Even today, the simple act of getting a supermarket in Castlemilk has proven difficult, something i hope to change as the local MP.

What is true of all my constituency is that it is an outward-looking, diverse and welcoming place. The Scots-Asian community in particular have contributed enormously to Glasgow's character, and I am very proud to represent them here in Parliament. Immigration has made my constituency richer, and it makes our country richer, too. The southside of Glasgow is also a passionately pro-European place. Although Brexit was settled in the previous Parliament, I intend to support the Government's moves to repair our relationship with Europe.

My first duty is to my constituency and my country—being the Member of Parliament for Glasgow South is the only job that I will do, so long as the people of Glasgow South wish for me to continue—but I also feel a sense of responsibility towards the many millions of people at home and around the world who do not have a voice; the people toiling away in darkness, just as my grandpa did all those years ago. I hope that none of us in this House forgets the millions—indeed, billions—of people around the world who are not as lucky as us, including those facing persecution or war, those without access to clean water or a good education, and those bound by modern slavery. I am one of the lucky few to serve in this place, but I will never forget the people who put me here and the people who do not have a voice. Delivering for them will be how I judge my success.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call Lisa Smart to make her maiden speech.

4.10 pm

Lisa Smart (Hazel Grove) (LD): It is an absolute honour to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Gordon McKee). He spoke passionately about his constituency, and his love for his constituents was clear for all to hear. It is also an honour to follow maiden speeches from the hon. Members for Ipswich (Jack Abbott), for Spelthorne (Lincoln Jopp), for Telford (Shaun Davies), for Edinburgh East and Musselburgh (Chris Murray), for Mid Bedfordshire (Blake Stephenson), for Cardiff West (Mr Barros-Curtis), for Wolverhampton North East (Sureena Brackenridge) and for Poole (Neil Duncan-Jordan). Each is, in their own way, an act to follow.

I thank the people of Hazel Grove constituency for placing their trust in me. That trust is a profound responsibility, and I am committed to repaying it through hard work, integrity and service to my community. I acknowledge the work of my predecessor William Wragg, who served in Parliament from 2015 until he stood down at the last election. He stood up to those in power when he felt that it was needed, and he spoke openly about poor mental health in a way that I am sure will have helped to break down stigma. On behalf of all residents of Hazel Grove, I wish him all the best for the future.

I accept that I may be a little biased, but Hazel Grove is quite clearly the finest constituency in the land. It ranges from central Stockport out to the edge of the Peak district, taking in the communities of Bredbury, Bosden Farm, Compstall, Great Moor, Hawk Green, Heaviley, High Lane, Little Moor, Marple, Marple Bridge, Mellor, Mill Brow, Norbury, Offerton, Romiley, Strines, Woodley, and some, but not all, of Hazel Grove itself. Whether the peaceful havens of our green spaces or the proud reminders of our industrial heritage, Hazel Grove has it all. We have the Peak forest, the Macclesfield canals, which have one of the steepest lock flights in the

[Lisa Smart]

country, and our beautiful rivers: the Goyt, the Mersey and the Tame. It is no wonder so many people want to call our area home. Our rivers would be even more beautiful if the water company were not pumping quite so much sewage into them. We very much look forward to the Government implementing their plans to clean up that scandal.

However, it is the people who really make our community. Starting Point social enterprise in Woodley is tackling digital exclusion by giving some of my more mature constituents the confidence to get online, the Cherry Tree Project in Romiley empowers young people to live their best lives, and NK Theatre Arts works with children and adults of all abilities across the borough, using creativity and the performing arts to transform lives. Local people have many of the answers that we seek on how to fix the problems we face as a country. My job, and the job of this House, is to empower them, not tell them what is good for them.

I am a liberal and a Liberal Democrat. We exist to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society in which we balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity.

I joined the Lib Dems and got involved in politics because shouting at the television was not bringing about the changes that we need. My constituents have been very clear with me that their top priority is our local health service. They should not have a hospital that is literally falling down, they should not have to wait months or years for treatment, and they should not have to struggle to care for their loved ones. The phenomenal staff at Stepping Hill hospital should not have to wade through flooded corridors to get to their patients because yet another pipe has burst, as it did last weekend. Stepping Hill hospital must get the repairs it needs, and we need a new, additional hospital in the town centre so that local people can get the health and social care services they deserve. I will not rest until they do.

I could not possibly make my first speech in this House without mentioning the last Liberal Democrat to represent my community, Andrew Stunell. Andrew was the MP for Hazel Grove from 1997 to 2015, and he was that rare kind of politician who gave politics a good name. He was an MP who set the standard to which all who came after him are rightly held—he was interested in doing something, not just being something. He put his constituents first and brought about changes in the law, both as a Minister and as a Back Bencher.

Andrew made things better for the whole country: as a Minister, he delivered the Localism Act 2011, but as a Back Bencher he came top of the private Member's Bill ballot in 2003, resulting in the Sustainable and Secure Buildings Bill becoming an Act of Parliament in 2004. More than all that, he was one of the warmest, kindest people I have ever met. He was the kind of person you want on your team: hard-working, honest and kind. He helped me work out what it was to make a difference in public life. The people of Hazel Grove, the whole Lib Dem family and I will miss him and his guidance hugely.

I am the first woman to be elected as the MP for Hazel Grove, and I take that responsibility really seriously. I am especially delighted to be a Member of the largest group of Liberal Democrats ever elected to this House: there are 73 of us, if we include the right honourable Jennie. I went to a comprehensive school, and was the first member of my family to go to university.

Before deciding that shouting at the telly was not bringing about the changes that I wanted to see in the world and that standing for elected office was the way to be part of that change, I worked in a business as a director of client relations—my clients were big pension funds, charities and foundations. I was then the chief exec of a charity, educating women and girls in the developing world. For the past eight years, I have also been lucky enough to represent some of my constituents as an elected councillor for Bredbury Green and Romiley on Stockport council, a role I have loved. I am one of a rather large number of colleagues who come to this House knowing at first hand the value of local government, and the desperate need for it to be funded properly.

I turn to the substance of today's debate, which is standards and modernisation. The main thrust of what we have heard from the Government and the Leader of the House—that any further roles should benefit an MP's constituents—is absolutely right. In the short term, we should of course stop MPs from taking on roles as paid parliamentary advisers, strategists or consultants. In the longer term, daylight is often the best disinfectant, so I ask the Leader of the House to consider whether publishing any employment contracts for outside arrangements—with suitable redactions—and the transparency that would bring would allow constituents to judge for themselves whether they were getting value for money from their MP.

As a new MP, I am struck and more than a little bemused by some of the wonderful conventions and habits of this House. Taking it as read that colleagues are honourable is a good thing, and referring to one another as the Members for our constituencies acts as a powerful reminder of who sent us here, but I am also struck by how much modernisation is needed. We on the Lib Dem Benches look forward to supporting the Government when we agree, but I would expect us to urge, persuade, and on occasion push the Government to go further and faster to make us the most effective we can be, because our constituents deserve no less.

With so many newly elected colleagues, we have a cracking opportunity to change this place for the better. It could be so much more efficient and so much more effective. Let us do that with fresh eyes before we are all too institutionalised and think that some of this stuff is normal. However, that is also going to take some courage from the new Government, because making processes and procedures less obscure so that more people understand them and making this place more efficient will mean that MPs have more power and the Government slightly less of it. Governments—especially Governments with new large majorities, I am guessing—will probably grow rather fond of that power quite quickly, so let us get cracking.

Alongside modernising this place, we should of course reform our politics and our democracy more fundamentally. The House of Lords should obviously be elected, 16 and 17-year-olds should be able to vote, and we must replace the antiquated and deeply unfair first-past-the-post system with a fair, proportionate voting system. I look forward to making the case for these changes during my time here.

This election was the fourth time I have stood to represent the people of Hazel Grove as the Lib Dem candidate, and it probably takes a certain sort of stubbornness, resilience and determination to do that. It most certainly took the support of my family, and especially of my partner, Ed. I am so grateful to him. Our mischievous rescue dog Bonnie has not quite made up her mind yet about what she thinks about me working away from home rather more, but I hope to be able to convince her that winning is better than losing, as it undoubtedly is. Winning enables us to get stuff done, and there is a lot to do.

It is the honour of my life to be elected to represent my phenomenal community, the people of Hazel Grove constituency. They will be at the heart of everything I do here, and I hope I do them proud.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call Hamish Falconer to make his maiden speech.

4.21 pm

Hamish Falconer (Lincoln) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I pay tribute to the many maiden speeches of new Members I have heard today, including the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Lisa Smart) for her fine speech. Hon. Members have spoken with affection and commitment about their home constituencies. Each of them rightly places their own area above all others, and that is understandable, but I stand before you as the Member for the oldest continuous constituency to send a Member to this House. For almost 1,000 years, men and women have stood, as I stand today, proud to proclaim themselves the Member for Lincoln.

I walk in the footsteps of a series of strong Labour women. Lincoln's first female Member of Parliament was a titan of our movement, Margaret Beckett. Grafton House, Lincoln's Labour club, was founded and sustained by the much-missed Leo. Margaret was succeeded by two other formidable Labour women, Gillian Merron and Karen Lee, both of whom continue to serve our movement in local and national Government. I am honoured to succeed them.

I would like to pay tribute, too, to my immediate predecessor, Karl McCartney, who also loved the city. He dedicated himself particularly to improving local transport provision. He pressed forward with relief roads for the city, and I now take up that cause too. Lincoln is a beautiful, historic, young and dynamic city, but we are far from other major urban centres and, indeed, from any of my hon. Friends on these Benches. We need a public transport network that reflects that relative geographical isolation, and I hope to work with colleagues across the House to make sure that Lincoln and Lincolnshire get the transport network they need. Right hon. and hon. Members may not yet be sick of hearing me talk about the urgent necessity to upgrade the Lincoln to Newark line, one of the slowest in the country, but I assure them that they will be.

All of us elected to serve our communities will of course be seeking the support that they deserve, as I also intend to in relation to the cost of living, healthcare and housing, but I want to pause to pay tribute to the service my city has done for this country. That service snakes back even further than my predecessors. Over 1,000 years ago, in 1217, England seemed almost lost. French forces loyal to Prince Louis had taken most of England, and even the majority of Lincoln herself. It was only our castle, led by a woman in her mid-sixties, Nicola de la Haye, the constable of Lincoln castle, who survived months of bitter siege warfare, that finally repelled the invaders at the battle of Lincoln, securing the city and saving England.

Hundreds of years later, Lincoln and her workers again sprang to the defence of this country. In the chaos of the first world war, facing mechanised industrial-scale warfare of the most horrifying kind, Lincoln invented the tank. We produced one in 14 of all Royal Air Force planes at Ruston, and the working people of Lincoln delivered to this country the equipment and people needed to prevail against the odds. On these Benches, and in this movement, we never forget that.

Lincoln's connection with the RAF has never since dimmed, and less than a decade later young men, including my grandfather, trained to fly at the RAF stations surrounding our city. To this day we are proud to continue to host RAF Waddington, one of the most important RAF bases. At this moment RAF Waddington and its brave men and women protect this country and this House, as does Sobraon barracks in uphill Lincoln. I am proud of their service, and I will be a champion for them and their families for as long as I am in this place.

As for so many of my constituents, public service took me far from home, and I was surprised and honoured to be asked to return to the Foreign Office shortly after my election to this place. I know that my constituents expect me to do my duty there, as they do at Waddington and across the world. It is an honour to join the Government, but before I speak from the Front Bench on Government business, I wish to send a message to my constituents: I am first and foremost the Member for Lincoln—for the city and Bracebridge, Waddington and Skellingthorpe; for the schools and two universities; for the barracks and the airbase; for the hospital, cathedral and castle; for our copy of Magna Carta; for the independent shops of the bail; for Sincil Bank and the parks of Boultham and Hartsholme; and for the Gillies, the Ermine, Birchwood and Steep Hill. This is the honour of my life, and our city on a hill will be my first and last priority for as long as you send me here.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I now call Patrick Spencer to make his maiden speech.

4.27 pm

Patrick Spencer (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): It is an honour to rise to make my first formal contribution as a Member of this House, and I start by congratulating you on your election, Madam Deputy Speaker, and on taking your seat in the Chair.

I also start with a slight admission of honesty. Since arriving here, I have been nervous and anxious about making my maiden speech—we might even say that I delayed making my maiden speech for fear that my new colleagues were superb orators who would go on to make excellent speeches. I am happy to admit that that fear came to pass: there have been some superb speeches over the past couple of days. Even today, I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Spelthorne (Lincoln Jopp) and for Mid Bedfordshire (Blake Stephenson), and the hon. Members for Edinburgh East and Musselburgh (Chris Murray), for Cardiff West (Mr Barros-Curtis), for Poole (Neil Duncan-Jordan), for Glasgow

[Patrick Spencer]

South (Gordon McKee), for Hazel Grove (Lisa Smart), for Lincoln (Hamish Falconer), and of course my neighbour, the hon. Member for Ipswich (Jack Abbott), whose great speech did justice to that town. I thank him for his kind words. He is no longer here, so I will stop the niceties there.

I am in the fortunate position of having been sent to this place to represent a constituency and a people that have played a huge role in my life. My grandfather grew up in east London before moving to Essex to raise a family. It was in the 1980s, after retirement and with my grandmother Mary, that he made that all-too-familiar trip up the A12 to settle just 20 minutes outside Ipswich. My earliest and happiest childhood memories were spent falling in love with a country and a countryside that I still call home today, and a county and a people I am now humbled to represent in this place.

Shock horror, Madam Deputy Speaker: I think Central Suffolk and North Ipswich is blessed with some of the most beautiful countryside in England, but it is the history of the area that makes it unique. The Anglo-Saxon King Raedwald was one of the richest and most powerful of his era. Consequently, Suffolk has become a treasure trove for archaeologists for nearly a century. My neighbour the hon. Member for Suffolk Coastal (Jenny Riddell-Carpenter) can boast of Sutton Hoo, but on my far-eastern border, just last year a 1,400-year-old pre-Christian temple was discovered. Experts can trace back human activity in the area almost 6,000 years. I am fortunate to have the beautiful market town of Framlingham in my patch. It is home to Framlingham castle, a former seat of the famous Howard family, and St Michael's church, which contains the tombs of Tudor royalty and nobility, and which I love to take my two children to see. I also have Helmingham hall in my constituency, which has unbelievably hosted both Queen Elizabeth I and Queen Elizabeth II.

It is unsurprising, given our ancient, lush and beautiful landscape, that we have a rich history of producing great artists who are inspired by those surroundings. Thomas Gainsborough, John Constable, Benjamin Britten and even Brian Eno and Ed Sheeran, to name a few, are all products of our wonderful county in some way or another. I am afraid to say that this child of Suffolk was not blessed with the same artistic talent.

The other great contribution that I have always felt that Suffolk makes to our country is in food and drink. I have been told by my wife that it is certainly a domain in which I have more expertise and experience. Central Suffolk and North Ipswich is home to Aspall cider, manufactured for almost 300 years from apple trees in the grounds of Aspall hall. It is now one of the most recognisable brands in the global drinks market, exporting products to customers around the world. It is a great example of global success by a home-grown British business. We are great exporters of not only cider but sausages, spuds, chocolate and condiments. It is not uncommon to find Suffolk produce in shops across the country. It is for that reason that I have in the past, and will now in this place, support initiatives like that of my hon. Friend the Member for Hinckley and Bosworth (Dr Evans) that give consumers in this country the opportunity to buy produce from producers in this country.

The Suffolk farming and agricultural community are such an important part of our local society, and they are also emblematic of our local culture and identity, with their no-nonsense attitude to hard work, love for family and community, complete and utter ambivalence to the weather, and deep affection for our natural environment. I am sure that all Members have their bias, but I am of the firm belief that the people of Central Suffolk and North Ipswich are the finest our country has to offer.

While I hope to be a voice primarily for the people of Suffolk and Ipswich, I hope to use my time in this place to speak up for another cause. In a previous life, before entering this place, I worked under my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Sir Iain Duncan Smith) at the Centre for Social Justice, and then as an adviser in the Department for Education. In that time, I realised that the Conservative party and conservativism have a proud story to tell on the critical issue of helping those who need help—on offering the most vulnerable in our society not just a handout but a leg up, and on standing up for what is just and fair in society. More than anything, they are about giving people the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

I count the wards of Whitton, Whitehouse and Castle Hill as part of my patch. Whitton and Whitehouse are two of the most deprived wards in our country. Castle Hill is probably one of the most unequal. By any measure, Ipswich is, like its football team, a huge success story, but large parts of it, including many families living in Whitehouse, Whitton and Castle Hill, have been left behind. The story is all too familiar: the failure to adapt in a post-industrial economy; generations of low-wage work, if not worklessness; the proliferation of crime; and high levels of immigration that have caused a degree of social polarisation. For however long the people of Central Suffolk and North Ipswich want me to represent them, I will fight in this place to empower those people who feel left behind, those who want to get on in life, and those who want to, and can, reach their potential. At a time when faith and trust in politics is at an all-time low among those who feel locked out of our economy and our society, there is no more pressing cause than ensuring that Britain works for everyone.

Today, we are debating the merits of allowing MPs to have a second job. Time and again on the doorstep during the election, and across dining tables for many years, I have heard from people—rich and poor, young and old, left and right—that they have lost faith in politicians doing the right thing. Believe it or not, the NHS, immigration, jobs, incomes and access to homes were all hugely important to the voters at this general election, but the most important thing to the people across my constituency—from Whitehouse to Whitton, Kesgrave to Claydon and Ringshall to Rendham—whether they voted for me or not, was restoring a sense of moral probity and public spiritedness to our political system. As we embark on this debate and others in this place, let us keep that in mind.

Before I finish, I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Dr Dan Poulter. He was as dedicated a servant to the people of Suffolk and Ipswich as ever there was, both as an MP and in his second job as a consultant doctor. He used his invaluable NHS experience when he was a junior Minister in the Department of Health, and when he was on the draft Bill Committee

reviewing the Mental Health Act 1983 for the first time in 40 years. We felt the benefits of his healthcare expertise in Suffolk when he managed to save Hertismere hospital, which was previously in my constituency and is now in neighbouring Waveney Valley, and when he lobbied the Government for a new accident and emergency wing for Ipswich general hospital.

As many people know, Dr Dan arrived in this House as a Member of my party and left as a Member of another, but I do not feel any ill will, for another political hero of mine, Winston Churchill, performed a similar journey over 120 years ago. I do not mind saying it here, Madam Deputy Speaker: I, too, hope one day to cross the Floor. Before I give my Whips a heart attack, I should add: not to swap political allegiances, but as part of a Conservative party elected back into government, taking our place on the Government Benches. That was a Whip-issued line.

In the meantime, though, I would like to thank my wife and my two little boys, Leo and Jasper, who I am sure are watching on BBC Parliament right now. I also thank the Doorkeepers and the Clerks. I also want to thank my mother, who has been a real trouper to sit through a nearly 3.5-hour debate. She looks brighter now than she did when I put her in a polling station as a teller. As I was saying, I look forward to working with Members from across the House in the pursuit of delivering for the people of this great nation.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I intend to start the Front-Bench wind-ups at 4.40 pm, but I call Stella Creasy.

4.38 pm

Ms Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. In the very short time available to me, let me say, after so many glorious maiden speeches, that I hope that this place can rise to the occasion, in terms of what we do on this Modernisation Committee. The truth is that we do not have any rights as MPs, yet we come here to defend the rights of our constituents. That will matter, because this should be a modern workplace, safe not just for us, but for our staff, and accessible not just for us, but for anybody who comes to see us; and it should not be a place that leads us to divorce, drink, and all the other things that new Members of Parliament may have been warned about.

In one minute, let me tell the House what I think we could do through the Committee to redress the situation and give us some rights. If hon. Members employ young women here, somebody will take them out for a drink to warn them about this place and the people that they should be aware of, but that is not good enough. We must enforce the findings of the Paul Kernaghan review, and we must ensure that where people face bullying and sexual harassment, there is no unfairness, no favour and no political interference, because, sadly, no political party can hold its head up on that score.

We must learn from other jurisdictions around the world, including New Zealand, Australia and Ireland, about making this place family-friendly. That is not just about having a workplace crèche, but about holiday clubs, and knowing what time we will leave here and get home. No one in this place will enjoy doing bedtime via FaceTime, but unless we reform this place to make it family-friendly, that is the future ahead of all hon. Members and their families.

Let me turn to the gender-sensitive Parliament review that we signed up to in the Kigali accord. We must make that happen, not just for the women in this place, but for all the women and men to come. There are so many things that we can do through this Modernisation Committee, which is a welcome development, but the test will be whether we do them. I urge all hon. Members, new and old, to make sure that happens.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

4.40 pm

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): Let me say how impressed I am by all the maiden speeches that we have heard this afternoon, in particular that of the hon. Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Patrick Spencer), who talked about the importance of restoring moral probity—a relevant subject for today's debate. It is good to hear that he heard that subject raised on many doorsteps during the election campaign; so did I. It was good that he referred to his predecessor, Dan Poulter, who was an example to many people in this place. He used his experience in another job—I will not say a second job—to inform debate and make sure that things said in this House were based on experience and knowledge that can only be found through the personal experience of professionals like him.

As Members of Parliament, we are fortunate to have one of the most satisfying jobs in the world. There should be no such thing as a safe seat, some kind of sinecure; the job of MP ought to be earned through hard work and dedication. The public put their trust in each of us to be their champion and their voice. The Liberal Democrats welcome this debate on the code of conduct, and in particular the fact that it will examine second jobs. The primary focus of all Members must be on serving those people who elected us and put us here. In recent years we have seen a series of scandals that have weakened people's trust in politics and politicians, and I welcome the fact that the Modernisation Committee will seek to restore some of that trust.

Aside from the scandals of the sorts referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain), there are a tiny number of MPs who are really quite absent. I want to illustrate the problem with one of the more egregious examples—the case of the right hon. and learned Member for Torridge and Tavistock (Sir Geoffrey Cox), who is not in his place, but whom I notified that I planned to refer to him. He is a former Attorney General and a very eminent barrister with a high-profile career outside this place. It was revealed that, in 2021, he had earned more than £1 million in a single year, including by representing tax havens in the Caribbean. However, he was absent from parliamentary votes because of this outside work, and in one case even voted by proxy from 4,000 miles away.

Between 2023 and 2024, the right hon. and learned Member declared more than £836,000 of external earnings for 500 hours of work—the equivalent of 66 full days' work—while having contributed to just four debates in the whole of 2023. In the whole of the last Parliament, he contributed to just 20 debates here in the Commons. Looking at *Hansard*, that included a contribution to just one debate in 2020 and one debate in 2021, and there is no record of him having contributed to a debate

[Richard Foord]

in 18 months. That is in stark contrast to what we heard about Dr Dan Poulter. It is not a party political point. Dan Poulter contributed to 124 debates in the last Parliament and made some significant contributions with his experience as a mental health doctor. The hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) is a Labour MP and a doctor who puts in shifts in accident and emergency, not just to keep up her medical qualification but because that enlightens the House and informs the legislation that we debate here.

No, I am taking issue with that very, very small number of MPs who give the rest of us a bad name by earning huge sums of money for the hours of work they put in outside of this place in what is, frankly, their first job, not their second. They and we must remember that our principal employer is the voting public in those areas that we represent. Being elected as an MP is a massive privilege. It is a role that we should strive to do our very utmost to fulfil. We must work night and day to repay the trust that is put in us by voters. The Modernisation Committee should ensure that we are focused first and foremost on our jobs here.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the shadow Leader of the House.

4.45 pm

Chris Philp: Congratulations on your election, Madam Deputy Speaker. I congratulated one of your colleagues at the beginning, so let me add my congratulations to you on your election to the Chair.

Let me start by saying a huge congratulations and well done to the Members on both sides making some very impressive maiden speeches today. The hon. Member for Ipswich (Jack Abbott)—I am struggling to see him in the Chamber—listed all the premier league grounds he intends to visit now that his team are in the premier league. He did not mention Selhurst Park, the home of Crystal Palace in the borough I represent in Parliament—an accidental omission, I am sure.

My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Lincoln Jopp) made an excellent maiden speech. I wish him good luck with the upcoming house move. He very wisely observed that he does not plan to place any political bets anytime soon. The hon. Member for Telford (Shaun Davies) gave an excellent speech. He clearly brings to the House experience as a former chair of the Local Government Association. There is certainly no need for him to experience any imposter syndrome.

We heard from the hon. Member for Edinburgh East and Musselburgh (Chris Murray), who spoke extremely eloquently about his constituency and the Edinburgh festival. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Blake Stephenson) about his support for the modernisation of Parliament and his commitment to public service here. We heard from the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Mr Barros-Curtis), who made an excellent and very eloquent speech. The hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Sureena Brackenridge) will clearly bring to bear her experience as a former deputy headteacher. The hon. Member for Poole (Neil Duncan-Jordan) has possibly one of the narrowest majorities in Parliament, which he will no doubt be valiantly defending. We also heard from the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Gordon McKee).

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Lisa Smart) paid fulsome tribute to the work of her predecessor, Andrew Stunell. The hon. Member for Lincoln (Hamish Falconer) has already assumed ministerial office. In fact, I can see his red ministerial folder on his knees—a meteoric ascent. My hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Patrick Spencer) is apparently going to be the new Ed Sheeran of Parliament—that is what I took from his speech, anyway—and his mum is with us today. I did speak to a Labour Member whose mum was also here during her maiden speech a few days ago. Apparently, her mum fell asleep during the preceding speeches. You can take that how you will. *[Laughter.]*

Having congratulated new Members on their really brilliant maiden speeches, let me turn back to the substance before us. My hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) spoke eloquently about the importance of ensuring that we take on board the long expertise of the existing House Committees, in particular the Standards Committee, which the hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) also referred to at the beginning from the Liberal Democrat Front Bench. The Standards Committee is elected by the House, not appointed by Whips, as the new Committee will be, and has seven lay members who bring in external experience, including, as I said earlier, a retired chief constable and others who bring genuine independence and expertise. It is vital that we continue to draw on the independence and experience of the Standards Committee.

These are complicated issues. We heard from the hon. Member for Honiton and Sidmouth (Richard Foord), winding up for the Liberal Democrats just a moment ago, how experience of practising medicine can help to enrich debates and inform the proceedings of the House, as Dan Poulter did when he was both a Member of Parliament and a practising doctor. Such considerations need to be carefully considered.

I am very much hoping—I might even go so far as to say "expecting"—that the Leader of the House will give the House some assurances in her winding-up speech. In particular, I seek assurances that the Procedure Committee, the Committee on Standards, the Committee of Privileges and the Administration Committee will always be invited to report to the Modernisation Committee on matters that it is due to consider; that the Speaker will always be consulted; that the work of the Modernisation Committee will not cut across what the House of Commons Commission does; and that the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards will be invited to make submissions and give evidence where appropriate or necessary. If the Leader of the House can give strong enough such assurances about how the Committee will function, as well as an assurance that she will chair it on the basis of cross-party consensus, I am prepared not to move my amendments. I therefore wait with trembling and eager anticipation to hear what she says.

I am sure I speak for us all when I say that it is critical that we maintain standards at the very highest level here, to ensure that the public—our constituents—can have confidence in the work we do.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the Leader of the House.

4.50 pm

Lucy Powell: May I congratulate you on your election, Madam Deputy Speaker, and on having already made good use of the parliamentary hairdressers? I hope that you will maintain that tradition.

I thank so many Members of this House for taking part in this debate. We have heard some excellent maiden speeches. My hon. Friends the Members for Ipswich (Jack Abbott), for Telford (Shaun Davies), for Edinburgh East and Musselburgh (Chris Murray), for Cardiff West (Mr Barros-Curtis), for Glasgow South (Gordon McKee), for Lincoln (Hamish Falconer), for Wolverhampton North East (Sureena Brackenridge) and for Poole (Neil Duncan-Jordan) and the hon. Members for Spelthorne (Lincoln Jopp), for Mid Bedfordshire (Blake Stephenson), for Hazel Grove (Lisa Smart) and for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Patrick Spencer) all made excellent contributions. There is always a competition about who represents the very best constituency, but of course we all know that it is actually me.

Trust and dedication to constituencies, constituents and public service have been a common theme today. Substantive points have also been raised about the modernisation agenda, for which I am really grateful. The shadow Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), raised several issues. I welcome his engagement, which I have sought over recent days; I discussed our proposals with him well in advance of tabling them.

The size of the Modernisation Committee, which is the subject of Opposition amendment (c), has been part of the conversation about representation across the House. The current proposal is to have 14 members; under the current algorithm, which is based on the make-up of the House, that will give nine places to the Government, three to the official Opposition and two to the third party. Expanding the Committee to 18 members would give 12 places to the Government party and three to the third party, but the official Opposition would still have three. I looked at all the numbers and I felt that having 14 members would give the fairest distribution among Government and Opposition parties. Going bigger still would not bring the smaller parties into the mix, which is why I have made a very firm commitment to have ongoing dialogue and meaningful engagement with them. If the numbers included Chairs of other Committees, the shadow Leader of the House might actually lose his place on the Committee, because the other Committee Chairs would take up the official Opposition places, so I ask him to think about the numbering.

The shadow Leader of the House asked about the Modernisation Committee's relationship to other Committees. It is essential to be clear about this. I have been very clear that it will be a strategic, overarching Committee. It will not seek to duplicate any of the work of other Committees, which would be a waste of everybody's time. Instead, it will work closely with those Committees, commission their work, seek their views, ask for their reports and their input and carefully consider their recommendations on all matters.

I see this as a sort of clearing house, a "task and finish" group that can more quickly bring recommendations from some of those Committees to the Floor of the House and take a strategic overview of how the different issues interrelate. The Standards Committee itself recommended that in its most recent report, in which it described the siloed and disjointed context in which we operate.

Chris Philp: The right hon. Lady's comments are extremely welcome, but, for absolute clarity, can she confirm that when the new Modernisation Committee intends to consider a matter, it will first invite the relevant other Committee of the House to prepare a report and come back to the Modernisation Committee with it?

Lucy Powell: On the whole, yes; that is the intention and the hope. Some of those Committees do not yet have Chairs, but that is certainly the modus operandi for which we are hoping. We do not expect to be doing that work ourselves, or duplicating it.

The Standards Committee, which was raised earlier, has a completely distinct and different role because of the relationship with the lay members and with the Standards Commissioner. As I have said to the Leader of the House privately—I am sorry; I mean the shadow Leader of the House. *[Laughter.]* I am still getting used to this gig. As I have said to the shadow Leader, I sought the advice of the Standards Commissioner when considering how we would tighten the rules on paid advocacy, and I have followed his advice to the letter, because I think this is critical. The Standards Commissioner would not want to sit on the Committee because it would conflict with his role, but I see his role as being central to the drawing up of any further advice, because he has to police it—that is his job. I hope that satisfies the shadow Leader of the House.

The hon. Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain) and I have worked closely together, and I greatly value her input on these issues. I think that we largely agree on most of them. We do need to take forward the recommendations on the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme review, and that would be a first task for the Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blyth and Ashington (Ian Lavery) made an erudite speech, as usual, about trust and cleaning up politics, and I thank him for his contribution. That is very much what we are seeking to do. The hon. Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) has done invaluable work on this matter in the past in his role as a member of the Standards Committee. As I have said, I am very conscious of the work that the lay members do and the need for that to play a separate role in this context, but, as the hon. Gentleman will know, the landscape review pointed clearly to the need for a more strategic, joined-up approach to some of these issues. The hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Ellie Chowns), as a newbie, presented some welcome ideas. She reflects the enthusiasm of many other newbies and, I think, the frustration of many of them as well.

I listened to the speech of the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) from outside the Chamber. I really do value her contribution to this debate, and I look forward to working with her. I would love to have her on the Committee, but I am hopeful that we can find a way for that ongoing relationship to be meaningful and regular, and that she will be able to contribute some of the ideas that she mentioned today in a more formal manner. My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy), in a very short space of time, gave some very good advice about the implications

[Lucy Powell]

for safety and human resources on the estate, and she was right to do so. We did not hear many comments on second jobs, but I think we all agree that we need to take action in that regard, and I am glad to see the extent of the cross-party support for such action.

I hope we will not divide the House on these issues, because I think it important for us to stand together today. We have seen plenty of enthusiasm and support, and I hope that Members will now support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That, with effect from 25 October 2024, paragraph 2 of Chapter 4 of the Guide to the Rules relating to the conduct of Members be amended to leave out:

"a) advice on public policy and current affairs;

b) advice in general terms about how Parliament works; and".

Madam Deputy Speaker: We now come to motion 5, relating to a Modernisation Committee. I remind the House that Mr Speaker has selected amendments (b), (c), (d) and (e), as listed on the Order Paper. If amendment (b) is defeated, amendments (c) and (d) automatically fall, and I will not call anyone to move them. I call the Minister to move the motion formally.

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That—

(1) There shall be a Select Committee, to be called the Modernisation Committee, to consider reforms to House of Commons procedures, standards, and working practices; and to make recommendations thereon;

(2) The Committee shall consist of not more than 14 Members, of which 4 will be the quorum of the Committee;

(3) Members shall be nominated to the Committee by a motion in the name of the Leader of the House;

(4) Unless the House otherwise orders, each Member nominated to the Committee shall continue to be a member of it for the remainder of the Parliament;

(5) The Committee shall have power to send for persons, papers and records; to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House; to adjourn from place to place; to report from time to time; and to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the Committee's order of reference;

(6) That this Order be a Standing Order of the House until the end of the present Parliament.—*(Lucy Powell.)*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Amendment (b) has been selected. I call Chris Philp.

Chris Philp: On the basis of the assurances given by the Leader of the House, I will not move the amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: As amendment (b) has not been moved, I will not call amendments (c) and (d), but I will call amendment (e).

Chris Philp: On the basis of the Leader of the House's assurances, I will not move the amendment.

Question put and agreed to.

Convention on Biological Diversity

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*(Gen Kitchen.)*

5.1 pm

Barry Gardiner (Brent West) (Lab): May I add my voice to the concatenation across this House welcoming you to your new role, Madam Deputy Speaker? I also welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry East (Mary Creagh) back to this House. I am delighted to see her at the Dispatch Box as the Minister for nature. She was a most distinguished Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee, and I look forward to supporting her and our Government in championing nature in this critical decade for the natural world. I thank her for joining, just a day and a half into her new post, the meeting of the international conservation caucus, which I chaired in Parliament on Tuesday. Her enthusiasm for her brief, and for all that we hope this Government will deliver for the environment, was an inspiration to the dozens of MPs and campaigners who crowded into what was, I am afraid, a much too small room on a very hot evening.

Nature is the source of life. It is the foundation of everything we have and everything we value, yet some economists talk as if the natural world is a subset of the economic one—something to be accounted for separately. In fact, the opposite is true: the economists' world is a subset of the natural world. When did we last receive an invoice for pollination services from a bee? When did the forest last invoice us for its flood protection? However, a decline in our forest cover can affect everything from our food security to the destruction of our homes. A decline in insect populations can affect the yield of our crops. We use nature because it is valuable; we abuse nature because it is free. Because classical economics treats the services that nature provides as externalities, it fails to properly represent either the non-market benefits of ecosystems or the environmental costs of growth.

More than a decade ago, I gave a speech at the Berlin summit on natural capital. I said then that the time when the Earth could support human communities without difficulty was coming to an end. The truth is that it has ended. We live in an age of planetary boundaries and tipping points. Natural capital has been eroded to such an extent that the complex mechanism of ecosystem services that nature provides has been compromised, and we now need to repair and restore the Earth's ability to support us.

In simple terms, that is what the convention on biological diversity has sought to do since it opened for signatures at the Earth summit in Rio in 1992. It has been ratified by every member state of the United Nations, with the appalling exception of the United States of America. Its aims are the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. It has two supplementary agreements: the Cartagena protocol, adopted in 2000, which seeks to protect biological diversity from the potential risks posed by living modified organisms created by modern biotechnological practices, and the 2014 Nagoya protocol, which aims to share the benefits arising from the utilisation of genetic resources in a fair and equitable way.

If the CBD was established 40 years ago, why on earth is our biodiversity in the state that it is? The most comprehensive report ever compiled on biodiversity and ecosystem services by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services told the United Nations:

"Nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history—and the rate of species extinctions is accelerating",

and that the impacts for people around the world are grave. We have not made the progress that we need to.

The CBD set important goals and targets to halt this frightening state of decline. I pay tribute to the Canadian Government who, at short notice, hosted COP15 and established the global biodiversity framework. It set in place four goals: to halt human-induced species extinction, to use biodiversity sustainably, to share its benefits equitably, and to implement the finance of $700 billion a year necessary to achieve the first three goals. It also agreed 23 vital targets, including the 30 by 30 target to conserve and protect 30% of the planet's land, seas and inland waterways by 2030, and the reduction of perverse subsidies by $500 billion a year.

Talk is cheap. Targets are easy to set, but difficult to implement and even more difficult to police and enforce. That is why every country needs a plan—specifically, a national biodiversity strategy and action plan, or NBSAP. Revised NBSAPs must be submitted in advance of COP16 in Colombia this year.

The UK Government originally committed to publishing the NBSAP in March and then May, but I am glad that they did not, because the change of Government should have afforded officials in the Department time to radically revise the draft. It was intended by Conservative Ministers to be merely a restatement of what the UK was already doing, not the urgent and transformative action plan that is required to deliver on the four goals of the GBF.

Adrian Ramsay (Waveney Valley) (Green): I thank the hon. Member for securing this crucial debate and I agree with the analysis that he has set out. On his point about the need to move beyond the previous Government's commitments, this week, environmental groups published new economic analysis that showed that almost £6 billion of investment is needed every year in nature-friendly farming to meet legally binding nature and climate targets. Does he agree that it is vital for Ministers to confirm urgently that the budget for nature-friendly farming will be not only maintained but increased in this Parliament?

Barry Gardiner: I am delighted to have given way to the hon. Gentleman, who makes a fair and important point. The way that we are incentivising farmers and land managers, and the financial resources that we put behind that through the environmental land management scheme and others, is vital.

The previous Government put a number of objectives in place for the environment. I always commended their work on natural capital, the Environment Act 2021 and the Office for Environmental Protection. The Minister will know, however, that although the objectives were commendable, the implementation was often lacking. Indeed, the Office for Environmental Protection's latest assessment of 40 individual environmental targets, which were set under the 2021 Act, is that we are on track to achieve just four. We are partially on track to achieve 11; we are off track for achieving 10, and 15 others lack sufficient evidence to make an assessment.

Let me outline some of what I hope to see in our revised NBSAP when it is published. Although our commitment to COP15 is to protect 30% of our land, seas and inland waterways by 2030, only 5% of our land is effectively protected for nature. At sea, only 8% of the network has effective management measures in place. All four UK Administrations need to act on the recommendations of the latest special protection area review to protect threatened bird species. At sea, a special protection area sufficiency review is required to ensure that the current gaps in our marine protected area network are filled.

The previous Government did well to set legally binding targets to increase species abundance and decrease extinction risk. However, all the devolved Administrations need to do so too. Most important, those targets must be matched by costed delivery plans, which should be published to support the UK NBSAP.

A nature positive, net zero future can be delivered only if actions for nature and climate are hardwired into decision making. All public bodies must have a legal duty to help recover the natural environment. We must ensure that Government and industry take a strategic approach to planning for new energy infrastructure, which puts nature at its heart, and introduce mandatory reporting against the taskforce on nature-related financial disclosures aligned with global nature preservation and restoration targets.

In the new Government's first spending review, I would like a new UK nature fund to corral private sector funding to address the finance gap for nature. The Government should also commit to pressing forward with the forest risk commodities regulation and the renewal of important species recovery programmes such as Darwin Plus and the species survival fund.

The UK is highly unusual in the United Nations in that 93% of all the biodiversity for which it bears international responsibility lies not within the UK itself, but in its overseas territories and Crown dependencies. Those regions—incredibly rich in biodiversity though they may be—do not have the financial resource to effectively conserve their own biodiversity, yet only 5% of the money that the UK spends on biodiversity actually goes to them. That is 5% of spend for 93% of the biodiversity for which we are the international guardians. That cannot go on and must be addressed in our NBSAP and the long-awaited publication of the UK overseas territories biodiversity strategy.

It is crucial that the NBSAP be published before the COP16 deadline, and ideally before the 1 August deadline, which comes up next week, for inclusion in the COP16 documentation. That is important to show that the UK is taking its commitment to implementation of the global biodiversity framework seriously. The plan must not be a ceiling on ambition and it should be open to revision, always in an upward direction.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister what steps the UK is taking to ensure that our NBSAP is submitted by the early deadline of 1 August and is a robust and ambitious contribution to the delivery of the global targets.

The Nagoya protocol and access and benefits sharing are now encompassed in the convention by the work on digital sequence information on genetic resources.

[Barry Gardiner]

The truth is that the pace of discussion is unacceptable. We are now a decade on from Nagoya and there is almost no agreement. There is agreement only that a fund should be set up to share a tiny fraction of the benefits made by sectors such as pharmaceutical and food production. The fact that the co-chairs can find agreement among the parties only to such a fund contributing to target 19 is a joke. Target 19 talks of $200 billion a year by 2030 being mobilised to support biodiversity conservation. That is in six years' time, yet at this point—10 years on from Nagoya—we cannot agree whether the trigger for payment of such moneys should be at the point of access of the genetic data, the point of use, or the point of commercialisation. There is no agreement as to how the scale of contributions to the fund could be determined—whether they should be 1% or 0.1%, or whether the levy should apply to profits, turnover or revenue. It is an absolute mess.

I hope that the Minister will make progress on digital sequence information, a signature of the UK's work at COP16 this October. But more than that, I hope she will speak with our Chancellor and our Secretary of State for Business and Trade to arrange for a high-level summit to haul in the chief executives of big pharma who are dragging their feet on this issue and encouraging their sponsor Governments to do the same. We have four years in which to deliver this target. It requires a whole of Government commitment to ensure that we succeed.

The issue links to one of the specific features of COP16 in Cali, where I know the Colombian Government wish to make greater progress. Framework target 22 aims at ensuring the full, equitable and inclusive representation and participation of indigenous peoples and local communities in decision-making processes that are related to biodiversity, and it aims to foster inclusive, participatory and rights-based approaches to conservation.

I am extremely grateful to the Colombian ambassador, who joined us on Tuesday evening and spoke movingly about the need to ensure that those peoples who have, for eons, been the guardians of so much of the planet's biological diversity should not find that their traditional knowledge is commercialised for others' gain as they are left impoverished, their territories polluted, and their way of life stolen from them. I hope the Minister will make space in her diary at the COP to meet the leaders of those communities in Cali.

That brings me to the question of who in Government will be attending COP16. I know the Prime Minister and other senior Ministers have been invited. What an amazing signal it would send to the rest of the world that the UK is back, seriously engaged on the international stage with the most critical threats facing our planet, if the Prime Minister were to lead our UK delegation and if not only the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs were to attend, but the Foreign Secretary. The CBD has sometimes been seen as the Cinderella COP to the Climate Change Convention. In truth, they are twin crises in which each turbocharges the other. The loss of biodiversity will deplete all of the provisioning resources and ecosystem services on which human life depends. This is not just an environmental problem, but an economic and a security problem.

I have another reason for wishing that the Prime Minister would go to Cali. I hope he will announce that the UK is willing to host the next CBD COP—COP17—in London in 2026. The fourth goal that was set in Montreal at COP15 was the goal of finance and resource mobilisation. Where better to make progress on the financial framework for delivering our 2030 and 2050 targets than the City of London, the world's financial centre?

Governments cannot do everything on their own. The role of the private sector in mobilising the resource of business and industry is vital. I refer the Minister to the "Financing Nature" report produced by Henk Paulson, the former US Treasury Secretary. He talks of the

"clear and compelling economic case"

for financing nature conservation. Although it is important that business recognises the value of ecosystem services, it must appreciate that it is far cheaper to prevent environmental damage than to repair it afterwards. That is why it is important that the Government make it mandatory for companies to report against the Taskforce on Nature-Related Financial Disclosures. London is the centre of the green bond market. It is the right place and this is the right Government to mobilise the financial flows on which the sustainability of our planet depends.

COP17 will take place mid-way through the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework—possibly the most important moment for taking stock of progress towards 2030, and a chance to work in partnership with all 196 countries that are party to the CBD to ensure that we are moving at the necessary speed and scale to meet our 2030 goals.

The Government were proudly elected on a promise to ratify the global ocean treaty, improve access to nature, expand nature-rich habitats such as wetlands and peat bogs, take steps to clean UK waters, meet UK Environment Act targets, and improve animal welfare by banning trail hunting and the import of hunting trophies. We should be proud of that ambition. As we make good on those promises, we can proudly resume the global leadership role that so many around the globe are urging us to take by hosting COP17. By doing so, we will become even better placed in the future.

We often think that rights are things that apply only to people. That is not true. Companies have rights. Trusts and institutions have rights—rights safeguarded by their guardians and trustees. At the heart of the convention on biological diversity is the idea that nature has rights, and we are but the guardians and trustees of those rights. I am confident that the Minister will be an exceptional guardian for nature, and I look forward to her response.

5.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mary Creagh): I congratulate you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your election, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Brent West (Barry Gardiner) for his very kind words to me, and for securing today's debate. What an incredible privilege it is to stand here as the Minister for nature in a Labour Government who will put this at the front and centre of our national missions.

My hon. Friend is a true champion of nature at home and abroad, and as a distinguished former Minister for biodiversity he has made tireless efforts to hold us, the

UK, and all parties to the convention on biological diversity to the very highest standards. He deserves our thanks and commendation for that work. I also thank him for hosting the introduction to the International Conservation Caucus Foundation on Tuesday, where I had the chance to meet both the Colombian ambassador to the UK and representatives from Canada house. It was an important reminder of the fact that reversing nature loss is a global priority—one that we can achieve only by working in partnership with our friends around the world. We will need leadership, participation and commitment in equal measure to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and climate change.

As the MP for Coventry East, I am delighted to have the opportunity to listen and learn today on the UK's approach to the next meeting on the convention on biological diversity, COP16, which, as my hon. Friend said, takes place in Colombia this October. It is a unique opportunity to begin to re-establish the UK as a global leader on nature and climate co-operation. Protecting and restoring biodiversity begins at home. Almost half our bird species and a quarter of our mammal species that have been assessed are at risk of extinction here in the UK. Precious landscapes in our national parks are in decline, with rivers, lakes and seas awash with sewage and chemical pollution.

We feel that loss and destruction of nature wherever we live. We remember our childhoods, looking out of the window at murmurations of starlings—across the Warwickshire countryside, in my case—and we think about how rare it is now to hear the cheeping of a sparrow in our gardens. More of our land is underwater, with our children getting sick after swimming in our seas and rivers.

This Labour Government are laser focused on restoring and protecting nature. In England, we will deliver a plan to hit the Environment Act targets, halting the decline of species by 2030. We will honour our international agreements to protect 30% of our land and seas by the same date, and we will ensure that England's environmental improvement plan is fit for purpose. We will work collaboratively with our colleagues in the devolved Administrations on the shared challenges and opportunities that restoring nature brings. We will do that in partnership with civil society, communities, businesses and volunteers, to harness their creativity and insights.

Calum Miller (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): I thank the hon. Member for Brent West (Barry Gardiner) for securing this debate. I recently attended a session led by the Wildlife Trust in my constituency on exactly the depletion about which the Minister is speaking. In my previous role as a county councillor I was aware of the previous Government's efforts around local nature recovery partnerships and strategies. Can the Minister clarify whether it is the intention of this Government to persist with those and, if it is, whether they will be adequately funded? One of their features under the last Government was a lack of funding to allow them to have the impact that we would all hope they would.

Mary Creagh: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the intervention. The Secretary of State is today visiting the Purple Horizons project in the west midlands, an example of a huge nature recovery project extending across 10,000 hectares of vital heathlands, wetlands, woodlands and grasslands. That is an example of the partnership working that the hon. Gentleman talks about, with the local Wildlife Trust there, the council, the University of Birmingham and Lichfield district council. It is my firm intention, as we move towards the autumn statement and the spending reviews next year, that nature should take its place firmly at the heart of those discussions.

Nature is central to each of the missions that define this new Government. We know that being in nature promotes wellbeing and tackles poor mental health. Clean air helps to cut hospital emissions. Protecting landscapes that capture and store carbon helps us to meet our net zero targets, and training people for new jobs in new industries, restoring and protecting the natural world, will protect our economic growth.

Nature is the monopoly provider of everything we need to exist, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brent West has already said, but we stand at a moment in history where nature needs us to defend it. Without it there is no economy, no food, no health, no society. We are not merely observers; we are an integral part of nature and our future depends on protecting it. I look forward to working with my brilliant team of officials and my new ministerial colleagues at DEFRA to tackle the nature crisis.

At COP15 in Montreal, 196 countries agreed the landmark Global Biodiversity Framework to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030. We look forward to COP16 and there is much on the agenda. My hon. Friend asked about attendance. Four Ministers from three different Departments attended the last conference on biodiversity. We do not yet have a detailed programme of events in Cali, which is completely normal at this stage, but once we do we will confirm precisely who will attend, and we will of course make that information available to the House. Hon. Members can rest assured, however, that this Government will send a very senior delegation from across Government so that the rest of the world will be in no doubt as to the crucial importance we place on the summit and on global co-operation on nature loss.

There are 33 items on the agenda for this COP, covering everything from marine protected areas to plant conservation. UK teams will be active on all of them, driving consensus and finding ambitious agreements to help to deliver the goals and targets of the Global Biodiversity Framework. We must speed up and scale up action at home and abroad.

However, there are three priorities we are following closely. First, the negotiations on digital sequence information, or DSI, aim to ensure that those communities that make available genetic data from biodiversity—trees, plants and fungi—receive benefits from doing so. This is a unique opportunity for global science and nature conservation: payments for using genetic information could unlock billions of dollars of finance for nature every year and ensure that nature is protected for future generations of not just scientists, but forest dwellers. UK negotiators are chairing the negotiations on this complex issue, and are making good progress towards ensuring that this COP will be able to take the exciting step of launching a new global fund for nature action.

On implementation, all parties need to take domestic action to fully implement the GBF. The first step is to publish the national biodiversity strategies and action plans, or NBSAPs. We have been working hard with the

[Mary Creagh]

devolved Administrations to prepare a UK-wide plan—a single document—to show the policies and strategies that are in place. We will aim to publish that NBSAP as soon as possible ahead of COP16.

Barry Gardiner: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her response. She will know that the reason for the 1 August deadline is to show our intent for the UK to be back out there at the forefront of this debate, which is precisely what she is talking about. I urge her to publish the plan by that date, so that it gets out with the other documents, even if it has to be revised later on—it is an iterative process and something that we can revise upwards—because it really is important that we show that intent.

Mary Creagh: I am in passionate agreement with my hon. Friend. I assure him that it is one of the first submissions that I have seen as a Minister. We will absolutely do our best, and I will write to him should there be any issues around publication.

We need to mobilise finance from all sources and align global financial flows with the global biodiversity framework. Working with other donors, we have collectively pledged over £250 million to the new global biodiversity framework fund. The UK is contributing an initial £10 million. We are working with the multilateral development banks to mainstream—

5.31 pm

House adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 9(7)).

Written Statements

Thursday 25 July 2024

EDUCATION

Technical Qualifications Reform

The Secretary of State for Education (Bridget Phillipson): I am today announcing a short review of post-16 qualification reforms at level 3 and below, alongside the re-contracting of T-level qualifications to ensure these high-quality qualifications continue to be available to learners.

This Government believe all young people and adults should have access to high-quality training that meets their needs and provides them with opportunities to thrive. We know that the current post-16 skills system in England is confusing for young people, adults and employers. The qualifications system remains complex, and there are many overlapping qualifications, including those that overlap with T-levels. Too many young people leave education without the qualifications they need to get into high-quality apprenticeships, higher level education and good jobs. This is not good for our young people or our nation's prosperity.

Our qualifications must deliver on our two central missions for this Government of enhancing and spreading opportunity for everyone and growing our economy. Young people and adults should have a choice of a simpler suite of high-quality qualifications that provide them with the skills they need, and which deliver on our missions.

We will undertake a focused review of the post-16 qualification reforms at level 3 and below to assess how best to improve the quality of the overall qualifications landscape, support the growth of T-levels, and ensure that all young people and adults have high-quality options that meet their needs. This review will begin immediately and will examine the current planned reforms and look at how we can ensure leading technical qualifications like T-levels are open to as many people as possible, while ensuring high-quality alternatives.

T-levels are high-quality qualifications which provide young people with a firm foundation for their future. This coming year will see further developments, including rolling out new T-levels in animal care and management, media, broadcast and production, and craft and design in September 2024, and marketing in September 2025, to ensure that young people continue to benefit from these respected qualifications which include direct experience of the workplace. To ensure T-levels continue to be available in the years ahead, we will proceed with re-contracting T-levels where contracts are due to expire.

To allow space for a short review of the current planned reforms, we will place a pause on the planned removal, on 31 July 2024, of 16 to 19 funding from qualifications in construction and the built environment, digital, education and early years, and health and science. This will mean that, subject to any commercial decisions made by awarding organisations on these qualifications, they can be funded for 16 to 19-year-old new students in the 2024-25 academic year.

We understand that the sector needs certainty so that it can plan its future delivery. We will conclude and communicate the outcomes of this review into qualification reforms at level 3 and below before the turn of the year. Defunding decisions will be taken after the short review, and the curriculum and assessment review will reflect these decisions. The expert-led curriculum and assessment review will be chaired by Professor Becky Francis CBE, announced on 19 July 2024. This review will consider the existing national curriculum and statutory assessment system, and pathways for learners in 16 to 19 education and recommend changes where necessary.

We will also publish, as soon as possible, a list of reformed level 2 qualifications in construction and the built environment, education and early years, engineering and manufacturing, and health and science that will be funded from August 2025. These qualifications, alongside those already announced at level 3, will provide the next step to ensuring we deliver the skilled training needed to support key areas of our economy.

[HCWS22]

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

Great British Energy

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Ed Miliband): Our country faces huge challenges. More than two years on from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, families and businesses continue to pay the price for Britain's energy insecurity. Bills remain hundreds of pounds higher than before the energy crisis began and are expected to rise again soon. At the same time, we are confronted by the climate crisis all around us, not a future threat but a present reality, and there is an unmet demand for good jobs and economic opportunities all across Britain.

In 2024, the answers to all these challenges point in the same direction: investing in clean energy at speed and scale. That is why making Britain a clean energy superpower by 2030 is one of the Prime Minister's five missions, with the biggest investment in home-grown clean energy in British history.

I am pleased to say that we are already delivering on one of the Government's first steps for change by setting up Great British Energy, a publicly owned company headquartered in Scotland, to invest in clean, home-grown energy.

Today, we are reaching a major milestone to help establish Great British Energy by introducing the Great British Energy Bill to Parliament. I am also announcing Great British Energy's first major partnership, with the Crown Estate, as well as publishing our founding statement to outline Great British Energy's mission and functions.

Great British Energy's first major partnership will bring together two national institutions for the benefit of the British people. The Crown Estate brings a £16 billion portfolio of land and sea bed that returns its profits to the Government, long-established expertise to enable swift action, and new borrowing powers as announced in the King's Speech. Great British Energy will bring the strategic industrial policy that the state can provide, as well as its own ability to invest.

The Crown Estate estimates this partnership will deliver up to 20 to 30 GW of new offshore wind developments reaching sea bed lease stage by 2030. It will help boost Britain's energy independence, and cut the time it takes to get offshore wind projects operating and delivering power to homes by up to half.

The UK Government are in discussions with the Scottish Government and Crown Estate Scotland on how Great British Energy could help to support new development and investment in Scotland.

Today's publication, which I will place in the Library of the House later, sets out what Great British Energy is, why it is needed, what its structure will be, what role it will play and what the next steps are. Great British Energy will have five key functions:

Project development—leading projects through development stages to speed up their delivery, while capturing more value for the British public.

Project investment—investing in energy projects alongside the private sector, helping get them off the ground.

Local power plan—supporting local energy generation projects through working with local authorities, combined authorities and communities.

Supply chains—building supply chains across the UK, boosting energy independence and creating jobs.

Great British Nuclear—exploring how Great British Energy and Great British Nuclear will work together, including considering how Great British Nuclear functions will fit with Great British Energy.

I will ensure that we establish Great British Energy at pace, so that it can make an early impact, while also setting it up for long term success. I will continue to take the important steps to put Great British Energy on a delivery footing, including announcing the location in Scotland of its headquarters and undertaking a programme of stakeholder engagement to further develop our policy approach. I look forward to keeping the House updated throughout this process.

[HCWS20]

JUSTICE

HMP Dartmoor: Temporary Closure

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Shabana Mahmood): I would like to announce the decision to close HMP Dartmoor temporarily, as His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service manage the levels of radon at HMP Dartmoor to ensure the safety of staff and prisoners.

Our prisons are in crisis. This is the most recent illustration of why this Government were forced to take urgent action to release pressure on the estate. We are committed to locking up the most dangerous offenders and protecting the public. Public safety will always be this Government's priority.

Radon is a colourless, odourless radioactive gas formed by the radioactive decay of the small amounts of uranium that occur naturally in all rocks and soils, and is naturally more prevalent in the south-west of England. Studies have shown that increased exposure to radon increases the risk of lung cancer. His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service has been working with specialist radon experts over the past six months to manage the levels of radon at the prison.

Following the latest readings of radon found in non-accommodation areas of the prison on 12 July, the operational decision was taken by His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service to move all prisoners out of HMP Dartmoor, over a two-week period, and to close the prison temporarily while further mitigation and investigation takes place.

This was an operational decision as it had become unviable to continue with the mitigations to reduce radon while also running an effective prison regime. The Government will continue to work with staff at HMP Dartmoor and trade unions to manage the impact on staff, and prisoners are being transferred to other prisons of an appropriate security level.

The Government have already taken decisive action to address prison capacity pressures. While the loss of capacity at HMP Dartmoor will put additional strain on the system, the Government are confident the system can be sustained until the implementation of SDS40 in September, the measure I announced on 12 July which will change the automatic release point for those serving standard determinate sentences from 50% to 40%.

We will publish a 10-year capacity strategy later this year. We will build prison places, acquire land for new prison sites and classify prisons as being of national importance, placing decision making on planning for new prisons in Ministers' hands. The Government are committed to longer-term reform of the system and reducing reoffending —making sure that punishment is effective and prisons make better citizens, not better criminals.

[HCWS21]

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Great British Energy [Col. 830]
Bill presented, and read the First time

High Speed Rail (Crewe—Manchester) [Col. 830]
Bill presented, and read the First and Second time

Criminal Law [Col. 831]
Motion—(Shabana Mahmood)—on a Division, agreed to

Code of Conduct and Modernisation Committee [Col. 856]
Motion—(Lucy Powell)—agreed to

Convention on Biological Diversity [Col. 914]
Debate on motion for Adjournment

Written Statements [Col. 25WS]