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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 12 September 2024

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Speaker's Statement

Mr Speaker: Before we proceed to business, I should like once again to thank the Speaker's Chaplain, the Venerable Patricia Hillas, who, as I told the House in the summer, will be consecrated next month as Bishop of Sodor and Man. That means that today is her final day saying Prayers in this Chamber and this is her final week in the House Administration.

During her tenure, Tricia has been involved with some of the most challenging times to face this House: the impact of covid on the parliamentary community; the murder of our much-loved colleague Sir David Amess; the deaths of Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh; and, of course, the coronation of His Majesty King Charles III. At every gathering, in all circumstances, Tricia has had a calming presence, showing warmth and giving wise counsel to MPs and staff alike. I personally will miss Tricia, and all the support and help that she has given me in my position. I am sure that the whole House would like to take this opportunity once again to wish Tricia well. The Isle of Man's gain is our loss.

I do mean this, Tricia: you will always be with us, and you will always be there for us. Thank you. When Members lost their seats and were troubled about it, as we were, you were there to give compassion and support. I know that you have met new Members as well. Thank you for everything that you have done and for the compassion that you have given the House. You will be missed, but I hope that you enjoy the Isle of Man. Tricia's successor will be announced in due course.

I also hope that the whole House will wish to join me in congratulating Terry Wiggins MBE, sous chef, who retires this week after an astonishing 50 years' service to the House. Terry joined the House Service in 1974 at the age of 16, starting in the Members' Dining Room and working his way up through various chef roles, culminating in running the Debate in Portcullis House. Terry was also pivotal in the establishment of the Commons and Lords rugby team—wrong code!—which has raised significant sums for charities over the years. In 2005, he was awarded an MBE for services to Parliament. Terry is a most talented, friendly and hard-working individual. I am sure that the whole House will join me in thanking him for his long and loyal service, and in wishing him and his wife Christine a long and happy retirement. But if we are struggling, we will call on you, Terry! Thank you for your service.

I can now announce the results of the remaining Select Committee Chair election. I congratulate Patricia Ferguson, who has been elected Chair of the Scottish

Affairs Committee. A breakdown of the results of all of yesterday's elections will shortly be made available in the Vote Office.

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

LORDS

Ordered,

That the Lords Message [11 September] relating to the Royal Albert Hall Bill [*Lords*] be now considered.

That this House concurs with the Lords in their Resolution.—
(*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Agricultural Sector: Innovation

1. **Sir Julian Smith** (Skipton and Ripon) (Con): What steps he is taking to promote innovation in the agricultural sector. [900417]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Steve Reed): First, I add my congratulations to the Speaker's Chaplain on her distinguished tenure, and to Terry Wiggins, who has been here much longer than all of us.

I thank the right hon. Member for his question. The Government recognise the importance of innovation in supporting farmers to boost Britain's food security, drive productivity and improve nature's recovery. The UK has world-class science and innovation capabilities. The Government will promote the UK as a great place for technology innovators, which will drive investment, economic growth and create high-skilled jobs, supporting farmers to embrace the latest technology and best practice.

Sir Julian Smith: One of the challenges for risk-taking farmers is the regulatory environment. Will the Secretary of State update the House on how he will bring together Natural England, the Environment Agency and other agencies to reflect and be much more responsive to the enterprise culture in farming?

Steve Reed: I share the right hon. Member's interest in the need for effective regulation. I will soon make an announcement about our intentions to review regulation to ensure that it is fit for purpose across the Department and helps to achieve the priority objectives that we have set out as a new Government and ministerial team.

Environmental Land Management Schemes

2. **Claire Young** (Thornbury and Yate) (LD): What steps his Department is taking to increase uptake of environmental land management schemes. [900418]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mary Creagh): I echo the good wishes of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to your chaplain, Mr Speaker, and to Terry, who have nourished us in mind, body and spirit.

I congratulate the hon. Lady on her election to the House. This Labour Government are fully committed to environmental land management schemes. We will optimise the schemes so that they produce the right outcomes for all farmers, including small, grassland, upland and tenant farmers who have been too often ignored, while delivering food security and nature recovery in a just and equitable way.

Claire Young: On a visit to a local farm this summer with the National Farmers Union, it was raised with me that some farmers are not signing up for one of the Government's sustainable farming initiatives, because they fear being locked in when a better deal may be just around the corner. If we want farmers to farm more sustainably, we need to ensure that they are getting the support they need to do so. With that in mind, will the Minister clarify whether farmers who sign up for an SFI will be able to transition to an alternative one, and if not, whether the rules will be reviewed so that they can do so?

Mary Creagh: I believe a cow was very interested in the hon. Lady's coat on one of her recent visits—I hope both the cow and the coat have recovered.

We encourage all farmers to apply for the sustainable farm initiative, and we are actively looking at how we can achieve stability going forward.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee.

Mr Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to see my hon. and right hon. Friends in their places on the Front Bench.

The environmental land management scheme approach was a really innovative idea from the previous Government, but its implementation has been a shambles and it is leaving far too many farmers desperately worried about their future. Can my hon. Friend tell me any more about what the Government have inherited and the urgent steps that they will take to support Britain's farmers to farm in a more natural way in the future?

Mary Creagh: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his election to Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee—obviously the finest Committee in Parliament, of which I have very fond memories. He is right, and he will know that this Labour Government are addressing the £22 billion hole in the public finances. No decisions on the farming budget have been taken. Spending on the Department's priorities will be confirmed as part of the spending review, but we will not be overturning the apple cart and we are fully committed to environmental land management schemes.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Arguably, and in the view of some of us, ours is the finest Select Committee in the House.

The problems with the uptake of ELMS have been at the heart of a significant departmental underspend. No fair-minded individual would blame the current Government for that, but if that money disappears

back into the Treasury, never to be seen again on farms, that blame will be attached to the current Government. In opposition, they said that any underspend should be rolled over into future years. Is that still their position in government, and how will they do it?

Mary Creagh: I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his election to the second best Committee in the House of Commons. We will have to sort that out outside.

There was about a £350 million underspend in the farm budget under the previous Government, who failed on their manifesto pledge to spend £2.4 billion a year on farmers. We are looking at everything as part of the spending review and decisions will be announced in due course.

David Burton-Sampson (Southend West and Leigh) (Lab): In my constituency we are about to hold regular water quality summits, alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Southend East and Rochford (Mr Alaba), with the water company, Ofwat, the local council, the Environment Agency and, most importantly, residents, with the aim of ending the scourge of sewage dumping. Does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State agree with me that this is a good local model and a good blueprint to be used nationally, and would he like to join us at an upcoming meeting?

Mary Creagh: I cannot speak for the Secretary of State, but I am sure that all Ministers will fight over any invitation to visit my hon. Friend's gorgeous constituency. We are announcing a review into water. I urge him to participate and feed into that review. The sort of innovative model that brings partners together is certainly one we will be looking at.

British Food Producers

3. **Sarah Bool** (South Northamptonshire) (Con): What steps he is taking to support British food producers. [900419]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Emma Hardy): I congratulate the hon. Lady on her achievement in the election.

The Labour Government will restore stability and confidence in the sector, introducing a new deal for farmers to boost rural economic growth and strengthen food security alongside nature's recovery. We will make the supply chain work more fairly, back British produce, and cut energy prices through GB Energy. We are continuing the roll-out of the sustainable farming initiative, and will optimise schemes and grants.

Sarah Bool: In recent weeks, I have had the pleasure of meeting farmers in Evenley at Stowe Heights farm and Barnowl farm, two of the amazing producers in South Northamptonshire. However, they and many other farmers are gravely concerned by media reports that the farming budget will be cut by £100 million. Can the Minister confirm that that is not the case, and that support for local producers is to be maintained?

Emma Hardy: Those sound like wonderful farms to visit—I might even be tempted to pop in and see them myself. Our farming Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), has done an incredible

job, going up and down the country visiting many farmers and talking to stakeholders. As I am sure the hon. Lady will understand, anything involving the Budget is part of the spending review process, and answers will be given in due course.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Steve Barclay (North East Cambridgeshire) (Con): Both in that answer and in the earlier answer from the environment Minister, the hon. Member for Coventry East (Mary Creagh), the House has heard Government Front Benchers say that no decision has been taken on the farming budget. However, media reports say that the Chancellor has decided to cut the farming budget by £100 million, as she prioritises her trade union paymasters over farmers. In these first DEFRA questions of the new Parliament will the Minister rule out cuts to the farming budget? Farmers are watching these questions, and need to be able to plan their business and have confidence that the budget will be maintained.

Emma Hardy: I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but I think the right hon. Gentleman will find that it was the previous Government—in fact, the Department for which he was responsible—who underspent the farming budget, despite their promises to spend £2.4 billion a year. That underspend broke a manifesto promise. He will also remember, because it is not all that long ago that he was on the Government Benches, that decisions about the Budget are made as part of the spending review.

Water Pollution: Accountability

4. **Sarah Coombes** (West Bromwich) (Lab): What recent progress he has made on increasing the accountability of water companies for pollution discharges into waterways. [900420]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Steve Reed): I welcome my outstanding former employee to her place in the Chamber, and thank her for her question. After 14 years of Conservative failure, the public are furious at the levels of sewage being released into our rivers, lakes and seas. Last week, this Government introduced the Water (Special Measures) Bill to strengthen the power of the water industry regulators and turn around the performance of failing water companies. The Bill will ban bonuses for chief executives when environmental standards have not been met, and will bring forward criminal charges for obstruction.

Sarah Coombes: Our canals are the pride of the Black Country: they are very important to our communities, our wildlife and our tourism. Unfortunately, like the rest of the waterways, we have seen serious pollution incidents in the canals in recent years. What are the Government doing to protect our canals and waterways and clean up the failures of the last Government?

Steve Reed: I congratulate my hon. Friend on being such a champion for waterways in and around her constituency. Toxic pollution of canals or, indeed, any other waterway is disgraceful and unacceptable. The previous Government cut resources for the regulators, leaving them incapable of investigating all the incidents

that were happening. We are putting firepower back with the regulators through the Water (Special Measures) Bill, which will allow them to claw back the costs of prosecution from the organisations that are prosecuted, so that they can carry out more enforcement against organisations that got away scot-free with polluting our waterways under the previous Government.

Dame Caroline Dinage (Gosport) (Con): Dozens of homes and businesses across Alverstoke village in my constituency were flooded with polluted water from the Alver creek when Storm Pierrick caused a tidal surge in April this year. We now hear that, without urgent flood protection measures, that could be a one-in-20-years scenario. Those measures will cost an extra £3.5 million, and we are waiting desperately for news from the Secretary of State's Department about whether we have been awarded that flood and coastal erosion risk management grant so that the work can start. We are now heading into winter, with higher tides, and some of my constituents still have not been able to return to their homes and businesses after the previous flooding event. What reassurance can the Secretary of State give me that that announcement is coming soon, and will he please meet me urgently to discuss this scenario?

Steve Reed: I congratulate the hon. Member on winning her seat in the general election and taking her place. I will certainly make sure that the relevant Minister is able to meet her to discuss that issue in more detail. I am very pleased that the first meeting of our new flood resilience taskforce will be later today. The intention of that organisation is to ensure much better co-ordination between Whitehall at the centre, where the resources are held, and the agencies on the frontline that need to be taking appropriate action as quickly as possible to protect communities, businesses, farms and all of the rest of the people who can be affected by flooding, particularly given that we are seeing more frequent severe weather incidents because of climate change.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Robbie Moore (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con): Sound management of water companies is of course vital if customers are to receive the high level of service they expect and environmental performance obligations are to be strictly adhered to. Some water companies are better managed than others, so will the Secretary of State guarantee that in his efforts to hold water companies to account, no offer of a regulatory easement will be provided—in other words, no permission to lower standards, relax environmental permits or reduce agreed levels of investment will be provided to any water company, no matter their financial circumstances, by the Government or the regulator?

Steve Reed: I will be announcing later this autumn—in just a few weeks' time—a review of the entire water sector, including regulation. In particular, I want to make sure that regulation is as tough as possible to ensure that the practices and, frankly, the abuses that were going on can no longer happen. Part of that will be complete transparency about what is going on—on the part of the water companies, and also, I have to say, on the part of Government. It was very disappointing that, when he was a Minister, the hon. Gentleman tried

to cover up the extent of sewage spills before the election, telling Environment Agency officials not to put the key figures on the front page of its environmental portal.

Mr Speaker: Order. Saying that the hon. Member “tried to cover up” is suggesting that a Member is lying, and I do not—

Steve Barclay (North East Cambridgeshire) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Member cannot raise a point of order now. He has been here long enough to know that they come at the end of questions. *[Interruption.]* Order. I am dealing with this. We really have to reflect on what we say about other Members in this House, and I would like the Secretary of State to withdraw what he has suggested.

Steve Reed: I withdraw that comment. Perhaps I should have said that the shadow Minister could have been more open and transparent. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I am not going to open up that question. We will now have the second question from Robbie Moore.

Robbie Moore: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

So there we have it: the Secretary of State’s first outing at the Dispatch Box, and he was not able to clearly answer the question I asked. Will the Secretary of State confirm that, in fulfilling his obligation to hold water companies to account, he will not issue regulatory easements, no matter their financial circumstances? Will he answer that question clearly right now from the Dispatch Box?

Steve Reed: As I have already said, we are looking to strengthen, not weaken the regulation. The regulation was inappropriate. It is not just the regulation itself, but the lack of resources the regulators have had. That is why the Water (Special Measures) Bill we are introducing will allow the regulators to claw back resources from water companies that are successfully prosecuted, so that they have the firepower to prosecute further wrongdoing by those water companies or others responsible for it.

Funding for Farming

5. **Harriet Cross** (Gordon and Buchan) (Con): If he will maintain the level of funding for farming. [900421]

10. **John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): What discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on funding for farming. [900426]

12. **Martin Vickers** (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): If he will maintain the level of funding for farming. [900428]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Steve Reed): The Government will restore stability and confidence in the sector by introducing a new deal for farmers to boost rural economic growth and strengthen food security alongside nature’s recovery. The Government are currently conducting a spending

review, which will conclude in October. Departmental budgets, including spending on farming, will be confirmed through this process.

Harriet Cross: The Labour party manifesto rightly stated that the Labour party “recognises that food security is national security.”

I agree, but those words must be matched with actions. We have already asked today about future budgets, but have not heard any answers. Will the Secretary of State confirm that there will be no real-terms cuts to the agriculture budget?

Steve Reed: As the hon. Member will know, there is a spending review process going on, which will culminate with announcements in the Budget. That is the point at which all of that will be made clear and apparent.

I would gently remind the hon. Member that it was her Government who underspent the farming budget by £130 million in the previous financial year. That money should have been in the pockets of farmers, who desperately need it for the work they are doing to provide the food we want to eat and to help nature’s recovery, yet that Government were too incompetent to get it out the door. This Government will make sure that the money allocated to farmers is handed over to farmers so that they are able to use it for the purposes for which it is intended.

John Lamont: Being an MP for the Scottish Borders, I am lucky enough to represent some of the best farmers and food producers in the whole of the UK. However, as we have heard, the new Government have chosen not to give them any clarity about their future funding settlement, so I ask again: can the Secretary of State commit not to cut the funding for farmers and food production?

Steve Reed: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his appointment as shadow Secretary of State for Scotland.

As I said previously, a spending review process is going on. No Government announce their Budget in advance of the Budget taking place. I cannot do that either, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are keen to ensure that farmers in every single part of the United Kingdom receive the support they need to do the job that we as a country need them to do to ensure that we have the food security that we want, because it is part of our national security, and that this country deserves.

Martin Vickers: Farmers in my constituency who receive funding through the sustainable farming incentive are concerned that some of the schemes are becoming over-subscribed and therefore their income is reducing. Will the Secretary of State give a reassurance that that particular initiative will continue and will do so at the existing funding levels?

Steve Reed: I have been clear, throughout the election campaign and since, that we do not intend to overturn the appletart in respect of the old schemes in general, including the SFI. We support the principles behind the schemes and want to see them continue. In terms of what the hon. Gentleman alluded to, there are ways to make them work better. My intention is to work closely with the farming sector and the nature sector to make

sure that we get the maximum bang for our buck for every single penny that goes through those schemes, and that the farmers who need it get the support they deserve.

Steve Witherden (Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr) (Lab): British farmers have been badly let down by crippling trade deals, skyrocketing energy prices and devastating floods. Will the Secretary of State outline how he will restore confidence and support British farmers?

Steve Reed: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There are all sorts of ways in which farmers have felt very let down over the past 14 years, and that has contributed to the tragic situation today in which we have the lowest levels of confidence ever recorded in the farming sector. Our new deal for farming is intended to start to sort part of that out.

My hon. Friend referred to trade deals that undermine farmers; they are furious about that, and at the National Farmers Union's Back British Farming Day reception yesterday farmers made that clear to me again. We have ruled out any future trade deals that undercut and undermine British farmers in the way the previous Government's Australia and New Zealand trade deals did.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney) (Lab): May I support your thanks to Terry Wiggins, Mr Speaker? He has been a great servant of this House and is a lovely bloke.

The Conservative complaints about support for farmers are a bit lame. Has the Secretary of State had the opportunity yet to work out why there was an underspend of over £100 million in the agricultural budget last year?

Steve Reed: My hon. Friend raises an important point. Opposition Members are asking me today about budget decisions that they know cannot be announced before the Budget, when presumably they are aware—because the statement has been laid—that they underspent the previous budget to the tune of £130 million. It is not that they were not warned about this either, because while we were in opposition we were making points, as were farmers, about underspends and the desperate need to get that money back out to the farmers who needed access to it. We will review the situation, find out exactly what went wrong and publish that information as soon as it is available.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Sarah Dyke (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): Somerset is home to 8,500 farmers and food producers, which is more than any other county in the UK. They are worried that the £130 million of support will be stripped from them because the previous Government replaced the basic payment scheme with systems that were too complicated for many farmers to access. Notwithstanding the previous comments, will the Secretary of State confirm that he will not be slashing their funding, and give farmers the confidence that they need to be able to invest in the future and secure the nation's food security?

Steve Reed: I am delighted to congratulate those farmers, producers and growers in Somerset. It is a fine county and they do an incredibly good job, of which the

hon. Lady is rightly proud. I hope she will understand that I cannot make comments about the Budget in advance; I would be in deep trouble with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, which is something I wish to avoid. At the appropriate time, we will make absolutely clear what we intend to do. My intention is to fight the corner of farmers through the spending review process so that we can make sure they receive the resources they deserve.

Support for Farmers

6. **Dame Harriett Baldwin** (West Worcestershire) (Con): What steps he is taking to support farmers. [900422]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Emma Hardy): This Labour Government will introduce a new deal for farmers to boost rural economic growth and strengthen food security alongside nature recovery. We will make the supply chain work more fairly, better protect farmers from flooding and back British produce. We are continuing the roll-out of the sustainable farming initiative and will optimise schemes and grants to ensure that they work for farmers.

Dame Harriett Baldwin: It is the time of year when we thank farmers and nature for the harvest, and it has been a particularly difficult year. Farmers are planning ahead for next year, so will the Minister kindly give me a one-word answer to my question? I understand that she cannot announce what is in the spending review, but in the request that her Department has made to the Chancellor, is the amount she has asked for more or less than £2.4 billion?

Emma Hardy: I thank the hon. Lady—dare I say, my hon. Friend—for her question. Yes, it is good to remind ourselves that this is the time of harvest, when we should all be grateful and give thanks. In answer to her question, as a previous Chair of the Treasury Committee she knows that we cannot make comments on the Budget before it comes through. Like the Secretary of State, I do not wish to be in trouble with the Chancellor either.

Mr Speaker: Right, we come to Mike Amesbury—let us see if he gets in trouble.

Mike Amesbury (Runcorn and Helsby) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Last week, I met farmers in the Frodsham part of my constituency who were asking for support to curtail the industrial thefts of GPS systems. Will the Minister meet me to discuss that, with representatives of the National Farmers Union?

Emma Hardy: It is always a pleasure to meet my hon. Friend, and I would be delighted to talk to him about that in more detail.

Topical Questions

T1. [900435] **Graeme Downie** (Dunfermline and Dollar) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Steve Reed): Scotland's financial allocation will be confirmed through the spending review that concludes in October. As agriculture is devolved, it will be for the Scottish Government to allocate funding to farmers in Scotland. The UK Government are supporting farmers across the country with a new deal to boost economic growth and strengthen food security. We will protect farmers from being undercut in trade deals, make the supply chain work more fairly and back British produce.

Graeme Downie: Farming and agriculture are a vital part of the economy in west Fife and in my constituency of Dunfermline and Dollar. Yesterday, I was delighted to meet a delegation from NFU Scotland. Given the economic, social and environmental value of active farming and crofting in Scotland, and its significant contribution to the wider UK economy, will the Secretary of State share what he will do to ensure that food security and food production in Scotland remain at the heart of our national security?

Steve Reed: Many of those issues are devolved to the Scottish Government. I have already held meetings with the Scottish Agriculture Minister and we are due to meet again next week, and I will be making sure that we have a strong working relationship.

Where the UK Government have a role in particular is with trade deals. Many British producers were upset that because the previous Government erected barriers to trade when they were told that they would continue to get open access to the European markets, they could no longer continue to sell their great British produce into those markets, damaging them economically and financially. We will be seeking a new veterinary deal with the European Union to get those exports moving again.

Mr Speaker: I remind those on the Front Bench that it is topical questions, so questions and answers have to be short and punchy. The thing is, I have to try to get in as many as I can. Let us see a good example of that with the shadow Secretary of State.

Steve Barclay (North East Cambridgeshire) (Con): The Secretary of State has repeatedly talked tough with the water companies, yet the Water (Special Measures) Bill that he announced actually weakens a number of measures, such as the automatic fines for category 1 and 2 prosecutions, and removes the unlimited penalties that would apply. He said that the review of water regulation would strengthen requirements on water firms; will he therefore confirm to the House that there will be no regulatory easements as part of that review?

Steve Reed: The very Bill that the right hon. Gentleman referred to strengthens regulation. We will be looking further at regulation through the review. The intention will be to make it stronger, not weaker, because it was far too weak under the previous Government and we need to turn that around.

T3. [900437] **Dr Beccy Cooper (Worthing West) (Lab):** Raw sewage was discharged into our rivers and seas for a shocking 4 million hours last year. Will the Minister reassure our coastal communities, including my own in

Worthing West, that water companies will be held accountable for the necessary investment to address the systemic and chronic pollution of our waters?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Emma Hardy): Congratulations to my hon. Friend on her election. She is absolutely right to be outraged at the level of sewage pumped into our rivers, lakes and seas under the previous Government. I hope that where she saw inaction in the past, she will see this Government taking action right now through our Water (Special Measures) Bill. We will not stand by and allow these levels of pollution to continue.

T2. [900436] **Ayoub Khan (Birmingham Perry Barr) (Ind):** Water bills in the west midlands are set to increase by some 37% by the end of the decade. Many of my constituents are already struggling with the cost of living. What steps will the Secretary of State take to stop private water companies ripping off consumers in the west midlands and to keep bills at an affordable level?

Emma Hardy: Of course, we recognise the impacts of the cost of living on all our constituents, but the years of under-investment by the Conservatives mean that we need £88 billion-worth of investment in the industry. Customer bills will be ringfenced under the changes brought about by the Government, and if that money is not spent on infrastructure improvement, it will be refunded to customers. Of course, the final bills are determined by Ofwat, not the Government.

T4. [900438] **Helena Dollimore (Hastings and Rye) (Lab/Co-op):** My constituents in Hastings and Rye got their water bills this month. Many of them were shocked to see their bills going up despite the failures of Southern Water, which include sewage dumped along our coastline, flooding in our town centre and leaving us without water. It has even charged us for the five days when the taps ran dry. What are the Government doing to clean up the mess left by Southern Water and by the Conservative party?

Steve Reed: What has been going on in my hon. Friend's constituency is completely unacceptable. I know that she has been a huge champion for cleaning up the water in that part of the country. One of the things we are looking at doing is doubling the rates of compensation from water companies when they let down their customers as she described.

T5. [900439] **Dr Neil Hudson (Epping Forest) (Con):** Animal and Plant Health Agency staff deserve our thanks for tackling a number of challenges facing our biosecurity. Given the outbreaks of bluetongue in East Anglia, the advance of African swine fever across Europe, and the existing threats posed by avian influenza and bovine tuberculosis, will the Minister support the APHA by affirming that the Government will fully commit to the redevelopment of its HQ in Weybridge—Labour rightly called for that in opposition—to protect the UK's biosecurity, and human and animal health?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mary Creagh): I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new seat and congratulate him on winning the Royal Society for the

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' Massingham advocacy award. The Department remains vigilant to potential global disease threats and has robust measures in place to prevent and detect disease incursion. We will be looking at funding as part of the spending review, but I pay tribute to those officials and veterinary officers who are working so hard to tackle the outbreaks that the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

T7. [900441] **Ms Polly Billington** (East Thanet) (Lab): Margate, Broadstairs and Ramsgate are bywords for the English seaside holiday, but Thanet district council has to deal with the appalling levels of littering and fly-tipping that come with the popularity of our beautiful beaches. At the end of a hot, sunny day, 5,000 people will have descended on Margate main sands, leaving them far from beautiful. The rubbish is an environmental and health hazard. Of course, the challenge is a seasonal one. What plans do the Government have to support coastal communities in tackling this blight?

Mary Creagh: I welcome my hon. Friend to her place. We need to educate the public and ourselves that there is no such place as "away" and that when we bring our children and our picnics to the beach, we should consume the food and leave only footprints in the sand. I am convening a circular economy taskforce, and we will look at seasonal needs as part of that.

T6. [900440] **Adrian Ramsay** (Waveney Valley) (Green): Any cuts to the environmental land management scheme would be a blow to farmers and to the Government's climate and nature recovery missions. The nature-friendly farming budget needs to be not just maintained but increased. Does the Secretary of State agree with the economic assessment made by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the National Trust and the Wildlife Trusts that the environmental land management budget will need to be increased to around £5.9 billion a year to meet the targets?

Steve Reed: The Government remain fully committed to the ELM schemes, and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will make announcements about the budget at the appropriate time.

Dr Marie Tidball (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): Under the Conservative Government, there were almost 18,000 hours of sewage dumping in my constituency in 2023. What is the Minister doing to ensure that Yorkshire Water cleans up its act and our beautiful River Don?

Emma Hardy: I thank my hon. Friend for her question and welcome her to her place. She is already a tireless champion for her constituency, and she has raised this issue with me in the past. Our new Water (Special Measures) Bill will clean up our rivers, lakes and seas, undoing the damage left behind after 14 years of Conservative rule.

T8. [900442] **Alison Griffiths** (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con): The Secretary of State is certainly talking tough, but will he publish the justice impact test for his Water (Special Measures) Bill and list the additional court cases and prison places needed?

Steve Reed: We will publish all information relating to the Bill at the appropriate time during its passage through Parliament.

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): What action will the Secretary of State and his Department take to support farmers in addressing rural crime, which is a huge issue for farmers in my constituency and across Essex?

Steve Reed: I am pleased to say that I made a joint announcement with the Home Secretary that this will be the first Government to have a cross-departmental rural crime strategy intended to cut the huge impact of rural crime on communities.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Biodiversity net gain is critical to replacing the loss we are experiencing in our environment and is now mandatory in planning applications—but with exemptions. Those exemptions mean that most developers are avoiding biodiversity net gain, so what will the Government do to tighten up the exemptions and make that more difficult?

Mary Creagh: This is a very new policy and has only just come into force, as the hon. Lady will be aware. There are very limited exemptions in place at the moment, such as that on side returns on housing, but we are keeping the issue under active review and I am in discussions with officials about it.

Ben Goldsborough (South Norfolk) (Lab): The bluetongue outbreak in Haddiscoe is seriously concerning, and it is crucial that the Animal and Plant Health Agency is provided with sufficient resources to conduct testing swiftly. Will my right hon. Friend meet me to discuss this urgent matter?

Steve Reed: I am happy to ensure that the relevant Minister meets my hon. Friend to discuss the issue. However, the APHA and other authorities are doing a good job right now of containing a very worrying incident of bluetongue.

Dr Kieran Mullan (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): In Bexhill and Battle we get to enjoy the amazing High Weald area of outstanding natural beauty, but it is expansive, covering more than 1,400 sq km. What advice did the Minister's Department give the Housing Department on taking such issues into account when centrally imposed housing targets are putting pressure on the area as a whole?

Mary Creagh: It is important to remember that our national landscapes are protected landscapes and that the planning authorities work appropriately on such issues. I am in discussions with officials and I am happy to write to the hon. Gentleman with a proper answer on the issue.

Jenny Riddell-Carpenter (Suffolk Coastal) (Lab): In my constituency we also have confirmed cases of bluetongue, and I recently met a farmer who lost six pregnant ewes last week. Will the Minister meet me to discuss the issue and how we can support farmers in my constituency and across the east of England?

Steve Reed: I will happily ensure that my hon. Friend gets a meeting, perhaps with our hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Ben Goldsborough), to discuss the issue in her region.

Mr Joshua Reynolds (Maidenhead) (LD): Before the school summer holidays, 26 year 3 students at Holy Trinity primary school in Cookham wrote to me about sewage in the Thames. They are really concerned that water companies are allowed to get away with putting sewage in our water. Will the Minister meet me and students at Holy Trinity to discuss their concerns?

Emma Hardy: As a former primary school teacher, how can I not say yes to a meeting with the students from my hon. Friend's constituency? I am already looking forward to it.

Terry Jermy (South West Norfolk) (Lab): I am very concerned about the future of the Thetford biomass facility in my constituency. Every year, it turns half a million tonnes of poultry litter into electricity. Has the Secretary of State had meetings to discuss the potential impact of the end of the renewables obligation scheme on the disposal of poultry litter?

Mary Creagh: We are in the early stages of looking at how we deal with the country's waste and considering the policies we will bring forward. This will be looked at as part of the review. We will be working with colleagues from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to ensure we get the right results.

Freddie van Mierlo (Henley and Thame) (LD): Will the Secretary of State meet me and the Environment Agency to discuss the closure of Marsh Lock bridge on the Thames path in Henley-on-Thames?

Emma Hardy: I would be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman and the Environment Agency to discuss the matter in more detail.

SOLICITOR GENERAL

The Solicitor General was asked—

Unduly Lenient Sentence Scheme

1. **Ellie Chowns** (North Herefordshire) (Green): If she will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending the unduly lenient sentence scheme to include unduly severe sentences. [900390]

The Solicitor General (Sarah Sackman): It is a privilege to be appointed as His Majesty's Solicitor General. My fellow Law Officers and I will be working to restore public faith in government and the rule of law, and to support the Home Secretary and the Lord Chancellor in delivering our safer streets mission.

Sentencing policy is quintessentially a matter for the Ministry of Justice; sentencing is a matter for our judges. Offenders already have the right to appeal to the Court of Appeal against their sentences, including when they consider them to be unduly excessive.

Ellie Chowns: Since 4 July, more than 40 people have been jailed in the UK for peaceful acts of conscience: some for protesting climate breakdown, some for taking measures to stop violations of international humanitarian law in Gaza. The UN special rapporteur, Michel Forst, has made public statements to the effect that these sentences violate international law and are not acceptable in a democracy. With our prisons in crisis and radical measures necessary, as we have seen with the release of prisoners this week, will the Attorney General issue guidance to judges to ensure that sentencing for peaceful protest is realigned with common sense, democratic principles and international law?

The Solicitor General: Decisions to prosecute, convict and sentence are rightly made independently of Government by the Crown Prosecution Service, juries and judges respectively. As I have already said, if someone wants to appeal an unduly excessive sentence, they can do so and our courts are there to handle that matter.

Mr Speaker: I welcome the new Chair of the Justice Committee.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith and Chiswick) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Government have pledged to undertake a review of sentencing generally. I wonder whether I can tempt the Solicitor General to support a wider review of aspects of the criminal justice system that do not seem to be working, in particular the role of the Criminal Cases Review Commission and the CPS in dealing with potential miscarriages of justice. This week, Oliver Campbell's conviction for murder was quashed by the Court of Appeal as unsafe. The Criminal Cases Review Commission was asked to look at the case in 2005. The CPS resisted the appeal and asked for a retrial after 33 years.

The Solicitor General: First, I welcome my hon. Friend and congratulate him on his election as Chair of the Justice Committee. He is right that we will be undertaking a review of sentencing. On miscarriages of justice, we will want to work with him to look into that further. I am happy to meet him to discuss such matters.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Attorney General.

Sir Jeremy Wright (Kenilworth and Southam) (Con): May I first warmly welcome the Solicitor General to her place, and the Attorney General to his place in the other place, in what the Solicitor General will already know is one of the most interesting and challenging parts of government? While I am at it, I should of course also welcome the hon. Member for Hammersmith and Chiswick (Andy Slaughter) as the new Chair of the Justice Committee. May I also take the opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa), the shadow Solicitor General, on the responsibilities he will shortly take up on behalf of the whole House, which he will do brilliantly after an all-too-short career on the Opposition Front Bench?

I do not know for how long the Solicitor General and I will have these exchanges over the Dispatch Boxes, but I am glad to be able to start on a note of consensus. I

agree with her that it would not be appropriate to extend the unduly lenient sentence scheme to cover unduly severe sentences, for which, as she says, appeal is already available, but she will agree that the scheme is always capable of improvement. It is currently wholly reactive, responding to requests from others for sentences to be reviewed. May I ask the Solicitor General to consider the merits of her Department, and indeed the Ministry of Justice—I see that the Minister of State, Ministry of Justice, the hon. Member for Swindon South (Heidi Alexander), is sitting beside her—monitoring sentencing more proactively, in particular for newly created offences, so that we can all have confidence that, particularly in relation to those offences, sentences are being passed within anticipated ranges?

The Solicitor General: I thank the right hon. and learned Member for his question, and also for his warm welcome. He is enormously experienced in these matters, as both a former Attorney General and a former Justice Minister. As he rightly notes, newly created offences, such as those created by the Online Safety Act 2023, do not currently fall within the scope of the unduly lenient sentencing scheme, and I understand that there are no immediate plans to extend the scheme further, but—again, as he rightly notes—we always look for opportunities to reform, and, along with my Department, I will keep that under review.

Violence against Women and Girls

2. **Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help increase prosecution rates for cases relating to violence against women and girls. [900392]

7. **Peter Swallow** (Bracknell) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help increase prosecution rates for cases relating to violence against women and girls. [900398]

9. **Catherine Fookes** (Monmouthshire) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help increase prosecution rates for cases relating to violence against women and girls. [900400]

10. **Anneliese Midgley** (Knowsley) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help increase prosecution rates for cases relating to violence against women and girls. [900401]

The Solicitor General (Sarah Sackman): For too long, women and girls across the country have faced routine threats of appalling violence and abuse. This Government were elected with a clear mandate to halve violence against women and girls within a decade; that is what we will deliver, and it is something to which I am personally committed. In the early stages of that process, I have recently met both the Domestic Abuse Commissioner and the Victims' Commissioner to discuss how the Crown Prosecution Service can work closely with the police from the earliest point to build robust, victim-centred investigations that will drive improvements in conviction rates.

Debbie Abrahams: I, too, welcome the Solicitor General to her position. She will be aware of the appalling increase in crimes against women and girls throughout the United Kingdom, including my constituency and

Greater Manchester more widely. More than a million such crimes were recorded last year, constituting both 20% of all crimes logged and an increase in the number of violent crimes against women and girls. Given the seriousness of the situation, what plans do the Government have to ensure that we prosecute effectively and quickly?

The Solicitor General: I congratulate my hon. Friend on her election as chair of the Work and Pensions Committee. The statistics that she has given are indeed worrying, and the mission of halving violence against women and girls is therefore central to the Government's agenda. Behind each of those statistics lie heartbreaking personal stories. We need to do much better, which is why the Lord Chancellor has committed herself to introducing specialist rape courts to fast-track rape cases and why the Home Office is delivering plans to introduce specialist rape and sexual offence teams in every police force. It is measures of that kind that will address the problems highlighted by my hon. Friend.

Peter Swallow: The 2023 police efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy report on Thames Valley police established that the force did not make full use of Clare's law. Does the Solicitor General agree that Clare's law is a powerful tool to protect women from those who have already been prosecuted for domestic violence?

The Solicitor General: I thank my hon. Friend for raising an important issue. He is right: Clare's law is a powerful tool, and it needs to be applied more evenly and consistently. The domestic violence disclosure scheme, known as Clare's law, enables the police to disclose information to a victim, or potential victim, of domestic abuse about previous abusive or violent offending by a partner or ex-partner. The police need to consider each request on its own merits. However, more needs to be done to ensure that the scheme is used consistently by police forces across the country, and I understand that the Home Office is currently engaging with the police to see how its application can be improved.

Catherine Fookes: May I warmly welcome the Solicitor General to her place? I am sure she agrees that the dreadful legacy of the last Government's record on rape convictions cannot be allowed to continue. She knows that behind the statistics—less than 2% of rapes are prosecuted—lie real people such as a woman in my constituency of Monmouthshire, who has been waiting on a CPS decision for two years and three months. Her life has been on hold and in limbo as she waits to hear whether the perpetrator will be charged. She has summoned up the courage to report, and we cannot leave her or anyone else in indefinite limbo. Can the Solicitor General share what progress has been made on the introduction of the Government's new rape courts? What impact does she expect them to have on the time lag between reporting and charging, and on prosecution rates for those charged with violence against women?

The Solicitor General: I absolutely share my hon. Friend's concerns. As her constituent's heartbreaking experience illustrates, such delays are traumatic for victims. They too often lead to what is known as victim attrition, which leads to trials collapsing and deters others from reporting these sorts of offences. This has gone on for far too long, and we need to get a grip on

the situation. That is why the Lord Chancellor has committed to introducing specialist rape courts and working with the judiciary to drive down wait times. Obviously, those need to be carefully considered while navigating other pressures on the justice system, and I hope to be able to update the House on the Government's plan in due course.

Anneliese Midgley: Between 2022 and 2023, my constituency of Knowsley had the highest number of deaths per capita due to domestic abuse, but very few people are charged for domestic abuse, let alone prosecuted. Will the Law Officers meet me to discuss how we can join up the criminal justice system so that the police and prosecutors work together to take dangerous abusers off our streets?

The Solicitor General: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the incredibly distressing figures. As I said before, the human stories that lie behind them will each tell a tragic tale, which is why tackling this issue is at the heart of this Government's agenda. I am happy to meet my hon. Friend and her local chief Crown prosecutor, Jonathan Storer, to discuss this serious issue and look at how we can improve joint working between the CPS and the police.

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst (Solihull West and Shirley) (Con): May I congratulate the Solicitor General on her appointment?

Among the most serious offences involving women and girls are rape and serious sexual offences. Once victims come forward, there are often delays in their cases being heard, and a frequent driver of that is the difficulty in getting sufficiently experienced counsel. A major driver of that is the gap between the fees for prosecuting and defending counsel. Does the Solicitor General agree that there is an urgent need to plug that gap?

The Solicitor General: We know that the availability of sufficiently experienced prosecutors is a problem that needs to be looked at. That is why, in appropriate cases, we are looking at using associate prosecutors to clear the backlog in our courts more generally, but for the most serious crimes of rape and violence against women and girls, we need specialist prosecutors. The Government will be looking closely at both recruitment and retention.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): May I welcome the Solicitor General to her place? I wish her well in the role and hope that it goes according to plan. Can she further clarify that funding is available for each branch of the prosecution services to provide the protection and support that helps victims to speak out? Is there any discussion about whether increased funding for victim support could embolden victims and help to facilitate even more safe prosecutions?

The Solicitor General: It is vital that we place victims at the centre of our justice system, which is why this Government are looking to strengthen the powers of the Victims' Commissioner. As we announced in the King's Speech, the victims, courts and public protection Bill will strengthen those powers to improve accountability

and ensure that victims' voices are centred and heard from start to finish throughout the criminal justice process.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Solicitor General.

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): May I, too, welcome the Solicitor General not just to the House, but to her place? I thank the shadow Attorney General for his warm words and for the good nature of yesterday's election.

Only a few weeks ago, the National Police Chiefs' Council and the College of Policing issued a joint national policing statement on violence against women and girls, which said:

"We are transforming the way police officers investigate rape and serious sexual offences and over the last year we have trained over 4,500 new officers in investigating this complex crime."

The Solicitor General does not have direct responsibility for policing services, but she did say that she would be working with her Home Office and Ministry of Justice colleagues, so can she confirm that those 4,500 newly trained officers, who were trained under the previous Conservative Government, will dedicate the majority of their policing activities to working on cases exclusively involving violence against women and girls?

The Solicitor General: I echo other hon. Members in congratulating the hon. Gentleman. As we have said, the mission to halve violence against women and girls within the next decade is a central priority for the Government. One aspect of that will be cross-departmental working between the Attorney General's office, the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice, as well as with other departmental colleagues. It is an absolute priority and at the moment—in the earliest stages—we are looking at exactly how we will do that. It is right that those priorities are communicated to every branch of the criminal justice system, including policing, the Crown Prosecution Service and other agencies involved.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Sarah Dyke (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): Just one in 83 rape offences recorded by Avon and Somerset Police last year resulted in a charge or court summons. Compared with other police forces in the south-west, that represents a significant increase in 2023-24 for rape and sexual offence crimes. Does the Solicitor General agree that more needs to be done to strengthen the justice system as a whole to properly deal with sexual violence and domestic abuse, not just in Avon and Somerset but across England and Wales?

The Solicitor General: I entirely agree with the hon. Member that this needs to be an absolute priority and that we need to drive improvements in conviction rates. That is why there is a commitment to introduce specialist rape courts, working to fast-track rape cases and driving down wait times, and why it is important, at the start of the system, to put domestic abuse experts in 999 control rooms. It is that whole suite of measures that will lead to the improvements that we all want to see.

Shoplifting: Prosecutions

3. **Steve Darling** (Torbay) (LD): What steps she is taking to help increase prosecution rates for shoplifting. [900393]

The Solicitor General (Sarah Sackman): Our safer streets mission will drive essential change to bring an end to the epidemic of shoplifting that is plaguing our high streets. Between 2018 and 2023, under the last Government, the charge rate for shoplifting offences went down significantly, by 5%, so we are seeing 10,000 fewer charges a year. Rather than criminalising vulnerable people, this Government believe that criminal gangs have been emboldened by poor enforcement and immunity for low-level shoplifting. We are not prepared to stand by and allow that to continue, which is why the time is right to take action against that unacceptable behaviour.

Steve Darling: I congratulate the Solicitor General on their appointment. The British Retail Consortium identified a £1.7 billion cost to traders from the offence. Having spoken to traders in Torquay and Paignton, I know that it has a massive impact on the viability of them trading on our high streets. How will the Solicitor General ensure that we expedite shoplifting prosecutions?

The Solicitor General: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this matter. Members will be all too aware of the impact that such offences have on our constituents, whether they are customers or business owners. The police are working closely with CPS colleagues to prosecute shoplifting, but we know there is more to do. Among additional measures, the Government will introduce a new offence of assaulting retail workers, in order to protect the hard-working and dedicated staff who work in those stores. There are other things that we can do, but that is a start.

Rioters: Prosecutions

4. **Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help ensure rioters are prosecuted efficiently and effectively. [900394]

8. **Jake Richards** (Rother Valley) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help ensure rioters are prosecuted efficiently and effectively. [900399]

The Solicitor General (Sarah Sackman): There seem to have been a lot of congratulations this morning, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) on being elected as Chair of the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee.

The Prime Minister and the Home Secretary have been clear that there is no place for senseless violence on our streets. During the summer, after the recent disorder, the Crown Prosecution Service deployed an additional 100 prosecutors, expanded its 24-hour charging service and received additional advice from the Director of Public Prosecutions to enable it to charge more quickly. The deterrent effects of this swift action are an example of how the system can work well when it works together.

Bill Esterson: I thank the Solicitor General for her kind words, and I congratulate her in turn on her appointment. I also congratulate the Government on their excellent response to the riots over the summer, which she has just outlined.

My hon. and learned Friend has talked about the early release scheme, which is, of course, the result of the shortage of prison places inherited from the previous Government, but does she agree that those convicted and imprisoned as a result of the riots, and those imprisoned for inciting the riots, should not benefit from the early release scheme?

The Solicitor General: I express my solidarity with my hon. Friend and his constituents, who will have been closely affected by the awful recent events in his neighbouring constituency. I know the Attorney General was deeply moved by his recent visit to Southport and what he learned there.

On the early release scheme, my hon. Friend will have heard the Lord Chancellor set out very clearly this week the importance of taking action on the mess on prison places that this Government inherited. Without the action we have taken, courts would have been unable to hold trials, the police would have been unable to make arrests and there would have been a total breakdown of law and order. The Lord Chancellor has provided details of the scheme, including its carefully considered safeguards. The scheme will apply across the board to all offenders, including rioters and those convicted of the most serious offences.

Jake Richards: It is wonderful to see my hon. and learned Friend at the Dispatch Box. I also congratulate the Government on the speediness with which justice has been done for many of the summer's rioters, which is testament to the good work of the CPS and defence lawyers. What lessons can be learnt more generally to ensure that speedy justice can occur for specific offences, particularly domestic violence?

The Solicitor General: The main lesson that we can take from this is how well the system can work when all of its constituent parts—the police, the leadership at the top of Government, and the CPS—all pull in the same direction. That approach will inform this Government's commitment to mission-led government, which will bring all the key elements of the criminal justice system together and ensure that decisions are taken with the whole system in mind. That will particularly apply to the mission on halving violence against women and girls.

Street Crime: Prosecutions

6. **Ms Polly Billington** (East Thanet) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help ensure the effective prosecution of street crime. [900397]

The Solicitor General (Sarah Sackman): This Government have made tackling antisocial behaviour, which blights our streets and threatens many of our communities, a top priority. The new crime and policing Bill announced in the King's Speech will include strong measures to tackle antisocial behaviour, to support neighbourhood policing and to give the police stronger powers to crack down on antisocial behaviour and keep our streets safe.

Ms Billington: What we have noticed, particularly in town centres such as Ramsgate and Margate, is that antisocial behaviour, drug dealing and street crime, particularly knife crime, continue because of people's

anxiety about giving evidence against the criminals. What will my hon. and learned Friend and the Government do to give people confidence that the criminal justice system and prosecutions will flow once they have given their evidence?

The Solicitor General: Just this week the Prime Minister met police, victims, families and media companies specifically to discuss knife crime, which plagues my

hon. Friend's community and many others across the country. The Prime Minister has promised to double down on these crimes, and to halve them in the next decade. I am part of a cross-departmental team that will work to deliver this. The Government are committed to taking back our streets by increasing the amount of neighbourhood policing, recruiting more prosecutors to deal swiftly with these crimes and bringing forward laws to ban zombie knives and machetes.

Point of Order

10.39 am

Sir David Davis (Goole and Pocklington) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Transparency of justice is vital. To that end, Members of this House should be freely able to see exactly what happens at any trial in this country. Yet when I tried to obtain a transcript of the Lucy Letby trial from Manchester Crown court, I was told it would cost me £100,000. That number eventually reduced to £9,000. In any event, that is more than any of us in this House can afford. It is critical that parliamentarians have free access to that kind of data. Will the House authorities talk to the relevant Government Department to ensure that transcripts of all trials are freely available to Members of this House?

Mr Speaker: This is not a matter for the Chair, but I know that the right hon. Gentleman is not the only Member with concerns about the cost of such transcripts. I will ask the House authorities to look into the matter, because such costs inhibit Members. The outrageous amount of £100,000 prohibits Members of Parliament from carrying out their duty on behalf of their constituents. The Solicitor General is in the Chamber, so I hope that she will take these comments on board and let us speak to the company concerned. I will also take the matter up with the Clerks of the House. Does the Solicitor General wish to make a comment? If not, let us proceed.

Business of the House

10.41 am

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): Will the Leader of the House provide a statement about forthcoming business?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Lucy Powell): The business for the week commencing 7 October is as follows:

MONDAY 7 OCTOBER—General debate on Lord Darzi's independent investigation into NHS performance.

TUESDAY 8 OCTOBER—Opposition day (2nd allotted day). Debate on a motion in the name of the official Opposition; subject to be announced.

WEDNESDAY 9 OCTOBER—Second Reading of the Renters' Rights Bill.

THURSDAY 10 OCTOBER—As well as my birthday, a general debate on sport, following the Team GB and ParalympicsGB successes.

FRIDAY 11 OCTOBER—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 14 October will include:

MONDAY 14 OCTOBER—Second Reading of the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill.

TUESDAY 15 OCTOBER—Second Reading of the House of Lords (Hereditary Peers) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 16 OCTOBER—Opposition day (3rd allotted day). Debate on a motion in the name of the Liberal Democrats; subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 17 OCTOBER—General debate; subject to be announced.

FRIDAY 18 OCTOBER—The House will not be sitting.

Chris Philp: The business announced for the first week back strikes me as extraordinarily light. There is only a single piece of substantive Government business and half the time will be taken up with general debate. This "Government of service" seem to be taking it pretty easy. In fact, after 70 days, only 13 Bills have been introduced. I looked up the record of the previous Government. I discovered that they introduced 31 new Bills in 100 days following the 2019 election. The right hon. Lady has quite a lot of work to do in the next 30 days, if she is going to catch up with Boris Johnson.

Millions of pensioners are sick with worry following the vote earlier this week to strip them of the winter fuel allowance, including pensioners in poverty. I acknowledge and recognise the 53 courageous Labour MPs who did not support that appalling measure, but the other 350 did vote for it. I join the Leader of the Opposition in urgently calling on the Government to publish the impact assessment.

On 8 July, in a speech to the civil service, the Prime Minister said that his Government would be "open and transparent". Where is the openness and transparency here? The only impact assessment that we have seen is the Labour party's own impact assessment suggesting that the policy would cause 3,850 deaths. I call on the Leader of the House to do the decent thing and publish that impact assessment. This is not so much a Government of service as a Government of secrecy.

[Chris Philp]

I also call for an urgent debate on the management of the early release scheme for prisoners. The Justice Secretary came to this House on 25 July and promised us that the “worst violent and sexual” offenders would be “excluded”—I am quoting her words directly. She also promised that domestic abuse offenders would be excluded. I am sorry to say to the House that that is not what has happened. The Napo general secretary, Ian Lawrence, says:

“Members have shared examples where those with both Domestic Violence offences and Sexual Offences have been released”.

He goes on to say that his members—prison officers—“are extremely disappointed that this has been denied during several media appearances by Government ministers”.

He calls on the Government to correct the record, and I call on the Leader of the House to do so now: to correct the record and correct the inaccurate information that her colleagues have provided to the public.

Some of the examples of those being released early, contrary to the assurances that the Justice Secretary gave to this House, are appalling. Lawson Natty, age 20, who is due for early release, provided the machete that was used to kill 14-year-old Gordon Gault, whose mother describes herself as “sickened” by the early release. Adam Andrews, who is also due for early release, brutally assaulted a 21-day-old baby, leaving that baby blind and paralysed. We were promised that serious violent offenders would not be released early. That promise appears to have been broken. Not a Government of service; a Government of shameful incompetence.

It has been 70 days since the election and it has been a pretty terrible start to government: pensioners in poverty have been stripped of their winter fuel allowance, while there are inflation-busting pay rises for train drivers who already earn £65,000 a year; Labour party donors have been appointed to civil service positions; and there has been the botched release of prisoners, contrary to promises made to this House that violent offenders would not be released early. No wonder the Government’s approval ratings have plummeted at what, as far as I can see, is the fastest rate for any Government in modern times. The rates now stand at minus 36%. But not to worry: the Government do have one new supporter. Mr Djaber Benallaoua says that he will now be “a lifelong Labour voter”. The only problem is that he is a convicted drug dealer who is very happy about his early release. Not so much a Government of service as a Government for their donors, for their trade union paymasters, and for violent criminals who they promised would not be released early, but who they did in fact release.

Lucy Powell: May I start by welcoming the news that the Princess of Wales has completed her chemotherapy and is moving on to the next stage of her recovery? Like you, Mr Speaker, I place on the record my thanks to the Speaker’s Chaplain, the Venerable Patricia Hillas, in her final week. We thank her for her contribution to this House.

I congratulate all the newly elected Select Committee Chairs; they play a very important role in this House. I also send my regards to Terry Wiggins, who has served us as a chef for an astonishing 50 years. We all know Terry as the mainstay of the Debate, and I am sure that he will miss serving up the famous House of Commons

jerk chicken. I know that he is looking forward to having more time for walking with his dogs. They must be the best-fed dogs in the country.

This week, for the first time in 14 years, a Labour Bill became an Act. The Budget Responsibility Act 2024 ensures that there can never again be a repeat of Liz Truss’s disastrous mini-Budget. It comes as we grapple with the £22 billion black hole left by the Conservative party—what a stark reminder that is of the importance of economic stability.

The theme this week is the Government honouring their commitment to all those who have been let down. We have published the Renters’ Rights Bill, which will finally end no-fault evictions—a measure long promised but never realised. In order to help unlock town centre regeneration, we have begun reform of outdated compulsory rules—levelling up, remember that? And to the workers of Port Talbot Steel left hanging by the previous Government, the Business and Trade Secretary announced a new deal, welcomed by workers and their representatives.

Today, we introduce the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill, otherwise known as Martyn’s law, meeting a promise that the Prime Minister made to Figen Murray, who lost her son Martyn Hett in the Manchester arena attack. I am personally delighted that we are doing this today. This is a Government of service, delivering their manifesto, sticking to their promises and cleaning up the mess left by the Conservative party.

Work began this week on another commitment that we made, with the first meeting of the Modernisation Committee. I thank Members from across the House who have joined and contributed to the process so far, including the shadow Leader of the House and the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope), who is taking his membership very seriously indeed. This morning, the Committee published a memorandum setting out its core principles and early priorities, and I encourage Members from across the House to take a look at that.

We seem to be developing a common theme in these exchanges. The Conservatives lost the election badly because they crashed the economy, made people worse off and did not fix the foundations of this country. The shadow Leader of the House seems to think that we can just carry on as we were, but we saw that movie and it did not end well.

The shadow Leader of the House asks me about the prisons crisis—[*Interruption.*] Okay, he say it was the management of the prisoner release scheme. Let us just remember that we inherited from the Conservatives prisons on the point of collapse. After the riots, we came within 100 places of our prisons overflowing. If we had not acted, courts would not have been able to hold trials and the police would not have been able to make arrests. Our entire criminal justice system was on the brink of collapse. Police chiefs warned his Government that failing to act before the election would increase the risk considerably, including the risk of serious disorder. What did his Government do? Absolutely nothing. We took the difficult decisions that we had to in order to ensure that our prisons and the whole criminal justice system did not collapse. The previous Government ducked the big issues, as ever; we acted. I will not take any lectures from him about that.

I notice that the shadow Leader of the House did not ask me about the NHS. The damning findings of the Darzi report, out this morning, are another utterly unforgivable example of the state of public services that we inherited from the Conservative party. The true scale of the crisis in our NHS, experienced by all our constituents, family and friends every day, has been laid bare this morning. Does he want to take the opportunity to apologise for that? No, I did not think he would.

I also notice that the shadow Leader of the House did not repeat the claim that he often makes that the previous Government left us a booming economy. Is that because yesterday's growth figures confirmed what we all know: that under his party's watch, we had no growth, falling living standards and a stagnant economy? That is the legacy of his party, and he knows it.

We are fixing the foundations and stabilising the economy. That is why the Conservatives lost and we won. We will not put our heads in the sand. We are keeping our promises—to renters, to steelworkers, and, today, to Figen Murray—and restoring the trust in politics squandered by the Conservative party. This is the change that the country voted for, and the change that we are delivering.

Dame Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on glioblastoma drug treatments? As Mr Speaker and she will know, 3,200 people each year are diagnosed with this death sentence. It is the largest killer of the under-40s, and life expectancy at five years is just 5%. Without Government intervention in the pharmaceutical industry and the NHS, there will be no improvement for another 40 years, and we will continue to see the same number of people traumatised, dead and scandalised.

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this important matter. I know what an amazing campaigner she has become on the issue of brain cancers, following the tragic death of her much loved sister, Margaret, whom we all dearly miss to this day. My hon. Friend and I both know many people affected by this terrible disease, which is the killer of so many, and delivers people such a terrible prognosis. It is absolutely heartbreaking. I will ensure that the Health Secretary has heard what she has said. Should she apply for a debate on the subject, I am sure that it would be very welcome to the House.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the forthcoming business, and echo her in wishing the Princess of Wales all the best in her further recovery. May I also say how proud it makes me that the first Opposition day debate in the name of the Liberal Democrats has been announced?

Tomorrow marks the beginning of the Jane Austen festival in Bath. It is the largest festival of its kind, and a wonderful occasion to celebrate one of the city's most famous residents. Everybody here is invited to come and celebrate Jane Austen in Bath's regency glory. Austen is one of the UK's best known female authors, and her writing is still known hundreds of years after she wrote her famous novels. She was a strong advocate for education and broke down barriers for women in education and literature, which makes it all the more disappointing

that even today many students will not study a female author at GCSE. A shameful 2% of students did, according to End Sexism in Schools. It is not just when it comes to the authorship of novels that women lack representation; over 70% of the set texts offered by the most popular awarding body have both a male author and a male protagonist.

Diverse literature enriches children's education. There is a wealth of inspiring novels written by women that children unfortunately do not get to read in school. If the next generation is to grow up challenging male dominance in society, boys and girls need to be exposed to empowering representations of women. We need more pride and less prejudice in the curriculum. In the light of the Government's upcoming curriculum and assessment review, can we have a statement from a Minister on how to address the gender bias in English literature?

Lucy Powell: What a wonderful issue to raise in business questions. I wish the residents of Bath, and everybody across this country, good wishes in celebrating the fabulous work of Jane Austen. I have not had time to think of a better pun than the one that the hon. Lady weaved into her tribute, but she is right that women, young girls, and young boys really should study female authors, and understand the contribution that women have made to the progress of society across not just culture, the arts and literature but science, engineering and technology. They are too often forgotten in our history and curriculum. I am sure that this matter figures in our curriculum review, and I will ensure that the Secretary of State for Education has heard her very good question.

Clive Efford (Eltham and Chislehurst) (Lab): I associate myself with the words of the Leader of the House about Terry Wiggins. I knew Terry over 50 years ago, as we grew up in the same area. He is also a commissioner of scouts in Greenwich, and he puts a lot into our local community.

Will the Leader of the House consider the contaminated blood scandal as a possible subject for debate on Thursday 17 October? We were promised a full day's debate on the scandal following the publication of Sir Robert Francis's report on the compensation scheme.

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. He will be aware that in the short time we have been in Government, there have been two statements to the House on the infected blood compensation scheme. Over the summer, the Government worked at pace, and incredibly hard, to ensure that our statutory deadline for establishing the compensation scheme was met by 23 August. That compensation scheme is now up and running, and money is being paid out. He is right that there is a commitment to providing further time for debate of the issues on the Floor of the House, and there is active discussion about bringing that forward.

Mr Speaker: I call and welcome the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I urge the Leader of the House to publish the membership numbers for Select Committees, and

[*Bob Blackman*]

urge the usual channels to get on with populating those Committees, in particular of course the Backbench Business Committee, so that we can start to schedule the debates that Back Benchers, rather than the Government, want to table.

The Leader of the House has not announced when the Tobacco and Vapes Bill will come back. In Committee, I and many Labour Members proposed amendments to the then Government's Bill that we will want to progress. I realise that the matter will be considered by the Health Secretary. Will the Leader of the House also take away and consider the view that shisha lounges and the sale of paan need to be included in the measures? Otherwise, we will leave escape clauses for those who want to resist taking action on mouth, throat and lung cancer.

Lucy Powell: I welcome the hon. Gentleman, following his election, to his position as Chair of the Backbench Business Committee. I know what fantastic work he did as Vice-Chair of the Committee in the previous Parliament, as he and I were in these sessions together for many hours. I look forward to working with him, and have already been in touch with him to fix up a meeting at the earliest opportunity, so that we can table forthcoming business in the Chamber. We will absolutely work at pace to populate the Committees and get them up and running as quickly as possible.

We announced in the King's Speech that we would take forward the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, which will come to the House in due course. One issue that the Secretary of State is considering is how to strengthen the Bill before we introduce it by looking at amendments from the previous Session.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney) (Lab): May I say how good it is to see my right hon. Friend in her role as Leader of the House?

The Competition and Markets Authority, backed by the Court of Appeal, found that pharmaceutical firms Auden McKenzie and Actavis UK charged excessive and unfair prices for hydrocortisone tablets. NHS spending on those products rose from around £500,000 to over £80 million a year. Producers gaming the system to gouge the NHS is a bad look. Tens of thousands of people depend on those tablets to treat conditions such as Addison's disease. May we have a statement on NHS procurement? Our new plan for procurement must prevent bad actors from ripping off our NHS.

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words. It is a pleasure to continue working with him in this new Session, as I did so closely in the last. He is a real champion for transparency, accountability and value for money in government, and he raises those important matters today. He may wish to raise them after business questions, during the statement on the NHS audits that have just been carried out, as procurement is a key part of those findings.

Martin Vickers (Brigg and Immingham) (Con): I recently visited Lindsey Lodge hospice, which serves my constituents along with St Andrew's hospice in Grimsby. They rely on Government for approximately a third of their income. Obviously, there were concerns that that income may be reduced in the near future. The volunteers

do tremendous work, but they need that Government support. Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement from the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to reassure those hospices about their future income streams?

Lucy Powell: That topic came up a lot in last week's business questions, so I am sure that there would be wide support for the hon. Gentleman's request. The role that hospices play in end-of-life care is critical to this country. I think it would surprise most people to understand that the vast majority of hospice funding is charitable and not from the Government. I encourage him to apply for a debate, because I think that he would get a lot of support.

Mr Speaker: I call Patricia Ferguson, whom I congratulate on her election to the Chair of the Scottish Affairs Committee.

Patricia Ferguson (Glasgow West) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Will the Leader of the House comment on the Government's actions to reset the relationship with the Scottish Government? The early meeting of our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister with the First Minister of Scotland was widely welcomed, but what more can be done to ensure that both Governments work together to deliver for the people of Scotland?

Lucy Powell: I congratulate my hon. Friend on her election to the Chair of the Select Committee. I know that she will approach that job with gusto and be a powerful voice on those issues in the Chamber. She is absolutely right: it is important for us to work constructively and in a grown-up way with the Scottish Government. The Prime Minister has begun the process of resetting the relationship. I myself have met the Scottish First Minister, and I will go up to Scotland in the coming weeks. We also want to strengthen the Sewel convention, to which I know she will give great consideration as the Chair of the Select Committee.

Dame Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): May I pick up on the question asked by the hon. Member for Eltham and Chislehurst (Clive Efford) about the infected blood scandal? The Leader of the House confirmed that there would be regulations to establish compensation for eligible persons affected—the families, widows in many cases, or children who were left without parents—by the scandal. Will she make time for a debate in which the Government confirm when those regulations will be made?

Lucy Powell: I congratulate the hon. Lady, too, on becoming Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. I know she will perform the role with great passion and diligence as she did in the last Session.

The hon. Lady is absolutely right. The compensation scheme is now established. Those infected will receive their compensation by the end of this year, and those affected can expect to receive their compensation in 2025. There will be further statements from the Paymaster General as the compensation scheme progresses.

Mike Amesbury (Runcorn and Helsby) (Lab): May I draw the attention of the House to early-day motion 169, which expresses my concern about the low threshold for pension credit and its cliff-edge nature?

[That this House notes that the current threshold of pension support to open the gate way of winter fuel allowance is too low; further notes the need to change the cliff-edge nature of the pension credit threshold; and calls upon the Government to capture the gateway support for those citizens with small occupational pensions that take them just above the threshold.]

Will we have a ministerial statement on how the Government are going to address that?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend is a fantastic campaigner for those who are on the breadline or struggling, especially the many pensioners in his constituency. I know he will continue to raise those matters with the Government, as he should and is right to do. We have protected the triple lock, which has increased the state pension by £900 this year and over £400 next year. We are ensuring that there is other support for pensioners on pension credit and aligning that with housing benefit. I encourage him to keep raising these questions and I will ensure that the Secretary of State has heard his call for a further statement.

Vikki Slade (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): The issue of special educational needs funding is well known in the House. Local authorities are still waiting for clarity on an extension to the statutory override that allows them to fund the shortfall from core council budgets, including their reserves. The deficit in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, where many of my constituents' children go to school, has reached £64 million with reserves at just £65 million. Councils are not permitted to borrow to fund the deficit, and without urgent action they will be unable to set a legally balanced budget in February. Will time be made for the House to discuss special educational needs and disabilities funding and local government finance before well-run councils such as BCP become insolvent and more vulnerable children are failed?

Lucy Powell: I thank the hon. Lady for bringing up an issue that is raised frequently with me and other Ministers, because, too often, those with special educational needs find that our education system does not cater for them. Our children's wellbeing Bill will come to the House in due course. It will require all schools to co-operate with local authorities on special educational needs inclusions. There will be further announcements about education funding as part of the comprehensive spending review.

Liz Twist (Blaydon and Consett) (Lab): This Tuesday was World Suicide Prevention Day. Sadly, the latest statistics from the Office for National Statistics show that suicide rates are higher than we have seen for two decades. These are not just statistics; they are people, and each suicide affects families, friends, colleagues and communities. Suicide is preventable, not inevitable, so can we have a debate in Government time on how we can prevent these dreadful suicides?

Lucy Powell: Suicide remains one of the biggest killers of young people in this country, and the figures are growing. It is a terrible blight on all those who are left behind and many people struggle to come to terms with it. Any action that we can take on suicide prevention is action that we will take, and putting mental health on a

parity with physical health is a key part of the reforms that the Secretary of State will be discussing in a statement shortly.

Robbie Moore (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con): Many constituents across the Worth valley, Keighley and the wider area are deeply concerned about proposals to construct 65 wind turbines on Walshaw moor in Calderdale. That development will have a hugely detrimental impact on the carbon storage capacity of the peat bogs and on the ecology, but also on local communities, and I am staunchly opposed to it. Constituents are concerned that as a result of Labour's choice to remove the moratorium on the development of onshore wind farms, that development is more likely to take place. Could we have a debate in Government time on the negative impacts of the Government's choice to remove the moratorium on onshore wind farms?

Lucy Powell: We make no apology for removing that moratorium, because it is absolutely critical that we increase the capacity of wind and clean energy in this country to lower bills and give us the energy security and independence that is crucial to the future of our economy and our wellbeing. The hon. Gentleman might want to raise this issue at Energy Security and Net Zero questions, which will take place on 8 October.

Jen Craft (Thurrock) (Lab): Due to a legacy of financial mismanagement and effective bankruptcy left by the previous Conservative administration, services in my constituency have been cut to the quick. That includes home-to-school transport for children with special educational needs and disabilities—including children under the age of five and young people between 16 and 19 years old—which local authorities do not have a statutory requirement to provide. Given the well-documented positive impact of early intervention, particularly for children with SEND, and the devastating effect on children aged 16 to 19 of removal of provision at that point of their development, will the Leader of the House allow time to discuss whether the statutory framework meets the needs of all children with SEND for home-to-school transport?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend raises an incredibly important issue. As she has said, local authorities have a statutory duty to arrange free home-to-school travel for children of compulsory school age, but many others fall outside of that obligation. I will ensure that the Secretary of State for Education has heard my hon. Friend's plea. If she applied for an Adjournment debate on this matter, I am sure that it would be granted.

Mr Speaker: I will be running business questions for about another 40 minutes, so to help each other, shorter questions and brief answers might be a way to get everybody in. If people are disappointed, they should look to colleagues who may have taken too long.

Tessa Munt (Wells and Mendip Hills) (LD): The Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023 introduced the requirement that directors and other individuals verify their identity before being listed at Companies House. I have found company directors whose registered addresses simply do not exist, which at the least means that papers cannot be served, and at the

[Tessa Munt]

worst enables fraud and other crime. May we have a debate on the progress of two things: the secondary legislation that needs to be passed for those basic checks to take place; and an update on how Companies House's systems are progressing to allow directors' identities to be checked?

Lucy Powell: The hon. Lady raises an important technical matter, and I will certainly look into the progress of that statutory instrument. Given that she has such expertise and diligence in this space, she might want to consider going on the Public Accounts Committee or other Committees as those places come up in the coming weeks.

Olivia Blake (Sheffield Hallam) (Lab): Earlier this week, I met a constituent who was distressed by the fact that Enhertu—which could extend her life by two years—will not be available in England on the NHS. May we have a debate in Government time on the impact of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's new methods of evaluating health technologies, and in particular, the impact on secondary breast cancer of not approving life-extending medicines for NHS use that might have been approved under NICE's earlier evaluation methods?

Lucy Powell: NICE's agreement to the use of drugs on the NHS is a very topical issue that comes up in the Chamber, including at business questions, many times over. My hon. Friend might want to raise this issue at Health questions after we return from recess, but I will certainly ensure that the relevant Minister has heard her call today.

Dr Luke Evans (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): I would be grateful for some help and advice from the Leader of the House. When the winter fuel announcement was made, I wrote to the Treasury and was told three times no, it was a Department for Work and Pensions issue. Following that logic, when it came to VAT on school fees, I wrote to the Department for Education, and much to my surprise it told me that assessing its impact was a Treasury issue. I am therefore stuck on a merry-go-round of trying to find out how this policy, which is due to be introduced in January, will impact on my constituents. Will she advise me on how I can do that, and would she be kind enough to ask the Education Secretary to meet me to discuss the impact on my constituents of VAT going on private school fees?

Lucy Powell: I am sure the Education Secretary would be happy to answer the hon. Member's questions on that. It is a clear policy of this Government. We want to ensure that the 93% of children who attend state schools get access to the high-quality education and expert teachers they desperately need, and that is why we are imposing VAT on private school fees. Our analysis suggests that many schools and parents will be able to absorb that cost. Unfortunately, that is the situation as it is.

Lee Pitcher (Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme) (Lab): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Hatfield Town cricket club in my constituency on its 150th anniversary? At the recent anniversary celebration,

many residents asked me about my commitment as their MP to reopening Doncaster Sheffield airport. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government will continue to work with me, Mayor Ros and Doncaster city council and others to support progress with its reopening?

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend, and I join him in congratulating Hatfield Town cricket club on its 150th anniversary. He has been a real leader on the issue of reopening Doncaster Sheffield Airport, and I know that progress is being made. A 125-year lease has been agreed, and I very much look forward to the progress that he and Mayor Ros will continue to make in once again getting planes flying over Doncaster.

Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): This morning I attended Environment, Food and Rural Affairs questions, and I was surprised and somewhat confused to realise that only 40 minutes were allocated for them compared with the hour that is standard for other Departments. Why are this Government following what I understand was the convention under the previous Conservative Government of restricting the time allocated for EFRA questions, considering that it is such an important Department, covering everything from river pollution to farming support and the biodiversity crisis? Please would the Leader of the House consider expanding the time allocated to EFRA questions to the full hour?

Lucy Powell: It is always a struggle to balance the demand and supply of oral questions on the Floor of the House, and I know you share those concerns, Mr Speaker. We look at these things periodically, so I suggest that Members enter the ballot for EFRA oral questions, because if demand is increased significantly, we would take that into account. Demand in other Departments is sometimes much higher.

Helena Dollimore (Hastings and Rye) (Lab/Co-op): Over the summer, many parents in my constituency were in touch with concerns about our local schools. Of particular concern to parents of children at Ark Alexandra secondary is a new rule that children must leave their mobile phones at home. Many parents support measures to reduce mobile phone use and social media use in school—they know how damaging it is—but they are really concerned about children having phones on the journey to and from school and the safety issues involved, and they want schools to look at options, such as lock boxes, which have been used successfully elsewhere. Can the Leader of the House advise me how in this House I can take forward that issue and the wider issue of improving our local schools?

Mr Speaker: Order. I will try to call as many Members as possible, but we are really going to have to be a bit quicker, otherwise other colleagues will not get in.

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. As the mum of teenagers, I know what an issue it is to balance the desires of parents to be able to contact their children and see where they are with their not wanting them to be on their phones all the time, especially while at school, which would be damaging to their education. Schools are encouraged to consult parents on these

issues to get that balance right. The issue of mobile phones for teenagers and children is a big one, so and if she puts in for a debate, I am sure she will get one.

Greg Smith (Mid Buckinghamshire) (Con): Mr Speaker, may I associate myself with your words of thanks to Tricia Hillas, who has given superb service to this House and who will always have the gratitude of the Smith family, having baptised my sons Charlie and Rupert in 2022.

Something else that happened in the previous Parliament was the passage of my private Member's Bill—through to Royal Assent, with the support of the then Opposition—on combating equipment theft from farms and other elements of rural crime. That Act requires a statutory instrument to bring it fully into force. Instead of having all these general debates, will the Leader of the House bring that SI forward?

Lucy Powell: The hon. Gentleman will know that in many cases statutory instruments do not require time on the Floor of the House, but as I have responsibility for triaging SIs, I will look at the progress with that and let him know in due course.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith and Chiswick) (Lab): May we have a debate on the importance of investigative and public interest journalism? The best journalists are an essential part of our democracy. I urge Members to look at "The Long Read" by Tom Burgis in today's edition of *The Guardian*, "How oligarchs took on the UK fraud squad—and won". May I pay tribute to *Telegraph* journalist David Knowles, creator of the brilliant "Ukraine: The Latest" podcast, who tragically died last weekend at the age of only 32? I am sure my right hon. Friend will join me in sending condolences to his family and friends.

Lucy Powell: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his election as a Select Committee Chair.

I certainly send my condolences to David's family. My hon. Friend is absolutely right: investigative journalism is so important to our democracy and we should do whatever we can as a country to support it. I am sure that the Culture Secretary would be happy if he were to raise these matters with her in forthcoming oral questions.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): The Chancellor of the Exchequer offered assurances on 29 July from the Dispatch Box about the construction of railway stations at Wellington and Cullompton, but this was contradicted the following day in a letter I received from the rail Minister, who said that those stations were still at the design stage. The rail Minister offered a meeting in the Tea Room when the House was sitting, but given that the House is about to adjourn for three weeks for the party conferences and the next Transport questions are not until 10 October, can the Leader of the House suggest how I might progress the case for a station at Cullompton with the Rail Minister with urgency?

Mr Speaker: I think the hon. Gentleman has done that.

Lucy Powell: I was going to say the same thing, Mr Speaker. I am sure the hon. Gentleman has done that in raising the matter this morning. I will ensure that

the Transport Secretary has heard that call and will ask for a Transport Minister to meet him urgently, as he was promised.

Emma Foody (Cramlington and Killingworth) (Lab/Co-op): First, may I pay tribute to a constituent of mine, Jack Hearn? He turns 101 this week and is the UK's oldest judo teacher and also one of just five living veterans who fought at the battle of Monte Cassino in world war two. He is supported by Forward Assist, a local charity that helps veterans around the country. Will the Government make time for a debate on support for veterans?

Lucy Powell: I join my hon. Friend in congratulating Jack. I am sure that, as is often the case, around the time of Remembrance Day there will be ample time on the Floor of the House to do what this Government and many Members will want to do: pay tribute to all those veterans who served this country so well over many years.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I would like to draw the attention of the House to a recently passed anti-discrimination law in the Philippines that is aimed at enhancing equality and protecting marginalised groups which has sparked a nationwide debate about the implications for religious freedom. The key question is: although the law seeks to prevent unfair treatment in employment, education and public services, how can the Government ensure that religious freedoms are safeguarded, particularly given concerns raised by faith-based groups about potential conflicts with their beliefs on gender identity and sexual orientation? Will the Leader of the House join me in questioning such persecution of religious freedom and will she urge the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to raise this issue with its counterparts in the Philippines?

Lucy Powell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for once again raising the important issue of expression of freedom of religion or belief for all. I certainly will ask the Foreign Office to raise these issues about what is happening in the Philippines. He will know that the Government are committed to ensuring that there is freedom of religion and belief for all across the world.

Jake Richards (Rother Valley) (Lab): There have been a number of tragic road traffic accidents in my constituency in Wickersley, Anston, Sitwell and Whiston. I am meeting South Yorkshire police to look at steps we can take to prevent these accidents from happening. Can we have a debate on how agencies, local authorities and the police can work together to tackle speeding and boy racers in my constituency and across the country?

Lucy Powell: May I first congratulate my hon. Friend on coming so high up in the private Members' Bills ballot? I know that achievement will be the envy of many.

My hon. Friend raises an important matter about road traffic accidents and road safety. We will soon update the strategic framework for road safety, and I will ensure that is brought to the House as soon as it is ready.

Jessica Toale (Bournemouth West) (Lab): This month, Bournemouth hosts the Arts by the Sea festival, the largest arts and culture celebration of its kind in the south-west. Investments in the arts and culture and in community arts festivals have been crucial to revitalising our seaside towns by bringing visitors, supporting the local economy and nurturing a community of creatives. Can I ask the Leader of the House for a general debate in Government time on how we invest and support the arts to help our cities and towns to develop?

Lucy Powell: I commend my hon. Friend on her campaigning for an art gallery in her constituency and on all the campaigning she is doing to bring attention to Bournemouth West and all that it has to offer. She is right that the creative sector and the creative economy are critical to regeneration and levelling up. This Government fully support that agenda.

Sonia Kumar (Dudley) (Lab): In the town of Dudley, the Conservative-led council has proposed the introduction of parking charges. That will affect students from Dudley College of Technology, learning development, local businesses, traders, users of the leisure centre and my residents, who will struggle with the costs. Will the Leader of the House allow a debate in Government time on how we support town centres and properly consider the potential negative impact on economic activity and community wellbeing caused by the hiking of parking charges?

Lucy Powell: As the Member of Parliament for Manchester Central, I am all too familiar with the challenges of parking charges in our towns and city centres. That is in part why we as a Government are ensuring that we have better public transport, and in particular better buses, so that people have alternatives. I know that this issue creates a lot of interest, should my hon. Friend wish to apply for a debate on parking charges.

David Williams (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): Over the recess, I met the Hubb Foundation in Stoke-on-Trent, which has delivered yet another fantastic holiday activities and food programme over the summer. I have seen the impact of its work at first hand over many years, and it was a bittersweet moment when it handed out its 1 millionth meal a couple of weeks ago. Will the Leader of the House make time for a debate on the continuation of such programmes to alleviate child poverty in Stoke-on-Trent North and Kidsgrove and across the country?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. The fact that in this country in 2024 we still need to operate food banks and holiday clubs to stop children from starving in the school holidays is frankly something that should bring us all shame. That is why we have a child poverty strategy. We will continue to support holiday clubs, such as the one he describes in Stoke-on-Trent North. I thank him for raising this important matter.

Dr Beccy Cooper (Worthing West) (Lab): The Darzi report published earlier today clearly outlines the importance of prevention. One aspect of that is the provision of good-quality school meals and increasing

the uptake of free school meals. May I request consideration of a debate on an opt-out free school meals scheme, perhaps on the basis of universal credit?

Lucy Powell: That is the second question in a row on food poverty and the importance of children getting access to healthy, hot, high-quality meals. My hon. Friend raises an important issue about the uptake of free school meals and how they are delivered in schools, so that we do not have the stigma we have sometimes seen in the past. I am sure that if she put in for a debate on free school meals, she might find her bid successful.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. A couple of Members are standing who came in very late. I will not be taking their questions.

Tom Rutland (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Lab): Our creaking water infrastructure is rarely out of the news, and just this week my constituents in Shoreham had to endure burst sewage pipes. Thanks to years of under-investment by our water companies, record amounts of sewage are being pumped into our rivers and seas. Will the Government make time for this important issue to be discussed?

Lucy Powell: The state of our waterways in this country is shocking, as is the decriminalised way in which our water companies have been run over many years. That is why the Government have taken quick action to clamp down on the water companies. Just last week, we introduced the Water (Special Measures) Bill, which will eventually find its way to the House. My hon. Friend might want to take part in its Second Reading when it comes.

Katrina Murray (Cumbernauld and Kirkintilloch) (Lab): Digital access has become an increasingly essential part of everyday life. However, large parts of my constituency suffer from both slow speeds and digital dead zones, which has a massive impact on residents and businesses, particularly as more of my constituents are embracing flexible hybrid working. Will my right hon. Friend grant a debate on digital connectivity?

Lucy Powell: Digital inclusion is critical to ensuring that the growth we want to see in our economy reaches every part and every community. My hon. Friend raises an incredibly important matter, and I am sure that the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology will want to hear from her at oral questions in October.

Paul Davies (Colne Valley) (Lab): The House may be aware that Holmfirth is one of the most cherished locations in Yorkshire, nestled in the heart of the Yorkshire Pennines. The Holmfirth food and drink festival offers a delightful family day out brimming with live music, delicious food and entertainment. This weekend, along with thousands of others, I will explore the stalls for local produce and enjoy the street performers. I welcome the £10 million that the West Yorkshire combined authority and Kirklees council are investing in the town, which will enhance the town centre, attracting more visitors to the town, its festivals and local shops, as well as to venues including the Picturedrome. Can we have a debate in Government time on the importance of the rural economy in the Government's growth agenda?

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend for that question on Holmfirth, where I recently went for a short staycation. What a beautiful Yorkshire town it is. It is a lot more than its reputation as the location of “Last of the Summer Wine”, which many will remember. My hon. Friend raises an important point. The rural economy is being continuously raised as an issue for a debate, and I am sure that we will look into it.

Alex Baker (Aldershot) (Lab): The Grub Hub in my constituency is supporting some of my most vulnerable constituents, offering not only vital food support but companionship and wraparound services to help people to move forward with their lives. Will the Leader of the House join me in commending that organisation for its fantastic work? While its work is fantastic, I join colleagues in asking for a debate about how we ensure that there will no longer be any need for food banks in towns such as Aldershot.

Lucy Powell: It is a disgrace that towns such as Aldershot still need food banks and that food poverty is still so prominent. That is a key issue for the Government and part of the work of our cross-cutting taskforce on tackling child poverty. I will ensure that the House is updated on that taskforce’s progress on an ongoing basis.

Dr Allison Gardner (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): Recently, a lovely constituent of mine spoke to me about the serious drug shortages affecting Creon 25000, which he needs to treat his condition of pancreatic enzyme insufficiency. The drug is also used to treat people with cystic fibrosis and pancreatic cancer—a horrible cancer that killed my mum. Joe is now petrified because he is running out of his tablets; he is scared to eat and terrified about the pain he will be in. Will the Leader of the House provide a statement on the supply of Creon 25000 and its alternative Nutrizym, which is also in short supply?

Lucy Powell: Access to appropriate drugs freely on the NHS continues to be raised with me and the Health Secretary, who was in his place as my hon. Friend asked that question. I am sure that he will take that up; I will write to him to ensure that he does.

Chris McDonald (Stockton North) (Lab): One third of the children in my constituency now live in poverty, and a recent report by Shelter showed that an increase in homelessness and child poverty is affecting many parts of the country. Will my right hon. Friend find some Government time for a debate on child poverty and its causes?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that child poverty, which is still too high and which blights us all, is a cross-cutting issue, and housing is a key part of it. That is why we have the cross-cutting taskforce looking at these issues and why, just this week, we introduced the Renters’ Rights Bill, which will look at the challenges of the private rented sector.

Chris Bloore (Redditch) (Lab): The devastating impact of knife crime is of huge concern to my constituents in Redditch and the villages. One constituent, self-defence

instructor Pete Martin, who witnessed a friend being stabbed 12 times, has been working with local schools to educate young people on the dangers of carrying knives. Will the Leader of the House make space in Government time for a debate on how we can support the work of people such as Mr Martin and reduce knife crime in our communities?

Lucy Powell: I welcome my hon. Friend to his place, and it was a pleasure to visit him before the election. He is absolutely right, and tackling knife crime is a key part of our mission to have safer streets. Just this week, the Prime Minister, along with campaigner Idris Elba, launched the coalition to tackle knife crime. Last month, we launched a nationwide call to hand over zombie-style knives and machetes, ahead of such weapons being banned from our streets on 24 September.

Andrew Pakes (Peterborough) (Lab): Small businesses, coffee shops and traders are the lifeblood of constituencies such as mine in Peterborough and across the country. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating the Federation of Small Businesses, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this Sunday? Will she also make time in the House for us to debate the amazing contribution made by the 5.5 million small business owners in this country?

Lucy Powell: My hon. Friend makes a really important point about the vital contribution of small independent shops to our high streets, including his in Peterborough. Let us be honest: the Conservative party hollowed out high streets and town centres across the country. But this Government will turn the tide and put that right.

Mr Connor Rand (Altrincham and Sale West) (Lab): The Altrincham minor injuries unit was relied on and appreciated by my constituents, but it has been closed since 2020, and the Trafford locality board recently recommended that it should never reopen. I am opposing that recommendation, shaped as it is by 14 years of Conservative failure on our national health service. Could we have a debate in Government time about the importance of minor injuries units in alleviating pressures on A&E departments and in ensuring that our national health service can truly be a neighbourhood health service?

Lucy Powell: As the Secretary of State for Health is about to outline in his statement, the truly shocking state of our NHS after 14 years of under-investment and neglect is being laid bare. One of the key priorities he will shortly outline is to ensure that our services move from hospitals to communities, and minor injuries units such as that in Altrincham would be important to that endeavour.

Mr Mark Swards (Leeds South West and Morley) (Lab): Antisocial behaviour is ruining lives. In my short time as the MP for Leeds South West and Morley, I have been inundated with residents’ requests for help about persistent antisocial behaviour by neighbours and by repeat offenders in public spaces and parks. Given that the previous Government decimated the services available to councils and the police to deal with the issue, will my right hon. Friend the Leader of the

[Mr Mark Sewards]

House please grant an urgent debate in Government time to get the police and councils the resources they need to deal with this persistent problem?

Lucy Powell: Tackling antisocial behaviour is a top priority for this Government, which is why we will get thousands more police and police community support officers on our streets, with neighbourhood policing roles back in action. It is also why we will bring in tough new powers and legislate to ensure that they are as effective as possible.

Ben Goldsborough (South Norfolk) (Lab): Residents in South Norfolk are being let down badly by Royal Mail. Those living in the Poringland area are waiting weeks to receive urgent post, such as NHS letters, legal documents and birthday cards. Can we have a debate in Government time about the importance of Royal Mail connections in our rural areas to ensure that we get post delivered on time to the people who need it the most?

Lucy Powell: The universal service is vital to communities such as the one my hon. Friend represents. That is why any changes to it will be a matter for the House to debate thoroughly and robustly, and I am sure my hon. Friend will want to take part in any such debates.

NHS: Independent Investigation

11.39 am

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Wes Streeting): With permission, I would like to make a statement on Lord Darzi's investigation into the NHS.

Unlike the last holders of this office, this Government will be honest about the problems the NHS faces and serious about fixing them. That is why I asked Lord Darzi, an eminent cancer surgeon who served both Labour and Conservative-led Governments with distinction, to conduct an independent investigation into the state of our national health service. I am sure the whole House will want to join me in thanking him for producing this expert, comprehensive report, a copy of which I have placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

I told Lord Darzi that we wanted hard truths, warts and all. His findings are raw, honest and breathtaking. He says:

"Although I have worked in the NHS for more than 30 years, I have been shocked by what I have found".

He has uncovered an enormous charge sheet, too long to list in this statement, so these are just a few: the NHS has not been able to meet its promises to treat patients on time for almost a decade; patients have never been more dissatisfied with the service they receive; waiting lists for mental health and community services have surged; 50 years of progress on cardiovascular disease is going into reverse; and cancer is more likely to be a death sentence for NHS patients than for patients in other countries. It is not just the sickness in the NHS that concerns Lord Darzi, but sickness in society. Children are sicker today than a decade ago and adults are falling into ill health earlier in life. That is piling pressure on to the NHS and holding back our economy.

Those are some of the symptoms; the report is equally damning on the causes. First, a decade of under-investment left the NHS 15 years behind the private sector on technology, with fewer diagnostic scanners per patient than almost every comparable country, including Belgium, Italy and Greece, and in 2024 mental health patients are treated in Victorian buildings with cockroach and mouse infestations, where 17 men are forced to share two showers.

Secondly, there was the disastrous 2012 top-down reorganisation overseen by Lord Lansley. Lord Darzi's assessment is damning:

"A calamity without international precedent...it took a 'scorched earth' approach to health reform".

"By 2015...ministers were...putting in place 'workarounds and sticking plasters' to bypass the legislation".

"Rather than liberating the NHS, as promised, the Health and Social Care Act 2012 imprisoned more than a million NHS staff in a broken system for the best part of a decade".

"the effects...are still felt to this day."

Just imagine if all the time, effort and billions of pounds wasted on dissolving and reconstituting management structures had instead been invested in services for patients—clearly, the NHS would not be in the mess it finds itself in today.

Thirdly, there was coronavirus. Everyone can see the lasting damage caused by the pandemic, but until now we did not know that the pandemic hit the NHS harder than any other comparable healthcare system in the world.

The NHS cancelled far more operations and routine care than anywhere else. As Lord Darzi writes:

“The pandemic’s impact was magnified because the NHS had been seriously weakened in the decade preceding its onset.”

In other words, it is not just that the Conservatives did not fix the roof while the sun was shining; they doused the house in petrol and left the gas on, and covid just lit the match. That is why waiting lists have ballooned to 7.6 million today. *[Interruption.]* If I were an Opposition Member, I would not complain about the diagnosis. I would take responsibility.

Fourthly—this sits firmly at Opposition Members’ door, so they should sit and listen—there was the failure to reform. From 2019 onwards, the previous Government oversaw a 17% increase in the number of staff working in hospitals. Did it lead to better outcomes for patients? No. At great expense to the taxpayer, the NHS has instead seen a huge fall in productivity. We paid more, but got less—a deplorable waste of resources when so many parts of our health and care services were crying out for investment. As Lord Darzi has put it:

“British Airways wouldn’t train more pilots without buying more planes.”

Doctors and nurses are wasting their time trying to find beds for their patients and dealing with outdated IT when they ought to be treating patients.

Too many people end up in hospital because they cannot get the help that they need from a pharmacy, a GP or social care. The effective reforms of the last Labour Government, which drove better performance and better care for patients, have mostly been undone, and that is why patients cannot get a GP appointment, an operation or even an ambulance when they need one today. That is what the Conservatives did to take the NHS from the shortest waiting times and highest patient satisfaction in history to the broken NHS that we see today.

Lord Darzi has given his diagnosis. Now it is over to us to write the prescription, and we have three choices. The first is to continue the Conservatives’ neglect, and allow the NHS to collapse. That is the path on which they set the NHS, and the path that it is on today. Or we could—as some of my critics on the left demand—pour ever-increasing amounts of money in without reform, wasting money that is not there and that working people cannot afford to pay. That would be wasteful and irresponsible, so we will not take that path. This Government are making a different choice: we choose recovery and reform. We are taking action today to deal with the immediate crisis by hiring 1,000 GPs whom the Conservatives had left without a job while patients were going without an appointment, and agreeing an offer to end the strikes that they allowed to cripple our health service.

At the same time, we will introduce the fundamental reforms needed to secure the future of our NHS. Earlier today, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister confirmed that the Government would publish a 10-year plan for change and modernisation, on the foundation of Lord Darzi’s report. Our plan will deliver the three big shifts needed to make our NHS fit for the future. The first is from analogue to digital, giving patients proper choice and control over their own healthcare, and finally realising the untapped potential of the NHS app. There will be fully digital patient records so that your surgeon can see

the notes that your GP writes. By marrying our country’s leading scientific minds with the care of more than 1.5 million NHS staff, we will put NHS patients at the front of the queue for cutting-edge medicines and treatments that we can only imagine today.

Secondly, there is the shift from hospital to community, turning our NHS into a neighbourhood as much as a national health service so that patients can get their tests and scans on their high streets and be cared for from the comfort of their own homes. That means bringing back the family doctor and building a national care service that can be there for us when we need it, able to meet the challenges of this century.

Thirdly, there is the shift from sickness to prevention, which means taking the decisions that the Conservatives ducked to give our children a healthy, happy start in life. It means stopping the targeting of junk food ads at children, banning energy drinks for under-16s, reforming the NHS to catch illness earlier—starting by offering health checks in workplaces and on smartphones—and delivering the Tobacco and Vapes Bill that the Conservatives failed to pass, to tackle one of society’s biggest killers.

Lord Darzi’s diagnosis is that the NHS is in a “critical condition”—unless we perform major surgery, the patient will die—but he also finds that

“its vital signs are strong”:

an extraordinary depth of clinical talent, and a shared determination to improve care for patients. This is a public service, free at the point of use, so that whenever we fall ill we never have to worry about the bill. The NHS is broken, but it is not beaten. Every person I have met in the NHS during my first two months as Health and Social Care Secretary is up for the challenge. It will take time, but this party—the party that created the NHS—has turned the NHS around before, and we will do it again. I commend this statement to the House.

Mims Davies (East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: How long has the hon. Member been here? Points of order come at the end—you cannot intervene in the middle of these proceedings.

I call the shadow Secretary of State.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the Secretary of State for advance notice of his statement.

The NHS belongs to us all, and we all care about it, so let us stop the political posturing and talk constructively about its future. We all know that our healthcare system faces significant pressures, as do all health systems around the world. We are living longer, and with multiple and complex conditions. We have wider societal pressures, such as the impact of social media on the development of some young minds, as well as the cost pressures of miracle drugs developed by our world-class life sciences sector for their treatment benefits, and the shock of the pandemic has had catastrophic impacts on the NHS and its productivity.

I believe there is much to be proud of in the NHS. Its dedicated staff look after 1.6 million people a day—25% more people than in 2010. It has more doctors, more nurses and more investment than at any point in its history. It is delivering tens of millions more out-patient

[Victoria Atkins]

appointments, diagnostic tests and procedures for patients than in 2010, and we delivered the fastest roll-out of vaccinations for covid in the world, freeing our society more quickly than other countries. We have more healthcare in the community, with the opening of 160 community diagnostic centres—the largest central cash investment in MRI and CT scanning capacity in the history of the NHS—and 15 new surgical hubs; and the launch of Pharmacy First, helping to free up 10 million GP appointments for those living with more complex conditions. [Interruption.] I say to the Secretary of State that I paid him the courtesy of listening to him in silence, so I hope he will do the same for me.

Wes Streeting: I didn't say anything!

Victoria Atkins: The right hon. Gentleman was chuntering from a sedentary position. We on the— [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. I want to hear the right hon. Lady, and Members' constituents want to know what is being said. Please, let us give the same courtesies that I expected for the Secretary of State.

Victoria Atkins: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

We on the Conservative Benches never pretended that everything was fixed. We have not pretended that we have a monopoly on wisdom or that there are easy answers to the difficult challenges we face. For the NHS to thrive in its next 75 years, it needs to reform, modernise and improve productivity. That is why the Conservative Government, working with NHS England, announced the NHS productivity plan at the spring Budget to transform how the NHS works through better IT systems for frontline staff, the expansion of services on the NHS app, which is used by three out of four adults in England, and the use of new technology, including voice-activated artificial intelligence. Together, that would see productivity grow by 2% a year by the end of the decade and unlock £35 billion-worth of savings, yet the plan is not mentioned in the 163-page report. Why is such an important and forward-looking reform missing from the report, and can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that he is choosing to cancel it—yes or no?

New medicines and trials are an essential part of the productivity challenge. There is only one mention of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence in the 163-page report. Do the Government have a strategy for life sciences and the provision of rare medicines, including cancer and dementia drugs? Why have they paused the childhood cancer taskforce?

The need for reform was also why we implemented the first ever long-term workforce plan with NHS England to train even more doctors, nurses, midwives and other healthcare staff for the future. The plan was described by the NHS CEO Amanda Pritchard as

“one of the most seminal moments in our 75-year history”,

yet it is not mentioned in today's report. Again, why is such an important and forward-looking reform missing from the report? Is the right hon. Gentleman going to cancel the new places and forms of training, including apprenticeships, that were to be provided through that plan?

The need to modernise is why, in 2019, we announced the largest programme of hospital building in modern history: 40 new hospitals across England by 2030 [Interruption.] I would be careful if I were some Back-Bench MPs. Today, seven new hospitals have opened, the Midland Metropolitan university hospital will open at the end of the year—I imagine the Secretary of State will enjoy going to its launch—and a further 18 are in construction. We are not even halfway through the decade.

Since January 2023, it has been Labour's plan to pause, review, delay and, presumably, possibly cancel those new hospitals. That was when it published its health mission; it is on page 6 for those who have not read it. In other words, it was always Labour's plan to delay and possibly cancel the new hospitals, and it has nothing to do with the Chancellor's questionable accounting since the general election.

When that was pointed out in the general election campaign, Labour candidates ran around promising voters that their new hospital or community diagnostic centre was safe with them—in Torbay, Chelsea and Fulham, Basingstoke, Watford, Bracknell, Truro, Corby and Kettering to name a few. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that Labour will delay those hospitals?

Mr Speaker: Order. It is difficult, but the time limit is supposed to be five minutes, and it has now been six minutes 22 seconds, so we are well over. Can you now conclude on that sentence?

Victoria Atkins: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

There is one part of Great Britain where, on almost every measure, the NHS performs the worst: Labour-run Wales. The right hon. Gentleman has compared—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry; I meant that you were to conclude now, not to continue with the rest of the speech. I call the Secretary of State.

Wes Streeting: The first word that the shadow Secretary of State for Health and Social Care should have said was “sorry”. She says that she never pretended everything was fixed, and that is true, but it is about time that she admitted that it was her party that broke the NHS in the first place.

In fact, it has been a feature of debate in the House since the general election that the Opposition have taken absolutely no responsibility for the mess they left our country in, including a £22 billion black hole and the new hospitals programme that the right hon. Lady referred to, in which the timetables were a work of fiction and the money ran out in March. She knew that when she went to the country to claim that the programme was fully funded. She talks about the decisions made by NICE; that was a new Labour reform and modernisation—one that thankfully survived the last 14 years.

The right hon. Lady has endorsed the right hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) in the Conservative party leadership election. I wonder what she makes of his admission that the Conservatives failed to make the tough reforms that the NHS needed because they were afraid of what Labour might say. Is that not the most derisory excuse for 14 years of neglect?

My predecessor does not bear responsibility for everything in the Darzi report—this crisis was more than a decade in the making—but I wonder when the right hon. Lady will show some humility on behalf of her party and apologise for the mess that her Government made of our national health service. Otherwise, why should anyone trust what the Conservatives have to say ever again?

This Government were given a mandate for change, and nowhere is that more needed than in our NHS. The report must mark the beginning of the long, hard work of change. It is the platform from which we will launch a decade of reform that will make sure that the NHS can be there for us when we need it—for us, our children and our grandchildren. It must draw a line in the sand, so that we never go back to the pain, fear and misery that the Conservative party inflicted on millions of patients.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: This statement will run for an hour, so please help each other. Let us try Clive Efford as a good example.

Clive Efford (Eltham and Chislehurst) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will rise to the challenge.

I welcome the Secretary of State's statement. In 2008, the previous Labour Government commissioned a report from Sir Michael Marmot on the state of society and health, and he found that there was health inequality, particularly in deprived areas. Ten years on, his second report found that health inequality had become even worse against the backdrop of an underfunded NHS. Does that not demonstrate the urgency of the need to invest in those communities under this Government? What can my right hon. Friend do to direct resources into the most deprived communities in order to turn around those health inequalities?

Wes Streeting: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that our country has stark health inequalities. It is not right that people who live in different parts of the country have such different chances of living well. A girl born in Blackpool can expect to live healthily until she is 54, whereas a girl born in Winchester can expect to live healthily until she is 66. That is why, with the Prime Minister's mission-driven approach, we will not just get our NHS back on its feet and make sure it is fit for the future; we will also reduce the cost and burden of demand on our national health service by attacking the social determinants of ill health.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD): Much of the content of Lord Darzi's report has been known for some years. None the less, today's report is a scathing summary of the complete devastation that the Conservatives have wrought on our health services and on the health of our communities. We Liberal Democrats have long argued that we need to shift healthcare from hospitals to high streets, and from treatment to prevention, because doing so improves health outcomes and saves taxpayers' money. It is a win-win.

But the report is long on diagnosis and short on prescription, so may I invite Ministers to read our fully costed manifesto to fix public health and primary care by recruiting 8,000 GPs, ending dental deserts, boosting public health grants by £1 billion, implementing our five-year plan to boost cancer survival rates, and putting a mental health expert in every school?

Does the Secretary of State accept that there is an elephant in the room: social care? Will he meet me to discuss the Liberal Democrat plans for social care, starting with free personal care? This bold idea would prevent many people from going into hospital in the first place, as well as enabling them to be discharged from hospital faster. Does he accept that it is a truth universally acknowledged that we cannot fix the NHS if we do not fix social care too?

As for the dire state of our hospitals and primary care estate, well, the Conservatives have left it to fester like a wound. Will the Secretary of State give the green light to hospitals that are ready to rebuild, such as mine in west Hertfordshire? Will Ministers look to reform outdated Treasury rules that are preventing our integrated care boards and hospital trusts from spending and investing their funds in the GP practices and hospitals that we need? This Government say that they want growth. Well, health and wealth are two sides of the same coin, which is something the Conservatives do not understand. If Labour wants economic growth, fixing our health and social care must be its top priority. And it must be a priority without delay.

Wes Streeting: How refreshing to have constructive opposition in the Chamber. It was clear throughout the election campaign that my party and the Liberal Democrats have much in common, both in the commitments we made, which in some cases were identical, and in our shared areas of emphasis: the link between health and wealth, the importance of prevention and the importance of social care.

As the Prime Minister reiterated again this morning, we are absolutely determined to address both the short-term crisis and the long-term needs of the century in our social care system. We want to work on a cross-party basis wherever possible, so I would be delighted to meet the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Peter Prinsley (Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket) (Lab): Hundreds of thousands of operations, including dozens of my own lists, were cancelled because of the strikes in the NHS over the past two years. Does the Secretary of State agree that the Conservatives' refusal to negotiate with the doctors contributed to the terrible state of the health service, and that ending the strikes is the first step towards fixing the NHS?

Wes Streeting: It sticks in the craw to hear the carping and criticism from the Conservatives, and their obvious bitter resentment that we were able to do in three weeks what they failed to do in over a year. All the while they complain about the costs of solving the strikes, they say nothing about the costs they racked up—the direct financial costs of covering the strikes, as well as the untold costs of misery to patients whose operations, procedures and appointments were cancelled, even as the shadow Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

[*Wes Streeting*]

and her Ministers had not even bothered to meet the junior doctors since March this year. The Conservatives have no grounds to complain.

Mims Davies (East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con): I thank those who daily work in NHS services across our country. If the Secretary of State is truly serious about assisting and supporting the whole of our NHS in England, across all our constituencies, “warts and all”, as he says, will he explain thoroughly why the health outcomes and experiences of families across Wales, over the last 25 years, do not merit this attention equally? Is it perhaps because Wales is Labour-run?

Wes Streeting: I have never denied, nor have the Welsh Government, that our health and social care systems are in crisis across the United Kingdom, and that waiting times and patient outcomes are not where they should be. [*Interruption.*] The Conservatives do not wish to acknowledge the truth, and even now, without a shred of humility or acceptance of the responsibility of their record in government, they carp from the sidelines. They will not admit or accept that different parts of the United Kingdom have different strengths and weaknesses.

Regardless of the fact that there is a Scottish National party Government in Scotland or a unique arrangement in Northern Ireland, as well my friends in the Welsh Government, I am proud that in my first weekend as Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, I made it my business to phone my counterparts in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. I made it clear that we will always work constructively, whatever our parties and however hard we will fight each other at the ballot box. Rather than pointing fingers at other parts of the United Kingdom, as the Conservatives did when they were in government, this Government are determined, just as the last Labour Government were, to create a rising tide that lifts all ships. I look forward to working with every devolved Administration to improve health and care outcomes across the whole of our United Kingdom.

Ms Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State is right that the future of our NHS lies in reform, and not waiting until people get sick before we intervene to keep them well, but we cannot do that without money. He says we cannot waste money that is not there, but we are wasting money that is there on the contracts we have with the private sector. He knows I feel strongly about this issue. Millions of pounds are being paid to private equity-backed funds to run sexual health centres in the NHS—the iCare clinics. Billions of pounds are being lost to the legal loan sharks of our NHS—the private finance initiative companies—and some trusts are spending more on PFI payments than on drugs. As part of the process, will he commit to an urgent review of the way in which the NHS has worked with the private sector, because reform must also include restructuring our debt?

Wes Streeting: My hon. Friend has done a lot of work in this area and I would be delighted to meet her. Let me give the Conservative party a lesson in humility. However proud I am of the last Labour Government—and

I am incredibly proud of what they did to our health estate, the investment they brought in, through a range of different types of private financing, and the impact that had; I can see the benefits in my own constituency—I have never shied away from what we did not get right. At the same time as celebrating what we got right in government, we must reflect on what we did not get right and genuinely learn those lessons, which is what we did in opposition. It took us too long to get back into government—we will learn from that for the future—but it has been really interesting to listen to Conservative Members over the past nine weeks. They have not learned anything, they have not got the message and they are not going to change.

Dr Kieran Mullan (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): As Labour embarks on a reform programme, may I ask whether the Secretary of State has read the report of the Mid Staffordshire public inquiry, which looked at the shocking patient neglect last time Labour was in charge? Reading it might temper the hubris that he is showing in the Chamber today, in the face of the challenges that his colleagues in Wales have certainly not managed to overcome.

Wes Streeting: I gently point the hon. Gentleman to the bold claims made by the now shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Godalming and Ash (Jeremy Hunt), about patient safety. He might like to reflect on every subsequent patient safety scandal. In fact, he might want to walk into maternity services across the country and ask himself whether the Conservatives bothered to learn lessons on patient safety.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent and Rhymney) (Lab): Pharmaceutical producers Auden Mckenzie and Actavis UK charged excessive and unfair prices for hydrocortisone tablets. NHS spending on those products rocketed because producers gamed the system. How will my right hon. Friend ensure that future procurement processes deter the rigging of drug prices?

Wes Streeting: My hon. Friend makes a great point, and he has given great service to the Public Accounts Committee of this House by drilling into waste, inefficiency and exploitation of the public purse. I want to work with the great life sciences sector and pharmaceutical industry in this country and globally, but in a spirit of genuine partnership. A really good working relationship requires social responsibility; it certainly involves not ripping off the taxpayer.

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): I welcome the report. The previous Government left this Government with NHS and care services in the worst crisis in their history. The Secretary of State led by emphasising the decade of underinvestment; that needs to be coupled with pointing out the very weak workforce planning. When he meets the Liberal Democrats, will he review our costed plan to raise the investment necessary to address the issues highlighted in the report and to strengthen workforce planning in order to deliver services?

Wes Streeting: Fiscal policy is a matter for the Chancellor. I know on which side my bread is buttered, so I will not write her Budget or spending review now, but let me reassure the hon. Gentleman that, notwithstanding the

£22 billion black hole that the Conservatives left in the public finances this year and the weak foundations of our economy that we have inherited, the Chancellor knows as well as I do that it is investment and reform that will deliver results. It will take time—we cannot reverse more than a decade of underinvestment in a single Budget or even a single spending review—but at least we have a Government able to face up to the hard choices and capable of making them.

Jo White (Bassetlaw) (Lab): I very much welcome Lord Darzi's report, which exposes how our country was let down by the previous Government. In my Bassetlaw constituency, I will be asked when people who need a GP appointment will get one, and when the 2,000-person dental waiting list will come to an end. I am listening to my GPs and my dentists so that I can work with them to tackle this crisis. I will be meeting them shortly. What is the Secretary of State's message to them all?

Wes Streeting: My hon. Friend, who I am delighted to see representing Bassetlaw, is already showing herself to be an outstanding champion for her community. She raises a really good challenge that we all face as constituency MPs: the public recognise that change takes time and that we cannot fix more than a decade of problems in the immediate future, but they want to know that at least we are hitting the ground running and getting the job done.

I can reassure my hon. Friend's constituents in Bassetlaw that within our first couple of months, this Government employed 1,000 more GPs on the frontline who had been left unemployed by the previous Conservative Government. We did that pretty much immediately. We have settled—I hope; we await the outcome of the ballot—the junior doctors' dispute, so we can remove the cost of disruption and industrial action and start work on getting the waiting lists down. We will be working at pace to deliver 40,000 more appointments every week so that we can cut waiting lists, and 700,000 urgent emergency dentistry appointments so that we can ensure that people get the care they need. Every single promise in our manifesto, notwithstanding the challenges in the public finances, was a fully costed, fully funded promise that we will keep and that the country can afford.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): May I urge the Secretary of State to learn from what is working well in the NHS, as well as from what has gone wrong? In reference to the Health and Care Act 2022, paragraph 14 on page 121 of the report states:

“The result is that the basic structure of a headquarters, regions, and integrated care boards (ICBs) is fit for purpose.”

I draw the Secretary of State's attention to the Suffolk and North East Essex ICB, which is one of the most successful in the country. Can we learn from that success, and build it into other areas?

Wes Streeting: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his constructive approach. The tragedy of the Health and Care Act 2022 was that a large part of its focus was on trying to correct the enormous damage done by Lord Lansley through a top-down reorganisation that nobody wanted and that the country could not afford. That is

why I have said very clearly that we will not repeat the mistakes of top-down reorganisation. With the architecture of the system, we will take an approach of evolution rather than counter-revolution.

On the hon. Gentleman's point about learning from what is working well in the NHS, what gives me great hope for the future of our national health service is that every day there are amazing people providing great-quality care, reforming, innovating and showing us what the future looks like. It is the responsibility of this Government to take the best of the NHS to the rest of the NHS. That is exactly what we will do.

Olivia Blake (Sheffield Hallam) (Lab): Lord Darzi's report makes grim reading and lays bare the failure of the last Government. NHS staff up and down the country will recognise everything in it. Does the Secretary of State agree that much more needs to be done on retaining, recruiting and compensating the NHS workforce and making sure that we have a workforce fit for the future?

Wes Streeting: For all the innovations that modern technology will bring—the revolution in big data AI, machine learning and medical advances that we will see very soon but can scarcely imagine today—health and social care will always be fundamentally a people-based service. If you do not value your people, you lose them and end up in the appalling situation that we are in today. We have invested so much money and time in training people who imagined a long future for themselves in the NHS but who, because of the reality to which they were subjected by the previous Government, are now packing up and moving into different careers—or to other continents. We are determined not just to recruit the great staff we need, but to value and retain the brilliant staff we already have.

Dame Caroline Dinenage (Gosport) (Con): The Secretary of State will know that cancer is the biggest cause of death by illness for children under 14 in the UK, and that this is Childhood Cancer Awareness Month. He will not know that it is also the third anniversary of the death of my constituent Sophie Fairall, who was 10 years old. With Sophie's mum Charlotte, I have been campaigning for the past three years for the children and young people cancer taskforce to be set up. The taskforce was set up at the beginning of this year with the stated aim of meaningfully changing detection, treatment and care for children with cancer. I have listened carefully to the Secretary of State and have heard him passionately set out that he wants to focus on prevention and early intervention, yet this month we learned that he is pausing the taskforce. Parents of children with cancer are deeply disturbed by that announcement, as am I. Can the Secretary of State set out why it was made?

Wes Streeting: Absolutely. I thank the hon. Member for the way she put her question. I send my deepest condolences to Sophie's family on what will inevitably be a difficult day—I suspect just the latest of many difficult days—on the imaginable pain, grief and loss that they have suffered. I thank the hon. Member for her work over many years campaigning on children's cancer in this House on behalf of her constituents and so many other families affected by young cancer.

[*Wes Streeting*]

The pause is because we are looking at the breadth of the work of the Department to make sure that we have the right vehicles to deliver the outcomes that we want. That is why we have paused rather than cancelled, slammed or criticised the work that she was doing. I would be delighted to meet her to talk about the genesis of the taskforce and how we can take forward the outcomes that she wants to see. What we are trying to avoid is a plethora of taskforces, and the risk that there has sometimes been—this is not a party political point, because this spans successive Governments—of taskforces being an alternative for action. I know that she wants action, so let us meet and see what we can do together.

Jacob Collier (Burton and Uttoxeter) (Lab): When I grew up in Stretton under the last Labour Government, I could get an appointment with my family doctor the next day. After 14 years of the Conservatives, Stretton residents now often have to travel more than six miles to a GP surgery in another village just to get an appointment for which they have already waited weeks. Does the Secretary of State share my view that this is unacceptable, and that it falls to this Government to fix the Conservatives' mess?

Wes Streeting: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We need to make sure that we have the right staff in the right place and an equitable distribution of access to NHS services right across the country. We also want to shift from the hospital-centred NHS that we see today to a neighbourhood-centred service. That is why we have acted immediately to put 1,000 more GPs on the frontline before the end of this year. I am looking forward to working with GPs to expand access to primary care right across the country, especially in communities that are particularly under-served.

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): This review highlights the need for capital investment in the NHS. The question that NHS staff and patients in North West Norfolk have is urgent: are the Government committed to replacing their hospital, which is affected by reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete, with a new Queen Elizabeth hospital in King's Lynn by 2030—yes or no?

Wes Streeting: I can absolutely reassure the hon. Member that RAAC-impacted hospitals are a priority. We are putting safety first, and it is just a shame that when his residents had a Prime Minister in their backyard, the Conservative Government did not fix the problem.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): For the sake of openness and transparency, I will just mention that I am a former chair of an NHS trust and a public health academic. I recognise the real issues that are raised in the findings of the Darzi rapid review. I am grateful to Lord Darzi for referring in particular to the inequalities that we have experienced, and how those inequalities were laid bare during covid. Will the Health and Social Care Secretary expand on the cross-departmental work that he is doing? I agree with my hon. Friends the Members for Walthamstow (Ms Creasy) and for Eltham and Chislehurst (Clive Efford) that people's socioeconomic circumstances drive their health

status. We do not want a situation where, for every 1% increase in child poverty, six additional babies per 100,000 live births do not reach their first birthday.

Wes Streeting: I thank my hon. Friend for her question and congratulate her warmly on her election to the Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee. I am looking forward to sharing, through the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the work that our Departments are doing together, particularly on the link between mental health and unemployment and on integrating pathways. She is right about the social determinants of ill health. That is why I am genuinely excited that, through the mission-driven approach that the Prime Minister has set out, we are already bringing together Whitehall Departments, traditionally siloed, to work together on attacking those social determinants. The real game changer is genuine cross-departmental working, alongside business, civil society and all of us as active citizens, to mobilise the whole country in pursuit of that national mission, in which we will be tough on ill health, and tough on the causes of ill health, as someone might have said.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the Father of the House.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I greatly respect the Secretary of State, and, as an older person who relies on the NHS, I support his radical zeal. I repeat what he said in his statement: cancer is more likely to be a death sentence for NHS patients than for patients in other countries. We have had this conversation previously, but can he at least look at the health systems in other countries, particularly those in the Netherlands, Australia, France and Germany? Those countries, which have wonderful health systems protecting the vulnerable, use a mixture of social insurance and public and private funds to maximise inputs into their health services.

Wes Streeting: Every time the right hon. Gentleman praises my zeal for NHS reform, Labour Members get very nervous. Let me reassure him that I have looked at other countries, and I will definitely continue to do that. I genuinely do not think that it is the model of funding that is the issue—the publicly funded, public service element. I hope that he knows me well enough to understand that if I did think so, I would be more than happy making, and would quite enjoy taking on, the argument, but I think that the equitable principle that underpins our NHS is one that we should cherish and protect. The single-payer model has enormous potential for the century of big data, AI, and machine learning. There is huge potential there that we must unlock, but that does not mean that we cannot learn from the way that other countries organise care, particularly in the community and particularly social care. This week, I met virtually with my friend the Health Minister in Singapore. I will continue to work with my international counterparts to learn from other countries whose health outcomes are far better than ours.

Rachel Taylor (North Warwickshire and Bedworth) (Lab): In my constituency of North Warwickshire and Bedworth, patients wait far too long for GP appointments. The Conservative party has presided over sticking-plaster solutions, papering over the cracks in our health service

rather than making it fit for the future. Does the Secretary of State agree that today's report is a chance to get the right diagnosis of the problems, so that this new Labour Government can come up with the right prescription, and my constituents can once again get the treatment that they so desperately need?

Wes Streeting: I am delighted to see my hon. Friend in her place. She is absolutely right. We will take Lord Darzi's diagnosis to write the prescription and ensure that our reform agenda benefits every part of the country—not just big cities and the wealthiest communities—so that every person, wherever they are from, grow up and live, has access to the very best health and care services.

Ayoub Khan (Birmingham Perry Barr) (Ind): A key finding in the Darzi report is that NHS staff morale is low. The Medical Defence Union of medical practitioners stated recently that more than 44% of NHS staff will reduce the number of hours that they work, because of low morale. Will the Secretary of State meet representatives of the union to explore those issues and work out ways of improving staff morale?

Wes Streeting: Of course we seek to work constructively with all trade unions representing staff across our health and care services, and also with the royal colleges. We want to work in a spirit of partnership, and we are only able to do so because people sent Labour MPs to Parliament to replace the Conservatives.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I agree with my right hon. Friend: this is the most devastating analysis that I have read of the NHS in over 30 years. It just shows the challenges that lie before him. Talking of challenges, will he challenge the integrated care boards to focus on moving resources into primary care? In particular, will he look at what is happening in York, where Nimbuscare has been able to pull out services from the acute sector and deliver work in the community?

Wes Streeting: I am really grateful to my hon. Friend for her question. She has a huge amount of expertise in health and care, and she is absolutely right about the need for that shift. I have made it very clear to ICB leaders and to trusts across the country that I want more focus on secondary prevention, which means much more activity in the neighbourhood. I know that she will keep on championing these causes. She is a good critical friend, and I know that she will hold my feet to the fire to ensure that I deliver.

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): I declare my interest as the husband of an NHS doctor; I also served as a non-executive director of my local NHS trust. The last time that Lord Darzi was brought into service was by a Labour Government, shortly before they appointed him to the House of Lords. Will the Secretary of State take steps to ensure the widest possible input from senior clinicians? It is clear that some, including Professor Sir John Bell, do not share Lord Darzi's prescription for the improvement of the NHS. Will he also apologise to my constituents for the doubt that he has cast over the future of the new Hillingdon hospital, on which work had already started under the previous Government?

Wes Streeting: I am not sure that is a fair characterisation of Sir John Bell's position. I have a huge amount of respect for him. I am grateful to Lord Darzi for writing the diagnosis. Given that the Conservative party was in government for 14 years, repeatedly promised to rebuild Hillingdon hospital and left my Department in a position where the money for the new hospitals programme ran out in March, the hon. Member has some brass neck to point the finger at us while he is in opposition.

Sean Woodcock (Banbury) (Lab): In 2016, the Horton hospital in my constituency lost its consultant-led maternity unit—a temporary downgrade that ended up being made permanent three years later. Is it not about time that someone from the Conservative party apologised for the damage done to Banbury's hospital, as well as to the NHS as a whole?

Wes Streeting: I am delighted to see my hon. Friend here. His constituents can already see that he is not backwards in coming forwards. He will stand up and champion their interests in this House as a great constituency MP. When it comes to the Conservative party, sorry seems to be the hardest word.

Alison Bennett (Mid Sussex) (LD): I welcome the announcement of the Secretary of State about the shift from hospital to community care. My fellow Liberal Democrats and I fully believe that fixing social care is part of the solution in getting the NHS back on its feet, so I also welcome the announcement of a national care service. Part of care in the community is of course the hospice sector. I recently met the chief executive of St Catherine's hospice, which is in the constituency of the hon. Member for East Grinstead and Uckfield (Mims Davies). He highlighted to me that, although the hospice has 24 beds, it is currently using only 12 of them. What assurance can the Secretary of State give me, and people right across the country, that fixing the hospice sector will be part of the solution as we take the NHS forward?

Wes Streeting: I am so grateful for that question, not least because it gives me the chance as a constituency MP to say a huge thank you to St Francis hospice and Haven House children's hospice for the care they provide to constituents, like so many other hospices around the country. I know that the sector is under real pressure. We look forward to working with the sector throughout the period of the spending review and the 10-year plan, not only to support our hospices but to improve end-of-life care, which is pertinent to debates that I know this House and the other place will have about how we ensure a good death for everyone, in every part of the country.

Tahir Ali (Birmingham Hall Green and Moseley) (Lab): On Tuesday, I was at the Birmingham children's hospital. Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating the excellent staff on their work and their commitment to each individual patient who goes through the door? That evening, I was also with a local GP at Sparkbrook health centre, Dr Abid Bhatti, whose frustration was with the outdated computer system. If he could get one message across to the Secretary of State, it would be that he has to reboot his computer numerous times a day. Will the Secretary of State put resources in to ensure that the IT is up to date?

Wes Streeting: First, my hon. Friend is right that we should celebrate and thank staff who are doing an outstanding job against a very difficult set of circumstances. On his second point, we have to ensure that, on the tech side, we unlock productivity in the system. Having literally sat looking over the shoulder of GPs at their IT systems, I well understand those frustrations. For the benefit of all observers, there is sometimes a perception that I am up against NHS staff when it comes to reform. Actually, it is staff who are crying out for change.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): One aim of the Lansley reforms was to transfer from Ministers to clinicians decisions on the day-to-day running of the health service. It is not clear from his statement whether the Secretary of State intends to change that process, but let me give him a constructive proposal that he might take on board, which is to streamline the business planning side of the NHS. Staff have to go through multiple bids and preparations of business plans before decisions are made. That means that more money is spent on employing business consultants than consultants in hospitals. I have campaigned for this change for many years. Will he take that on board? [*Interruption.*]

Wes Streeting: The Minister for Secondary Care was whispering in my ear that it was her frustration with exactly the bureaucratic processes that the hon. Gentleman describes that led to her seeking election as a Member of Parliament to sort them out, so I defer to her on this one.

On a serious note, he is right that wherever we find waste and inefficiency designed in, we must deal with it. I want to see an NHS that is more clinically led, free from political interference. We must also be honest: as it is such an enormous part of the public sector, which the public pay an enormous price for and value so much, there will always need to be an accountability relationship. What I have tried to build with NHS England in the last couple of months, with real joy in the process, is a real team between the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England, as well as the team across the country. I look forward to continuing to galvanise that team as we embark on the 10-year plan process.

Dr Marie Tidball (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): In my constituency, a staggering 28% of patients said that it was “not easy at all” to get through to someone at their GP practice. Worse, the figure for patients who said that doing this was “generally easy” was far below the national average. Does the Secretary of State agree that the Conservatives have pushed the NHS to breaking point, and only this Government can get the NHS fit for the future?

Wes Streeting: I am delighted to see my hon. Friend in her place, standing up for her communities in Penistone and Stocksbridge. In opposition, it was very frustrating watching successive Ministers promise better hold music for people trying to get through to their GP, rather than solving the problems of access. Fixing general practice, and building general practice so that it can meet the needs of this century, will be a vital part of our 10-year plan process.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): May I make the Secretary of State a little more nervous? The Darzi report makes seven high-level recommendations,

the fourth of which is to drive productivity in hospitals. From 2017, in south Essex we saw a merger of Basildon, Chelmsford and Southend hospitals to create the Mid and South Essex NHS Hospital Trust. It has not been an unmitigated success. As local MPs, we were promised significant back office savings that could be channelled into patient care. In fact, the reverse has been true, and there has been such a turnover of senior managers in that trust in recent years it has been like a game of musical chairs. The trust is now trying to appoint three permanent managers and directors for each hospital to provide stability, which makes sense, but is offering a salary of £200,000 for each post, which is more than the Prime Minister earns to run the country. Now that this is on his watch, will the Secretary of State take a personal interest? We should pay a good rate for that job, but £200,000 sends the wrong signals to all the other very hard-working people in the trust.

Wes Streeting: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that question. He is not too far away from me geographically, but he is miles away from me politically, and I always get nervous when he stands up to praise me. We have to keep a sharp eye on value for money. The Darzi report presents some politically challenging messages about NHS management. I could be wildly popular with the country if I stood up and said, “I’m going to take the axe to management across the country and sack loads of managers.” What we need is better management and a sharp eye on value for money. The NHS would not work without good leadership. We have to ensure that we have the right people in the right place, delivering against the public’s expectations, so it is a more nuanced position, but I am sure that what he says will have been heard by his local trust. I will certainly keep an eye on value for money across the country.

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South and South Bedfordshire) (Lab): The Darzi report rightly says that prevention is better than cure, and that public health interventions that protect health are far less costly than tackling the consequences of illness and ill health. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the recklessness and incompetence of the 14 years of Conservative government, stripping millions of pounds from local authorities, which deliver the public health work, has contributed to children being sicker than they were 10 years ago, and adults getting iller sooner?

Wes Streeting: My hon. Friend is right, and at some point the Conservatives will have to take responsibility for it. We learned through bitter experience that if we did not change as a party, the country would not choose to change the Government. Long may the Conservatives continue, therefore, with their head in the sand, and long may we continue to get on with the job of clearing up their mess and building an NHS that is fit for the future.

The relationship between the NHS and local government, and between my Department and local government, is of particular importance in relation to social care, which is why I was especially delighted that the Prime Minister chose this week to appoint Tom Riordan, the chief executive of Leeds city council, as second permanent secretary. He is an outstanding public servant with a demonstrable record on health and care integration,

public health and prevention. I look forward to having that local government perspective, and local community delivery perspective, at the heart of our Department.

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): I think the whole House agrees with what the Secretary of State said in his statement: the NHS needs reform. In reality, when I speak to people in the NHS, almost all of them say that this is not about a shortage of money, but about the legendary levels of waste, bureaucracy and mismanagement. Indeed, the report refers specifically to the huge number of regulators, accountants and bureaucrats from the top down. Is there recognition among the NHS senior leadership that management reform is a critical part of improving healthcare in the United Kingdom?

Wes Streeting: I welcome the hon. Member to his place and thank him for that question. I am always cynical about huge volumes of regulation. We reassure ourselves as legislators and regulators that putting regulations in place means that we have dealt with the issue. But the problem is that if we fail to deliver, we put another regulation in place, then another, and then more, and before we know it, we have drowned the people responsible for delivery in so much regulation that they cannot sort the wheat from the chaff or see the wood for the trees, compromising standards and patient safety. That is why I welcome the work that Penny Dash has done in relation to the Care Quality Commission, and we will continue to work with her to reduce the burden of regulation, focus on the things that really matter and free NHS staff from red tape. I hope that he finds that reassuring. I plead with him not to send his party leader to agree with me as well, or I really will be in trouble.

Ms Julie Minns (Carlisle) (Lab): I declare an interest as the mother of an NHS nurse. It is important that we remember what is at the centre of this issue: people. Three individuals came to my Carlisle surgery last week because they were at the end of their tether about the care that their loved ones had received, or not received, at our local hospital. One is the husband of a woman who has profound physical disabilities and cannot leave the House unaccompanied. She now has no trust in her local hospital because, among other things, her recent care involved her being fed food that she was known to be allergic to.

I also saw the parents of a young woman who has epilepsy, a physical disability and profound anxiety. The failure to put in place a care plan to account for all that means that she is now self-harming. The other case was that of an elderly woman whose husband was discharged from the hospital without her consent. He is now in a care home 20 miles away, and she cannot visit him. Will the Secretary of State assure those people that this Government will not only fix our NHS, but restore their broken trust in it?

Wes Streeting: I am so grateful to my hon. Friend. I enjoyed visiting her Carlisle constituency ahead of the general election campaign, and I look forward to working with her to improve health services there and across the north-west, especially in the rural and coastal communities that rely on the hospital in Carlisle, as well as on more local neighbourhood services. I must warn new Members

that one of the most depressing things about the last nine years has been constituency advice surgeries, where people would come to see us about the consequences of the failure of Government and the failure of this place. We owe it to them to do better—better integration of health and care services, better access and outcomes, and better joined-up care. As she has painfully described, if we do not tackle the problems early, they become multiple, higher-cost and personal tragedies. We have seen enough of that.

Dame Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): Famously, the House has not seen an impact assessment of the withdrawal of the winter fuel allowance from frail 85 and 90-year-olds on low incomes. Has Lord Darzi or the Secretary of State seen an assessment of the impact of that decision on NHS bed capacity over the coming winter?

Wes Streeting: The hon. Member is an experienced Member of this House, as both a former Chair of the Treasury Committee and a former Treasury Minister, so she knows how impact assessments are done at the Treasury. She knows that impact assessments of all the Chancellor's fiscal decisions at the Budget and the spending review will be published at that time. She also knows, I suspect, that despite the withdrawal of the winter fuel allowance from some pensioners—it will be targeted at those most in need—they will still be better off because the Government have committed to maintaining the triple lock and to extending the warm home discount scheme and the available hardship support, so that pensioners are not left behind as we clean up the £22 billion mess that the Conservatives left behind.

Uma Kumaran (Stratford and Bow) (Lab): Lord Darzi's report lays bare the scale of the challenges that our NHS faces. Does the Secretary of State share my deep concern that because of the Conservative party's dismal record, the progress made by the previous Labour Government on heart disease and stroke—of which I have had recent personal experience—is now in reverse? The number of people in England dying from cardiovascular disease before the age of 75 has risen to its highest level in 14 years.

Wes Streeting: I am delighted to see my hon. Friend in the House representing my old east end stomping ground. I wish her and her husband well in his recovery, and for their recovery, as a family, from his experience. Let me reassure her that, when it comes to the future of health and social care, we will clean up the mess that the Conservatives made. That will take time. The reverse in the progress made on cardiovascular disease, and the early warning signs of an uptick in smoking, are why we must put public health and prevention at the forefront. That is not just about what is good for the individual, their health and their chances; look at what the Office for Budget Responsibility says today about the long-term cost to the Exchequer. We have no choice but to act.

Nigel Huddleston (Droitwich and Evesham) (Con): A key conclusion of the report is the absolute necessity of focusing on productivity and not just throwing money at the NHS; I think we all agree on that. Ministers are constantly telling us that government is about making difficult decisions—something that that we already knew.

[Nigel Huddleston]

Why, then, on one of his first opportunities, did the Secretary of State do the absolute opposite of that? In solving the doctors dispute, he took the easy option of throwing money at it, and did not require productivity enhancements and changes. Will he reassure me that in future he will practise what he preaches?

Wes Streeting: I like the hon. Gentleman very much, but what audacity to criticise this Government for cleaning up the Conservatives' mess. He fails to acknowledge the cost to the Exchequer and to patients in delayed and cancelled operations, appointments and procedures. More than £1 billion has been lost and more than 1 million appointments cancelled because of the Conservatives' gross incompetence and failure to understand the difference—they are penny-wise and pound-foolish. That is why they have been sent into opposition and Labour has been trusted to clean up their mess.

Natasha Irons (Croydon East) (Lab): There can be no greater example of the previous Government's failure than the shocking outcomes for our children and young people, as Lord Darzi's report highlights. Our children now have some of the worst health outcomes in Europe, with higher rates of obesity, diabetes and asthma, and poor oral and mental health. From head to toe, they have been failed. Will the Secretary of State ensure that the Government's long-term plan for our NHS will give young people's health the priority that it deserves?

Wes Streeting: I am delighted to see my hon. Friend in her place. She might be from the wrong side of the river, but she is absolutely right about the importance of prioritising children's health. As the Prime Minister said this morning, it is shocking that the No. 1 cause of hospital admission among children aged between six and 10 is tooth decay. I was criticised by the shadow Secretary of State, who said that I called our children "short and fat"; she is more outraged by my calling out the scourge of childhood obesity that her Government fuelled than she is by the scourge of child obesity itself. That is why we will act and why the Conservatives failed.

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): I welcome the fact that the Health Secretary talks about a shift from hospital to community care; that builds on Lord Darzi's finding that 13% of beds are occupied by people who are waiting for care in more appropriate settings. Caring for patients in community hospitals is much more cost-effective than caring for patients in big acute hospitals like the Royal Devon and Exeter hospital where I live. What thought has the Secretary of State given to the use of community hospitals that have lost beds in the last decade, such as Seaton, Axminster, Honiton and Ottery St Mary?

Wes Streeting: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about the value of community hospitals, step-down accommodation and care close to people's homes—or, better still, wherever possible, in their homes, so long as it is clinically safe and the right support and care is available. The shift from hospital to community will be at the heart of our 10-year plan for reform and modernisation. Like lots of his colleagues on the Liberal Democrat Benches and lots of those on the Government

Benches behind me, the hon. Gentleman has already done a good job of putting his local lobbying of Ministers on the record in the House.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order. I am aiming to end this statement at 1 pm. I remind Members that anyone who was not in for the start of the statement will not be called.

Ms Polly Billington (East Thanet) (Lab): A recent survey of staff at East Kent Hospitals University NHS foundation trust showed that less than half of employees would be happy for their loved ones to be treated at an east Kent hospital. That is a devastating verdict from staff, showing the impact on their morale and on confidence in the community for the care that people need. Does the Secretary of State agree, however, that a broken NHS is not the fault of staff like them, but down to the previous Government's decade of austerity and top-down reorganisation of the NHS?

Wes Streeting: I am delighted to see my hon. Friend in her place. She is absolutely right. I feel really sorry for NHS staff for what they have been put through over more than a decade of mismanagement and political incompetence, and we will work with them to clean up the mess. She establishes exactly the right test, which is whether we would want our loved ones to be treated in our local health and care services, and whether we would have confidence that, in every case, on every occasion and in every interaction, they would have access to the best-quality care. The truth is that we do not have that certainty, and too often it feels like chance. That is why we will always put the patient voice, the patient interest and the patient experience at the heart of our reform and modernisation programme.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for the honesty in his statement, and for his contact with the regional Minister responsible at the Northern Ireland Assembly. Those are the first actions of a Secretary of State who, I suggest, does not run away from issues but takes them head on. I congratulate him on that.

I appreciate the terminology used in the report, which outlines the seriousness of conditions in the NHS but also highlights the fact that the vital signs are still strong. Will the Secretary of State outline how he intends to address the fact that the NHS in devolved regions is in an arguably worse condition? Will he confirm that the review will incorporate Northern Ireland and will he ensure that the findings, new practices and standards will be in place for Northern Ireland, along with increased funding in a new funding formula?

Wes Streeting: I thank the hon. Gentleman for what he said; coming from him, that means a great deal to me. I reassure him that I am committed to working with Ministers in all devolved Administrations to improve health outcomes for everyone in every part of our United Kingdom. I know that the system is particularly pressed in Northern Ireland and I will do whatever I can, working with Ministers in Northern Ireland, to help that situation and create the rising tide that lifts all ships right across the UK.

Josh Fenton-Glynn (Calder Valley) (Lab): I truly learned to appreciate the NHS when I became a parent and saw the care given to my family and children. It therefore horrified me, having sat in A&E with an ill child, to see in Lord Darzi's report that 100,000 infants waited for over six hours in A&E last year. Does the Secretary of State agree that that is a shocking state in which to leave the NHS? Will he commit to bringing the numbers down and making sure that parents do not have to endure that terrible wait?

Wes Streeting: I am delighted to see my hon. Friend representing Calder Valley. He has captured the fear and anxiety about the length of the wait experienced by far too many parents when they access A&E departments. It is a terrifying experience, particularly for parents with small children, to be in that situation. Frankly, the lack of focus on paediatric waiting lists and waiting times, whether in A&E or for electives, really is shameful. We have got to put children first and that is exactly what this Government will do.

Jessica Toale (Bournemouth West) (Lab): My constituents in Bournemouth West have faced rising NHS waiting times; we have GP surgeries closing despite rising populations and health burdens; there are no dentists accepting any NHS adult patients and residents are being told to go to Southampton; and the junior doctors and nurses I meet are devastated that they cannot deliver the quality of service that they want to. Does the Secretary of State agree that although the road ahead is long, Lord Darzi's frank and raw assessment is the first step to recovery under a Labour Government?

Wes Streeting: I am delighted to see my hon. Friend in her place representing the people of Bournemouth. The great thing about where we are at this moment is that, for the first time in a long time, there is a feeling of hope and optimism about what the future could be. We are determined to build on that and give staff and patients the confidence of knowing that the best days for the NHS lie ahead.

Mr Calvin Bailey (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Lord Darzi's report highlights the use of capital expenditure to cover in-year spending by successive Tory Governments. Money intended for long-term investment has been redirected over and over, and that has exacerbated the extremely serious and urgent problems that the Secretary of State so rightly raises today. Does he agree that that has stopped us making progress on capital projects that would enable big productivity improvements and improve access to care for all, particularly those in my constituency of Leyton and Wanstead?

Wes Streeting: I am delighted to see my parliamentary neighbour in his place; he has big shoes to fill and he will certainly do that. The Chancellor and I are determined to break the vicious cycle in which ballooning costs and overspends in day-to-day spending see raids on capital and tech budgets to fund the shortfall. The £22 billion black hole that we have inherited is a direct example of exactly where Conservative short-termism leads. That is why, in respect of the spending review, I assure my hon. Friend that productivity, tech and capital will be my focus in my representations to the Chancellor and in the work we will do together to fix the mess that the Conservatives left behind.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask Members to help each other with one or two-sentence questions.

Emily Darlington (Milton Keynes Central) (Lab): To return to a subject close to the Secretary of State's heart, does he agree that people's actual experience is how we will measure whether the NHS has been improved? One of my children's grandparents, who was diagnosed under a Labour Government, had 12 great years of cutting-edge treatments and 12 years with their grandchildren. Their grandfather, who was diagnosed under a Conservative Government, had 12 weeks.

Wes Streeting: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the work she does championing Milton Keynes. Therein lies the challenge: it cannot be right that delays in diagnosis lead to the difference between life and death. I am very lucky that my cancer was caught early. It was diagnosed quickly and treated quickly. Not everyone is fortunate, and I am so sorry that my hon. Friend's family is bearing the consequences of what happens when things go wrong.

Sonia Kumar (Dudley) (Lab): Despite the damning analysis of the state in which the Conservatives left the NHS, Lord Darzi says that its vital signs remain strong. Does the Secretary of State agree with the case for the health service being taxpayer funded, free at the point of use, and based on need and not the ability to pay?

Wes Streeting: I am delighted to see my hon. Friend from Dudley. I agree wholeheartedly, 100%, unequivocally.

Emma Foody (Cramlington and Killingworth) (Lab/Co-op): In a recent conversation, a nurse in Brunswick Village in my constituency shared her damning experience of the increasing number of black alerts in her hospital. Does the Secretary of State agree that, although her experience is no surprise to many who have used the NHS recently, the Tories have pushed our NHS to the brink and it is up to Labour to fix it and make it fit for the future?

Wes Streeting: Absolutely.

Darren Paffey (Southampton Itchen) (Lab): The amazing NHS staff in my constituency work tirelessly, day in and day out, in our local hospitals and surgeries. Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking them, and will he be clear that Lord Darzi's shocking findings are not on them, but on the appalling legacy of the Conservatives, who still have not apologised?

Wes Streeting: NHS staff did not break the NHS—the Conservatives did—and this Labour Government will mobilise them to help fix it.

Anna Dixon (Shipley) (Lab): It was great to see the Prime Minister speaking this morning at the King's Fund, where I worked as director of policy for a number of years. In my constituency, I met a man who had been told he needed urgent surgery on his leg, but was still waiting 18 months later and had had to give up work. It is clear from today's report that too many people have been stuck on NHS waiting lists and locked out of

[Anna Dixon]

work. Does the Secretary of State share my view that a healthy nation is critical to a healthy economy, and will he work with his colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions to deliver that?

Wes Streeting: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: the health of the nation and the health of the economy are inextricably linked. Under this Government, the Department of Health and Social Care is a Department for growth as well as a Department for health and care, and the Chancellor understands those linkages too. I can say to my hon. Friend and all of her friends at the King's Fund—we were delighted to see them host the Prime Minister this morning—that unlike our predecessors, this Government cannot get enough of experts.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): That concludes the statement. We have had more than 45 contributions from Back Benchers, so I thank you for your patience.

Points of Order

1.1 pm

Mims Davies (East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. We are all passionate about our hospices, our hospitals, our GP practices and the other health services that our constituents get. Coming to this place is not for the faint-hearted, but is it appropriate for the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to adopt the tone that he brought to the Chamber earlier? As I say, we are all passionate, but perhaps his tone—his bedside manner, may I say—needs a new approach on occasion. I noted his more collegial tone later in the statement, but to tell Opposition hon. Members—we are all hon. Members in this place—to sit down and listen, or to liken some previous holders of his role to arsonists and similar paraphernalia, is not befitting of this Chamber.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Wes Streeting): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I like the hon. Lady very much, and I will just say two things in response: first, she has been around in this Chamber a long time. Conservative Members cannot sit and heckle, then get cross when Ministers respond robustly. Secondly, I think that was a perfectly legitimate analogy; indeed, I might say that the arsonists should not complain about the fire brigade.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I remind all hon. Members that good temper and moderation are the characteristics of a good debate.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You will recall that I have raised in the House the use of crossbows by criminals. These are lethal weapons. The previous Government added to the list of weapons that are banned, and the current Government are implementing those measures. Have you had any notice of a statement being brought to the House by Ministers to respond to the increasingly pressing cries from those who want to see crossbows added to that list of banned weapons?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank Sir John for his point of order. It is not a matter for the Chair, but I can clarify that we have not had notice of a statement.

BILL PRESENTED

TERRORISM (PROTECTION OF PREMISES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Yvette Cooper, supported by the Prime Minister, Pat McFadden, Secretary Ian Murray, Secretary Jo Stevens, Lucy Powell and Dan Jarvis, presented a Bill to require persons with control of certain premises or events to take steps to reduce the vulnerability of the premises or event to, and the risk of physical harm to individuals arising from, acts of terrorism; to confer related functions on the Security Industry Authority; to limit the disclosure of information about licensed premises that is likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time Monday 7 October, and to be printed (Bill 9) with explanatory notes (Bill 9-EN).

Sir David Amess Adjournment Debate

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this House has considered matters to be raised before the forthcoming Adjournment.—(*Christian Wakeford.*)

1.4 pm

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I am honoured to open this debate in the memory of our great friend—my great friend—Sir David Amess, a fallen comrade whose plaque I am looking at right now. It is on the other side of the Chamber, just above where he used to sit; appropriately enough, it is directly opposite that of Jo Cox, another fallen comrade who graced this House while she was here.

As there are a number of new Members in the Chamber, maybe nervously waiting to make their maiden speech—I remember that feeling, too—perhaps I could explain why we call this debate the Sir David Amess debate. It is not just in honour of his service, but because he was a past master at making use of it. In essence, David would manage to cram a vast number of different topics, usually related to his constituency, into a very small amount of time. From memory, the all-time record was 20 different subjects in 12 minutes, each of which mysteriously led to a subsequent press release. He basically turned it into an art form, and as a result, the end-of-term Adjournment debate was always known in the Commons Tea Room as the Sir David Amess debate. As such, after his loss, Mr Speaker and the House authorities decided to turn that from *de facto* to *de jure*, and formalised it by giving the debate his name. I am delighted that we have done so, because it helps to keep his name alive. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”]

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Francois: Yes, of course—even on the Adjournment.

Jim Shannon: I commend the right hon. Gentleman on the speech he is making. Every one of us who had the pleasure of knowing Sir David Amess can picture him over on the far side of the Chamber. He was able to rattle off about 30 things at some speed, every one of them pertinent to his constituency, but he did it with a grace and respect that we all loved, and we miss him dearly. Is it the right hon. Gentleman’s intention to do the same—30 items in about 12 minutes?

Mr Francois: No, I can reassure the hon. Gentleman and the House that I only intend to raise three topics.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Before my right hon. Friend leaves the subject of Sir David, whom I first met in the 1970s—in a different place, and when I was briefly in a different party—I ask him to confirm my recollection: that in all those many years, I cannot think of a single occasion when David said a mean, unkind or unfair thing about anyone. There are not many people about whom one can say that, and I for one regard him as an inspiration.

Mr Francois: I generally agree with my right hon. Friend, particularly about defence matters, and he has summed my great friend up very well. At the end of my speech, however, I will make a small revelation about David and the 1983 general election, which I hope colleagues will find amusing.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Of course, David Amess was a famous Back Bencher—he spent his career in this place entirely on the Back Benches. During the 19 years that I was on the Front Bench, I tried to do all kinds of things, but I am absolutely certain that David Amess achieved far more than I ever did speaking from the Back Benches. That tells a story of its own: as David illustrated, it is perfectly possible to make a huge difference from all parts of this House, not only to one’s constituents but to this place.

Mr Francois: I think my right hon. Friend is being too modest about his own achievements.

Sir John Hayes: That is probably true.

Mr Francois: I hope *Hansard* got that!

I want to raise three specific topics. The first is animal welfare; the second is local NHS services, perhaps in a non-partisan way; and the third and final is the story about the election. To turn to animal welfare first, David was an absolutely renowned animal lover. He frequently raised a number of animal welfare issues in this House and campaigned for them passionately, including by forming alliances with people on the other side of the aisle, as they would say in Congress. Specifically, he was a patron of the Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation, a wonderful organisation run by two brilliant people, Christopher and Lorraine Platt. It has actively campaigned for a number of years on animal welfare issues such as increasing penalties for animal cruelty, seeking to ban imports of hunting trophies and ending the cruel use of farrowing crates for sows and piglets. It has succeeded with one of those—two more to go.

David was also a serial entrant to the Westminster dog of the year competition. Every year he would faithfully enter his dog, and every year he would come back to his office full of faux outrage about the fact that, for some inexplicable reason, his dog had not been awarded the prize. My office was around the corner on the same corridor, and we always knew to hide when David was coming back from the competition, except that in his final year he entered his French pug named Vivienne. She was named, incidentally, after Julia Roberts’s character in “Pretty Woman”. Only my mate could name a pet after a lady who earned her money in that way.

When David put Vivienne in, he was asked by a local journalist, “Why should members of the public vote for Vivienne rather than one of the other dogs?” His answer was, “Because Vivienne wants Southend to become a city.” He won twice: after he was murdered, Southend did become a city, so we like to think he won in the end, and on a wave of public sympathy, Vivienne was indeed voted the Westminster dog of the year. My great friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) and I had the privilege of accepting the award on David’s behalf, with Vivienne in tow.

I am delighted to tell the House that I am very honoured to have been asked to become a patron of the Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation, a duty I have proudly taken up this week, partly in David’s memory. I will attempt to match his legacy in campaigning for animal welfare, and I am deeply indebted to the Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation for giving me that opportunity.

[*Mr Francois*]

Secondly, David always had a strong interest in the national health service. He served for many years as a senior member of the Health Committee of this House. I declare an interest at this stage, as I am proud to say that my wife Olivia works as a senior neuroradiographer in the NHS and has done for many years. I am very proud of what she and all the other staff of the national health service achieve for us day in and day out.

I had the privilege of going on a ride-out with the East of England ambulance service a few weeks ago. I was accompanied by a senior paramedic named Emily, who showed me the ambulance service in action. We were in an emergency response vehicle, and I was immensely impressed not just by her professionalism, but by her empathy with the people with whom she came into contact—an absolute professional.

I am pleased to report that, while the East of England ambulance service has been through a turbulent time—it was in special measures for a while—it came out of special measures under the leadership of its previous chief executive, Tom Abell. Whereas before there were often a dozen ambulances in the car park early on a Thursday evening, when we went to Southend hospital as part of my ride-out, there were only three.

However, there is an issue at Southend because the A&E unit is, shall we say, not very well designed. There is a very narrow entrance to it, such that if there is a trolley in the corridor, it is very difficult to get people in and out. So I am pleased to report that the hospital trust has secured £8 million of capital to completely rebuild A&E with a proper, purpose-designed entrance that ambulances can back into and discharge their patients from more quickly. The first phase of that will, I hope, open prior to Christmas, and it will also be possible to expand capacity in A&E and to treat more patients more quickly. That was something David and his successor, Anna Firth, campaigned for very hard, and he would be pleased to know that.

I campaigned some years ago to expand primary care in my constituency. I helped to get an expansion of Audley Mills surgery in Rayleigh, and I have been involved in campaigns to expand two others: the Riverside medical centre in Hullbridge and the Jones Family practice in Hockley. As it happens, Tom Abell has now taken over as the chief executive of the new Mid and South Essex integrated care board, and I had a meeting with him about these surgeries only a week or so ago. I am pleased to report to the House that it was a very positive meeting, and I am therefore hopeful that we will be able to secure those expansions.

I did say that I would tell the House about the 1983 general election, but I am not sure whether what I am about to reveal has previously been in the public domain. For context, in 1979 Basildon was one of the largest constituencies in the country, so in the early 1980s the boundary review basically divided it in two along the A127 arterial road. David never liked the term “safe seat”, because he felt it implied that one took one’s constituents for granted, which he palpably never did. However, the pundits said that a safe Tory seat had been created around Billericay to the north of the A127 and a safe Labour seat had been created in Basildon new town, so at the time it was regarded as a one-all draw. But a Tory sacrificial lamb still had to come along and

fight this seat, so along came David Amess. He had fought a Newham seat at the 1979 general election in his late 20s, and at age 31 he became the Conservative candidate for Basildon.

The campaign did not get off to an auspicious start. In those days, electoral law required that prospective candidates should have a formal meeting at which they would be legally adopted by their party. David’s local association had hired the Northlands community centre in Pitsea to have the meeting. Unfortunately, there had been a miscommunication, and when they arrived the place was padlocked up. There were no mobile phones in those days, so a colleague was immediately dispatched to a nearby telephone box to try to get the council caretaker to come and open the community centre. These efforts proved unsuccessful. By now it was approaching dusk, so he was adopted as the parliamentary candidate while standing under a lamp post in the community centre car park—and thus he went into battle.

David being David, he fought a feisty campaign. There was lots of music and balloons, and it was all very high profile. However, as he told me when we had supper a few years ago, he thought that he was going to lose but that he would go down fighting. So in the run-up to the count, he wrote a defiant speech, saying that although he had been defeated, Margaret Thatcher would surely win the election and carry the torch forward. He arrived at the election count armed with this speech, steeling himself for what was to come.

As hon. Members will know, at an election count there is a moment before the result is read out when the returning officer calls the candidates and agents together to go through the result with them first, and to make sure there are no irregularities and no one wants a recount. The call went out for candidates and agents, and David walked across. There was a small huddle around the returning officer, who turned to David and said, “We’ve completed the count, and there is a clear winner. Well done, Mr Amess—you’ve won.” David looked at him and said, “What?” and the chap said, “You’ve won. You’ve been elected. You’re the Member of Parliament for Basildon. I’m going to read it out in five minutes’ time. I hope you’ve got your speech ready.” David looked at the returning officer in awe, and said, “Could you just give me one moment?” He dashed into the gents, ripped off some loo paper and jotted down some bullet points, because obviously the speech he had prepared was no longer appropriate, and he went out on to the stage.

For the record, he won by 1,379 votes. The result was read out and he observed all the courtesies, and he thanked the returning officer and other officers for conducting an efficient count, he thanked the police for maintaining order, and then he said, “I never doubted for one moment that I would win this seat. I always knew that by fighting an active and lively campaign, I would be elected to represent the people of Basildon in the House of Commons.” And so it was sheer chutzpah literally from the first moment. Those of us who knew him know that he carried on like that for the rest of his career, and that is why the House loved him.

David always had great concern for all colleagues on all sides of the House, so if he were here now he would be thinking of those about to make their maiden speeches, and he would say something like, “Don’t worry, don’t be nervous, you’ll be absolutely fine.” And of course you will. After all, you worked very hard to get here—even

if you were not adopted under a lamp post. So ladies and gentlemen, it is wonderful to have this debate in his name, and I thank the House and the Chair for the great honour of being allowed to open it. To all those who are about to make their first speech in Parliament, I say, “I wish you all the very best of luck—but not too much.”

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): David Amess was my mentor, as he was for many colleagues, and he helped me become a good constituency MP. He also spent time with us, especially colleagues who felt threatened or unsafe; he gave us his time for nothing. We all miss him.

I call Daniel Francis to make his maiden speech.

1.21 pm

Daniel Francis (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to make my maiden speech in this debate. It is an honour to follow the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois), having served with his brother on my local council 20 years ago. I wish to add to his tributes to Sir David Amess and Jo Cox.

I would like to start by paying tribute to my predecessor, Sir David Evennett, who represented our local area for 33 years, first in the former Erith and Crayford constituency and then in Bexleyheath and Crayford. He took a keen interest in education, serving twice as a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Education Department. He was elected with the other Sir David in 1983 and they were close friends, and it is apt that this debate is named after Sir David Amess. Sir David Evennett was the only Conservative Member of Parliament to lose their seat in 1997 and then regain it at the second attempt in 2005, which says a great deal about his tenacity, and I wish him and Marilyn a happy and healthy retirement.

I note that when Sir David Evennett made his maiden speech in 1983, he followed and complimented the then Member for Sedgefield, who of course went on to be a great Prime Minister for 10 years, so I say to the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford, please feel no pressure in the years ahead.

At this election, my constituency of Bexleyheath and Crayford gained parts of the Northumberland Heath and West Heath wards that were previously represented by his hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Ms Oppong-Asare). Given the new boundaries, it is a privilege to follow former Members who have represented parts of my constituency, including Jennie Adamson, Norman Dodds, Jim Wellbeloved, Sir Ted Heath, John Austin, Nigel Beard and Teresa Pearce. It is an honour to have been elected to this House and I am indebted to those constituents who have sent me here, and I shall work tirelessly for them as well as for those who did not vote for me.

I have lived in the London borough of Bexley all of my life, attended local schools and served as a councillor for 20 years. My constituents include former school friends, former work colleagues, my parents, who are here today, and my grandmother. My constituency is located at the south-east tip of London, with my constituents looking both west into the capital and east across the Kent boundary. My family roots are like those of many of my constituents: families from south London who moved a bit further east, with my maternal roots in Southwark and my paternal roots in Plumstead.

We in the constituency are proud of two amazing heritage assets: the grade 1 listed Hall Place, built in 1537; and the Red House, designed by Philip Webb and William Morris in 1859. We are also proud of our contribution to the hits of my childhood, having been the birthplace of Boy George and Kate Bush.

We have an industrial past, with the Thames at the north of the constituency, but today most jobs are in manufacturing, retail and hospitality. However, that past helped change history and ensure that Britain is the country it is today. The Vickers works were located in Crayford for 101 years, from 1884, and during the world wars they manufactured the Vickers machine gun, aircraft, naval gun laying equipment, and the casings for the Barnes Wallis bouncing bomb of Dambusters fame. Famously, it was where the British aviators John Alcock and Arthur Brown manufactured the first Vickers Vimy bomber, with the first 12 manufactured in Crayford, while it was the thirteenth, manufactured elsewhere, which in 1919 made the first non-stop transatlantic flight. That history of our constituency continues today with my constituents across Barnehurst, Bexleyheath, Crayford, Northumberland Heath, Slade Green, and the small parts of Abbey Wood, Belvedere, Erith and Welling that I represent, working hard and delivering for our country.

Every day I speak to local residents who work in the public sector, and I know how grateful their neighbours are for the work they do and on which we all rely. My constituents rely on train services provided by Thameslink and Southeastern, which have a depot in Slade Green where they maintain rolling stock and train staff. It is those railway workers who keep my constituents on the move. Those commuters work in the financial and professional jobs that London relies on, but also, importantly, in shops, restaurants and hotels, keeping London's economy moving. And if we take a quick glance around any road in my constituency, we see a variety of white vans and black taxis, demonstrating that my constituents are the workers that London relies on to get them from A to B, and the builders, plumbers, brickies and lift engineers who will help us grow our economy.

But there is one set of workers on which our community really does rely: our volunteers and carers. Today, my day started as many others' will have done: I lifted my child from her bed; I changed her nappy, dressed her, fed her and tidied her hair; and then I ensured that she was in her wheelchair and ready for her transport to collect her for school. Our children are twins but will lead very different paths in life. One talks of a future in work and the journeys she will make; the other, after many years of work from professionals, can now manage to talk, but her language is limited to about a dozen words. The eldest of our twins has cerebral palsy and a range of complex disabilities. Like other carers, the greatest concern that my wife and I have is what will happen to her when we are gone.

Many of us know what it was like to have to work and educate our children at home for months during the covid pandemic. In our case, this was stretched by the fact that one of our children requires full-time care, our family network and carers were not allowed into our home, and my wife was undergoing chemotherapy at the time—she is now thankfully recovered, due to the fantastic work of our incredible NHS. I can assure Members that in my time in this House I will be the greatest of champions for carers and the disabled, because I really

[Daniel Francis]

do know the challenges that families in our position face on a daily basis: having to fight the local authority because either it has not transferred the money to pay the carer, or it is not paying at a rate that meets minimum wage requirements; the constant battle to ensure that our child has a wheelchair that works; the arguments over which part of the public sector will fund the person required to cut our child's food at lunchtime because the education, health and care plan is not clear on the matter.

I could take the easy path and sit at home rather than be here taking difficult decisions to fix the inheritance bequeathed to this Government, but I believe that this House really does need people like me, who know how badly reform is needed in the special educational needs system and for the rights of carers.

My constituents, like me, rely on volunteers and charities across the constituency. I am not going to name them, because I am bound to miss one out, but those charities know that I have the greatest admiration for them, having worked alongside them for many years. They make such an important contribution across Bexleyheath and Crayford, and I look forward to continuing to work with them, our faith groups, businesses and my incredible constituents to deliver the change that our community and our country so desperately need.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): That speech was very powerful indeed. I call Bob Blackman.

1.29 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I congratulate the new hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Daniel Francis) on his maiden speech. It is clear that he will contribute to the work of this House in an incredible fashion. May I also pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) for opening this debate? I thank the Leader of the House for responding to my request at business questions last week to properly entitle this debate the Sir David Amess Adjournment debate. I persuaded Sir David to join the Backbench Business Committee purely by undertaking that we would always ensure a pre-recess Adjournment debate, to which he could contribute. His self-interest was clear even then.

It is fitting that this is the first Sir David Amess Adjournment debate since the release of the Grenfell inquiry report, because Sir David was my immediate predecessor as chairman of the all-party parliamentary fire safety and rescue group. The inquiry's report is incredibly comprehensive and makes for terrible reading. I strongly suggest that all Members read at least the executive summary—the full report is of a daunting size. It is clear that Governments of all persuasions badly let down people in this country and, in particular, the people of Grenfell. The all-party group tried relentlessly to bring forward urgent changes to building safety, but they were refused. Jason Beer KC, representing the Department at the inquiry, even apologised on behalf of the Government for not listening properly to what the all-party group was saying. Sir David said, "If Government had listened to us, Grenfell would not have occurred." I am glad he has been vindicated on that, but I am very sad that he was not here to hear that.

Deadly fires do not just happen; they are the result of a series of failures over a number of years on a number of levels. There were a number of alarming similarities between Grenfell and the King's Cross fire, which claimed 31 lives back in 1987, although Sir Martin mentions it only once in his report. I remember it vividly; I was a commuter to central London at the time. Just as Sir Martin's report has done, Sir Desmond Fennell's report on the King's Cross fire identified key failings over several years across many public bodies that could have prevented the fire from spreading out of control. The similarities do not end there; they include inadequate fire training, the use of unsafe materials and the failings of the London Fire Brigade. It is alarming how similar the two fires were, despite being dealt with by totally different Departments.

Sir Martin talks about improving the cross-government response. I wonder what would have happened if the lessons learned about unsafe building materials at King's Cross been implemented across all Departments. I welcome the Government's promise to respond to the recommendations within six months, but we need to get the ball rolling on the legislative changes that Sir Martin recommends sooner rather than later. It will take a long time to get the legislation right, to get it through Committee in both Houses and on to the statute book, and then to find the solutions to the problem of the regulatory gap as a matter of priority. We cannot wait six months for a White Paper. I urge the Government to consider at least that key point urgently. Let us get the legislation laid before this House as soon as possible.

That leads me on to the scandal of the remedial work required to fix buildings up and down the country that are still coated in dangerous cladding. The recommendation from King's Cross to replace wooden escalators took until 2014 to be completed. Surely the cladding replacements cannot take 27 years as well, but the start has not been great. There is another question about this work: who will pay for it? I am adamant that it should not be leaseholders and tenants. They are the one group who have done nothing wrong, and I hope that the Government will address that point.

On Monday, I was pleased to be elected unopposed—that is a mode of election that I welcome—as Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee. It has terrific honorificability. That leads me neatly to my tribute to my predecessor in the role. Ian Mearns served as Chairman for nine years, and as the Member of Parliament for Gateshead for 14 years. I am sure that the new hon. Member for Gateshead Central and Whickham (Mark Ferguson) will be as dedicated a servant to the people of that community, and I hope that my chairmanship will live up to Ian's legacy.

My other role is chairman of the 1922 committee. You will remember the role well, Madam Deputy Speaker, having been vice-chairman. For the benefit of Members who are wondering when the Prime Minister will face a new opponent at lunchtime on Wednesdays, let me say that we have concluded the second ballot of MPs; further ballots will occur after the party conference, and there will be a new leader in November. I thank the officers on the '22—a somewhat smaller team than in previous years—namely my hon. Friend the Member for North Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown), who has been elected to the august role of Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, and my hon. Friend the

Member for Stockton West (Matt Vickers), for being so efficient in helping me with the ballots over the past couple of weeks.

Moving on to transport, this is the first opportunity I have had to talk about the new part of my constituency that came in after the boundary changes. I am sure that PARLYapp will be pleased to hear that I will not give a history of Queensbury from 1249 to 2024, but there are two interesting tidbits on the history of Queensbury station. The branch from Wembley Park to Stanmore began life as part of the Metropolitan railway, in the final fling of the Met as a private venture. Government Members should perhaps note that all four of the tube stations in my constituency resulted from private investment and initiatives, not Government diktat. When Queensbury station was built around 90 years ago, there was no development in the area, and the company could not decide what to call it. The local authority adjacent to the area was Kingsbury, so naturally it was named Queensbury. That leads me on to a bittersweet point about Queensbury station.

While it was nice to gain Queensbury, it is yet another tube station in my constituency without step-free access. Those who follow these debates closely will know that I have raised the issue of Stanmore station before. It is in dire need of a lift, as it has about 3 million passenger entries and exits a year. I continue to bang the drum and to point out to the Mayor of London, Transport for London and the Department for Transport that Stanmore is not step-free. In fact, it forces disabled users to wheel themselves through a car park and up a steep ramp on the other side. Even one of our great Paralympians cannot do it unaided. It is completely inadequate as a step-free entrance, and a public lift is badly needed, so that the 48 steps that people are “meant” to use while entering or exiting the station can be circumvented. I am disappointed that my pleas seem consistently to fall upon deaf ears, but here is a warning: I will continue to campaign until we get a lift at Stanmore station and the other stations in my constituency.

We are all conscious in this House of the escalating situation in the middle east. There is a clear and present danger that if terrorists remain in Gaza, there will be no long-term resolution to the conflict; indeed, Hezbollah, Iran and the extremist forces in the middle east could be dragged into a full-scale war with Israel, which none of us wants. I am therefore concerned about several U-turns by the Government, which I want corrected. Many of us who are friends of Israel are alarmed by the message that is sent by the Government’s suspending 30 arms licences. It gives the impression that, in the Government’s eyes, Israel and Hamas are the same, but let us be clear: they are not, and the Government should not treat them as such. I am chair of the all-party parliamentary group on UK-Israel, and as we come to the one-year anniversary of the 7 October attacks, which were the largest loss of Jewish life since the holocaust, Israel needs the UK’s support, not censure.

On 25 June, Labour said that if elected, it would proscribe the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, as many of us had called on the Conservative Government to do for a number of years. On 8 July, *The Guardian* reported that this Government would not proscribe the IRGC as a terrorist group, which is a complete U-turn.

I am concerned that anything but proscription is simply a cop-out, particularly given that Israel-Iran tensions are escalating.

There needs to be Government action on defence spending. We had commitments from the previous Government to raising defence spending, first to 2.5% of GDP and then to 3%. We now seem to have a road map from the Government towards spending 2.5%. Given the challenges that our defence industry faces, we need to take appropriate action.

My Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 from the last Parliament mandated the Government to establish a supported housing advisory panel within 12 months of the Act being passed. The sifting date was listed as 31 July, but nothing has been heard since. As of 30 August, that is overdue, and technically that puts the Secretary of State in breach of the law. I urge her to get the job under way and to ensure that we set up the panel.

I am conscious that other colleagues want to contribute, so I will mention only one or two other things. On the potential free trade deal with India, the last Government promised it by Diwali—they forgot which year—but both sides decided to put negotiations on hold because of elections here and, of course, in India. Those elections are now over, and the Governments have settled into place, so let us get on with the job of getting the free trade agreement that everyone wants.

At business questions, I mentioned the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, which I wholeheartedly supported in the last Parliament. Javed Khan’s review on achieving a smoke-free 2030 ought to be implemented in full. I hope that the Government will take on board the various cross-party amendments proposed to the Bill, so that we can get over any objections from the industry and progress that legislation swiftly.

I am delighted that the Government have taken forward the plans for a Holocaust memorial and learning centre in Victoria gardens. I strongly support that. I also chair the all-party group on Holocaust memorial. We recently heard from Holocaust survivor Eve, who reiterated our plea to get the memorial built before the survivors unfortunately pass away. We are seeing huge increases in antisemitism; that is clearly a scandal.

There has not been a Government statement on Bangladesh. The Government in Bangladesh have been displaced and there is a human rights catastrophe, particularly for the Hindu population, yet we have heard nothing from the Government. I hope that we will hear what the Government will do to safeguard Bangladeshi citizens.

Finally, on a local issue, I turn to Edgware Towers. There is a proposal in the neighbouring constituency to build 29 blocks of high-density multi-storey flats, the tallest of which would be 29 storeys; 20 would be above 20 storeys high. That is in a cramped area. Most important is the proposal to build a bus garage for 100 electric buses under a 29-storey tower block. Given the fires that have taken place on electric buses, the consequences are unthinkable. The London Fire Brigade has objected, and this proposal should be ruled out of order straightaway at planning application.

I thank all colleagues in the House, those in the other place, the staff on our teams, the security teams, the catering teams and everyone else who plays a key part in

[Bob Blackman]

keeping everything afloat. I also wish everyone celebrating it a very happy Rosh Hashanah. As ever, I end by paying tribute to my great friend and colleague. We all miss you, David. I hope that everyone has a good recess, enjoys their party conference and finds some time to relax with friends and family.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): We have 30 Members wishing to contribute, so if everybody's speech is around five or six minutes, everybody will get in. For her maiden speech, I call Olivia Bailey.

1.44 pm

Olivia Bailey (Reading West and Mid Berkshire) (Lab): I thank the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) for a wonderful tribute to Sir David Amess, and for his kind words to those of us sitting nervously on these Benches today. I am proud to be the first Member of Parliament for the new constituency of Reading West and Mid Berkshire. The most populous part of my constituency is the village of Tilehurst, where I live with my family. Tilehurst has always been a place of skilled labour. Our name reflects our history in the manufacture of tiles, but today we are proud to be a place of brewers, beauticians and builders. In this place, I will always stand up for small businesses and the self-employed.

My constituency also has a proud history of defending our great country. There are many military families, and we are also home to the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston and Burghfield. I am really proud of the work that my constituents do there, and I will always support our nuclear deterrent.

We are an unusual constituency in that we are made up exclusively of villages and hamlets, discounting our official overlap with Reading. There are more than 70 settlements, most nestled in the north Wessex downs national landscape. The rivers, fields and architecture around Pangbourne and Basildon are said to be the inspiration for E. H. Shepard's beautiful illustrations of "The Wind in the Willows". My constituency is truly the quintessential English countryside. Perhaps the most picturesque leaflet rounds of any constituency are had strolling through Streatley, Yattendon, Compton, East and West Ilsley, Mortimer and Frilsham, although eyebrows were raised when I asked one of my activists to take a trip to the hamlet called World's End. Thankfully, they were met with beauty rather than eternal doom.

I thank the many activists who worked so hard to see me elected to this place, and I thank everyone who placed their trust in me at the ballot box; many voted Labour for the first time. I will work tirelessly to live up to that trust and to fight for everyone in my constituency, no matter how they voted. I know that my predecessors sought to do the same, and I also want to thank them for their service.

The majority of my constituency was previously represented by Sir Alok Sharma. He was a good constituency MP, held in high regard by many locally. He was also a tireless campaigner in the battle against climate change, most notably as President of COP26. I wish him all the best in the other place.

I must also mention the last Labour MP for Reading West, Martin Salter. Martin served for over a decade and gave me one of my first tastes of politics as I undertook my work experience in his office. He remains a force within the constituency—as I am sure hon. Members can imagine—as a passionate campaigner for the protection of our waterways, and in particular our fragile and precious chalk streams. My constituency also contains areas previously represented by Laura Farris and John Redwood. I put on record my thanks to them both for their commitment and public service.

While the rural villages of Berkshire may not be traditional Labour territory, I think that my constituency shares the values of this new Government. We are a place of service to our country, to our land and to each other. We are a place where people work hard, enriching our economy, our community and our families, and we are a place of opportunity, where our young people can get a great start. In this place, I am determined to do everything in my power to embody that service and support our communities to prosper.

My political passion was sparked in the corridors of my school, where Government policy in section 28 told me that I should be ashamed of who I was. But my commitment to public service came from my parents. My dad, a police officer known as "Red Roy" because of his belief in building relationships with the community, not simply asserting power, first took me out delivering leaflets for the Labour party. My mum, an English teacher who would always fight the corner of even the most badly behaved pupils, instilled in me the determination captured in her favourite book:

"you never really understand a person until you consider things from their point of view".

I have spent my career trying to honour their contributions. I have developed policy solutions to improve our public services, reconnect the police with their communities and tackle discrimination. I have sought to put the public at the heart of our politics through my work conducting public opinion research.

But the political is ultimately personal. It was political progress that enabled my wife and I to marry and to build our own family. My political flame, sparked at school, burns now for my two boys and for all young people still in our care system. It burns most fiercely as I hold the hand of my mum, being taken from me by Alzheimer's while being let down by the state.

I am very proud to find myself here today, and my two boys are very proud as well. The problem is that, having spent the election telling their teachers to vote Labour, they are now telling all their friends that I am some sort of supreme leader—[*Laughter.*] That may be funny, but I am at pains to remind them that the opposite is true: I am a servant, and in the years I have in this place I hope to continue the hard work and dedication of the many men and women who, little by little, have fought for change.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Beautifully said.

1.50 pm

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Members for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Daniel Francis) and for Reading West and Mid Berkshire (Olivia Bailey). It is daunting to undertake a maiden

speech, but both of them did so with panache and with passion, and my hon. Friends and I are grateful to them for sharing their insights with us on this very, I hope, non-partisan occasion.

Both hon. Members rightly spoke about the aspects of their constituencies in which they take pride, and that gives me a cue to put in a brief word for the Waterside Arts Festival, which has been going on this week. Sadly, I have had to miss most of it, being up here in Westminster, but last Saturday, on a very rainy day, I was privileged to see a few of the offerings of this cultural feast, which is supported by Culture in Common and Arts Council England. One was a remarkable pair of acrobatic dance artists, Olivia Quayle and Jan Patzke, who operate under the title of Joli Vyann. One artist uses the body of the other as a sort of climbing frame, ultimately ending up standing unsupported on one foot on the head of the other artist. That is not something I have ever seen even on television, let alone live, and it was quite impressive to see it on a rainy Saturday afternoon in Hythe, in Hampshire. Another theme was cartoonists, and there was a remarkable, fascinating talk by Clive Goddard about not only technique but the effort involved in a cartoonist ensuring that his or her precarious life as a freelancer somehow makes economic sense.

Next year will mark the 80th anniversary of the end of the second world war, so anyone old enough to have fought in that terrible conflict must now be at, or very close to, their 100th birthday. On suitable occasions, I have previously referred to friends among the wartime and early post-war veterans who are now no longer with us. They have included world war two Mosquito pilot Doug Gregory DFC, who flew a replica world war one biplane fighter at air displays until the age of 90, and who died in 2015 at the age of 92; Fleet Air Arm telegraphist air gunner Norman “Dickie” Richardson DSM, who flew from HMS Victorious in the far east, and who died in 2020 aged 96; and my late father-in-law, Malayan emergency supply drop navigator Frank Souness DFC, who died at the end of 2022 aged 92.

It is not surprising, but still sad, that this year has seen the passing of the last of my second world war friends, all of whom lived in New Forest East. There was Marion Loveland, who reached the magnificent age of 102 and who was a lady of grace, poise and elegance. She was born on 6 June 1921 and was a Wren third officer at HMS Collingwood on her birthday in 1944 as D-day began. Her moving and dignified television interview, recorded earlier this year shortly before her passing, and telling how her fiancé, a decorated Royal Marines commando, was killed landing on Sword beach on 6 June—D-day and her birthday—is still available to view on the ITVX website, and I commend it to right hon. and hon. Members.

Then there was the wonderful Liz Gregory, the widow of Doug, whom I mentioned earlier. She helped him build his replica SE5a world war one biplane fighter in their back garden—as one does—and unfailingly supported him in all his flying adventures and escapades. This great lady lived to the age of 95, and Members can read all about her in Doug Gregory’s fascinating autobiography, “Aeroaddict”, published by Little Knoll Press—if I were not forbidden from brandishing props in this presentation, I would wave it around at this point—*[Laughter.]*

Finally, just last month, we lost Dr Arthur Page at the age of 100. He was a comrade of Dickie Richardson in 849 Squadron, Fleet Air Arm, on HMS Victorious. Arthur also flew in the famous Palembang raids against the oil refineries in Sumatra and on many other dangerous missions in the far east. Both *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* published remarkable obituaries of this fine and gallant officer, who quietly resumed his interrupted medical studies after the war and served as a GP in Totton, in my constituency, for more than 30 years. He too continued to fly—until the age of 75—and Members can read about his and Dickie’s adventures in “Palembang and Beyond”, a book written by the late Mike Roussel. Again, I am not allowed to brandish it in the Chamber, but it is an eminently worthwhile read. Although all those outstanding individuals have now gone, the example they set will long continue to inspire those who knew them and generations yet to come.

In the time remaining, I shall return to a continuing constitutional issue, which I previously raised in the debate on the King’s Speech. With the election of Select Committee Chairs having just taken place, we must hope that the Prime Minister, after consulting the Leader of the Opposition, will soon present to the House nominations for membership of Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament. The matter is pressing, not just because the Committee was about to complete a key inquiry when the election was called, but because of the fact that, while there is no Committee, its dedicated expert staff are left vulnerable to the tender mercies of some of those whom it oversees. That is of serious concern.

For the benefit of new MPs, I should explain that the ISC is a cross-party Committee of both Houses of Parliament created by statute. Under the Justice and Security Act 2013, the ISC has the legal responsibility for overseeing the UK’s intelligence community on behalf of Parliament and its Members. After confirmation in both Houses, its members choose their own Chairman from among their nine members.

Right hon. and hon. Members may be surprised to learn that the ISC’s office—with a very small number of staff—belongs to the Cabinet Office, despite the ISC overseeing several sensitive organisations within the Cabinet Office. They would be right to be surprised, because that is indeed a fundamental conflict of interest. That is why, at the time of the Justice and Security Act, the Cabinet Office was supposed to be only the temporary home of the ISC’s office. Yet here we are, more than 10 years later, with the Committee’s staff still beholden to, vulnerable within, and unfairly pressured and even victimised by the very part of the Executive the Committee is charged with overseeing.

The Executive should not be able to constrain and control the Committee’s democratic oversight on behalf of Parliament by exerting control over the Committee’s small staff team to prevent them doing their job independently. Such control means that part of the Cabinet Office can and does starve the team of resources, so that the ISC’s staff are unable to fulfil the Committee’s legal responsibilities. That is in complete contravention and disregard of a clear ministerial undertaking given by the then Deputy Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Sir Oliver Dowden), before the election. It also means that they can stigmatise and penalise the ISC’s staff, with damaging consequences for their careers in the civil service.

[Sir Julian Lewis]

The outgoing members of the ISC value the Committee's staff very highly indeed, and we found such treatment to be unacceptable. In the last Parliament, the Committee therefore formally resolved, by a unanimous vote across all three political parties on the ISC, that it is essential for parliamentary democracy and its scrutiny system that the Committee's office must move out from under the control of the Executive—that is, the Cabinet Office—and should be established instead as an independent “body corporate” with a link to Parliament rather than to the Executive. That unanimous decision was confirmed by the members of the Committee at its meeting on 19 March 2024, following expert and authoritative external advice that it is indeed within the ISC's power to take such a step and to determine the suitable mechanisms for implementing it.

This constitutional change, essential to protect the separation of powers, is easy to achieve. It requires a very short amendment to the Justice and Security Act to change the status of the ISC's office. The amendment would establish an independent office to support the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament to safeguard the independence of the Committee itself. It had been hoped that the amendment would be included in the new legislative programme. Unfortunately, but unsurprisingly in the Committee's absence, the Cabinet Office has hitherto managed to block it. However, this is to underestimate the previous members of the Committee, from both sides of the House and in both Chambers, who are convinced that the Committee's office cannot and must not continue to be controlled by the Cabinet Office.

There is already, in the legislative programme, an obvious vehicle for achieving the necessary change: the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and International Committee of the Red Cross (Status) Bill is designed to change the status of those two organisations. It is therefore the obvious place to include a short amendment to the Justice and Security Act to change the status of the Committee's organisation, too. As a measure to secure democratic oversight, I am confident that it should and would secure cross-party support in both Houses. Prior to the election, both the then Government and the then Opposition seemed to accept that this reform was needed, which does rather beg the question why it has not happened yet.

I trust, in conclusion, that the Government will ensure that this change is not being blocked somewhere by forces unknown, and will ensure that it is now taken forward, together with the emergency uplift in resourcing that was approved by the then Deputy Prime Minister before the general election but which has been disregarded by the Cabinet Office since. This is urgently required if the new Committee is to have sufficient efficient staff to be able to meet and function fully when it is reconstituted. The Government should recognise that this cannot wait. Too much valuable time has been lost already.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call Satvir Kaur to make her maiden speech.

2.3 pm

Satvir Kaur (Southampton Test) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I want to start by congratulating hon. Friends and other hon. Members on some fantastic

maiden speeches today, but also on the many I have heard since the election in July. They have made me proud to be British.

However, notwithstanding those incredible speeches and hearing about the amazing and beautiful places across the UK, I would still argue that Southampton, the place where I was born and bred, where I have always lived and which I have the honour to represent as the Member of Parliament for Southampton Test, is the best city on earth.

Listen, I know it is a bold claim and many will have heard me make it before, but Southampton is where the world meets Britain. We have helped shape the world and we continue to do so, from the pilgrims who set sail from Southampton on the Mayflower over 400 years ago in search of a new life in America, to being the home of the Spitfire, which helped to defeat fascism in Europe during world war two. It was the University of Southampton that invented the internet as we know it today. And were those achievements not enough, Southampton also gave the world the fish-finger sandwich—you're welcome.

We are a city rich with culture, from our medieval walls that protected our nation in times of conflict to our award-winning parks, most notably Southampton common, which are the green lungs of our city, and our renowned art galleries and our theatre, the Mayflower. Southampton is where Jane Austen was schooled and lived, and it inspired some of her masterpieces. Even today, Southampton continues to produce great talent, from the singer Craig David to “MasterChef” winner Shelina Permalloo.

Southampton is also a world-leading maritime city that is integral to the UK economy. The port of Southampton handles over £71 billion-worth of trade every year, while also serving as the busiest cruise port in Europe.

We are a city of political firsts. Many will know that our country's first Prime Minister of colour is from Southampton. I was the first female Sikh council leader in the UK. And the former MP for Southampton Test, my good friend Dr Alan Whitehead, was the first, and I believe the only politician, to have a song dedicated to them by none other than Led Zeppelin—clearly, they have a “whole lotta love” for Alan.

Now, paying tribute to Alan Whitehead as my predecessor in this Chamber is an honour. He has been one of those unique politicians who was universally liked, valued, and respected on both sides of the House. His knowledge on climate change and green energy is unparalleled. He is essentially the Taylor Swift of the energy sector. [*Laughter.*] I'm pleased you got it. He leaves behind a legacy, not only of shaping Government policy on energy right now but of benefiting future generations, for which we all owe him a huge debt of gratitude. As I approach my 40th birthday in the coming days—[HON. MEMBERS: “Surely not!”] I know! It is incredible to think that Alan has served our city for as long as I have been alive, first as leader of the council and then as a Member of Parliament. He has done so with unwavering dedication, integrity and kindness, meaning that he will be sorely missed by many. I am acutely aware that I have very big shoes to fill.

Alan, and the former Member of Parliament for Southampton Itchen, John Denham, have both been instrumental in helping me to reach this place today.

Indeed, John, on a visit to my school fair, awarded me first prize, when I was only eight years old, for my fancy dress costume. I do not know what it was about me dressing up as a clown that made John think that I might one day be destined for a career in politics.

The truth is that I owe so much to my incredible city and the remarkable people of Southampton who gave me the opportunity to be where I am today. Southampton has made me who I am. As someone who grew up in one of Southampton's most deprived communities, I saw at first hand the importance of community and service to others. Southampton has a unique ability to come together when it is needed most. I have been inspired time and time again by the many examples set by our faith organisations, local businesses and incredible local charities, from Love Southampton, a faith-based initiative, to businesses such as the Saints Pub on the Millbrook estate, and charities like Yellow Door, No Limits and Saints Foundation. All work tirelessly to make Southampton a better place, and remind us that when we lift our poorest and most vulnerable in society, that lifts everyone.

Our city's diversity has made me realise that we are the great place we are because of it—historic, but modern, dynamic, creative, and so much more. I may stand here as our constituency's first female MP and MP of colour, but I know that there are many more before me who have paved the way. I feel that responsibility here as well, and feel their weight on my shoulders. As a graduate of Southampton's two world-class universities—the University of Southampton, and then Solent University—I know that they put our city on the map, and that both are institutions that inspire, innovate and push boundaries. They have helped me, and our city, to be more forward-thinking and outward-looking. As a Saints fan, I must confess that supporting our team is a bit of an emotional rollercoaster, which has taught me, above anything else, enormous resilience. We are thankfully back in the premier league, but whether we are winning or losing, together as one city we march on.

I am incredibly proud of Southampton and everything it represents, but like any major city, we know that we face challenges. One in every three children lives below the poverty line, and a person's life expectancy can drop by 10 years simply by their being the wrong side of a bridge. Public services are on their knees, and many families I represent are struggling. That is why I want to be part of the renewal that this Labour Government are promising, and want to rebuild the services on which my communities rely—from a decent home becoming a basic human right to people feeling safe in our streets and neighbourhoods again; from having access to healthcare when it is needed to protecting our environment and rivers. Another key priority of mine is to ensure that we create opportunities for all, and include the excluded. We know that children from poor areas or ethnic minority backgrounds, or those with disabilities, are not less talented; they are simply given fewer opportunities. Britain's talent is spread evenly across our communities and our country. If we are to realise our potential, we must ensure that those opportunities are spread more evenly too.

These challenges will not be easy to resolve, but the people of Southampton, like so many across Britain, are rightfully proud and ambitious for themselves, their families and their country. That is why we need a Government who are equally ambitious, and committed

to unlocking the potential and opportunities of places like Southampton. I know that, as a city, we stand ready to seize this moment to thrive and grow—and the drive, passion, compassion, togetherness and determination of the people of Southampton will see it through. Let me end by saying directly to them: I will be forever grateful to you for making this daughter of a market stall trader, who grew up in our inner city on free school meals, your Member of Parliament. You are the very best of me, and I am a product of every opportunity that you have given me. I shall never take that trust for granted, and I will spend every day, in here and beyond, championing our great city, fighting for it, and helping us to reach our enormous potential.

2.13 pm

Paul Holmes (Hamble Valley) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate. It is poignant that it is called the Sir David Amess debate. I knew Sir David well, and the last time I saw him was on the day before he died. I was in Qatar with him, in a country that he loved and for which he advocated for many years during his career. When I arrived, he was leaving. I said, "You are leaving, and I am just arriving." He said, "It's nothing personal; I have my surgery tomorrow, and I can't miss it." He was someone who embodied his constituency, and put his constituency and his constituents first. That is something that is shared by all of us, on both sides of the House, and we remember him particularly today.

David Burton-Sampson (Southend West and Leigh) (Lab): As the new Member for Southend West and Leigh, I have to say that on the doorstep in the constituency everyone knew Sir David Amess—or they thought they knew Sir David Amess—and that is the sign of a fantastic constituency MP. Although we may be different politically, Sir David was an amazing constituency MP. In his name, we are now a city, and that will continue to be recognised through the City Day being introduced by the city council. I join the hon. Member in recognising Sir David and his dedication to his constituents.

Paul Holmes: I know that the hon. Gentleman is a new Member, and I think that intervention shows the measure of the man that he will be in this House over the next four years. Judging by a debate in which he participated yesterday, I know that he will be a vocal advocate for his constituency, and that he will make Sir David very proud.

It is a genuine honour to follow the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Southampton Test (Satvir Kaur). I declare an interest, because I know the hon. Lady very well indeed. We were both on Southampton City Council, as councillors and in leading positions, and we both graduated from Southampton University. The hon. Member for Bridgend (Chris Elmore), the Whip on duty who will respond at the end of the debate—I am sure it is coming—should probably close his folder now and leave this out of his notes, but I was actually the best man at the hon. Lady's wedding. And on my phone I have video evidence of how good she is at dancing, of how bad her husband Ben is at dancing, and of how good a partyer she is at 2 o'clock in the morning.

I often call the hon. Lady "Mrs Southampton", because that is what she is. We both care about Southampton genuinely and passionately. She was a groundbreaking council leader; she cares about her city and she cares

[Paul Holmes]

about her constituents; and she will be a groundbreaking Member of Parliament. I will just remind her that I secured more votes in Southampton Test than she did when I stood in 2017—but I did lose by 12,500, so she did a lot better than me.

As is customary, I wish to raise a few issues on behalf of my constituents. I promise that I will not take too long, because I know that other Members want to make their maiden speeches, and today is a day for them—particularly the hon. Member for Winchester (Dr Chambers), my constituency neighbour, and my hon. Friend the Member for Exmouth and Exeter East (David Reed). I am watching him because he is in my flock in the Opposition Whips Office and I will be marking his homework later, and I know that he has two very special people waiting in the Gallery who probably want a cup of tea, so I will keep my speech short.

I have always spoken in these debates because I think it important to be able to raise issues on behalf of my constituents—very quickly but also, I hope, very thoroughly. The first issue is one on which I have been campaigning for five years in the House: the Access for All funding that the last Government awarded to a number of stations—including two in my constituency, Hedge End and Swanwick—and the vital importance of ensuring that our train stations are accessible to people who are less able-bodied than we are, and to people with children, particularly those with pushchairs. Following that five-year campaign and two Adjournment debates, we finally received the award, but under the present Government I have been told in a letter that the feasibility study funding is under review.

That is a disappointment to me and to my constituents, living in an area where there is excessive development built by the leadership of my local council. As the area grows, it is difficult for my constituents to travel to and from work using Hedge End station; they have to get off the train at Southampton Airport Parkway, 9 miles away. I really hope that the hon. Member for Bridgend will speak to the Department for Transport to ensure that Members on both sides of the House whose local stations have been awarded Access for All funding are given urgent clarification of whether they will receive it, because many people in our constituencies will rely on it. I am disappointed that the Government have chosen to place this under review. Hedge End will not require a massive amount of money. I do not want to hear about a £22 billion black hole; this is not enough money to make a difference to in-year spending. That is the last party-political point that I shall make, but the issue is important in my constituency and many others throughout the United Kingdom.

The next issue is broadband and mobile phone signal. A lot of new developments have been built in Whiteley, in my new constituency of Hamble Valley. It has the infrastructure of a number of old, chocolate-box villages that I inherited from the old constituency of Winchester. Many young professionals have bought homes along the Curbridge corridor and down into Burrigge, and, in this world of working from home, they want to be able to conduct their business and their work life at home. A number of them receive fines because they cannot pay their bills, and a number are getting into trouble because

they cannot turn up to work. I am very interested in hearing from the Government on the investment—maybe not necessarily today, but I hope they can allocate some time to debate the really important issue of digital deserts across the United Kingdom, which is vital. My new constituency is more rural than my old one, and I have picked up this issue across the whole of the constituency since I became its Member of Parliament on 5 July.

I want to raise an issue that the Government will hear about from me in a number of debates over the next five years: we need a walk-in centre in Whiteley in my constituency. We have the fantastic Fareham community hospital, which has a great diagnostic team. It opens its doors to the local community and takes some of the pressure off the primary care services that we have in other areas of the constituency, but we need to have more services at the hospital. It is a fantastic site and, with its excellent leadership and staff, has the capability to provide more primary care and more acute care. I hope that the Government will look at allocating funding for walk-in centres at Fareham community hospital and in Whiteley shopping centre.

Lastly, people who are watching us from the Gallery or on television—I suspect there are not many—do not see the hard work of the staff of this House. I particularly thank my office staff—they are paid by me, so they should expect to do all the hard work—and the House staff, who are really important. They include the Clerks and the Doorkeepers, who make sure that I get to meetings from time to time and that I know where I am going. New Members will find them particularly useful. I also thank all the catering staff and the people who make our lives here easier. I wish them a wonderful break as we go to argue things out at our party conferences. I hope they get a rest.

May I wish all Members from across the whole House, who represent a vast array of different parties, a wonderful recess? Go and have a good argument at various seaside locations across the United Kingdom.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I must put on record my thanks to the staff in the Tea Room, particularly Margaret, Godfrey and Gemma; otherwise, they will not make me a good cup of tea.

I call Sally Jameson to make her maiden speech.

2.22 pm

Sally Jameson (Doncaster Central) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is an honour to deliver my maiden speech in the Sir David Amess Adjournment debate, and to follow some truly inspirational maiden speeches by Members from across the House, and the speech by the hon. Member for Hamble Valley (Paul Holmes).

It was the honour of my life to be elected to represent Doncaster Central—my home, the place where I was born, and a place I care deeply about. Doncaster's industrial history is one of transformation and innovation, shaping us into the town, and now city, that we are today. During the industrial revolution we became renowned for railway manufacturing. We built iconic trains like the Mallard and the Flying Scotsman, which are still a source of great pride. We also have a long and deep mining history, which has significantly shaped our local economy, community and heritage. Only the other week,

I was at the Markham Main Miners Memorial Gardens in Armthorpe for the annual commemoration of the miners who died in the mine. The gardens remind us all of the miners' sacrifice, but also of the community that they helped to build, which is still woven into the spirit of Doncaster today.

We also have much to celebrate. This week, young chefs from the DN1 Delicatessen and Dining Room are at the World Skills Culinary Arts final in France. We have exciting and innovative companies, like Clean Power Hydrogen and Agemaspark, and a young generation ready to shape our future, like Millie and Emily from Hall Cross sixth form, who did their work experience on my campaign. From our racecourse, where the St Leger festival takes place this weekend—that is a quick plug—to our beautiful Mansion House and our sensational market, we may be a new city, but we have a long and rich history, which makes me proud to say that I am from Doncaster.

While we have much to be proud of, I must also recognise that Doncaster has faced a number of challenges over the past 14 years, with cuts to local government and a number of broken promises. But there are opportunities to grasp. The Labour Government's commitment to making Britain a clean energy superpower will not only bring down the soaring bills that people in Doncaster face, but bring greater energy security and the opportunity for a new, green industrial future with Great British Energy. As a Labour and Co-operative MP, I am particularly proud that, as part of that mission, we will deliver a local power plan that will have the community at its heart in order to empower people and the places where they live. I am sure that we in Doncaster will seize on this new industrial strategy to forge our future and build our city's legacy.

I am also determined to work alongside our fantastic council leadership, Mayor Ros Jones and Deputy Mayor Glyn Jones, the brilliant Doncaster Chamber, and my parliamentary colleagues across the city as we work to get our airport reopened and ensure that it thrives, and to get the health service and hospital that we so desperately need and deserve.

I could not let this speech pass without paying tribute to my incredible predecessor, Baroness Winterton of Doncaster. Baroness Winterton is a formidable politician, an incredible woman and a dear friend. She served as a Government Minister across a number of Departments, as a long-serving Opposition Chief Whip and, of course, latterly as Deputy Speaker of this House. Doncaster is a better place for having had Baroness Winterton as our MP for 27 years, and while I know that I will never be able to live up to her legendary shoe collection, I hope that I am able to continue her legacy of service to the people of Doncaster Central and to this House.

It is a great source of personal pride for me to be one of only two prison officers elected to Parliament, and to be one of the only POA branch chairs. Today I want to acknowledge my former colleagues in His Majesty's Prison Service across the country, who are doing an incredibly difficult job in increasingly difficult circumstances. For too long, the work of prison staff has gone unnoticed and without reference to the outside world, and I am determined to change this with my election to this House and my appointment as a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Ministry of Justice.

I want to pay tribute to the prisons in my area, starting with HMP Doncaster in my own constituency. I pay tribute to HMP Lindholme, and to HMP and YOI Hatfield, in Doncaster East and the Isle of Axholme. Finally—I am saving the best till last—I pay tribute to the staff at HMP and YOI Moorland, where it has been a privilege to serve for over six years with some of the bravest and most dedicated people I have ever met. They take on workplace challenges that most could not bear to think of. No matter what danger you are in, they are by your side. In moments of peril, you know that you do not need to look behind your shoulder to see what is there, because your colleagues have always got your back. To work in a place that is fraught with so many dangers and so many difficulties, and still to feel safe, is a testament to the people with whom you work. Today I pay tribute to the prison staff at HMP and YOI Moorland for their commitment to our service and for their friendship, which will stay with me throughout my time in this House and, indeed, for the rest of my life.

The criminal justice and prison system has highlighted to me the many things that we still need to do to ensure that children get the best start, and one area that needs urgent work is the children's care system. Sadly, there are a disproportionate number of care-experienced people in our criminal justice system, and they make up around a quarter of the overall prison population. This shows the urgent need to address the fact that we are failing so many of the most vulnerable children, leaving them targets for predators and criminal gangs. We are failing to give them the start in life that we would expect for our own family and friends.

In this area, along with so many other areas, including economic growth and restoring our services in Doncaster and across the country, change must come. I will ensure that I use every day during my time in this House to speak up and be a part of the change that the new Government will bring, to serve my constituents in Doncaster Central and to bring the prosperity, public services and progress that we deserve.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call Freddie van Mierlo to make his maiden speech.

2.29 pm

Freddie van Mierlo (Henley and Thame) (LD): That was very well pronounced, Madam Deputy Speaker. I echo the comments about Sir David Amess. I am also grateful to the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) for alerting me to the Westminster dog competition. My two Shiba Inus looking on at this debate will be very excited about that. I congratulate the hon. Member for Doncaster Central (Sally Jameson) on her maiden speech. Her passion for her constituency is clear. I am looking forward to visiting HMP Huntercombe in my constituency and paying tribute to the prison staff there.

I thank my predecessor, John Howell, who represented the constituency for 16 years before stepping down. I am sure that the whole House will join me in wishing him well as he recovers from a stroke. Among his achievements was his commitment to the Council of Europe; he led the UK delegation for many years. It is sad to see Conservative leadership hopefuls now calling for the UK to step back from the Council of Europe by

[Freddie van Mierlo]

leaving the European Court of Human Rights. That would put us alongside Belarus, Russia and the Vatican as the only non-member European nations.

It is an honour to be the new MP for Henley and Thame, which is a new constituency made up largely of the former Henley seat that was last Liberal in 1910. In the intervening period, the constituency has played host to well-known Members of the House, including, most famously, Michael Heseltine and the former Prime Minister, Boris Johnson. Although they are well-known names, I am very much looking forward to making my own distinct contribution to this House. I can only hope to emulate my relative, Hans van Mierlo, the founder of the Dutch liberal party D66, who exited government more respected and popular than when he entered—a rarity in modern politics. I will not comment on which of my predecessors achieved that feat and which did not.

Thame is one of the two main towns of the constituency, alongside Henley-on-Thames. As well as hosting two stunning, chocolate-box market towns, the constituency is characterised by the Chilterns national landscape and its iconic escarpment, and is bisected by a section of the historic Ridgeway national trail. Henley and Thame is also host to a significant portion of the Oxford green belt, and is criss-crossed by an abundance of well-cared-for villages and hamlets, such as the wonderful Waterstock and Waterperry in the north of the constituency, and the aptly named Christmas Common, which has supplied and decorated Christmas trees for No. 10 for many years. Watlington is the constituency's lesser-known third town, but is nevertheless known locally for its vibrant high street and welcoming community. It is also the town that I have had the sincerest pleasure of representing as a county and district councillor since 2021 and 2023 respectively.

The Rivers Thames and Thame and their chalk stream tributaries define not only much of the physical landscape of the constituency, but the communities that live there. Henley is, of course, home to the annual royal regatta, which fills residents with pride. This year, there is much to be proud of as we welcome our Olympic and Paralympic heroes back to Oxfordshire. In recent years, however, the river has been filled with something altogether more sinister. Rowers treat the water as a toxic substance, meticulously cleaning hands and covering mouths while they row, but that is still not enough to stop the steady flow of reports of serious illness following encounters with the waste-filled water. The shameful sewage crisis cuts deep in Henley and Thame, with Henley-on-Thames town council recently declaring no confidence in Thames Water in a precedent-setting vote. I join the council in declaring no confidence in Thames Water in this Chamber, and call for proper root and branch reform.

I am honoured to represent RAF Benson and its residents, and I pay tribute to the men and women of the armed forces who serve this country so ably. The constituency has a considerable and proud military history that dates back to the battle of Chalgrove field in 1643. Exactly 300 years later, construction started on Chalgrove airfield, from which reconnaissance missions were flown in preparation for the invasion of occupied Europe. Later, US army Pathfinders set off from Chalgrove, dropping into Holland as our allied forces sought to

liberate my father's home town of Arnhem in Operation Market Garden. That same airfield now hosts the world's leading manufacturer and tester of ejector seats and fighter aircraft. Sadly, the airfield was sold off to Homes England under the Conservatives and forced into an unpopular local plan as a site allocated for a new town. I will continue to support residents in their fight to keep Chalgrove a village and to protect its heritage in defence.

I close with a few words of thanks to my wonderful wife, who has put up with so much from me as I set about reversing 114 years of Conservative rule in Henley and Thame. I feel extremely privileged to stand in this Chamber, but whatever the future holds, I will have no greater privilege than being married to my wife. Having committed that sentiment to the public record, I trust I have now corrected my failure to mention her in my 6 am acceptance speech.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I am not sure that is the get-out clause the hon. Gentleman is hoping for. I call Phil Brickell to make his maiden speech.

2.34 pm

Phil Brickell (Bolton West) (Lab): It is a privilege to serve my constituents as the first Labour Member of Parliament for Bolton West in almost a decade, and to speak in this debate under your chairship, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is an honour to speak in the Sir David Amess Adjournment debate. I extend my thanks to the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) for opening the debate and for his very kind words.

As a new MP, I pay tribute to my predecessor, Chris Green, who always tried his best for the people of Bolton West. It is a great honour to be elected alongside my hon. Friends the Members for Bolton North East (Kirith Entwistle), and for Bolton South and Walkden (Yasmin Qureshi). It is the first time in nine years that Bolton has elected three Labour Members of Parliament. I look forward to working with them to realise my ambitions for a healthier, more prosperous constituency.

Over the years, Bolton West has had a long tradition of pioneering Labour Members of Parliament. Baroness Ann Taylor served Bolton West from 1974 to 1983. In her maiden speech, she noted the vital role that Government can play in addressing regional inequalities, and she highlighted the need for civic pride in our towns—both themes that, 50 years later, continue to resonate with my constituents. Ann still serves in the other place. I am proud to call her a friend. She is a true inspiration and I pay tribute to her for her lifetime of public service. More recently, Ruth Kelly was first elected to represent Bolton West in 1997, before going on to serve in the Cabinet. Most recently, Julie Hilling served as the MP from 2010 to 2015. I am the first male Labour Member of Parliament for my constituency since the 1970s and, rest assured, I have big boots to fill.

May I now enlighten the House about my background? Surprisingly, I am the first Brickell in this place, and I am proud to be Bolton born and bred. My parents served our country for many years. My father was a soldier in the Royal Artillery, stationed in Germany, Northern Ireland, Canada and Cyprus, before going on to work as a paramedic in Bolton and then as a carer on the minimum wage; and my mother worked in the women's health department at the Royal Bolton hospital

for more than 30 years. Indeed, my first job was at the Bolton hospital, before I went on to spend more than a decade tackling serious financial crime—bribery, corruption, money laundering and the facilitation of tax evasion. Let us not forget that four out of 10 victims of crime are victims of fraud, often online. The importance of public service was instilled in me from a young age by my parents, which is why I found myself wanting to stand for election to this place. I pay tribute to my family and my wife for their tireless support of my campaign to become a Member of Parliament and my ongoing work on behalf of my constituents.

Bolton West is a misleading name for a constituency that is made up of towns with distinct local identities. There is the former mining town of Westhoughton, the historic locomotive town of Horwich, Blackrod, and the western fringes of Bolton. Straddling the M61 between Rivington Pike and Leigh, the towns of Bolton West have a rich history. Indeed, last week marked the 126th anniversary of the Winter Hill mass trespass, when working people walked up together from Bolton to the West Pennine moors in search of open countryside, fresh air and a right to roam. To this day, there remains work to be done to open up our countryside for all to enjoy in a responsible manner, and I will work throughout this Parliament to secure that goal.

I know that Mr Speaker and I have a shared interest in following the ups and downs of Bolton Wanderers football club, who play their matches at the Toughsheet community stadium and provide vital support in the community for my constituents. Horwich has a long history of manufacturing, and more recently, the services economy, which is centred around the Middlebrook retail and business parks. It is home to Scan computers, a pioneering firm that remains family-owned to this day and that continues to invest in local talent across the borough. Elsewhere, MBDA, one of the UK's largest defence firms, manufactures at the Logistics North site in my constituency. Cohens Chemist, which provides invaluable GP and pharmacy services, is headquartered in Lostock. Finally and importantly, the plastic recycling firm Toughsheet focuses on repurposing waste products for use in the building industry.

There are fantastic organisations and charities working day in, day out to support my constituents. Bolton mountain rescue team, based in Ladybridge Hall, is made up of tireless volunteers who are called out every week to save lives. Pioneering charities such as The Hub in Westhoughton and Blackrod sports and community centre go above and beyond to ensure that local people have opportunities to thrive.

Turning back to politics, the recent general election campaign spoke to many of my constituents' concerns: the state of the local NHS; the reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete found in our local hospital and schools; the 8 am scramble each morning to obtain a GP appointment; spiralling housing costs; the need for better, well-paid jobs in the local area; better integrated transport that is both reliable and affordable; and effective policing that prevents individuals from falling into a life of crime, tackles repeat offending and ensures that local people feel safe in their neighbourhood.

I will work as hard as I can to secure the improved public services my constituents urgently deserve. I also want to draw attention to what will be a key focus during my time here—standards in public life. We must

always strive to be better if we are to retain public trust. We all know that politics has the potential to change lives immeasurably for the better, yet all too often, the public feel let down, and there is a perception that vested interests sometimes subsume those of constituents in need of support, but it does not have to be like this. That is why I am proud to see the Prime Minister stress the importance of public service.

As we look ahead to the remainder of this Parliament, let us never forget why we are here and who we serve. Let us embrace the politics of unity, which recognises that we can achieve lasting progress for our constituents by working together across party divides. Let us turn our back on the dog-whistle politics that sows division. The truth is that politics is far more difficult, more nuanced and, yes, more fractious than many of us might like to admit.

I end by drawing an analogy between this place and my favourite pastime. In my spare time, I am an avid white water kayaker, navigating our rivers from source to sea. The sport has taken me to far-flung destinations such as the Nepalese Himalayas, the White Nile in Uganda as it flows north out of Lake Victoria, and the upper reaches of the Alps. White water kayaking is an assumed-risk sport, and it is a team endeavour. There are many obstacles to navigate on the way downstream, blind corners that might belie a tree blocking the entire river, vicious recirculating features that can trap a kayaker whole, and huge hidden waterfalls can appear suddenly. That is before we get to the effluence being discharged into our waterways. The parallels to politics are striking, even for those uninitiated in the dark arts of navigating white water.

Growing up, I had a poster on my wall quoting the Chinese philosopher Confucius. It read:

“One's greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time one falls.”

That is an apt quote for politics, and one that we would all do well to bear in mind over the coming weeks and months. Together we have the power to make a lasting impact that will benefit our constituents. That is the privilege of being elected to this place, and it is one on which I intend to deliver during the coming years on behalf of the people of Bolton West.

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

2.44 pm

David Reed (Exmouth and Exeter East) (Con): I congratulate all hon. Members who have delivered their maiden speech. They have all spoken about their constituency with wit, passion and enthusiasm, and I have no doubt that they will be strong representatives for their constituents.

It is a real privilege to deliver my maiden speech during the Sir David Amess general debate. Sir David was a stalwart Member of this House and was barbarically murdered in the line of parliamentary duty. As I stand here in this most historic of Chambers, I look over to Sir David's memorial plaque behind the Government Benches and, as I start life as a Member of Parliament, I hope I can be a strong voice and a man of action for my constituents, as Sir David was for his.

[David Reed]

I start with a heartfelt thank you to the people of Exmouth and Exeter East, for they are the reason I am here. They have put their trust in me to represent them as the first Member of Parliament for our new constituency. It is a responsibility that will always weigh heavily on my shoulders.

I also say thank you to my family and campaign team, who have been bastions of love and support through the long journey to this place. For the record, I want it to be known that getting married during the early stages of a general election campaign makes for an interesting start. Thank you to my wife for being a constant voice of reason and my rock throughout.

Although Exmouth and Exeter East is a new constituency, it was created by amalgamating areas from three previous constituencies, of which East Devon was by far the largest contributor. Referring to all my predecessors, as is custom in a maiden speech, may, therefore, mark me to the Speaker's Office as someone who does not abide by time limits. I say this because all three of my predecessors have made significant contributions to local and national life.

Simon Jupp, the former Member for East Devon, worked hard for his constituents and campaigned relentlessly as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for the great south-west. He helped to secure investment into the region and always championed our part of the world. I consider Simon to be a friend, and his contribution to this House will be missed, as will his encyclopaedic knowledge of local Devon ciders.

Exmouth and Exeter East also incorporates one ward each from the Exeter and Central Devon constituencies. The new hon. Member for Exeter (Steve Race) no doubt gave the right hon. Sir Ben Bradshaw the respect he deserves in his maiden speech. However, I would like to pay my own tribute to Sir Ben, and I know that his judgment and leadership will be missed by the Labour party.

Lastly, I have been blessed to inherit the beautiful Exe valley from my right hon. Friend the Member for Central Devon (Mel Stride), who continues to serve and lead in this House. His loss is my gain, but I will ensure that I diligently represent the good people of the Exe valley as he has for the last 14 years.

For those who have not had the good fortune to visit Exmouth and Exeter East, please allow me to indulge in a Cook's tour of my new constituency, and to give Members a flavour of the geography, the history, the settlements, the people and the organisations that make my part of the world so irresistibly enchanting.

Starting at the mouth of the River Exe, going out to the heathlands of Woodbury Common and finishing in the countryside above the city of Exeter, the constituency of Exmouth and Exeter East has it all: beautiful beaches; serene, open and arable landscapes; the eastern part of a thriving city; vibrant towns; and picturesque villages. Many parts of my new constituency have been inhabited for several millennia, with areas such as Topsham being settled by the Celts, turned into a port by the Romans and expanded by the Saxons.

Possibly our most famous resident has been Sir Walter Raleigh, who was an Elizabethan statesman, soldier, writer and explorer. Although he achieved much in his

life, I will do my best not to meet the same fate, which was to be tried for treason before meeting his end outside this Chamber in Old Palace Yard.

We have some fantastic organisations across Exmouth and Exeter East, such as the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, which works tirelessly to keep locals and tourists safe in the waters around the constituency. We have global experts working to advance the frontiers of knowledge on weather and climate at the Met Office's headquarters. We have Clinton Devon Estates, which is ably responsible for the stewardship of much of the land in the southern area of the constituency. As an example, the Clinton Devon Estates team, working with the Environment Agency, recently demonstrated to the world how to proactively regenerate land by completing the lower Otter restoration project.

As is to be expected, we are fortunate to have some of the best farming produce anywhere in the country. For those looking to visit, I highly recommend stopping in for a pasty at Darts farm or Greendale farm shop.

However, the organisation that has the most special place in my heart is Commando Training Centre Royal Marines. For decades, the training camp in Lympstone and the area of Woodbury Common have been the proving ground for all wannabe Royal Marines, and for those from across our armed forces who aspire to become commandos. Having endured Royal Marine commando training over 16 years ago, I am happy to announce that I have learned, once again, to enjoy spending time on Woodbury Common, without fear of being cold, wet, hungry and covered in gorse thistles.

The Royal Marines is a proud organisation, in its 360th year in service to our country. Sadly it had become increasingly rare for a former Royal Marine to enter this House as a Member. However, Royal Marines must share the same tendencies that buses are afflicted by: none turn up for eons, then four turn up at the same time. Although the other three former Royal Marines, the hon. and gallant Members for Plymouth Moor View (Fred Thomas), for Halesowen (Alex Ballinger) and for Birmingham Selly Oak (Al Carns), opted to join the party now in government, I know that the kinship that binds Royal Marines together through shared adversity will benefit this House, and, I hope, provide combative but constructive debate.

While Exmouth and Exeter East has much to be celebrated, it also has its fair share of issues. From an aged and degraded sewerage network to antisocial behaviour, there are many issues that my constituents have placed trust in me to help improve. For too long we have built new houses in the area without delivering appropriate and corresponding infrastructure. I fear the new Government's top-down housing targets will further compound that issue, and I will do all I can to ensure that the right mix of houses are built, in the right places, with the right infrastructure and public consultation.

I am also deeply concerned that large parts of Exmouth and Exeter East will be tarmacked over within one generation. Of course we need new homes for the next generation, so that they can live near their friends, family and work, but we must have a tempered approach and ensure that we do not overdevelop and destroy our countryside, and the culture of our historic towns and villages. There are also areas that I will work hard to improve across Exmouth and Exeter East, such as

social care provisions, post-16 education schemes, job opportunities, transport links, and support for farmers and those in rural affairs.

It is worth voicing that this new Parliament brings the winds of political change to Devon and the wider south-west of England. As a new MP, I am open and willing to work with fellow south-west MPs, regardless of political affinity, to ensure we drive as much investment and opportunity as possible to our part of the world, in a joined-up way.

In an increasingly connected world, I believe our MPs must have a firm understanding of the national and international issues that affect us, and most importantly how these issues affect our constituencies. For much of my adult life, I have fought hard in several organisations to keep our United Kingdom safe and prosperous, both in the physical and the digital environment. We are on the precipice of a new industrial revolution. Frontier technologies, such as artificial intelligence, supercomputing and nanobiotechnology, will radically change our world and the relationship we have with it. It is imperative that the new Government understand these issues and work across the public and private sector to ensure that our United Kingdom remains a technological global leader.

There is no getting away from the fact that the international system is becoming more volatile. It is deeply sad that conversations about international conflict are no longer hypothetical. War has broken out across multiple global regions, and we must act without delay to increase defence spending to meet the threats that are clearly present. Anthropogenic climate change has long ceased to be purely an academic debate—it is visible and happening now. We must continue to work closely with international partners to reduce our overall global carbon emissions.

It is beyond a faux pas to speak in communist tones from the Conservative Benches—I could risk making the same treasonous mistake as Sir Walter Raleigh. However, there is modern resonance in Lenin's purported quote:

“There are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks where decades happen.”

In isolation, any of the points I have raised have the ability to cause mass societal and environmental change. When decades happening in weeks become the new normal, we must keep pace to ensure the United Kingdom remains strong, allied and ahead of the pack in an ever-changing world.

My final message is to the people of Exmouth and Exeter East who sent me to this House. I promise that I will always fight for us, and that I will represent us to the best of my ability, while I have the privilege of serving as their Member of Parliament.

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

2.54 pm

Jonathan Davies (Mid Derbyshire) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Exmouth and Exeter East (David Reed) on his maiden speech. It was a joy to hear a little about his constituency.

I will begin by thanking my predecessor as Member of Parliament for Mid Derbyshire, Pauline Latham, for all she did to serve its residents. Pauline represented the constituency from its creation in 2010 until she stood

down at the end of the last Parliament. Prior to 2010, the communities that make up the constituency were part of other constituencies, served by many illustrious former Members, perhaps most notably George Brown. Pauline championed many important causes in this place, including international development. She also led the charge to increase the marriage age from 16 to 18, a lasting change that reduces the risk of young people being subjected to coercion or abuse. I send Pauline my every best wish for her next chapter, and I look forward to working with her on areas of shared concern.

A small but important part of my constituency was served by the former Member for Derbyshire Dales, Sarah Dines. I thank her for her service and I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (John Whitby) will give a more extensive tribute to her in his maiden speech.

One of the most exciting priorities of this new mission-led Government is their commitment to harnessing the power of nature to deliver clean power and, in turn, to deliver energy security, new jobs and cheaper bills. There is a history, stretching back over 250 years, of using nature to power the economy in the Derwent valley, which runs through Mid Derbyshire. The world's first water-powered mills were built on its river banks to spin cotton, making the valley the birthplace of the industrial revolution. Among its early pioneers was Jedediah Strutt, a hosier and cotton spinner from Belper. Through an entrepreneurial approach, Strutt progressed from humble beginnings to become one of the leading industrialists of his age. Along with Sir Richard Arkwright and Samuel Need, he was a father of the modern factory system, which was adopted around the world.

Although the Derwent valley no longer hums to the clatter of looms or the rhythm of the people who operated them, it continues to harness nature to sustainably power homes and businesses through the hydroelectric schemes it supports today. However, despite the valley being the east midlands' only UNESCO world heritage site, and home to some of the country's most beautiful landscape and extensive biodiversity, some of the valley's iconic industrial buildings face an uncertain future, due to their poor state of repair and lack of occupation. We must save these buildings. They have incredible potential, including to support local economies, increase job opportunities and alleviate the housing crisis. They are also vital to telling Derbyshire's story, and the story of our country.

Celebrating and preserving the past is not frivolous or sentimental nostalgia. It is vital to our sense of place and our perception of who we are today, what we share with others and what makes us distinctive. Knowing where we have come from also shapes where we venture next; that is as true of buildings, countryside and historic sites as it is of our politics.

It is also true of our arts and culture. The creative industries are among Britain's most important exports. They are a huge part of our economy and boost our standing around the world. They are a vital catalyst to express and explore ideas and bring communities together. They have been common to every culture since primordial times. Music, the visual arts, dance and drama provide an opportunity to walk in somebody else's shoes. They build a more inquiring society and help us to understand who we are and what it might be like to have somebody else's experience. They are also a vital educational tool,

[Jonathan Davies]

but in far too many cases they are not a staple in schools or something that people have an adequate opportunity to engage with throughout their life. I look forward to making the case, throughout my time in this place, that this is an underused opportunity for our country.

As we face the huge challenges ahead and return the country to economic stability and renewal, opportunity must be our watchword: opportunity to help people get ahead in life through good jobs, for example in the small and medium-sized businesses that proliferate in my constituency or at places like SmartParc in Spondon, where food production is being reimagined; opportunity to benefit from exceptional education and training, such as is being offered at Rolls-Royce and at the University of Derby in my constituency; opportunity to enjoy good health and community safety through renewed public services; and opportunity to live in a greener world through the new Government's commitment to the environment and to tackling climate change.

Being given the opportunity to serve the people of Mid Derbyshire is the privilege of my life, and I thank everyone who supported me along the way. I thank the voters of Mid Derbyshire: whether they voted for me or not, I am here to serve them. I also thank my many friends and family, who have been a great source of strength on the journey. I am determined to do the people of Mid Derbyshire proud, and to support the new Government to deliver the change that my constituents tell me they need and that they rightly deserve.

3 pm

Sarah Green (Chesham and Amersham) (LD): It is a real privilege to contribute to my first Sir David Amess Adjournment debate. I did not have the privilege of knowing him, but may I acknowledge and pay tribute to his colleagues for keeping his memory very much alive?

We have had some brilliant maiden speeches this afternoon, and I know that there are more to come. I congratulate the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Jonathan Davies) on his confident speech; my hon. Friend the Member for Henley and Thame (Freddie van Mierlo), whom I welcome to the Liberal Democrat Benches; and the hon. Members for Exmouth and Exeter East (David Reed) and for Bolton West (Phil Brickell), who delivered confident and assured speeches. I also want to acknowledge the very moving and raw contribution from the hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Daniel Francis) and the very personal speech by the hon. Member for Reading West and Mid Berkshire (Olivia Bailey).

I wish the hon. Member for Southampton Test (Satvir Kaur) an early happy birthday. Her pride in her city shines through, as does that of the hon. Member for Doncaster Central (Sally Jameson). I echo the tribute that the hon. Member paid to Baroness Winterton, who was in the Chair when I gave my maiden speech.

Over the summer recess, I spent a lot of time in the smaller communities in my constituency, including Knotty Green, Winchmore Hill, Chenies, Coleshill, Seer Green and Jordans. There were some common themes that I would like to raise before the House adjourns. As Members might imagine, some of the issues are particularly local to the area.

In Coleshill, there is real frustration at the continuing lack of broadband in the village. In Coleshill and Winchmore Hill, I was told about the lack of reliable bus services. Recent bus timetable changes have made it harder for pupils to get back to school this term. A solution was found for the boys at a local boys' school, but the same cannot be said for the girls, who no longer have a viable way to get to one of the local girls' schools on public transport from the villages affected by the timetable change. I am mystified as to why boys and girls have been treated differently by the council.

It will not surprise the House that in all the villages that I went to, residents shared their horror at the state of our rivers. Many of them volunteer on the River Chess and the River Misbourne, which are rare chalk streams, and they can see the devastating impact of pollution and sewage.

A number of younger constituents came to share their concern for the environment and for making sure we all do our bit to save the planet. I pay tribute to one young constituent, Stella Jackson, for presenting her petition to me: she deserves particular praise for her efforts in gathering signatures for the petition that she ran in her village to encourage us all to reduce, refuse, recycle and reuse.

While I am talking about our young people, I have to say that I was encouraged to see that last week's Westminster Hall debate on services for special educational needs and disabilities was so well attended; indeed, I was unable to voice the experiences of my constituents, because Westminster Hall was so full. There is a crisis in SEND provision. In our local area, Buckinghamshire council states that demand for SEND services has increased by 50% in the past three years alone, and that this is unsustainable. The heartbreaking conversations that I had with families over the summer support that assessment.

It is also hard to hear the stories of people of all ages who have been waiting for healthcare appointments and treatments. We know the NHS is under great pressure. We know, too, that healthcare workers are working tirelessly in difficult circumstances. I hope that we can look back on today's Darzi report as the point at which the NHS started to turn a corner.

I wish to finish by mentioning the pensioners from my constituency who came to see me this summer worried about the cuts to the winter fuel allowance. The matter came up in every village that I visited. Since the summer recess, almost 100 other constituents have written to me with similar concerns. This Government cannot be held accountable for the mess they inherited, but stripping support from the poorest pensioners just when energy bills are set to rise again cannot be the answer. One constituent with Parkinson's told me that cutting back on their heating will almost certainly exacerbate their symptoms. Taking away this vital support is, quite simply, the wrong thing to do.

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

3.5 pm

Dave Robertson (Lichfield) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I thank hon. Members who have made their first speeches today for setting the bar so high? I hope I can live up to the standard that they have set.

I am sent to this place by the constituents of Lichfield, a constituency that includes not only the city itself, but the town of Burntwood and around 40 villages and hamlets in the great county of Staffordshire. I am proud to serve the area that has been my home since before I knew to call anywhere home, and where I hope it will be for many, many more years to come.

My predecessor in this House was Sir Michael Fabricant. He was knighted in 2023 for political and public service after more than 30 years representing first the constituency of Mid Staffordshire and then Lichfield in this House. Thirty-two years in total Sir Michael served, and I think that would be a number to which we would all aspire. Should I be fortunate enough to still be in this place in 30 years' time, Madam Deputy Speaker, I can only hope to have such a head of hair.

It is, however, to longevity that I wish to turn now. Although I have received advice from some colleagues not to mention the Domesday Book, I can neatly sidestep that as the recorded history of my constituency dates back some 1,000 years before William the Conqueror to the Roman invasion and the establishment of Letocetum, a Roman fort and later settlement near the crossroads of Watling Street and Rykneld Street in my constituency. The crossing of those two roads remained an important place throughout the Roman and Saxon periods, and, in the 7th century, Chad of Mercia established a cathedral and diocese in Lichfield, which still exists today. In just over a week's time, I will be proud to be in attendance at the installation of—I think—the 58th dean of Lichfield cathedral. The Right Reverend Jan MacFarlane will be the first woman to hold that post and will not only smash a glass ceiling, but be an excellent advocate for the cathedral and the Church in the local community and beyond.

The 7th century is also noteworthy for the burying of the Staffordshire hoard, which was uncovered in Hammerwich in my constituency in 2009, near that same crossroads of Watling Street and Rykneld Street. The largest collection of Anglo-Saxon gold ever found, the hoard is already having, and will continue to have, a significant impact on our understanding of the people of these isles, before there was an England, a Scotland, a Wales or a Northern Ireland.

Let me move on from the 7th century. Over the coming years, the city would continue to flourish and establish itself as a religious and ecumenical centre, although much of the surrounding area maintained its rural and agrarian aspect for many centuries to come. In this time, the area did produce innumerable great lives, and, while they are far too numerous to mention all of them here, I should note Gregory King, the world's first economic statistician; Elias Ashmole, whose collections founded the Ashmolean museum, the first of its type in the UK; David Garrick, the noted theatre innovator and manager; the physician Erasmus Darwin, a founding member of the Lunar Society who had a rather famous grandson; the poet, Anna Seward; Thomas Gisborne of Yoxall Lodge, an abolitionist and a close associate of William Wilberforce; the painter John Louis Petit, who is having a wonderful renaissance in the understanding of his work; Frederick Oakeley, who translated the words to "O Come All Ye Faithful" in Lichfield cathedral; and, of course, Samuel Johnson, a man of letters and the author of the first dictionary of the English language.

Johnson's heir, Samuel Barber, was a freed slave who would go on to run a school in Burntwood, decades before Tom Jenkins would begin teaching in Teviothead in Scotland, and who would also serve as a dozer in local government in Lichfield and almost certainly become the first black man to serve in local government in the UK.

Before I move on from some famous people from around the area, I should mention a local success story in Sophie Capewell. Lichfield's golden girl brought home not just a gold medal from Paris this year, but a world record as part of Team GB's fantastic efforts. In doing so, she ended my reign as the most successful former pupil of my old school, Nether Stowe in Lichfield, and although I had hoped to hold that title a little longer than 32 days, I am happy to be disappointed on that point.

Returning to my historical tour of Lichfield and its surrounding area, we reach the early and mid-19th century, and the town of Burntwood, a conurbation of mining villages, which grew up some four miles from Lichfield and has a similarly proud history. Its most notable resident was the fundraiser and campaigner Stephen Sutton, who raised millions for the Teenage Cancer Trust despite his diagnosis. We lost him far too soon, at the age of just 19. He was made an MBE for his fundraising, so it is more than fitting that Burntwood town council remembers him through a student award named in his honour.

Not to be outshone by the cathedral down the road, Burntwood also took its place in ecclesiastical history when, in 1883, St Anne's church in Chasetown became the first in the country to have electric lighting. Today, the people of Burntwood still maintain a close-knit community, typical of former mining areas. That is shown by the great examples of the Spark café and Burntwood Be a Friend, which have done so much to step in to replace services cut during 14 long years of Conservative Government. If we are discussing Burntwood, we cannot forget the giant-killing exploits of Chasetown FC in the FA cup of 2007-08. At some point, I will forgive the Members for Cardiff.

Burntwood is not the only part of my constituency that has a mining history. The village of Handsacre also more than played its part in powering the industry of the 19th and 20th centuries. It is also the village where my old man taught his first lessons as a probationary teacher in the 1970s. As for the suggestion that his Geordie accent was in part responsible for his hiring in a school built to teach the children of new arrivals from the north-east, that remains suspected, if unconfirmed.

Mining was not the only industry that found its way to my part of Staffordshire. Many of us will recognise the name Armitage Shanks, but few will know its links to the village of Armitage, just a short trip up Rugeley Road from Handsacre. As the new Government focus their legislative agenda on growth, I remind colleagues that while many of us may have already spent a penny with Armitage Shanks, they are all welcome to visit and spend many more in the coming years.

All this industry meant that the canals came to my constituency. The Coventry canal and the Trent and Mersey canal are still navigable today, and the work of the Lichfield and Hatherton Canal Restoration Trust should be commended, as it aims to restore that link as a green and blue way over the coming years.

[Dave Robertson]

Having touched again on transport, I will complete the circle and return to the crossroads that made Letocetum. Watling Street, or the A5, as it is now known, and Rykneld Street, the A38, are major transport arteries that link my constituency together, and link it easily to the rest of the country. The A38 in particular has helped to establish a logistics centre in the village of Fradley on the site of the former RAF Lichfield. Fans of the BBC's "Bargain Hunt" will know Fradley well, given the regular appearances of Richard Winterton and his auctioneers on that show. I hope that I can get as much airtime as they do.

Slightly further up the A38 is the National Memorial Arboretum near Alrewas—a wonderful venue, as the site of national remembrance. I advise every single person to make a visit there to remember, not just in November but on any day. I am sure that in the coming months the Secretary of State for Transport will grow tired of my lobbying about the need for a railway station to serve that amazing location. On a dissimilar note, the first Travelodge in the UK was opened slightly up the road some 39 years ago, near the village of Barton-under-Needwood, although that village should be much better remembered as the home of the Holland tug of war team. Founded in 1970, the team has represented England at numerous international tournaments, and even brought home a silver medal from the 2010 world open championships.

It is to this constituency that I will return during the recess. I look forward to speaking to my constituents about transport, access to healthcare, education, health and care plans, and many other issues that are on their lips. I look forward to bringing those stories back to this place, so that I can continue to advocate on my constituents' behalf.

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

3.13 pm

Edward Morello (West Dorset) (LD): I am extremely honoured to be giving my maiden speech in a debate named after the late, great Sir David Amess. I am grateful for this opportunity. I thank all Members who have given their maiden speeches today. I enjoyed the lot of them. It has been wonderful to learn about the many famous former residents of Lichfield, and I wish the hon. Member for Lichfield (Dave Robertson) the best of luck in adding his name to that pantheon. Special mention goes to the hon. Member for Southampton Test (Satvir Kaur) for providing the answer to the pub quiz question: what links Craig David and fishfinger sandwiches? We all know better now.

I am the first non-Conservative MP for West Dorset in its 139-year history—something I am extremely proud of. That notwithstanding, I will start by paying tribute to my Conservative predecessor. Chris Loder's family has farmed West Dorset for over 100 years, and he should be deservedly proud to have served as its MP. We are both successors to Sir Oliver Letwin, an MP who was so well respected by the residents of West Dorset that they would stop me at every opportunity to tell me what a fantastic constituency MP he was. I can only hope to leave this House as fondly remembered in the

area as he is. Although each of us has been proud to be the Member for West Dorset, we are not West Dorset's proudest member. That honour goes to the Cerne Abbas giant, a 55-metre-high chalk fertility symbol whose presence stands proud over the Cerne valley for all to see.

West Dorset is the best constituency in the country. I know that for a fact because the towns of Bridport, Dorchester, Lyme Regis and Sherborne have, at various times over the past few years, been described as the best towns in Britain by no less an authority than the *Dorset Echo*, a newspaper that shares my unrivalled objectivity when it comes to the virtues of West Dorset.

West Dorset is home to the world-famous Jurassic coast, a UNESCO world heritage site, where Mary Anning helped to revolutionise our understanding of prehistoric life. She was long overlooked by historians, but her contribution is now recognised with a beautiful statue in her home town of Lyme Regis.

At the other end of Chesil beach is the Fleet lagoon, the UK's largest saltwater lagoon, on which sits the Abbotsbury swannery, which is home to over 600 swans and is a fantastic day out, especially if you love swans. As well as the swans, one can also see, rather incongruously, a prototype of Barnes Wallis's bouncing bomb. Quite what the swans of Abbotsbury thought about their home being used as a replica for the Ruhr dams is still unknown.

Sadly, our beaches and rivers saw over 45,000 hours of sewage released into them last year. The River Lim, which exits at Lyme Regis, was declared "ecologically dead" due to the levels of pollution in it. It is shameful that I and my family, before we go swimming at the nearby beach of West Bay, must log on to the Surfers Against Sewage app to check whether it is safe to swim. I committed during the campaign to using my seat in this House to pressure the Government to take serious action on the issue of sewage, and I promise to do so.

West Dorset is Hardy country. Thomas Hardy is renowned the world over for his poetry, and novels such as "Far from the Madding Crowd" and "Tess of the d'Urbervilles." His works famously deal with themes of melancholy, sadness and moral conflict—emotions that I am sure are familiar to Members voting in the Tory leadership contest. In his lifetime, he was also highly critical of the declining status afforded to rural Britain. For even more than its beautiful towns and coastline, West Dorset is a constituency defined by its countryside—a landscape managed and maintained by our farmers and food producers, who are the beating heart of our rural economy. We desperately need a national food and farming strategy that will deliver sustainable living for our farmers. Far from being cut, the farming budget must be significantly increased if conversations about food security are ever to be anything other than fine words.

As an environmentalist, I am delighted that we now have a Government who seem to understand the importance of tackling the climate crisis and who recognise the vital part that renewable energy will play in achieving net zero. Having spent a large part of my career in renewable energy, I will be urging the Government to go further and faster if we are to avoid the worst ravages of the climate emergency, which is already unfolding. The Liberal Democrats will continue to champion the need for action in this House.

On the subject of my party, I pay tribute to our party leader, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Ed Davey). I and many of my colleagues owe our seats in no small part to his fantastic, if unorthodox, campaign. I must also pay tribute to another leader of the Liberal Democrats. My political journey began in 2015, with Nick Clegg's resignation speech. He said—I summarise here—that in the face of the politics of identity, nationalism and “us versus them”, it has never been more important to keep the flame of liberalism alive. It was true then and it is true now.

I knew then that it was not enough to stand on the sidelines and watch the country that I love so much be eaten by the self-interest of those who seek power only for power's sake or for self-enrichment. Sadly, over the summer we saw that there are those who would seek to use the misery of people who have come here seeking refuge to further their own aims. I mention that because it will come as no surprise that the Morellos are not originally from this island. The Morellos of Italy became the Morellos of Spain—with apologies to both countries for my pronunciation—before coming to Britain at the beginning of the 20th century. One of my forebears died fighting in world war one for the country that adopted him, and is buried in a Commonwealth war grave cemetery in northern France. My own father served in the Royal Navy.

Even more than Morellos, my family are Mazierskis. My maternal grandfather came here from Poland at the end of the second world war, fleeing another type of political tyranny. He arrived as a child, speaking no English. He became an engineer and set up a building company. His children became nurses, teachers, artists and architects. His grandchildren are doctors, civil servants, lecturers and environmentalists, and one of them stands here today as a Member of Parliament. In my experience, immigrants do not forget the debt they owe the country that offered them a future. We must not let hate win. We must champion hope. That is why it is more important than ever to fly the flag for liberalism, liberal values and a rules-based international order.

I would also like to mention my amazing wife. She is far, far cleverer than me and would make a far better politician. Without her, I certainly would not be here today, not just because of the love and support she has shown me, but because it was her suggestion that I run in the first place—something I find myself reminding her of with increasing frequency.

Finally, I thank the voters of West Dorset for putting their faith in me. It is a huge honour to represent them, and I look forward to doing everything I can to deliver a better deal for West Dorset.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Order. I think it would be a huge shame in the Sir David Amess Adjournment debate to put a time limit on speeches. Members can see how many are still standing, and I know that many would like to make their maiden speeches before we disappear on recess. Perhaps Members could think about restricting themselves to seven or eight minutes so that I can get everybody in this afternoon. I call Connor Rand to make his maiden speech.

3.22 pm

Mr Connor Rand (Altrincham and Sale West) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make my maiden contribution in this debate. I pay tribute to the Members on both sides of the House who have made their maiden contributions, including the hon. Member for West Dorset (Edward Morello), who gave us an illuminating insight into what we could hope to see in his constituency. I also pay tribute to those who knew Sir David Amess for their moving contributions.

I am extremely proud to be the first Labour Member of Parliament for Altrincham and Sale West, in no small part because of the brilliant team of local volunteers who worked on the campaign and the support of my wonderful friends and family. I also thank my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Andrew Western), who was born in my constituency and was such a valuable friend to me during the campaign.

At this early stage in my contribution, I want to pay tribute to my predecessor, Lord Brady, who represented the people of Altrincham and Sale West for 27 years. I thank him for his service to his constituents and for his kind words to me following my election. I think one of my constituents summed it up best. While I was knocking on doors in Hale during the election campaign, a woman—and the whole House will be relieved to know that I will not attempt to impersonate her—said of Lord Brady, “The thing about Graham is that whether you agreed or disagreed with him, and frankly I usually disagreed with him, he was always unfailingly affable.” I hope to one day be described by my constituents in a similar fashion. Of course, as the result of a rather interesting few years for the Conservative party, he might well come to be remembered as one as the more consequential chairs of the 1922 committee. I am sure the new chair, the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), is hoping for a slightly quieter few years. Judging by the friendly and collegial way in which that party's leadership contest is shaping up, I have every confidence that that will be the case.

When I meet new Members from all sides of this House and tell them I am fortunate enough to represent a constituency as beautiful as Altrincham and Sale West, in many cases I get a nagging sense from them that my mere presence in this House, representing where I do, is symptomatic not just of the level of change at the last general election, but of a Labour party that is able to appeal to every part of our country and every section of society. However, the reality is that my constituency is extraordinarily diverse in almost every regard. Within easy reach of the city of Manchester, it is a place of business, thriving small and medium-sized enterprises and entrepreneurship—including the spectacular market in Altrincham—but Wythenshawe and Trafford general hospitals are also major employers. It is an area with tens of churches, four synagogues and the Altrincham and Hale Muslim Association, and it is where many from Hong Kong have chosen to start a new life away from tyranny and repression. Yes, it is a part of the world where many people are doing well for themselves and for their families, but it also has an estimated 3,000 children growing up in poverty.

What unites the constituency and makes it such an extraordinary place is that it has such a strong sense of community, participation, and everyone pitching in to

[Mr Connor Rand]

play their part. I have seen that at Altrincham football club, a brilliant community club with amazing grassroots initiatives, and which in 2019 became the first team in England to wear a shirt inspired by the rainbow flag to show their support in the fight against homophobia. I have seen it from staff and volunteers at the Garrick Playhouse, who work tirelessly to put on a comprehensive series of plays and productions, and I have seen it at Trafford South food bank, which works across the constituency to provide for people in need. It is able to do what it does thanks to the remarkably generous donations of local people. However, all too often, organisations such as that food bank are having to go above and beyond in the most challenging of circumstances to stop people falling through the cracks, because as a country we have failed to provide people with the security in work that they need; we have failed to provide the economic stability and certainty that businesses need in order to invest; and we have failed to address the long-term challenges our country faces.

That is why Labour was elected: to fix what has become broken, and to offer hope and renewal. That is why the people of Altrincham and Sale West sent me here: to cut waiting times across our national health service, including at Wythenshawe and Trafford general; to clean up our badly polluted rivers and streams; and to make sure people can feel safe on our streets by tackling crime and antisocial behaviour. Having worked on a national campaign against the violence and abuse that shopworkers receive, I know how important it is that we clamp down on crime against public-facing workers, and I know that this Government will act. Having changed our party so that we could be given the extraordinary opportunity we have to change our country, that is the sort of tangible change to the lives of people in Altrincham and Sale West that we must achieve. I am looking forward to working to deliver that change in the years to come and showing how, even in difficult times, Government can still be a force for good. That is the very least that the people of Altrincham and Sale West, and of our country, expect and deserve.

3.28 pm

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): It is an absolute pleasure to speak in this debate and to follow the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Rand), who gave a fantastic maiden speech. I join him in his kind words about his predecessor, who was indeed an incredibly affable man who served my party, this House and this country with diligence while he was a Member of Parliament. I know he will continue to do so now that he is in the other place.

It is also a pleasure to speak in the debate named after Sir David Amess. My only sadness is that the many new Members will not have the benefit of his wit and wisdom, unlike those of us who first came to this place earlier—in my case in 2017. I particularly welcome the new hon. Member for Southampton Test (Satvir Kaur). I got to know her predecessor, Alan Whitehead, incredibly well when he was my shadow in the last Parliament and we spent hours and hours taking the Energy Bill through Committee. I completely agree that there was nothing he did not know about the energy brief—he was a giant in that field—and she does indeed have big shoes to fill.

I cannot quite agree with her when she makes a comparison with Taylor Swift, so while she has a hard act to follow, I am sure she will “Shake It Off” in time.

As my new hon. Friend the Member for Exmouth and Exeter East (David Reed) said, there are indeed weeks in which decades happen. I can almost prove that point. The last time I addressed this House from the Back Benches was on 11 July 2022, when I spoke against my Government’s introduction of the energy profits levy. By the time I returned to address this House, I was on the Front Bench as a Minister, we had had two changes of Prime Minister and one new monarch, and I had gained a daughter. That is by way of saying to new Members that things happen fast here, so be prepared for that.

Yes, I spoke about the introduction of the energy profits levy back in 2022, and although my Front-Bench position precludes me from speaking about that measure from the Back Benches, I take this opportunity to beg Ministers in charge of the new taxation and licensing policy in the North sea to remember that people in my communities are very worried about their future in the oil and gas industry. As these changes are made, Ministers should remember that local people—because of their livelihoods—and indeed those in communities in many part of this country, are watching and waiting, and they are worried.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I know you agree that West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine is the most beautiful constituency in the United Kingdom, despite having heard so many Members say the same about their part of the world. People across the world saw it in its full glory two years ago this week, when, after the death of Her late Majesty the Queen at Balmoral in the constituency, my constituents and people across our region turned out in their thousands to line the roads along Royal Deeside. I do not think anybody will forget the scenes of the horses and tractors lined up by the side of the road, and of local people paying tribute to one of their own, as she left for the very last time. On that day, people around the world saw what Her late Majesty saw and what her son, His Majesty the King, continues to see: the majesty, magnificence and unspoilt beauty of north-east Scotland. That is one of the reasons why there is such concern and worry about the plans for new energy infrastructure across the countryside in the constituency that I am proud to represent.

Tourism is so important to my constituents, and indeed wider north-east Scotland, but the hospitality and hotel sectors have struggled. Visitor numbers are good, but the cost of doing business has increased markedly over the last few years. Energy prices, higher staff costs and the lack of workforce have all contributed to the difficult and challenging environment in which some of Scotland’s best hotels and restaurants continue to operate.

When we were in government, we took action to protect hospitality businesses. In last year’s autumn statement, we extended the 75% business rates relief for firms in the retail, hospitality and leisure sector. That meant that £230 million extra would be sent to Scotland due to this policy area being devolved, but the Scottish Government did not pass that on to the hospitality industry in Scotland. Hospitality venues in West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine, and indeed in the rest of Scotland, suffered because of the mismanagement of the Scottish public finances and, sadly, because of the ignorance in the Scottish

Government of how best to support that vital sector. I very much hope that the situation changes, and that any support for hospitality in the coming Budget will be passed on in full to the Scottish businesses affected.

Hospitality brings me on to another sector of vital importance not just to West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine, but to the United Kingdom: whisky. On my regular visits to local distilleries such as Fettercairn and Royal Lochnagar, I have experienced at first hand the real quality produced by these world-recognised brands with world-class taste. Whisky is important not just to my constituency, but to the United Kingdom economy as a whole. It is our biggest food and drink export by a long way: 100 bottles of Scotch whisky are exported on average every second from the United Kingdom, with gross value added of £7.1 billion per annum, and it alone directly supports 66,000 jobs, so today I join the Scotch Whisky Association in calling for this sector, which is iconic and economically so important, to be championed and listened to by those at the heart of Government. Let us redouble our efforts to reduce remaining tariffs worldwide, and let us protect whisky by ensuring a fair advertising landscape. Let us introduce a duty freeze in the forthcoming Budget, so that this world-leading Scottish and British success story can grow still further.

West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine, as well as being the most beautiful constituency, the energy powerhouse of the UK and the home of the finest whiskies, is also the breadbasket of the country. From Cambus o'May cheese to the Aberdeenshire highland beef farmed near Banchory, and the farming of potatoes, cereals and malting barley across Laurencekirk and the Mearns, many of my constituents are directly or indirectly employed in the agriculture sector. It is the lifeblood that not only sustains our local rural economy but provides so much security in the national food supply chain, feeding our nation. My constituents are immensely proud of this, but it is not without its challenges. There is the challenge of persevering with producing and delivering food for this country, despite unpredictable weather and rising costs of energy and fertilizer. I echo the calls of the National Farmers Union Scotland for annual ringfenced funding to support Scottish farmers as they continue to deliver for our nation.

It has been a great privilege to speak in this debate, and now that I sit on the other side of the House, it is a daily inspiration to see Sir David's coat of arms looking down on us. I know that he, like us, would be working as hard as possible to ensure that we Conservatives return to the other side of the House at the earliest available opportunity, in four or five years' time.

3.36 pm

Naushabah Khan (Gillingham and Rainham) (Lab): I congratulate everybody in the House who has made their maiden speech today. They have spoken so passionately about their constituencies that I wish to visit them all, although I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton Test (Satvir Kaur) that I will come only if she promises to treat me to a fish-finger sandwich.

I am honoured to give my maiden speech today, and I do so in the mother of all Parliaments with the greatest humility. I will never forget that the people of Gillingham and Rainham have sent me, a Muslim woman, here and it is only with their authority and trust that I speak. It is

a privilege that I will never take lightly, which is why I would also like to begin by paying tribute to Sir David Amess, who embodied everything it means to be a public servant; I have learned a lot about him in the Chamber today.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge my predecessor, Rehman Chishti, who served his constituents faithfully over many years. Rehman arrived in this country at six years of age not speaking a word of English, but with the support of a community and our schools and teachers, he was eventually called to the Bar and then elected as an MP. He should be proud of his achievements in Parliament, and I wish him well with whatever the future holds for him. His story could only really happen in the UK, and I know the feeling: it is the feeling that I could not make sense anywhere else. I could visit Kenya, where my mother was born, or Pakistan, where my father comes from, but the moment I uttered a single word or walked a few metres, anyone who would care to would know that I was not from there, because the only place I truly feel myself is my hometown. I am a child of Gillingham and Rainham, no matter how much a small minority might insist that I am not. I could say, "I'm a Gillingham girl, I know I am, I'm sure I am." And now that I have said that, I can return to the Rainham end of the Priestfield stadium with my head held high.

It is that confidence that I want every child in my constituency to have, because opportunity is no good to a generation that feels so beaten down that they dare not look up. I want them to have confidence that they can set a course for their life and have the means to get there, or at least know how to make it possible. But that has to come from somewhere; it has to start with someone. For me, it was my grandparents, the first generation of my family to emigrate to the UK. My grandfather worked on the railways and my grandmother was a fruit picker. They made Gillingham and Rainham their home and taught me that nothing is easy, that things have to be earned, and that when we work together—as a family, as workers, as a collective—we achieve more. They were my first political role models. It is because of my parents that I am standing here today. My father never stopped believing in me, and he did not want me to be held back by the same things in life that had held him back. Before he sadly passed away in 2020, he made me promise to not stop until I had made the change I wanted to see. I wish he were here to witness this today, but I know that with my mother's support—she is in the Gallery—I can do just that, not by myself, but together with all my colleagues, our movement and the people of Gillingham and Rainham, with whom I make common cause.

There is so much to build on. If the House has not already guessed, we are the home to the mighty Gillingham football club. League one will be lucky to have us when we are good and ready. We also have Medway maritime hospital, a pillar of our community, staffed by dedicated professionals who do an outstanding job under increasingly difficult circumstances.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am not sure whether your privileges extend to a Disney+ subscription, but if they do, please ensure that you watch "Shōgun", which is based on the life of Will Adams. He was born in Gillingham and was the first Englishman to navigate to Japan in 1598, and he later became a samurai. When we are not exporting military heroes, we are making them.

[Naushabah Khan]

Gillingham and Rainham has a proud military and naval history, sharing a former naval dockyard and the Royal Engineers with neighbouring constituencies.

We face our challenges. From speaking to residents over the years, I know that a story of decline and disillusionment has become all too familiar, after years of neglect and a lack of hope. The worst of it is that it is not unknown. It is not a new insight; this has been spoken of many times in this House and the other place. It is said, it is forgotten, and we move on. Over time, feeling hopeless is the only rational response left to the public. I hear it at first hand from countless residents, who are worried whether their children will have the same opportunities they had growing up, and whether our community will continue to thrive in the years to come.

Those concerns are not unique to Gillingham and Rainham, but are deeply felt by the people I represent. It is my duty to ensure that their voice is heard in this House and that their needs are met by our Government, so that we can not only rebuild trust in our politics, but once again proudly say that this country is a place where anyone, regardless of background, can succeed. That is why I welcome the Government's pledge to improve children's speaking skills as a helpful step to breaking down class barriers. It is those values that underpin my politics, and it is my experience that will drive my work as a Member of Parliament.

Having a place to call home should be a fundamental right. Working for more than a decade in the housing industry, and most recently for the homelessness charity St Mungo's, has taught me that how someone accesses housing impacts everything, from their physical and mental health to their life chances. That is why I will always champion my constituents' right to good-quality, genuinely affordable homes. That work was started in my constituency by the late alderman Paul Harriott, who also recognised that housing is more than just having a roof over your head.

I will work tirelessly to improve our local healthcare services. The pressures on our NHS are immense, and it is vital that we secure the necessary resources and support to ensure that everyone has access to the best possible healthcare. The regeneration of our high streets is a matter of great concern to my constituents, so I will advocate for policies that support small businesses, encourage investment and help to restore the vitality of our town centres, just like the Love Gillingham initiative that I proudly announced only last week.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the incredible sense of community in my constituency. Whether it is neighbours looking out for one another, volunteers working to support the most vulnerable or local groups coming together to tackle common challenges, it is clear that people care deeply about their community and each other. As their representative, I pledge to work in that same spirit of co-operation and compassion. I will listen to the people I serve, and I will fight for their interests in this House. The challenges we face are significant, but I am confident that together we can start to rebuild Gillingham and Rainham.

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

3.44 pm

Dr Danny Chambers (Winchester) (LD): Thank you Madam Deputy Speaker. That was an interesting maiden speech; it is clear how passionate you are—sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will get this right. The hon. Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Naushabah Khan) spoke passionately about her constituency and how hard she will work for her constituents. It is an absolute honour to speak in this David Amess Adjournment debate. We heard moving tributes from people who knew him. We aspire to be MPs who are even half as good as he was for his constituency.

Practising as a veterinary surgeon has been deeply rewarding. Despite the 3 am calvings, visiting colics in the middle of the night and euthanising much-loved family pets, it was the perfect job for someone who grew up on a farm and loved science at school. I was relieved when I got elected that my first job as an MP was still within my comfort zone: I was asked to judge the dog show at Meonstoke village fair.

As I knock on a lot of doors—all of us do—one of the most common questions I get asked is, “Is it true that vets can treat humans as well?” I always answer, “Yes, vets can treat humans, but once we've taken your temperature, people tend not to ask a second time.”
[Laughter.]

Although being a vet is a fulfilling career, it is also stressful. It may surprise the House to learn that vets have a suicide rate that is about four times the national average. I have long been determined to do something about that. Along with one of my good friends, Sarah Brown, we set up a support group for veterinary professionals that now has more than 19,000 members. Unfortunately, my friend Sarah lost her battle with depression, so I took her place as a trustee of the charity Vetlife, which supports the mental health of the UK veterinary profession. Not only does Vetlife have a 24-hour helpline for people who are struggling, but we immediately refer anyone who is at crisis point with their mental health. I am sure the whole House is aware that, at the moment, a person who goes to their GP in crisis may have to wait months, even more than a year, to get the specialist healthcare they need. I am sure we all agree that is not good enough.

It is not only veterinary surgeons who are at high risk of mental health issues. Other groups need proactive support for their mental health, including military veterans, women in the 12 months after giving birth, farmers, the LGBT community and people struggling with debt. Living in poverty makes people vulnerable to the desperate cycle of payday loan companies and credit card debt, which not only puts strain on family relationships but saps the joy from life and contributes towards our mental health crisis.

My experience, which is probably shared by all Members when they knock on doors, is that one of the most common subjects brought up is the struggle of parents to access mental health care for children and teenagers whose education and social development was hugely disrupted by the pandemic. Parents are worried sick about that. I am proud that the Lib Dems have said for years that mental health should be treated with the same importance as physical health. We are heartened that the Government reaffirmed that in the King's Speech.

The Winchester constituency has seen slight boundary changes, having incorporated some of the Meon Valley, so my constituents were served by two MPs in the last Parliament. I pay tribute to Steve Brine, who was also Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, and Flick Drummond. I thank them for all the hard work they did over the years for the people of my constituency.

Winchester was once one of the ancient capitals of England. It is steeped in history. King Alfred the Great famously defended the city from Viking attacks in the ninth century, fortifying Winchester and leading a series of successful campaigns. He eventually secured a decisive victory in the battle of Edington in 878, and that victory marked the beginning of the unification of England under his rule. The city is home to the magnificent Winchester cathedral, which has stood as the symbol of the city's religious and cultural significance for over a millennium. We also have one of the oldest newspapers in the country, the *Hampshire Chronicle*, which is still very popular and very well read.

Although we are proud of our rich history, we are also a forward-looking community, keenly aware of our role in the world and our responsibility to the future. To that end, we are striving to become an official city of sanctuary for refugees, having welcomed so many from Ukraine and other areas of the world troubled by conflict. Organisations such as Winchester Action on Climate Crisis—WinACC—are also working tirelessly to ensure that Winchester plays our part in combating global climate change.

The River Itchen flows right through the heart of our city, and the River Meon through the Meon valley—*[Interruption.]* I must apologise; I seem to have contracted kennel cough—*[Laughter.]* These rare chalk streams support unique ecosystems so precious that the Itchen has been designated as a site of special scientific interest, and we hope the Meon will soon receive that same accreditation. Allowing sewage and other pollutants to be dumped in these rivers is nothing short of ecological vandalism.

Climate change, pandemics, antimicrobial resistance, and how we feed 8 billion people and give them energy sustainably—these are daunting challenges, but we must face them because they are existential threats to our civilisation. But they are also economic opportunities; the technology and expertise required to address them are opportunities for economic growth, and the UK has the potential to be a world leader in this area. No single country can address these issues alone, and to find lasting solutions, we need a united effort from Governments, research institutes, universities, scientists, engineers, businesses and tech start-ups worldwide. We have learned over the last few years that, whether dealing with pandemics or climate change, the human and economic costs are enormous when our political leaders ignore scientists and experts.

My upbringing and my state school education gave me the opportunity to have an enjoyable and fulfilling career, but I am also aware that I was privileged. I always had a roof over my head, I had a stable family life, I never went to school hungry and my mother, who is here today, is a former teacher and used to read to us every night—I vividly remember the day she quite angrily said, “I am not reading ‘Danny the Champion of the World’ to you one more time.” But many children today

are not so fortunate, and the increasing number of children growing up in poverty lack the opportunities I had. Although these are complex issues, we can begin addressing them by providing free school meals to all children who are hungry to ensure that every child can reach their full potential. Had I gone to school hungry, it is very unlikely I would have become a veterinary surgeon, and even less likely that I would be standing here as a Member of Parliament.

I will miss treating animals on a daily basis, although some of my colleagues have said to me, “It is fantastic for animal welfare that you have been elected to Parliament, because it means you will be spending less time in the veterinary clinic.” But I think I am going to have a bigger impact on animal welfare here than I ever could in clinical practice. My goals include updating the outdated Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 to make it fit for the 21st century. We also need to address issues such as puppy smuggling, which are not only an animal welfare issue but a human health risk, bringing the risk of importing rabies, brucella canis and other diseases that affect the human population. I also want to support our British farmers in upholding our high animal welfare standards, and to ensure that those are not compromised in future trade deals. It is not only vets and farmers who are proud of our high animal welfare standards but the British public, and we must not compromise them.

I thank my team of volunteers, many of whom are here today, who worked so hard not only during the general election campaign but in the transition to setting up a constituency office. They have been fantastic. While we have been recruiting for permanent members of staff, they have done over 800 pieces of casework, supporting our local community.

I thank my family and my partner, Emma. I pay tribute to my father, who is no longer with us. Our family had the heartbreaking experience of caring for him as he declined due to dementia. I know there are many people in Winchester, Hampshire and throughout the country who are experiencing the same situation with their loved ones.

It is the honour of my life to serve as Winchester's MP. I will continue to stand up and fight for our local NHS services and our local hospital services. I thank everyone who put their faith in me and my team. We will not let you down.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call Tristan Osborne to make his maiden speech.

3.55 pm

Tristan Osborne (Chatham and Aylesford) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester (Dr Chambers) on his excellent speech. I note that he has a bit of a frog in his throat, but he made it well—it was fantastic. I was interested, in particular, to hear his views on “Danny the Champion of the World”. I was reminded of how quintessentially British it is to hear about fishfinger sandwiches from Southampton and Armitage Shanks from Lichfield, and to hear about Devon pasties from the hon. Member for Exmouth and Exeter East (David Reed). It is a tribute to all of us that our constituencies are such a rich tapestry of difference and diversity. It is in that tradition that I stand before you today.

[Tristan Osborne]

I believe that David Amess would be proud of this Parliament and proud of the speeches given. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois), who spoke eloquently, with fond anecdotes, on the character, charm and wit of the former Member. I can say that my speech is not written on toilet paper. [Laughter.] However, I was possibly equally surprised to be elected to this Chamber as he was back in the 1980s. It is a privilege to be elected to represent the communities of Chatham, Aylesford, Snodland and the surrounding villages. We all do this not for awards or recognition, but simply because we all want to make our communities better, safer and fairer.

I would like to place on record my thanks to the House staff for the welcome and support they have given all new Members over the last few weeks, especially as there are so many of us this time: the Table Office, the Speaker's Office, the Doorkeepers, security and, as a former teacher, a special thanks to the education support assistants who do such outstanding work on tours. Yesterday, I had the great pleasure of meeting a Mr O'Sullivan, who is shortly to depart the education centre to go into teaching. I wish him all the best in that pursuit.

Preparation for this speech has not been without trepidation, and I have had a significant amount of advice from Members, former Members, siblings, partners and former students alike. One piece of advice was to treat it like a wedding speech: tread carefully to keep both sides of the aisle happy and always remember to speak highly of your elders. That was until I was reminded that, as I am in my mid-40s, I am possibly one of those elders, given how the age differential has changed. Another piece of advice, from a former Member, was to always keep the Whips happy.

The Comptroller of His Majesty's Household (Chris Elmore): Hear, hear!

Tristan Osborne: On that note, second only to Bridgend, Chatham and Aylesford is one of the most beautiful constituencies in the country. [Laughter.] Created in 1997 from the previous Rochester and Chatham, Mid Kent, and Tonbridge and Malling seats, we have a rich legacy of excellent and outspoken parliamentarians, including Dame Peggy Fenner, Andrew Rowe, Julian Critchley, Jonathan Shaw and the remarkable Dame Tracey Crouch. What can I say? Dame Tracey is well known for her warm personality and diligence. She is engaging, and her constituents spoke well of her on the doorstep and in the 14 years she represented the area. I am also reliably informed that, unlike me, she had a legendary involvement in the parliamentary football team. I am reliably informed, again, that her tackling skills were well known, and that no one ever tried to take the ball from her when she was in full flight. On a serious note, she has done outstanding work on the football fan-led review, she led on anti-gambling legislation when she was in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and she has left a deeply inspiring legacy for young women in sport in particular. I salute her record and her fortitude.

My constituents embody aspiration and determination. Although I was raised in the city of Medway, I have been actively involved in Chatham since 2001. It is a

dynamic and diverse area, with hard-working, direct and down-to-earth people. The constituency is truly beautiful, with stunning panoramic views from Blue Bell Hill over the weald of Kent. On a clear day one can see many other constituencies, including Tonbridge, Sevenoaks, Maidstone and Malling and Canterbury, and many walkers and hikers find entertainment along the historic Pilgrims' Way. The seat also contains some of the earliest human settlement history, with the megalithic structures of Kit's Coty harking back to neolithic times. It is identified with numerous artefacts of historical significance, although I must say to the hon. Member for West Dorset (Edward Morello) that there are—perhaps—no chalk figures of historic stature in my constituency.

The part of my constituency that will be most familiar to Members is Chatham, whose historic legacy is known across the world. Its significance as a commissioned dockyard has been recognised globally, and its long-standing naval tradition dates back to Henry VIII and the Tudor period. The area retained that naval link until the 1980s, when the dockyard was closed, and it still has that proud naval tradition. I am reliably informed that the Resolute desk in the Oval Office, in the heart of western democracy, came from HMS Resolute, which was constructed and supported in Chatham, and many of our finest naval traditions have come from that location.

Chatham and Aylesford does, however, face significant challenges. Many areas, particularly urban Chatham, experience poverty, and, according to figures from the House of Commons Library, 17% of children are living in poverty. Issues such as crime and antisocial behaviour have been exacerbated by cuts in neighbourhood policing and early intervention programmes. I am committed to working with all our communities to address those challenges, and it is on that note that I want to pay particular tribute to many of the charities and other organisations that serve my local community. They include the Arches project in Luton, the dementia awareness groups, Street Angels, Royal British Legion Industries and our Poppy Appeal volunteers, who go out every year to collect funds for veterans and our military community.

I believe that community wealth building should be central to our approach to government. By focusing on wealth creation, we can drive and support local businesses and revitalise our town centres. My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Naushabah Khan) has done excellent work in that neighbouring seat to revitalise Gillingham town centre, and I will seek to replicate it, working closely with council leaders across Medway, Tonbridge and Malling and Kent county council to advance the agenda.

In recent weeks I have heard many inspiring speeches from new Members, but what unites us all is a shared ambition to effect positive change for our communities and our country. I am honoured to serve, and I pledge to work across party lines to ensure economic security and improvements in our public services—and I will do so in a friendly, open and approachable way. The Government must of course deal with the £22 billion in-year deficit, and we must work to secure our economic prosperity to ensure that all our people, especially our young people, have the skills that will give them a future. I am deeply honoured to represent the constituents of Chatham and Aylesford.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Order. Before Members make their contributions, they may wish to bear in mind that I will be calling the Front Benchers at 4.45 pm.

4.3 pm

Mims Davies (East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con): It is a great honour to be called to speak in the Sir David Amess adjournment debate. Let me first refer Members to my registered interests before I make some points about my constituency.

There have been many maiden speeches this afternoon—the greatest tradition of the House—and I congratulate the new hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tristan Osborne). Following Dame Tracey Crouch is no mean feat—I have done that in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. I have appeared on the media with the hon. Gentleman, and he will do very well for his constituents.

We also heard from the hon. Member for Winchester (Dr Chambers), who talked about vets and about dementia. He spoke about some very personal issues in front of his family, which is to be applauded. All Members, including our new action man, my hon. Friend the Member for Exmouth and Exeter East (David Reed), have made moving contributions. The new hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Daniel Francis) is clearly a champion of carers, and he talked about disability. I have enjoyed listening to everyone's speeches this afternoon.

Many of us are not new Members, but we are new to parts of our constituencies, and it is right that we gallop around our constituencies in the way that Sir David Amess did, so that you are happy with us, Madam Deputy Speaker. I shall try to do that in the finest of his traditions. One thing I share with Sir David Amess is that I have owned a Westminster dog of the year; in fact, the reigning Westminster dog of the year. I have given back the trophy, and the battle will be back on—it is TJ's trophy right now.

I am the first Member for East Grinstead and Uckfield. Parts of my constituency were previously in the Horsham constituency, which the right honourable Sir Jeremy Quin represented, and in the Lewes constituency, which Maria Caulfield represented. Both were assiduous Members of Parliament who were dedicated to causes and very effective. I feel the pressure of following in their footsteps in my constituency, which is very rural. It has parts of Lewes and Wealden, and 50% or thereabouts of the Mid Sussex district. I wish the new hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Alison Bennett) well; we have already been working together on several issues. Today she raised the issue of hospice funding, which St Catherine's hospice in Pease Pottage is particularly struggling with, as is St Peter & St James hospice in North Chailey.

If we are to talk about assisted dying, we also need to talk about dying well and living well, and I urge the Government to look at hospice funding in the wider discussion about the NHS that we have had today. Uckfield hospital needs further support and my local GP services, which are run by Modality, are struggling in Crawley Down, East Grinstead and parts of Burgess Hill, as they are elsewhere. Indeed, I have heard in the last few weeks that the Balcombe surgery needs further support. Our local GPs do a fabulous job, and it is important that we support them in the wider NHS.

Roads and potholes have been perennial issues in my inbox; I am sure that new Members have found the same. We have issues with traffic lights, queues and Royal Mail deliveries in Slaugham, Pease Pottage and Uckfield. These problems are getting on constituents' nerves, so we need to tackle them.

There are some amazing local businesses in my constituency. Tim Haynes is a second-generation florist in Pease Pottage and serves his customers diligently. As in many communities, many of our businesses are small, rural and family-led, and they include farming. The hon. Member for West Dorset (Edward Morello) said that fine words and fine foods are not the same when it comes to farming, and we must make sure that we back our farmers again this week.

I have correspondence in my inbox about education, health and care plans; SEND provision; and special school places. This is a very difficult area for many of my constituents, and we face increasing diagnoses and challenges. As the Government look to charge VAT on fees for independent schools, I ask that they consider the impact on children without EHCPs who are being supported in independent schools. A significant proportion of pupils in my constituency attend independent schools, and parents are very worried about the impact of any changes on their children. What happens going forward must be fair to all children.

Turning to some positives, I recently attended the Queen Victoria hospital and the planting of a maple tree to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Canadian wing and the work of the plastic surgeons in the town that doesn't stare. I thank the team who welcomed me recently to the citizens advice bureau in Uckfield, which is a wonderful town. They work hard to support many rural residents in an area where poverty is not seen and noticed as it is in other areas.

Burgess Hill academy, Blackthorns community primary academy and Lindfield primary academy are having a particular issue with general annual grant pooling by the University of Brighton Academies Trust. Some 14 schools are part of that group, and those local schools are seeing an impact on their day-to-day budgets. I implore the Government and the trust to work with local MPs to make sure that the support that is being given for pupils actually lands in the laps of teachers and students. That worries me greatly.

Finally, I pay tribute to my predecessor, Sir Nicholas Soames. He called me "Mimsey" and his constituent. He was supportive, bombastic, warm and strident. He always stuck up for commuters and for casework being of the highest order. We all seek to continue in his fine tradition of standing up for those who go to work, work hard and live in our constituencies. If we are lucky enough to be sent here, a legacy such as his—like that of Sir David—is one that we aspire to.

4.11 pm

Brian Leishman (Alloa and Grangemouth) (Lab): I thank all hon. Members for their wonderful maiden speeches, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster Central (Sally Jameson). I look forward to speaking to her about her career in the Prison Officers' Association and the "68 is Too Late" campaign.

It is an honour to speak in the Sir David Amess Adjournment debate. The warmth and respect with which he is spoken about is a measure of the gentleman.

[Brian Leishman]

My contribution is neither light-hearted nor happy. The news that Grangemouth will stop refining oil in quarter 2 of 2025 is devastating. It is accurate to say that the mood music from the refinery owners has been pessimistic for some time, but even with the threat of closure that has been hanging over the refinery, today's news is shocking. What is happening will be felt far beyond Grangemouth. It will reverberate around Scotland, Northern Ireland and the north of England—the areas of the UK that Grangemouth primarily services. Its closure will have an impact on all the constituencies there.

I will give a brief history. Some 100 years ago, Grangemouth was the perfect location for a refinery. There was an abundance of flat land, a bustling harbour and, crucially, an already skilled workforce that was experienced in shale refining. It was one of the first crude oil refineries in the UK. It is currently the primary supplier of aviation fuel for Scotland's main airports and a major supplier of petrol and diesel ground fuels across the central belt of Scotland. It also provides power to the Forties oil pipeline, bringing oil and gas ashore from the North sea.

Although operations and procedures have changed over the century, a highly skilled local workforce remains a constant. I could detail the statistics about how the Grangemouth site contributes 4% of Scotland's GDP and is a key piece of Scottish infrastructure, but while that is accurate and pertinent when talking about the refinery, I want to talk about the human side of the issue.

When the refinery was known locally as “the BP”, there were social clubs and gala events for families. Grangemouth was known as Scotland's boom town. The refinery, and specifically the workers, created a community that was industrious and working class, where the jobs were dangerous, skilled and highly valued. The Grangemouth refinery provided apprenticeships to local people, and the possibility to gain the experience and world-class qualifications that provided the opportunity of forging a career, a platform for self-improvement, and social mobility.

For those of us who represent constituencies with social issues, which are often born out of industry leaving those communities, social mobility has become a negative journey, not a positive one.

The comparison with the miners of four decades ago is clear. And like the miners of the 1980s who kept Britain warm, the refinery workers of Grangemouth keep Britain moving. What happened to the miners cannot be the fate of Grangemouth refinery workers.

Over the past few months, the campaign to keep Grangemouth working has spread the message of extending the life of the refinery, investing in the workforce and making sure there is no gap that would see workers lose their jobs. I have stood in solidarity with the refinery workers, and I will continue to do so.

Unite the union has said that it does not accept that the future of the refinery

“should have been left to the whim and avarice of shareholders.”

I completely agree. Energy security is intrinsically linked to national security, and for both to be in the hands of a foreign Government and private capital is inherently wrong, not to mention utterly reckless. The primary ideal of the Keep Grangemouth Working campaign is

to extend the life of the refinery so that a truly just transition can be achieved. That is what should happen, and nothing will convince me otherwise.

Oil will still be part of the energy mix for a while yet, and the refinery workers know that. They also know that oil will not last forever. They know that cleaner industries must come, and they tell me that they want to be part of a new green industrial revolution. They have so many of the skills that will be required for us to achieve net zero and make Britain a clean energy superpower, but if there is a gap between refining stopping next year and these new industries being ready, the truth is that the workforce will be gone.

Workers cannot hang around and wait, because mortgages need to be paid and families need to be fed. Jobs must be found or talent will leave. The impact on the local community and the local economy would be enormous. The shops, the pubs, the restaurants, the hotels, the cafés, the bed and breakfasts and the snack vans would all suffer if the refinery were to close.

As a Government, we must do everything we can. I welcome the steps that the Secretary of State and his team have taken with the announcement of £20 million of funding to support the community and its workers by investing in local energy projects to create new growth for Grangemouth.

I have previously spoken positively about Project Willow and the importance of it being a joint commitment between both Governments to determine what the industrial future of Grangemouth will be, because both the UK Government and the Scottish Government will need to work together. The new working relationship that this Labour Government have with the Scottish Government has already shown its worth.

I know how hard the Secretary of State has worked during the intensive discussions with the refinery owners to secure tailored support for the workers who are impacted and, along with his counterpart in the Scottish Government, to devise a plan that will help to secure Grangemouth's industrial future and protect the workforce. I thank them both for showing what can be achieved when both Governments work together, but it is just a start.

This Labour Government have done more on this issue in eight weeks than the Conservative Government did in 14 years. Today's news, although shocking, has been coming. Truthfully, Project Willow or the like should have been done and delivered years ago. The workers and the Grangemouth community need action that leads to us creating something truly transformative and world leading at Grangemouth. Sustainable aviation fuels, low-carbon hydrogen and clean e-fuels—let us not rule anything out of the equation for the Grangemouth site. But we must act quickly, because time is of the essence. If we are to have a truly just transition, one that looks after workers and their communities, we must move with purpose and speed on determining the industrial future of the Grangemouth site. And Grangemouth must continue refining until these new energies are ready.

There has been an environmental need for a green industrial revolution for a long time, and it has been discussed for ages, but now we see the social need for a transition to clean energy, and the need for that has been incredibly accelerated today.

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

4.19 pm

Helen Maguire (Epsom and Ewell) (LD): Thank you for calling me to make my maiden speech, Madam Deputy Speaker. I congratulate the hon. Member for Alloa and Grangemouth (Brian Leishman) on his contribution. It was interesting to hear about the challenges facing industry in his constituency.

It is with immense pride and honour that I stand here today to give my maiden speech as the first ever female and first ever Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament for Epsom and Ewell, which also includes the towns of Ashted and Leatherhead. This moment is not just about my election victory, but part of a long journey of progress that started with brave women like Emily Wilding Davison, a suffragette who gave her life for the cause of women's rights. In 1911, she famously hid within the walls of this very building, the Palace of Westminster, to declare it her residence on the night of the census. Just two years later, she made the ultimate sacrifice, losing her life at the Epsom Derby while campaigning for women's suffrage.

It is remarkable that today, 101 years after her passing, we now have 263 women in this Parliament, more than ever before. That progress is a testament to her legacy and the relentless efforts of organisations such as 50:50 Parliament, whose support in getting me here I am personally grateful for. I am delighted that there is now progress towards establishing a women's caucus in Parliament.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate Lord Grayling, my predecessor, on his move to the other place, and to thank him for his 23 years of dedicated service to Epsom and Ewell. His service to the community is well recognised, and I look forward to building upon that work, while bringing fresh perspectives and new energy to our local and national challenges.

The community of Epsom and Ewell prides itself on strong local values, resilience, and a rich sporting and creative history. It is home to the world-famous Epsom Derby. We have the University for the Creative Arts, Laine Theatre Arts and many sporting clubs, including three running clubs and two football clubs. It has several vibrant economic hubs, with many successful businesses, large and small. But it is the people who make my constituency special. Whether it is our small businesses, voluntary groups or the diverse families who have made the area their home, Epsom and Ewell represents the best of what a community can be when it works together.

Epsom and Ewell is a beautiful place, blessed with remarkable green spaces and historical significance. We are fortunate to have three sites of special scientific interest: Ashted Common, Priest Hill and Stones Road pond. We also have beautiful green spaces, such as Horton and Nonsuch parks, Epsom Downs and the Surrey hills, an area of outstanding natural beauty.

One site that holds special meaning for many is Langley Vale, which was used to train over 8,000 soldiers during the first world war and where Lord Kitchener famously inspected the troops. Today, it stands as a centenary wood, a place of reflection with beautiful sculptures honouring our military past. As someone who proudly served in the Army, in the Royal Military Police, I am deeply moved by our community's ties to the armed forces.

My own military experience includes serving in Iraq during Operation Telic IV in 2004, where I was responsible for retraining and mentoring the Iraqi police force in Maysan province. It was a volatile and dangerous region at that time and it was not an easy tour. We came under fire on a regular basis and it was made harder with the knowledge that, just a year before my arrival, six of my RMP colleagues were killed in Majar al-Kabir. The coroner found that they had been given inadequate radios and ammunition, so it was no surprise that we were given more ammo and weapons when I arrived. I want to ensure that our armed forces continue to have the right resources to stay safe in their duties as this Government conduct their spending review. I hope the Secretary of State for Defence will bear in mind the effect that cuts can have in the field.

Lord Darzi's report about the NHS was published today, so it is apt that I share a personal experience that underscores my commitment to improving healthcare services in Epsom and Ewell. In 2007, my six-week-old son suddenly turned blue in front of me, while a health visitor was visiting. I called 999. It was a terrifying moment, and before I knew what was going on, my living room was packed with paramedics and there was equipment everywhere. I was told to pack a bag and shortly afterwards we arrived at A&E. The crash team was there and my baby boy was surrounded by 20 consultants trying to figure out what was wrong. I stood there looking on, helpless.

The doctors managed to stabilise my son and moved him to the amazing Evelina hospital, just over the river from Parliament, as they did not have the specialist equipment needed. He went into the paediatric intensive care unit. Every bit of his skin, even his head, was covered by some sort of patch or monitor to try to establish what was going on. The consultant informed us that he had bronchiolitis and that it would be touch and go that evening. Thankfully, my son survived the night and we spent over a week in intensive care, as the amazing doctors worked to save his life from bronchiolitis. I saw at first hand the critical importance of high-quality emergency care.

It is my mission to make sure that the residents of Epsom, Ewell, Ashted and Leatherhead have access to the best possible healthcare. Our community was promised one of the 40 new hospitals. That commitment must be fulfilled. We are part of the Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust. St Helier hospital is struggling, with crumbling facilities and overstretched staff. We have fewer hospital beds per capita than in many other nations. Ceilings are falling in and buildings are condemned. The need for a new hospital is urgent, and I look forward to discussing it with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care in the coming weeks. The House will be pleased to know that my son is now a big, strong 16-year-old, challenging his parents as every teenager does.

Epsom and Ewell is home to two significant rivers: the Hogsmill, a relatively pristine chalk river whose beauty was immortalised by Sir John Everett Millais in his iconic painting "Ophelia"; and the River Mole, which is one of the most polluted in the country. Thames Water's negligent handling of our water resources has led to more than 8,000 hours of sewage discharge into the River Mole in the first six months of this year alone. Thames Water is crippled by being billions in debt, and

[Helen Maguire]

water bills keep rising. Executive bonuses are handed out as the sewage is pouring out. This mismanagement of our water is unacceptable. I call for greater regulation and accountability and for a sewage tax to protect our rivers and water infrastructure.

Epsom and Ewell has affluent areas, but we also face stark social inequalities. There are parts of my constituency in which food banks have become a lifeline for struggling families, and our local housing waiting list has grown to more than 1,300 households. Food banks are not the norm; they are a sign that society simply is not working. I am concerned that even more of my constituents will be using them this winter as they struggle without the winter fuel allowance. The stark contrast between wealth and deprivation is a reminder that we must do more to support those who are most in need. I am incredibly grateful for the work of the Good Company, the Leatherhead community hub, local faith organisations and all the volunteers and local charities who work tirelessly to provide for our community's most vulnerable.

As the Member of Parliament for Epsom and Ewell—a constituency that stretches from Worcester Park and Stoneleigh in the north to Ashted and Leatherhead, the gateway of the Surrey hills, in the south—I want our community to thrive economically, socially and environmentally. My constituency has inspired literary greats such as C. S. Lewis and Jane Austen. I believe that it can continue to be a place of innovation and inspiration.

I thank my parents for their support throughout the years. I thank my husband and three kids for their support and their leafleting prowess throughout my campaign. Most importantly, I thank my constituents for placing their trust in me. I am committed to repaying their trust with service, dedication and determination to make Epsom and Ewell a better place for everyone.

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

4.27 pm

Kevin McKenna (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to address the House for my first speech, and for making time available for so many of us to make our first speech today. I particularly congratulate the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Helen Maguire): the story about her child in intensive care touched me very deeply, as an intensive care practitioner. I can see that she is going to be a fantastic advocate for our armed forces and for the things they need to serve the country well.

In passing, I must mention Lord Darzi's report, which my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary presented to the House today—not because of the content of the report, but because in 2015 I was honoured to become a Darzi fellow. Lord Darzi set up his fellowship programme to bring clinicians like me, a nurse, into clinical leadership, to ensure that the NHS and the health system are led by clinicians. I am not sure that the plan was to get us all into the Houses of Parliament, but I am the first Darzi fellow here and I think there will be quite a few more.

I am honoured to speak in this debate in memory of Sir David Amess, whose constituency of Southend West can be seen from mine of Sittingbourne and Sheppey—we

see the beautiful vista of Southend, which is now a city, across the Thames. Over the past few months, during the campaign and afterwards, there have been several times when I have looked over at Southend and taken a moment to reflect on the manner and the tragedy of Sir David's death and what it means for all of us serving here in the House.

It is a great blessing of my constituency that, amid our busy, traffic-laden towns, we have these beautiful vistas down the Thames and the Medway estuary. We have broad, flat salt marshes meeting big skies—places that you can escape to and properly reflect on everything that matters in life. During the election campaign, I asked my constituents what they valued most in the constituency, and it was that proximity to nature that kept coming up. They mentioned the wide-open estuary waters of the Thames and Medway—several of my Medway colleagues are in their places today—the many sites of special scientific interest and the nature reserve at Elmley. Now that Members are spending time in London, they might want to pop down for a hot yoga weekend—it's a whole thing.

However—so many Members have said something similar when describing their seat—that is only half the story. The other half is the still proudly industrial town of Sittingbourne. Its character and location challenge many people's preconceptions of Kent. Sittingbourne's twin on the Isle of Sheppey, Sheerness-on-Sea, has busy docks—docks that, hopefully, will become only busier as the opportunities for growth, construction and new green industries are realised by this Government. Sittingbourne and Sheppey is perfectly located to take advantage of all that development.

My job is not only to argue for our place in the rebuilding of Britain, but to ensure that my constituents see real social, economic, health and wellbeing benefits from the opportunities. The factors that led to the foundations of our towns being laid centuries ago fit the way that technological, industrial and transport strategies are all pointing now. Sittingbourne straddles the main road from Dover to London and is connected directly by water, road and rail to Sheerness docks on Sheppey. This is what made the Saxon kings of Kent grab the land and claim it as their terra regis. This is something that the residents of Milton Regis are very proud to remind me of—that it is a royal town in the middle of Sittingbourne.

It was those same routes that allowed the town of Queenborough to develop as a major port. Tucked behind Sheppey is the safe waterway—and major trading route—from London through to the continent and the rest of the world. Those routes are also what enabled Sittingbourne to develop a major brick-building industry in the 19th century. It produced more bricks and had more people working in it than the potteries in Staffordshire. Those bricks were largely used to build London. Many town houses in the 19th century, Buckingham Palace and many of the buildings on this parliamentary estate will have been built with the clay and bricks from Sittingbourne. Our water and transport gives us the opportunity to produce green energy and bring about greener ways of travelling. That will benefit Sittingbourne and Sheerness in the future. Peel Ports at Sheerness is a major importer of construction materials for the south of England. With investment to restore our rail freight links and an ambition to once again use our water routes, we can be at the heart of a green revolution.

But there is more to a place than land and water. A place is made by people. What will ensure that the people of my constituency get the benefits that they are crying out for as a result of growth and rebuilding is the strength of our local communities and the collective action that comes from grassroots organisations. As we move more services out of hospitals to the community and try to mend the broken sense of cohesion in our society, these community actors will be key. There are great organisations, including Seashells nursery in Sheerness, which holds true to the course taken by Sure Start centres, with their now proven benefits, although they are sadly under threat of closure, and Wiggles children's nursery, which has partnered with Sheppey's Range Rovers football club to create a multi-generational facility that will massively boost the health of the neighbourhood.

There are also people coming together, on the island and the mainland, to form progressive men's mental health peer support groups, including Men-Talk.UK in Sheppey and Sittingbourne. A team of volunteers resurrected the Sittingbourne carnival this year after several years' gap to ensure that its tradition of more than 130 years does not die, but instead will go from strength to strength. There is Swale food bank, and underpinning so many of the voluntary organisations in my constituency is Swale Community and Voluntary Services, which fosters lots of organisations, helping them to get started, get organising and help their communities.

Part of the reason for that depth of community co-operation is that my constituency faces the challenge of having some of the most deprived parts of Kent and the south-east. Unfortunately, a big driver for that is the very geography that otherwise brings in so many benefits and opportunities. As Sheppey is an island, with only one point in the west that connects to the rest of England, there are pockets of isolation, and when the two bridges go down, as sadly they have all too often of late, people cannot get off Sheppey to go to work or school, or on to Sheppey to deliver services in Sheppey's hospitals, schools, docks and three prisons. All that impacts not just Sheppey but Sittingbourne and the surrounding villages.

Both my predecessors worked to overcome those entrenched challenges. I pay tribute to my immediate predecessor, Gordon Henderson, who many here know well, for his work persuading his party when they were in power to invest in technical skills training on the island and expand Sheppey college. My Labour predecessor, Derek Wyatt, secured the funding for a permanent fixed bridge to the island, the Sheppey crossing, to overcome the problems of the old Kingsferry bridge, which is only a few metres away and has to be raised several times a day to let ships through, to link the paper mills and the docks. Both of them believed in the enormous potential of the area, but there is a lot more to do.

It is a professional habit of intensive care nurses that we are inveterate fiddlers and fixers. We like to help people, and we like to keep busy doing so. Now that I have swapped adjusting ventilator settings and syringe drivers for work in public policy, however, I need to find new ways to keep busy. I will keep working with people in Sittingbourne and Sheppey to bring them together, and will work collaboratively at trying to fix things for the better, but there is one thing in the constituency that

I assure you, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will not be fiddling with: the SS Richard Montgomery, a wrecked world war two cargo ship sunk just off Sheerness, which is packed with something like 1,400 tonnes of high explosives. Most experts feel that as long as the ship is not disturbed, the seawater will gradually inactivate those explosives, so if they are ever disturbed enough to trigger, any fireworks would be minor. However, there is a minority view that if something triggered all the explosives to go off at once, the resulting explosion would not just inundate the whole of Sittingbourne and Sheppey but send a 5-metre tsunami back up the Thames, all the way to central London, swamping the Palace of Westminster—giving us all very wet feet, and most of the MPs in the south-east and London an awful lot of extra casework.

Finally, I thank my constituents again for putting their faith in me; the campaigners and activists who helped me to get elected; my parents and siblings, who have always shown how proud they are of me; and most of all, my husband Lee, who I could not have got this far in life without, and who is a true partner to me in everything that we do.

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

4.37 pm

Manuela Perteghella (Stratford-on-Avon) (LD): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to make my maiden speech. I thank all hon. Members for their fine contributions, including my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Helen Maguire) and the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Kevin McKenna).

It is the greatest honour of my life to serve the people of Stratford-on-Avon. I am humbled to have been elected to represent the place that I call home, where I live and where I have raised my family, who are here today in the Public Gallery. I am proud to be the first Liberal MP for our constituency in over a century, and the first woman ever to be elected to this role. I extend my heartfelt thanks to the people of Stratford, Alcester, Studley, Shipston, Henley, Bidford and the many villages and hamlets that make up our beautiful constituency. I thank them for placing their trust in me. I promise to be their champion, and a strong and unwavering voice for everyone, fighting every day for the fair deal that they deserve.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, Nadhim Zahawi, who was MP for Stratford-on-Avon for the last 14 years. During his political career he covered many important roles in the Cabinet, but I thank him in particular for his work as vaccines Minister during the covid pandemic. I also acknowledge the service of the late John Maples, who represented Stratford-on-Avon with distinction from 1997 to 2010, before being elevated to the other place. He was both well liked and greatly admired. Although I am proud to be the first female MP for Stratford-on-Avon, I am not the first to bring Italian heritage to the role. That distinction belongs to another of my predecessors, John Profumo, who beat me to it—although I plan on a much quieter stay in the history books.

My constituency is one of the most beautiful areas of our country, with luscious woodland such as the Heart of England forest, valleys lapped by rivers and brooks, and fertile farmland—a landscape special as only the Warwickshire countryside can be. My connection to my constituency is one of deep love. I love the stretches

[Manuela Perteghella]

from Shipston-on-Stour and the rolling Cotswolds fringes in the south, to the Avon valley villages and Henley-in-Arden in the north, where the majestic forest of Arden once stood.

At the heart of my constituency lies the town of Stratford-upon-Avon, celebrated worldwide as the birthplace of the greatest playwright of all: William Shakespeare. Each year on William's birthday, the town remembers and celebrates its most famous son, with civic dignitaries and local schoolchildren parading through the historic streets to lay flowers on his tomb in Holy Trinity church. I look forward to joining them next April.

What makes our constituency special above all is its people, who are resilient and community minded. Each town and village is blessed with warm-hearted volunteers helping in repair cafés, food banks, the community speed watch and flood action groups. There are outstanding places of learning, such as our local schools and colleges, the Shakespeare Institute of the University of Birmingham, and the University of Warwick's innovation campus; national portfolio organisations such as the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust; as well as grassroots arts companies such as the Bear Pit Theatre and Escape Arts. Events such as the Shipston Proms celebrate the wealth of musical talent. Most of all, we are a constituency of entrepreneurs and innovators, businesses and social enterprises.

Overlooked by Beaudesert castle—known locally as “the Mount”—the town of Henley-in-Arden has a timber-framed high street, which includes Henley's most famous attraction, Henley Ice Cream, which is well worth a visit. Alcester is a town rich in community spirit that comes together each year for events such as the Alcester food festival. The town's roots stretch back to Roman times, and its heritage is proudly preserved today in the Roman Alcester Museum. Just up the road from Alcester is Coughton Court, home of the Throckmorton family, who played a rather infamous role in the gunpowder plot of 1605. As the new MP for the area, I assure the House that I will not continue that local tradition.

My constituency also has some of the most beautiful waterways in the country. The Rivers Avon, Alne, Arrow and Stour, and our fantastic canal network, including the longest canal aqueduct in England—the Edstone aqueduct—are not only vital to our community's natural and industrial heritage, but are central to our environmental responsibilities. Sadly, not enough has been done to tackle river pollution. I thank residents for joining citizens' science projects to regularly test the water and collect much-needed data on the state of our rivers' health, so that we can hold the Government and water companies to account.

As a rural constituency, we face many challenges: NHS dentistry deserts, long waiting times for mental health services, special educational needs and disabilities families battling for education provision, and fuel poverty. Many of my vulnerable constituents live in off-grid homes that are expensive to heat. The Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000, introduced by Sir David Amess, was important legislation that sought to eliminate fuel poverty. To further combat it, we need an emergency home insulation programme so that homes are safe, warm and cheap to heat.

As Shakespeare wrote:

“Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon 'em.”

I stand here today not because I was born great, or because I sought greatness, but because the people of Stratford-upon-Avon have entrusted me with public service. Together, we can achieve greatness not for ourselves, but for our constituents and our country. With a new Parliament, we have a chance to strive for a fairer, greener and more inclusive future. The stage is set, and it is now time for us to play our part.

4.44 pm

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): It is a great pleasure to wind up the Sir David Amess Adjournment debate for the Opposition. All of us who served in the House with Sir David remember him with enormous affection. We all remember his sense of humour and dedication to Southend with enormous fondness. I particularly thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois) for opening the debate and for his words about Sir David, which I am sure all of us will remember for a long time to come.

We have had something like 25 speeches this afternoon. It will be difficult to touch on all of them in such a short time, but I will try to canter through some of the more memorable moments. The hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Daniel Francis), a fellow south Londoner, spoke eloquently in his maiden speech. He clearly brings profound personal experience of caring to the House and we look forward to hearing a great deal more from him during his time with us.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) spoke with his customary passion about fire safety, and he made some extremely important points about the need to expedite the remedial work to the cladding on tall buildings, which we will be following carefully on both sides of the House. I congratulate him on his triumphant election, or acclamation, as Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee.

We had another fine maiden speech from the hon. Member for Reading West and Mid Berkshire (Olivia Bailey). I learned that her constituency is the setting for “The Wind in the Willows”, and we heard how she drew inspiration from her mother, a teacher, and her father, a police officer.

It was not exactly a maiden speech from my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis)—perhaps he gave one some time in the mists of the 19th century, I don't know—but he recalled those who served in the second world war and drew the House's attention to the importance of strengthening the independence of the Intelligence and Security Committee, which he had the distinction of chairing in the last Parliament.

We had another maiden speech from the hon. Member for Southampton Test (Satvir Kaur). We heard that the Mayflower set sail from Southampton and it has a premier league team once again, but I hope that Crystal Palace, the premier league team in my borough of Croydon, secure victory whenever we meet. My hon. Friend the Member for Hamble Valley (Paul Holmes) also spoke. I was told that he was the best man at the wedding of the hon. Member for Southampton Test—is that right?

Paul Holmes *indicated assent.*

Chris Philp: Well, there we are; we have some cross-party links already.

In her maiden speech, the hon. Member for Doncaster Central (Sally Jameson) touched on a lot of local issues, including a desire to deliver a local power plant. I am sure that all of us wish her good luck in that undertaking.

We had another maiden speech from the hon. Member for Henley and Thame (Freddie van Mierlo), with a tribute to John Howell, his predecessor, who sadly suffered a stroke a few months ago. All of us wish him a speedy recovery, and I wish the new Member for Henley and Thame well in representing his beautiful consistency—not as beautiful as Croydon, but fairly beautiful none the less.

In another maiden speech, the hon. Member for Bolton West (Phil Brickell) spoke about his experience working on serious crime and fraud, and paid tribute to the Bolton mountain rescue team. I am sure all of them have our good wishes. That was followed by the maiden speech—they were coming thick and fast—of my hon. Friend the Member for Exmouth and Exeter East (David Reed). I understand that he got married during the campaign. That is a pretty bold move, I must say. I am not quite sure where his honeymoon was held—“Darling, come with me to a constituency committee room while we do some telling.” Maybe that was a euphemism, I don’t know. Anyway, I hope his marriage got off to a good start. He is a braver man than I am.

The maiden speech from the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Jonathan Davies) included a tribute to our former colleague, Pauline Latham. The new Member spoke with great eloquence about the creative industries that are so important in that constituency. We heard quite a lot about local issues from the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sarah Green), including the local bus timetable in Coleshill and the importance of helping pensioners on the question of the winter fuel allowance, which we debated just a few days ago.

We had a maiden speech from the new hon. Member for Lichfield (Dave Robertson). I was going to say that he has some big footsteps to fill, but he has quite a big haircut to follow as well. We will see whether his locks are quite so luxuriant in 30 years’ time—there are some solutions available should they be necessary.

The hon. Member for West Dorset (Edward Morello) made another fine maiden speech, drawing attention to the gigantic carved image—the fertility symbol—of Cerne Abbas. I am sure he will be standing as proudly as the figure in that image.

The new hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Rand) paid tribute to his predecessor, Sir Graham Brady, who was kept busy with the shenanigans on the Conservative side of the House over the past few years. Hopefully his successor, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East, will not be quite so occupied. The hon. Gentleman made an important point about the Hong Kong population that his constituency is hosting, who are fleeing persecution by the Chinese Communist party. Of course, where people flee genuine persecution, this is a nation that welcomes them.

We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie), who has moved places in the Chamber just to confuse me—it is

easily done. He drew attention to the importance of the Scotch whisky industry, which I am sure we all support enthusiastically, as well as the North sea and the oil and gas contained under it, and how important it is that we are able to use that oil and gas here in the United Kingdom.

In her maiden speech, the hon. Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Naushabah Khan) paid tribute to Rehman Chishti, and talked about opportunity and the great thing about this country: that people from all backgrounds can go on to achieve great things. That is one of the values that unites us across this House, and I look forward to working with her on that.

The new hon. Member for Winchester (Dr Chambers) is a vet, and in his maiden speech, he made a reference to taking the temperature of people. I was not quite sure what he was referring to, so I googled how vets take temperatures, and after seeing the images that Google threw up, I have to say that I will not be asking him to take my temperature any time soon. It would have to be a truly desperate circumstance to require that.

We heard a maiden speech from the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tristan Osborne), in which he paid tribute to Dame Tracey Crouch. Chatham is, of course, the home of the Chatham royal dockyard, which built the Royal Navy in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. That is a piece of history that I am sure she is very proud of.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Grinstead and Uckfield (Mims Davies) was also not making her maiden speech. She expressed support for local schools and referenced one of her predecessors, Sir Nicholas Soames, who stood up for Southern railway, a line that also runs through my constituency in Croydon. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend and to Sir Nicholas for the work they have done to champion commuters.

We heard a very important speech from the hon. Member for Alloa and Grangemouth (Brian Leishman), who is in his place. The proposed closure of the Grangemouth refinery is an extremely serious matter, both for his constituents and for the country. That refinery represents 14% of our refining capacity, and I would like to see the Government do more to keep it open, because we certainly need it.

I am running out of time, so perhaps my opposite number on the Government Benches, the hon. Member for Bridgend (Chris Elmore), can cover the remaining three speeches. As you have requested, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will conclude by congratulating all those who have made maiden speeches today. It is clear that the future of this House is in safe hands with such eloquent speakers and such passionate advocates for their constituents. I wish everyone a pleasant conference recess and look forward to seeing you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and everybody else in October.

4.53 pm

The Comptroller of His Majesty’s Household (Chris Elmore): This will be a good test of my ability to speak quickly as a Welshman.

It is fair to say that we have had a very robust and positive debate this afternoon, criss-crossing constituencies from the north of Scotland all the way to the south coast of England. Because I am indeed Welsh, and because the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham

[Chris Elmore]

(Sarah Green) is from north Wales, we have had a good coverage of Great Britain one way or another—the only part of the United Kingdom that we are missing is Northern Ireland. We have heard about subjects from Christmas trees to Taylor Swift, and have had a wonderful tour of the rich industrial heritage of our country and heard how proud we all are as Members of Parliament to serve our constituents. The theme of the debate has been service: no matter which party we serve in this House, this debate is about trying to ensure not only that Sir David Amess's legacy is kept, remembered and celebrated, but that all of us are in this place to work for our constituents every single day.

I pay tribute to all those Members who have made maiden speeches—it is eight years since mine, which feels like a lifetime ago—and I will try to canter very quickly through what were truly wonderful maiden speeches from right across the House. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Daniel Francis) for his courage in talking about his family. There is often nothing more difficult in this Chamber than talking about personal experience, and I really do hope that he becomes the advocate he wants to be for people who are disabled to ensure they get the very best care they need not just from this Government, but from people across our United Kingdom.

It must be said that the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), the new chairman of the '22, will be hoping for a quieter period, and I hope he will be serving as the chair from opposition for a long period. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Reading West and Mid Berkshire (Olivia Bailey). I have had the privilege of knowing her and her wife for a number of years. I know what an advocate she will be for her constituents, and I know that she will also be a true champion for people who suffer with Alzheimer's. I have been so privileged to work with her over the last few weeks as we start the work of a new Government. I say to the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Sir Julian Lewis) that we do take extreme seriously the point he raised about the Intelligence and Security Committee. I will of course ensure that this piece of work is concluded quickly, particularly now we have resolved the issues about Select Committees.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster Central (Sally Jameson) that she must have had one of the most hard-working and diligent predecessors in this House. She was my first Chief Whip—I have never been more frightened before a meeting than going in to see Baroness Winterton as a new Member of Parliament. However, I know that my hon. Friend will be a true advocate for the city of Doncaster, and I know how hard she will work. I also say to the hon. Member for Henley and Thame (Freddie van Mierlo) that he follows an extraordinary Member, to whom I send all my wishes for his recovery in the months and weeks ahead.

I had a number of meetings with my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Phil Brickell) during the time he was a parliamentary candidate, and he has been a really excellent MP to date. I know he will put Bolton on the map, as indeed will my two other colleagues from across the city. I thank the hon. Member for Exmouth and Exeter East (David Reed) for his service to our country, and I know what a strong advocate he will be.

As a Sir Walter Raleigh nut—I am not sure that is even parliamentary language—I look forward to discussions with him about Sir Walter.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Jonathan Davies), the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham and my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Dave Robertson)—I make no comment on hair—as well as to the hon. Member for West Dorset (Edward Morello), my hon. Friends the Members for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Rand) and for Gillingham and Rainham (Naushabah Khan), the hon. Member for Winchester (Dr Chambers), my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tristan Osborne), the hon. Member for East Grinstead and Uckfield (Mims Davies), my hon. Friend the Member for Alloa and Grangemouth (Brian Leishman), the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Helen Maguire), my hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Kevin McKenna) and the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Manuela Perteghella), that I pay tribute to all of them for the positivity they have shown in advocating for their constituents and for the personal stories they have brought forward as Members of this House.

The reason for that canter is to enable me to pay tribute to the opening speech in this debate by the right hon. Member for Rayleigh and Wickford (Mr Francois). On Sir David, I still vividly recall, when I became a father almost four years ago, that Sir David, whom I barely knew, quite literally cantered up the No Lobby because he had discovered I had become a father and he wanted to give me a note to tell me that there is no greater privilege—he was right obviously. It is a memory that has lived with me since his death and before. The man was a gentleman, a true parliamentarian and somebody whose memory we should always work to keep alive. I was so pleased to hear the right hon. Gentleman's stories, including the one that we did not know. I bet there are not many parliamentary candidates who have been adopted under a light—of any sort, I would have thought.

To conclude, I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the other Deputy Speakers. As a Whip, it is a rare privilege to be able to speak, so I congratulate you on your election to the Deputy Speakership. I am reliably informed by the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Dame Nia Griffith), that if 330 new Members all took 10 minutes each for their maidens, that would be 55 hours of maiden speeches. I say in all sincerity that we are all the better for it, because to learn about the rich history of our country is so important in celebrating what is best about this House. The key thing for all new Members to understand is that we do work across parties, we are all human and we all work together for the betterment of our constituents.

I pay tribute to all the staff of this House—civil servants, all our staff, our constituency teams, and those in Mr Speaker's office—as we rise for the conference recess. I wish colleagues successful conferences—although, I think some might be a little more jubilant than others—and I look forward to seeing all Members when we return in October.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered matters to be raised before the forthcoming adjournment.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Martin McCluskey.)

4.59 pm

Lauren Edwards (Rochester and Strood) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to hold my first Adjournment debate in this House. I sought this debate because I am conscious that the forthcoming Budget is rapidly approaching and I wanted to raise with Members and Ministers the issue of the cliff edge for funding of the UK shared prosperity fund. Any future funding of the UKSPF is of course a matter for the Chancellor, but I would like to use the debate today to discuss the merits of the fund, how we can learn from the experiences of implementing it over the past few years, particularly in local government, and the approach to local growth funds under the new Labour Government.

We know that the Government's top mission is to boost economic growth across the UK. It is my firm belief that a new, improved version of the UKSPF could make an important contribution to that while also supporting local communities and boosting regeneration efforts. I thank the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Nottingham North and Kimberley (Alex Norris), for his attendance today; I know that he cares strongly about local growth and supporting community cohesion, and I look forward to hearing his response at the debate's conclusion.

The UKSPF was introduced as the domestic replacement for the European structural and investment fund after Brexit. The previous funding provided by the Conservative Government did not match the European structural and investment fund but did provide local authorities with some devolved funding to support local priorities, with particular emphasis on regeneration, business support and skills.

The UKSPF began in December 2022 and is due to end in March 2025. Although it is by no means perfect, I believe it has had a broadly positive impact and I would like to draw on my own experience as a former Medway council cabinet member responsible for distributing the UKSPF. Feedback from Whitehall to officials at the council has been that Medway council's approach was considered best practice, and hence I am keen that the Minister hears about our experience. I know he is a big supporter of local government and evidence-based policy making, and no doubt he will wish to hear from other Members of this House who also have direct experience of the UKSPF.

In Medway, we used our UKSPF allocation to support local community groups, businesses and charities, which we considered best placed to recognise what their areas needed in order to thrive. Rather than a top-down approach, we asked communities what they needed and functioned as the facilitator to make things happen, using the UKSPF. The feedback we received was that this approach was empowering for local communities and brought people together. An SPF network was established that created a mutually supportive community that led in later years to joint bids for community projects.

The UKSPF's potential to support broader regeneration efforts to revitalise our town centres is significant. In Medway, small pots of money delivered significant

economic and social benefits. One of the ways I was particularly keen to use the UKSPF was to help our town centre forums host high street events, on the basis that this would bring in thousands of extra visitors and benefit local businesses.

A notable example of this is the Chatham Chinese new year festival, held earlier this year in what is now my constituency. I was the biggest such celebration in the UK outside London and led to an approximate 25% increase in footfall on Chatham High Street. The festival was free to attend and saw a parade, street food, a market, traditional dancers and martial arts masterclasses. The Chatham town centre forum partnered with the local Chinese association, the shopping centre, Medway Youth Council, and local schools and charities to deliver the event. Feedback from residents and vendors was unanimously supportive. Materials purchased using the UKSPF will enable the event to run for future years without further financial support from the council, so the UKSPF will leave a lasting impact. This is important because we want schemes like the UKSPF where possible to deliver longer-term benefits.

I will briefly turn to a few other ways that we used the UKSPF to support longer-term improvements in Medway. We offered small feasibility funds—pots of as little as £5,000—to help groups demonstrate that an idea would work. They could then use that proof of concept to go on to attract funding from other sources to make it happen. We helped community groups, such as the Chatham Intra Cultural Consortium, to transition into a charitable incorporated organisation, or CIO. Achieving that new structure means that it can bid for other sources of funding and is less reliant on financial support from the council. That means it can continue its incredibly important heritage work.

Helping groups to get on a more financially sustainable footing is particularly important in the context of years of constrained local government finance. We also used the UKSPF to provide grants to help businesses to grow by purchasing modern technology and equipment. For instance, a gift business specialising in handmade travel keepsakes was able to use the grant to invest in a new fibre laser machine, which significantly enhanced the business's productivity and efficiency, allowing it to handle larger orders. We also funded net zero audits and green grants for local businesses that wanted to reduce their operating costs by making their premises more energy-efficient, and we helped them get those green certificates that are now needed to bid for many contracts.

Jayne Kirkham (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree how important the SPF is to areas, including Truro and Falmouth in Cornwall, that lost their funding under the European regional development fund and the European structural fund when we came out of the EU under Brexit? Does she agree how fundamental it is that there is some sort of replacement fund for that?

Lauren Edwards: I absolutely agree, and I will be making the case for that replacement fund later. I thank my hon. Friend for her contribution.

In my constituency, more than 30 local businesses have so far been supported under these UKSPF-funded programmes to reduce their costs, to grow their business

[*Lauren Edwards*]

and to contribute to helping us reach net zero. We would not be able to do that without this replacement funding for the EU structural funds.

I am conscious that in this final funding year the focus of UKSPF spending is on people and skills. It will be important for Ministers and others to assess the impact that these projects have on helping economically inactive people into good-quality training and work. The examples I have given are just a snapshot of how local councils across the UK have used the UKSPF. Overall, I consider that the UKSPF has worked well in my constituency, and I understand that it has worked well in others too, which is great to hear. It has delivered the economic growth and regeneration aims that this new Government are committed to boosting further.

Despite those successes, there have been challenges with the UKSPF, and it is appropriate that we consider them now, as the existing funding cycle comes to a close. Broader feedback from local authorities to the Local Government Association has highlighted a number of issues. The first is short timescales from Whitehall. Local authorities were given just three months to develop UKSPF investment plans in collaboration with local stakeholders. We need to give people more time to get the right approach and to put more emphasis on long-term strategic planning. The LGA has proposed that any future version of the UKSPF considered by the Government should adopt a six to eight-year funding cycle, and I would certainly endorse that approach.

We also need to reflect on the impact of single-year funding. The annual funding allocation of the UKSPF often led to local authorities commissioning services for just 12 months in order to manage the financial risk. For some projects, that is perfectly appropriate, but for those local areas using the UKSPF for business or skills support, for example, it made it more difficult to address some of the longer-term issues and inequalities in our communities.

Another issue is central Government restrictions. The requirement that skills be addressed in year 3 was an unnecessary restriction. We should trust local authorities to collaborate with their local partners in order to address community needs without such restrictions. I also consider that there is scope to improve and streamline the UKSPF reporting process, which some feedback has indicated was overly bureaucratic. It is of course important that the Government receive assurance that funding has been spent appropriately and used effectively. A fine balance will need to be struck in future.

Finally, I am aware that there were some delays in getting money out the door to local authorities to fund agreed projects. It is important that that, too, is considered by the new Minister for any future approach to local growth funding.

I will return to the immediate challenge that we face: the expiration of funding to support the UKSPF at the end of March 2025. Without continued funding of some sort, the types of initiatives that I have highlighted will struggle to continue or be replicated. I am not aware of any existing funding that would help fill the gap. For longer-term services such as business support and employability programmes that rely on establishing trust and employing staff, the cliff edge is of particular concern. Providers are likely to see staff leave as contracts

get closer to their end dates, putting at risk efforts to support businesses and help people get back into work and stay in good, stable employment.

For those reasons, I join with the LGA to urge the Minister to work with the Chancellor to include an additional one year of flexible revenue funding for the UKSPF in the forthcoming Budget. The LGA has suggested that such funding should equate to the value of year 3 of the UKSPF programme. I ask the Minister to consider that as part of his discussions with the Chancellor. Doing so would remove the immediate cliff edge and give Ministers time to consider what the new Government's approach to local growth funds should be. As I have set out, I consider that longer term allocations are needed alongside a more flexible and lighter-touch national framework that supports even greater local decision making. That would also give time to assess the full outputs of the UKSPF and what improvements can be made for a future replacement fund.

I am pleased to say that the outcomes achieved by Medway council already exceed those set out in the original UKSPF investment plan submitted to Whitehall some years ago. That data, alongside data from lots of other local authorities, should be available to Ministers and could provide a valuable steer on what approaches proved successful and what did not work. I am really confident that by learning from the past and working in partnership with local government to deliver a more flexible, longer-term funding scheme, the new Government could provide a real boost to local economies and communities that goes beyond far beyond anything that we have seen in the current UKSPF funding cycle.

5.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Alex Norris): It is a pleasure to respond on behalf of the Government to the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (Lauren Edwards). I am conscious that when I spoke in closing for the Government yesterday, my contribution lasted an unlikely 48 minutes. I am delighted—not least because my voice is a little on the cusp—that the rules of the House will prevent such a recurrence.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate and on the strength of the case she made. It is clear from what she has said just now and previously—I am similarly grateful for the question she asked me at oral questions last week—how strongly she feels about the UK shared prosperity fund as well as the work she did in Medway and the impact she made with the fund. There is clearly an awful lot to learn from the Medway example, and I look forward to doing that when we meet again shortly after the conference recess.

Dr Zubir Ahmed (Glasgow South West) (Lab): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way and to my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (Lauren Edwards) for securing this really important debate. Scotland has been a beneficiary of the shared prosperity fund to the tune of £212 million since 2022, over £70 million of which has come to my home city of Glasgow. Does the Minister agree that that is a demonstration of the Union dividend, which Scotland and the nations and regions of the United Kingdom

enjoy by being part of this Union? Does he further agree that the shared prosperity fund is an important vehicle for bringing equity to the regions and nations of the United Kingdom?

Alex Norris: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The United Kingdom Government are ambitious for growth across all of the United Kingdom. Ours is a four-nations commitment, and we look forward to working closely with colleagues in Scotland, in all strands of local growth funding, to ensure that people across Scotland—and in Wales and Northern Ireland—get the benefits of growth and that dividend of which he speaks. On the particular point about the UK shared prosperity fund, I agree on its effectiveness and will talk about its future, as I know colleagues are keen for me to do.

Jonathan Davies (Mid Derbyshire) (Lab): I too thank my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (Lauren Edwards) for introducing this important debate. Councils across the country, including in Derbyshire, have faced appalling cuts over the last decade, and the UKSPF has been one of the few points of light in what has been a very dark decade for local authorities. I warmly welcome the new Government's commitment to offer councils a three-year funding settlement, but can I encourage the Minister to lobby the Treasury to see what more it can do for local authorities, because the important services they provide are on the cusp of being inaccessible to people?

Alex Norris: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the health of local government. Like many colleagues, I am a veteran of local government, and I am very conscious of the pressures it is under. As we design a new model for local growth, I am also conscious that local authorities will be at the heart of making it effective. If they do not have the capacity because of those pressures, that will be a limiting factor on our success, and I am very mindful of that.

I have seen at first hand the good work that the UKSPF has done in my constituency, and I appreciate why there is such interest in its future. It has helped to support organisations that are addressing unemployment and providing training, such as the Bestwood Partnership and Evolve, which have made a huge difference to our community. It has also backed community projects such as the Kimberley community garden, allowing its members to redevelop their site and continue important community outreach work. So I understand very strongly why there is such interest in the fund.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood said, future funding is a matter for the Chancellor and the Budget—of course, we have the ongoing spending review, and the budget on 30 October. I appreciate the frustration that comes with that answer, but I am afraid that that is where we are at the moment. However, that does not prevent me from addressing a number of the points that my hon. Friend made.

It is one of the beauties of the electoral cycle and of our democracy that a change election brings in colleagues with a lot of different experiences. My hon. Friend talked about the impact that the £3.3 million from the UKSPF has had in Medway and about what she did to design the work involved, and I am keen to learn from that. It is good to hear how the funding has supported

growth in high streets and towns, increasing footfall, supporting local businesses and regeneration in the town centres of Chatham, Rainham and Gillingham, and addressing local challenges and, crucially, opportunities alongside community leaders. It has also supported projects such as Emerge Advocacy, which supports young people struggling with their mental health, and Mutual Aid Road Reps, which was formed during the covid pandemic to combat loneliness and isolation. Those hugely significant projects reach people who are often the hardest to reach, and the UKSPF has backed them.

Similarly, and very attractively, as my hon. Friend said, the fund has made sure that there have been great events in Medway, such as the Chinese new year festival, Easter celebrations, heritage awareness events and the Intra Lateral arts festival. There are lots of great things, and the model in Medway shows that putting local people in charge and letting them set local priorities yields great results, including a significant increase in town centre footfall and a greater sense of community. When my hon. Friend says Medway is a model, there is a lot of evidence for that, and I look forward to hearing about it.

Jayne Kirkham: My query is about the current version of the shared prosperity fund. Some of the capital projects going on at the moment are time-limited to the end of March. Some will not be finished by then, but local authorities are rushing to complete them and spending more money because they are worried that some of it—the current money, not the future money—could be clawed back. Will the Minister confirm that that will not be an issue with those existing projects and that that money will not be clawed back, so those projects can be completed?

Alex Norris: I am grateful for that intervention. As my hon. Friend knows, I have inherited 15, 16 or 17 strands of local growth funding, all at different stages, with the decisions made, in many cases, many years ago. We are trying to make the most sense of them and get the best value out of them. With regard to the projects she mentions, I encourage my hon. Friend to help her local projects to engage with my officials, so that they can give clarity on precisely what the timelines are in the context of what may well be discussed as part of the Budget. I am very happy to work with her to make sure that that happens.

Turning to some of the challenges to the UKSPF mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood, we have to start with the future of the programme. Local authorities, right hon. and hon. Members, and organisations across the country that deliver projects have rightly been seeking clarity on what comes next. My mailbag is very full, and we are giving the matter full consideration. We recognise the hard work undertaken—it is important that that is stated from the Dispatch Box—and we recognise the challenges that time poses. Organisations traditionally funded in annual cycles constantly have to put hard-working members of staff on 90-day redundancy notices. That puts pressure on people who then perhaps seek other work, because it does not suit them and their life—and why would it? We understand that those cliff edges are not a good thing. They are at the forefront of our minds as we think about the future.

Melanie Ward (Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy) (Lab): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood on securing this debate and thank her for doing so. This is such an important moment. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South West (Dr Ahmed) about the importance of the UK shared prosperity fund for his area. I was really glad to welcome the Deputy Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), to my constituency during the general election campaign, where she saw the need for that funding. Fife has benefited greatly from more than £13 million from the fund in recent years. In my constituency, that includes projects such as Step On, which is run by LinkLiving with Raith Rovers Community Foundation. It provides targeted help for young people to improve their mental health.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Order. I remind Members that interventions must be short.

Melanie Ward: It also helps employability and, crucially, access to work. Does the Minister agree that such cross-UK funding is hugely important for areas like mine, where inequality is an issue?

Alex Norris: I am very grateful for that intervention. I think I can probably speak for most colleagues when I say that the general election was, in many regards, quite a tricky one this time, but one of the few sources of joy was my right hon. Friend, the Deputy Prime Minister's battle bus, which seemed to reach admirable distances up and down the country, including to Fife. I know, from having spoken to her, how much she enjoyed that visit. The model my hon. Friend the Member for Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy (Melanie Ward) mentions is a great example of the impact being made on people's lives across Fife and in many different parts of the UK. We are very mindful of that.

I want to address the challenges mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood. She started with timescales. Certainly, the tiny run-in in year one is not an example of good practice, and is something we would always seek to avoid. I do not think that the Government of the day thought it was a good idea, but I think they rather found themselves a victim of circumstance. We absolutely hear that point.

My hon. Friend mentioned the Local Government Association's desire for a six to eight-year funding window. Again, I understand that very well. I have to say that that is quite challenging. Governments generally budget on a three-year cycle and often decisions are made on a one-year cycle. We have talked about wanting to give more certainty and a longer time period. I cannot commit to six to eight years, but I can commit to that principle. She mentioned the impact of single-year funding, and as I said, we very much understand that.

On my hon. Friend's point about central restrictions and monitoring, that is one of the points on which the new Government intend to diverge from the old one. My view is that we need to give communities up and down the UK the tools and resources to use their expertise to improve their community within the framework set by the Prime Minister and his missions for the country. They are the experts in this case, not Ministers.

We want a lighter touch on monitoring, and we want to be less directive on what the funding is for. UKSPF is actually a very good example of that, relative to other local growth funding, but I hear some of the challenges on that. They are important design challenges that I think we can engineer out as part of any future local growth funding programming.

Our model of local growth is reflected in the conversations we have had with local authorities and communities up and down the country. We know there is a desire to move to a more allocative settlement, with fewer beauty parades and a stronger focus on deprivation and need. We know there is a real desire for a lighter touch on monitoring, which can become a cottage industry in itself, and that is our view, too. Growth is at the heart of the things that will shape our future and growth. With local growth funding, the clue will be in the name. We want to ensure that the projects chosen by local communities drive growth.

Of course, we must see the fiscal picture in the context of the inheritance left by the last Government. This morning my hon. Friend penned an article on a well-known Labour-leaning blog, and what I took from that was the mutual desire of this Government and local government to reset the relationship to make it a better partnership, and to drive better outcomes. That will, I think, lead us to a more positive place. If local authorities are in the room and fully engaged, they may be able to use their creativity to combine funds with other funding streams, so that the money can go further. The shared prosperity fund has been a good model, but we will make changes, particularly in relation to short-term timescales and reducing some of the burdens. I have mentioned the importance of resetting the relationship with local government. Notwithstanding what we will be discussing on 30 October, those principles will guide everything we do to promote local growth.

We, as a Government, are committed to growth across the United Kingdom. We were elected on a manifesto that stressed the need to adopt a partnership approach with local authorities and an intention to stabilise the funding system, and we are going to do that. We are working closely with local authorities, stakeholders, the Scottish Parliament, the Senedd and the Northern Ireland Executive and will continue to do so, to ensure that there is a smooth transition to a new funding regime. I look forward to visiting Northern Ireland on Monday to talk further to colleagues who are interested in the UKSPF.

My hon. Friends are rightly seeking certainty. I know that they want that as soon as possible, and we have at least a bit of a pathway towards it, because, as always, important announcements will be made in the Budget statement and the ongoing spending review will shape the future. We hear the strong messages that my hon. Friends have conveyed. It has been brilliant to hear about the excellent work done in Medway and in other parts of the country, and I am keen to work with colleagues as we go forward to shape local growth funding.

Question put and agreed to.

5.27 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 12 September 2024

[CAROLYN HARRIS *in the Chair*]

Short-term Lets: Regulation

1.30 pm

Rachel Blake (Cities of London and Westminster) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the regulation of short-term lets.

It is an honour and a genuine privilege to serve under your chairship, Mrs Harris. The issue of short-term lets is an acute one for my Cities of London and Westminster constituents, so I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise it today and to discuss it with colleagues from across the House and across the country, and I look forward to the discussion with the Minister.

We need to improve the regulation of short-term lets in this country, from constituencies such as mine in central London to Truro and Falmouth in Cornwall, East Thanet in Kent, Morecambe in the north-west, and in cities like York—represented so ably by my hon. Friends today—where the demand for short-term accommodation is so high and the housing crisis so acute. Every place has its story to tell—I look forward to hearing them this afternoon—about how short-term lets are changing communities, sometimes for the better, but rarely in a way that is without challenges. We can see from the range of places represented that any solution has to be a national framework with power in local communities to decide on certain elements.

Alison Hume (Scarborough and Whitby) (Lab): Scarborough and Whitby are understandably popular destinations for holidays and short breaks, but the impact of short-term holiday lets is forcing people out of the towns. Today there are only seven homes available to rent on Rightmove in the Whitby area, while there are 300 properties on short-term let platforms. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government need to move at pace to introduce licensing and new planning powers for councils?

Rachel Blake: I agree, and the work that my hon. Friend has done to research the impact on the private rented sector is really helpful. I hope that we will continue that work together.

If I may relate this debate to wider business in the House, it is incredibly welcome to be conducting this debate the day after the introduction of the Renters' Rights Bill. I warmly welcome the Minister here, and I congratulate her and the wider team on the speed with which they have brought forward legislation that will improve the lives of millions of people.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall and Camberwell Green) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. She highlighted the Renters' Rights Bill, which is a welcome piece of legislation. We want to give security to renters. Is it not right that as well as security for renters, we should also have security

and high safety standards for tenants in short-term lets, and people who actually pay their business rates and VAT as part of their operation?

Rachel Blake: I am glad that my hon. Friend raises that issue, which is twofold. First, it is about a level playing field with other types of business. Secondly, it is about safety for the consumer. I hope that we will have a chance to explore those issues.

There are 27,798 private renters in the Cities of London and Westminster, all of whom will be better off thanks to this Government. The Renters' Rights Bill demonstrates that the Government are taking the housing crisis seriously, and I look forward to working with my hon. Friend and other colleagues on it as it makes progress through the House.

I think we would largely agree that platforms like Airbnb are not inherently a bad thing. I imagine that many in this room use Airbnb or similar services when we go on holiday, but we cannot deny that this has changed from being a peer-to-peer marketplace to something much broader. What started out as a way to make additional income from a spare room has become a significant cause of the decline in the number of homes available for local residents.

Noah Law (St Austell and Newquay) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this debate, which is crucial to the Cornish hospitality industry and housing landscape. Does she agree that while there is a need to establish a truly level playing field, for different kinds of holiday accommodation, including furnished holiday lets, we need to ensure that we support those local bona fide holiday businesses to continue to operate, lest we risk them flooding on to the market as more institutionalised Airbnbs or, even worse, second homes that are not well utilised?

Rachel Blake: I agree about the issue of the different types of places and different types of tourism and holiday accommodation. The experience in the centre of London is driven by technology. Previously, the ability to let out a room or even a whole home was much less, but in areas that have longer-standing tourist let economies—such as my hon. Friend's area and those of other colleagues—we have found that there are different challenges. I believe that those can be discussed through the progression of the regulation of the sector. I thank him for raising that important topic.

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): Does the hon. Lady agree that this is about the politics of justice, not the politics of envy? It is not just an issue of the taxation of furnished lets. There has been an industrial movement of properties—second homes—going from being registered for council tax to being registered for business rates, and people then apply for small business rate relief and pay nothing at all. Against that, we do not get the investment in affordable homes for local people. In Cornwall alone, £500 million of taxpayers' money has gone into the pockets of holiday let providers, while those specifically created, for planning reasons, with planning restrictions are outside that—

Carolyn Harris (in the Chair): Order. I call Rachel Blake.

Rachel Blake: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that helpful intervention and for elaborating on that point. I definitely believe in the politics of justice over the politics of envy. Technology has industrialised this sector, so we need to come up with a policy framework that reflects the scale of the changed situation.

Having large numbers of whole short-term lets in relatively small geographical areas, and on an increasingly commercial basis, as we have discussed, hollows out communities. It causes waste management issues and gives rise to concerns about community safety, and it depresses the availability of homes in the private rented sector.

I will discuss the impact on housing supply and then come on to the environmental impacts. One of the issues with this topic is that in some areas, there is a lack of concrete data, at least in part because of the lack of regulation. That means that much of the information comes from the experience of housing teams in local authorities and what data can be scraped from the relevant platforms. According to detailed work by Westminster city council, around 13,000 properties are listed as available for short-term let in Westminster. Over 20% of the housing stock in the west end ward are short-term lets and, at the time of the census, 30,000 properties in Westminster had no full-time residents. We have that information only because of the hard work of Westminster council's environmental health officers and others.

One in every 85 homes in the capital is available for short-term let on some basis for an undetermined number of nights each year. That is a problem in itself. As Claire Colomb, professor of urban studies and planning at University College London, noted:

“London is one of the least regulated European cities”

when it comes to short-term lets. Even Airbnb has been calling for a registration system for years, and the Short Term Accommodation Association agrees with the need for a national administered registration scheme.

Allowing short-term lets to proliferate without regulation is a potential challenge to growth. That may sound counterintuitive, but the variety of accommodation options in the tourism industry means that they are not on a level playing field, as we have discussed. Hotels, traditional bed and breakfasts, and hostels have to abide by safety regulations, which short-term lets, for example, simply do not.

Where we do not lack statistics, though, is in housing need. The latest homelessness figures show the highest ever number of families in temporary accommodation in London: 65,280. In March this year, over 3,000 households were in temporary accommodation in Westminster alone. I am sure that that is borne out in the inboxes of all Members here.

Every day I hear from a new family struggling to stay on an even keel after they have had to move to temporary accommodation away from school and their support networks. Just this week, I heard from a mother who has been moved to Dagenham, over 12 miles from her daughter's school, where she also works as a teaching assistant. She is realistic about how long they are likely to be in temporary accommodation and knows the state of the London private rented market, so to prevent her son from having to commute for four hours a day and to try to make sure that he has friends locally, she would like to move him to a school in Dagenham, but without

childcare support that means giving up her job. Families across London and across the country have to make that kind of decision every day, and it is not good enough. It is creating incredible pressure on our wider system and local authority finances due to the rising costs of supporting households in temporary accommodation—London councils estimate the cost to be £90 million every month—and it is all because there are simply not enough affordable homes for people.

Many of these pressures are directly attributable to the failures of the last 14 years, whether it is austerity eating into the resilience of our public services or the failure to reform the planning system to give local places more control over what is happening in their communities. In government, Labour banned the long-term use of bed and breakfasts for homeless provision, and between 2005 and 2010 the number of households in temporary accommodation halved. The national affordable homes programme got Britain building between 2008 and 2011, and the Mayor of London has started building the highest number of council homes since the 1970s. Even in opposition, Labour MPs such as Karen Buck, the former Member for Westminster North—parts of which are now in my constituency—improved housing standards through the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018.

The proliferation of short-term lets of whole homes is making the availability of private rented homes much worse. Of course, London is a proudly international city, and we need to make sure that flexible accommodation options are available for visitors, but we will remain a thriving international city only if we ensure that sufficient housing is available for Londoners. Whole homes rented out consistently as short-term lets—again, I am not talking about residents who go on holiday and list their homes while they are away—are making it much more difficult for communities to stick together.

I was contacted by a constituent, Jayne, who summarised the situation well when she wrote that

“when I first moved here twenty-five years ago, I had neighbours. Now I am concerned about the security of our building because of the constant turnover of strangers”.

In strong communities, such as the ones that we all represent and the neighbourhoods of the Cities of London and Westminster, neighbours are the ones who watch our kids when we go for a job interview and who help us to book a GP appointment. It is these communities that are at risk if we do not take action now to regulate short-term lets. As a proud Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament, I believe that the answer lies in community power, creating local assets and businesses that are owned—in the real sense of the word—by the people who use and rely on them. What would it look like if, instead of a tourism sector that stretches the resilience of communities, we built one that created opportunities?

As well as hollowing out communities, there are environmental challenges in the growth of short-term lets in the Cities of London and Westminster. Waste management and noise are consistent issues. There is almost no way for councils to enforce against them, not least because they do not have access to the resources to do that, so any policy on enforcement action comes at the cost of council tax payers, rather than those creating the problems in the first instance. That is one of the consequences of an under-regulated market.

Local authority environmental services teams are working tirelessly on these issues, but they can enforce against only those they actually catch red-handed in breach of the rules. That makes it very challenging for short-term lets, as the visitor is gone in a matter of days, and it is difficult to establish a responsible and accountable person for those listings. That is why a registration scheme needs to ensure that there is not only a unique property reference number, but a single point of contact responsible for the property. Frequently, the noise from short-term let flats is intolerably loud at very unsocial hours and unbearable for long-term residents, and it should be avoidable.

The lack of clear and consistent regulation means that enforcement capability sits with organisations and individuals who are not incentivised to enforce, while those who want to enforce are often those without the resources. A private landlord whose tenant is using their property as a short-term let is not incentivised to enforce against a breach of lease—although they might choose to—unless it is causing them any direct inconvenience. They would rather avoid reletting the property. The same goes for freeholders whose leaseholders are sub-letting on a short-term basis, whereas resident management organisations and the council, which of course want to enforce wherever possible, lack either the resources or legal recourse.

However, there are solutions. I believe that we must create a compulsory registration scheme that captures each individual property, using a unique property reference number; ensure that platforms are sharing data, as part of that scheme, on the number of nights for which each property, identified by its unique property reference number, is listed on their sites; ensure that the registration fee is reasonable and proportionate so as not to drive out the small or individual hosts in the market; ensure that where whole-home accommodation is consistently being let out on a short-term basis, there are in place commercial measures, including a named, verified and accountable individual, gas safety certificates, commercial waste contracts where necessary, and appropriate insurance; and give local authorities the power to prosecute those accountable individuals for antisocial and illegal activity, such as fly-tipping. I simply do not believe that that would be overly onerous.

Proposals to manage short-term lets through the planning system are welcome in theory, but the proposals by the previous Government were not suitable for this context. These proposals were a new use class and associated permitted development rights. A new use class for short-term lets not used as a sole or main home is not problematic in theory. The issue comes with the proposal to automatically reclassify existing dedicated short-term lets into this use class without planning permission. This, as the Local Government Association has pointed out, would be at odds with the premise and purpose of creating a new use class for short-term lets, and would give local authorities no say in their location, size and quality.

There are practical solutions to all these challenges. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister, when she, along with colleagues from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, considers this issue, to ensure that there is a robust national registration scheme, with data input from the platforms, as I mentioned, and that applications for short-term lets that exceed 90 days per year are dealt

with under the normal planning application process for a change of use, rather than our automatically entrenching the current unsustainable situation. Local authorities must have enough resources—probably from revenue raised from the registration scheme—to enforce the rules.

Those suggestions learn the lessons of attempts to regulate short-term lets in other major cities, where they have benefited from the data and information available. I firmly believe that we should use all the powers at our disposal to address the housing crisis. Although I know that dealing with short-term lets is just a small part of solving the problem in places such as mine, in the Cities of London and Westminster, it could improve people's lives, strengthen our communities and at least ease the desperate need for housing in the private rented sector, so today I urge the Minister to prioritise this. I would be grateful if she outlined a timeline for Government action on bringing forward a national registration scheme and considering and consulting on the future regulation of short-term lets through the planning system.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Carolyn Harris (in the Chair): I remind Members that anyone wishing to speak needs to bob. I have to impose a four-minute time limit from the outset, as this debate is oversubscribed. You can all sit down until I have finished. I call Anna Sabine.

1.48 pm

Anna Sabine (Frome and East Somerset) (LD): In my fairly rural constituency, many owners of short-term lets have been in touch with me this week because they are worried that this debate will focus particularly on the challenges in major cities and tourist towns and not take into account local rural economies that often rely on some element of short-term lets to survive. I should say that many of the people who have contacted me are also very happy to see the sector further regulated, so they are not anti that. Does the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake) agree that there is a balance to be struck between regulating short-term lets and supporting the importance of what they bring, particularly to rural economies?

1.49 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is always a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mrs Harris. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake) on an outstanding presentation of all the issues that we have been wrestling with for so long. I spent six months on the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill fighting for the licensing of short-term holiday lets. We only managed to achieve a registration scheme and a consultation on a change in use class. As my hon. Friend said, that would grandfather the rights of existing short-term holiday lets, locking in the inequity that we already see in our communities.

I have around 2,000 short-term holiday lets in my own constituency and I know the challenges that they bring as housing demand outstrips supply. As a result we have a serious housing crisis, not least where we have clusters and people lack access particularly to family homes. Short-term holiday lets break up communities and distort the normal community life that we have come to expect.

[*Rachael Maskell*]

We need a Bill—I have one I prepared earlier, which I presented to the House in 2022; I believe it still stands today. I will talk the Minister through my Bill, which has a licensing scheme rather than a registration scheme for the conversion of domestic properties into short-term holiday lets in exchange for a fee, differentiated of course if somebody lets out a single room in their own property.

Local authorities could issue fines or remove licences if conduct was criminal or if antisocial behaviour continued in the home. Also, a licensing scheme would ensure proper standards in the homes, with environmental controls, health and safety standards and electric and gas checks. That would bring short-term lets level with the traditional B&B sector so that there was no inequality there. It would also restrict the number of days that they can operate. Local authorities would be able to determine the standards within which they practised, giving them control in local communities.

The Bill was drawn from best practice across the world where schemes have already been tried, tested and tweaked, so we know that it would operate well. It would improve safety, the environment and communities. The licence would be renewed every three years to balance the administrative burdens with the need for inspection. It would be self-funding, with no extra cost to local authorities. Every short-term holiday let would have a named person who could be contacted and who would be liable for the management of the property. Also, the licence would say how many people could stay at the property so that there was not an overcrowding problem.

We know that as Friday night comes and the wheelie trolleys go down the streets, neighbourhoods are in fear because they know the parties are about to arrive. Well, we can get on top of that and also the criminality. These places have been used as pop-up brothels, for child exploitation and as drug dens. By ensuring that a proper scheme was in place, we could get on top of that, too. It would help the industry, landlords, visitors, and most of all communities and would regenerate our housing for the purpose for which it was built.

1.53 pm

Richard Foord (Honiton and Sidmouth) (LD): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Mrs Harris. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake) on calling this debate. Many of us in this House were eager to have it, so we are glad that she secured it. I am also glad that she referred to examples of short-term lets from beyond her constituency of Cities of London and Westminster because it would be a real error to see short-term lets only from the perspective of the sorts of properties that are available in the area outside this Palace in which we speak today.

I urge the Minister and civil servants who might be listening not to draw entirely on examples of the challenges that London boroughs experience around short-term lets. They would be welcome to come at any time to Devon and the Honiton and Sidmouth constituency that I represent to see the fantastic tourist businesses that exist before they consider regulation of the sector.

We must beware of having a one-size-fits-all policy that might fit very well here in London but that does not fit nearly so well in our rural areas and coastal towns and villages, which are quite depopulated. It was only yesterday that there was a debate in this Chamber on the depopulation of rural areas, and such depopulation is what is at stake here.

We know from the Professional Association of Self Caterers UK that traditional self-catering businesses could be subject to some of the new rules that are being introduced after the spring Budget, which was introduced by the right hon. Member for Godalming and Ash (Jeremy Hunt) when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer. The right hon. Member talked about stripping away parts of the furnished holiday let regulation system to create what he thought would be a level playing field. However, I can assure you, Ms Harris, and others that there will not be a level playing field, because there is no level playing field between those traditional holiday lets—the self-catering businesses that are already so excellent—and some of the fly-by-night Airbnb properties that are put on the market for overnight rent but taken off long-term lets. They are neither available to long-term renters nor being marketed to the same standards that we have come to expect of traditional self-catering properties.

This issue is crucial for the economy of Devon. I have with me a report from the Devon Housing Commission, which has been examining the shortage of housing stock in the county. It says that the “traditional” holiday let sector is at risk of losing £779 million of income. That sector encompasses not just those people who let their farmsteads or perhaps their heritage houses; it also includes the food and drink sector and the entertainment and tourist sectors, which depend on holiday makers.

The Liberal Democrats welcome the proposal for a registration scheme and the efforts to try to make more housing available for those seeking long-term lets. However, we also need to be careful. In particular, I urge that we pause the furnished holiday let regime that the former Chancellor of the Exchequer introduced in the spring.

1.57 pm

Lizzi Collinge (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab): It is a pleasure, Mrs Harris, to serve under your chairship.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake) for securing this debate. My constituency is very different from hers, but they are both worthy of consideration when discussing short-term lets. Morecambe and Lunesdale is a constituency with a thriving urban and rural tourism economy. From the stunning landscapes of the Lune valley to the beautiful coastlines of Morecambe Bay to the wild beauty of the Yorkshire Dales National Park, we are blessed with an array of attractions.

Visitors to our constituency contribute to the local economy, support small businesses, and help to maintain the vitality of our towns and villages. Short-term lets, such as holiday rentals, play an important role in enabling this tourism and provide much-needed accommodation options. They also support local businesses, such as shops, restaurants and activity providers.

However, although we recognise that contribution, we must also acknowledge that the rapid growth in this sector is causing unintended and harmful consequences.

Residents in areas such as Silverdale, Arnside, Sedbergh and Dent are seeing the effects of too many properties being taken out of long-term residential use and converted into holiday lets. The balance between supporting tourism and ensuring housing availability for local people is becoming harder to maintain. In Morecambe, we will soon welcome Eden Project Morecambe. As a responsible constituency MP, I am trying to look forward to see what risks, as well as benefits, that project might bring. One of the key risks is the potential impact of short-term lets on the local housing market. Already, some of the worst casework in my inbox is due to a shortage of housing.

That is why I believe that a licensing system for short-term lets that is fair, takes a balanced approach and works for both tourists and residents is right. Regulations would ensure that properties met safety standards, were used responsibly and did not unduly harm the local housing market.

I stress that I do not want to limit residents' ability to occasionally rent out a room, or exchange their home in a bid to get an affordable holiday. For Morecambe and Lunesdale, a balanced approach is crucial. Our local economy benefits greatly from tourism, and short-term lets are a key part of that success, but we must ensure that it does not come at the expense of local residents who are struggling to find a home or find stability in their community. Yesterday, I spoke about the number of young people leaving our rural areas, and short-term lets are contributing to the problem of depopulation.

We must look at the broader infrastructure challenges that come with an increase in short-term lets. I know some will say that regulating short-term lets would harm our rural economy, but I disagree: I believe that thoughtful, locally tailored regulation will strengthen it and help the existing businesses that pay business rates and meet safety standards.

Morecambe and Lunesdale is a place where tourism and community life go hand in hand. Short-term lets play a role in supporting that, but they must be properly regulated to ensure that local people are not harmed. Our policy must strike the right balance, and I look forward to working with Members from across the House, the local authority and tourism organisations to ensure that.

2.1 pm

Ms Polly Billington (East Thanet) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mrs Harris. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake) for securing this debate.

My constituency is made up of three towns that symbolise English seaside holidays: for more than two centuries, people of all classes have visited Margate, Broadstairs and Ramsgate to take the fresh sea air and enjoy our marvellous beaches and amazing microclimate. Where and how people stay has changed over the years. As boarding houses, holiday camps and large hotels have declined, short-term holiday lets have opened up the chance for many to take a short trip to the coast; but that is not without its drawbacks for many in our community.

Hotels and places offering bed and breakfast are regulated and licensed, which ensures good standards of safety and environmental health for customers, and means that the services the council needs to provide for

such establishments can be planned for. Appropriate business rates also mean that the services can be provided. None of that happens with unregulated short-term holiday lets, facilitated by platforms optimistically set up as part of the sharing economy. Instead, as the popularity of British holidays and short breaks has risen, not least since the pandemic and Brexit, so have property prices in places such as East Thanet, as people buy homes as a second place for them to stay at weekends and then rent them out when they are not there. Data compiled by VisitEngland suggests that there has been a 75% increase in short-term holiday lets since 2019: more than 2,000 properties are available for short-term let this year.

Helena Dollimore (Hastings and Rye) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend and I both represent beautiful coastal constituencies. Does she agree that we must get the balance right between the contribution that short-term holiday lets make to the tourism and hospitality economies in our constituencies and the need for affordable homes for locals, to address the acute housing crisis that both our constituencies face?

Ms Billington: I could have not said it better myself.

The large increase in short-term holiday lets has left whole streets dark and empty for months on end as the days shorten, with perhaps a small glimmer of light and activity over Christmas and new year. One of my constituents said in an email only today:

"We don't have any neighbours: they are all Airbnbs...Our lives are being hugely impacted by huge parties each weekend!"

The problem affects the community in many ways. How can primary school places be planned for when family homes do not hold families? How can the council prepare for waste collection and disposal from effectively commercial premises when it does not know where they are or when they are occupied? How do the police deal with the increase in antisocial behaviour that follows from the proliferation of party flats when they are not licensed or regulated? How does a whole community deal with spiralling property prices, driven by an increased appetite to make money from homes rather than live in them?

If Members search on Zoopla or Rightmove for rental prices in Thanet, they will find 140 flats and houses available for less than £1,000 a month. Then if they search Airbnb for Margate, Ramsgate, Broadstairs or equivalent places to stay, they will find more than 750 short-term lets next spring for £100 or more a night. There can be no doubt that such a mismatch is helping to drive house price inflation, rent inflation and the shortage of housing availability in Thanet where, during the summer months, a flat can be rented out as a short-term holiday let for potentially three times or more the rent it would fetch as a home for someone.

We are a seaside community made up of holiday resorts. We are proud of our heritage and know that it will and should be part of our economic future. Yet the beauty and attraction of the place that people come to visit needs to be underpinned by a strong community, with decent services and affordable homes for those who live there all year round. There must be a balance.

I am confident in my advocacy for regulation, not just because of the concerns raised by residents but because voices within the industry in my community

[Ms Billington]

also see the impact of rising house prices and stretched public services on their families and employees. The Minister should be in no doubt: East Thanet is ready for regulation and licensing to support our holiday industry and our community. I only urge that the package of measures really is designed with communities like ours, not imposed on them. Ideas on how to license, introduce and enforce standards, plan services and facilitate a process that works for those who offer the service, as well as those who use it, should be taken on board from those who are already living with the consequences of an unbridled market with few, if any, checks or balances.

We know we are not alone in Thanet. Many of my colleagues along the Labour Benches also represent coastal communities. This debate shows that the unregulated nature of the market is blighting a host of communities where people rightly go to enjoy themselves and contribute to the local economy. I urge the Minister to consider how the package of powers and tools can support our coastal communities in particular to thrive.

2.6 pm

Joe Powell (Kensington and Bayswater) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake) on securing this debate and giving the subject the attention it deserves. We obviously share a border, but we also share an office in this place that, with its high ceilings and windows, comfortable sofas and views of Whitehall, I am sure would fetch a very high price if it were a short-term let. I hope we can agree that we will not be doing that in our period of sharing an office.

When I was knocking on doors during the general election campaign, the issue of short-term let regulation united constituents in South Kensington, North Kensington, Bayswater and Lancaster Gate. That was due to the current effective free-for-all with weak rules that are barely enforced, leading to issues that had very real and personal consequences for them and their families. It was not just the antisocial behaviour, noise and associated crime, but the violations of building insurance, mansion block rules and tenancy agreements, which had very real impacts on service charges and their day-to-day living in flats. I therefore agree with many of the speakers in the debate that there must be a middle ground where we can find sensible regulation that allows a destination like Kensington and Bayswater to continue to welcome millions of tourists from around the world, but with a system that can also help tackle our housing crisis.

To give hon. Members a sense of the scale of the problem, I share councils—Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster—and it is estimated that more than 5% of properties in both those council areas have been listed as short-term lets. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster said, the latest estimate in Westminster is 13,000. It is therefore important that any proposed changes related to change of use do not lock in those numbers, and that we sequence the reforms correctly.

There are some things that work and I praise the councils that, with limited tools, have been able to take some steps on enforcement, especially in Westminster.

Kensington and Chelsea agreed a deal with Airbnb that would share data around some council blocks, so that leaseholders and council tenants in those blocks who might be in breach of their tenancy could be investigated. However, that also struck me as unfair when we have 40% of our residents in the private rental sector, where there is very little regulation.

As for solutions, I join others in calling for the Government to consider a licensing scheme, while thinking carefully about some of the lessons already learned. For example, the 90-day rule is totally unenforceable. With multiple platforms listing properties, and very small and limited—even non-existent—resources in local authorities to enforce the rule, we must ensure that fees are paid into the system to help cover the enforcement cost for local authorities, so that the cost is proportionate. We must also ensure that each property—not just each host—is registered, because individual properties have different consequences. This is an important part of tackling our housing crisis. I am delighted with the Renters' Rights Bill, introduced yesterday, and I believe that if we also brought in a complementary package of reforms, it could make a real difference for constituencies such as mine.

2.10 pm

Jayne Kirkham (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): This debate was called by a London Member, my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake). I am grateful to her, but I am happy that so many Members from across the country are here too. I wanted to make sure that our voice from Cornwall, where this is a really big issue, was heard very loudly. We have been running a “first homes, not second homes” campaign for a number of years.

Cornwall is the local authority with the largest supply of short-term lets outside London. There are around 24,300 properties in Cornwall, which is up 30% on 2019, while there are about 27,000 houses on the social housing waiting list—hon. Members can see the balance there. Statistics from the council tax base tell us that there are probably about 13,000 second homes registered in Cornwall. That is nearly 5% of the total housing stock, which is nearly five times higher than the average across England. Plus, we have roughly only 10,000 council houses and 22,900 housing association homes in Cornwall. We have 800 families in emergency or temporary accommodation. Lots of families have been evicted under section 21—a situation that will hopefully improve, now that the Bill has been introduced. Businesses struggle to get key workers. The private rented sector has all but collapsed in Cornwall, to be honest.

The taxpayer has lost about £20 million per year, as a result of the loophole allowing second homes to be registered as holiday lets for business purposes: they pay neither council tax nor business rates. During covid, approximately £170 million went to properties that were registered as business lets, with £100 million of that going out of Cornwall, which shows the ownership of the properties.

We have done an awful lot of work on this, and I suggest that the Minister should consider a toolkit of measures to deal with some of the issues. First, lots of people have talked about a licensing scheme obliging owners of short-term lets, including Airbnbs, to register

them for a fee for three years, which seems like a sensible amount of time. We would then know how many there were and where, and could push for fire and safety checks to be mandatory. It would be a similar scheme to the licensing of houses in multiple occupation, which currently only applies to homes registered for five or more people; it would seem sensible to increase the scope of HMO licensing as well.

Secondly, we want the business rates/council tax loophole closed. It should not be possible to pay no council tax or business rates on a property; it is just not fair. Thirdly, Cornwall council has already voted to double the council tax on empty second homes, and has actually asked the Government if it can triple it. Given that the council is Conservative-run, and that this decision was agreed cross-party unanimously, it shows how severe the problem has become in Cornwall. If we were to implement that, every time the council tax was doubled it would raise £25 million.

Finally, we should create a planning use class for short-term or holiday lets, so that homeowners need to actively apply for permission for the change from “lived in” to “holidayed in”—flipping the default that the Conservatives suggested. Those are the four measures I would like to see in the toolkit, which could be given to local authorities or could form part of the devolution package.

2.14 pm

Markus Campbell-Savours (Penrith and Solway) (Lab): My constituency includes parts of the Lake District national park and I have been a councillor for the town of Keswick for a number of years, so this has been a big issue for me. It was interesting to hear my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) talk about the number of holiday lets in her constituency, which I think she said was 2,000. The CA12 postcode, which comprises Keswick and the surrounding villages, has 1,000 holiday lets. The impact on a micro level is part of the issue. There will be people in some councils around the country who will listen to this debate and think, “What are they talking about?”, but others will know exactly what we are talking about and recognise the problems that it is causing for our people.

I have followed this debate for a few years, and I appreciate the toolkit approach, but my worry is that that is throwing everything at it. We have to remember that some of our tourism economies are now quite reliant on this accommodation. We have even seen some traditional holiday accommodation, such as bed and breakfasts and guest houses, move away because people prefer self-catering options. For me, the question is how we remove the bubble, which is causing so much harm, without destroying our tourism economy. We need to look at the range of options and evaluate them by asking what we would really gain from them and what damage they would cause.

I want to start with tax, which is a funny one. Some people have the idea—I have never bought into it—that if we throw taxes at people, eventually there will be a new equilibrium and all of a sudden we will hit a sweet spot where we have the right number of holiday lets and everyone is happy. Even if we were to achieve that in the Cities of London and Westminster or in Cornwall, it might not work in my area. I do not believe the tax

system is designed in a way that will allow us to manage this problem. I appreciate the arguments about fairness and what is just, and whether it is right that, every time a property turns from a residential property to a holiday let property, the tax burden of the parish precept has to be put on the neighbours, because of the way that calculation is done. I get that parts of the tax system are unfair, but I still do not think it is the answer to our problem.

There is also the registration system. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake) for bringing this issue to Westminster Hall. I used to be a Labour activist in her constituency and I remember it being talked about on the doorstep, but Westminster has a key thing that some other areas do not: the 90-day rule. It also has many people living in leasehold properties who are forbidden by their leases from offering short-term lets. The real issue in Westminster is the cat-and-mouse game whereby the leasehold block management companies chase people to try to prove that photographs on Airbnb are of the inside of their flat. Neighbours make complaints, but often enforcement is not possible. I can see the power of a registration scheme for enforcement by those companies and by councils. We have seen this problem on the Churchill Gardens estate, with chocolates on the pillows—the works.

I can see why a registration system would work in London, but there is a big flaw in it. In my area, it would only allow us to do one thing: count how many short-term lets there are. I do not need to count them to know the damage they are causing. What we really need is caps. Some people say, “Well, use the planning option,” but that would see permission given in perpetuity under permitted development rights. It would be a disaster for my community if the 1,000 holiday lets were made permanent in that way.

My hon. Friend the Member for York Central suggested a licensing scheme, and I think that is the way forward. That would allow us to build in caps. Importantly, whereas the planning system is under-resourced, does not have the funds and is front-loaded because people only pay for planning applications at the beginning, under a licensing scheme, owners would have to pay on an annual basis.

2.18 pm

Andrew George (St Ives) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake). I think I got the name of her constituency right; I come from Cornwall, so I do not know exactly how the boundaries cut in this part of the world. In my part of the world, as the hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth (Jayne Kirkham) explained, hundreds of families are still being evicted to make way for yet more holiday lets, because that is the way the tax system and what I will call the economic advantage system work in a place like ours. I will come to the tax system, which the hon. Member for Penrith and Solway (Markus Campbell-Savours) referred to.

We need to address issues of social justice. As I said earlier, this not the politics of envy; it is the politics of justice. I know that we have all been heavily lobbied by those who are concerned about changes in the rules for furnished holiday lets, but we are not being lobbied by

[Andrew George]

the people who are being made homeless as a result of the evictions that are taking place to create even more of those holiday lets.

The late, great Paul Flynn used to say that it is the role of a Member of Parliament to seek out the silent voices, and I believe that is what we should be doing. We should be looking at the issues of social justice and not only listening to the loudest voices in the room. We also need to distinguish between properties that are given specific planning permission that provides for holiday lettings with restricted occupancy and those that would otherwise be used, or have been used, for permanent occupancy. That point has been addressed in the debate already, but I wanted to emphasise it.

I am very much in support of carrying on in the direction of a registration scheme. I also support the hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth on widening the requirements for a C5 change of use class order so that specific planning permission is required for any non-permanent occupancy of a property, not just holiday lets. That is really important, because otherwise we will have all sorts of flipping going on in the system.

The problem we have is that since the Conservative Government introduced the opportunity for second home owners to flip them in order to apply for business rates, and then apply for small business rates relief and pay nothing at all, billions of pounds have gone into the pockets of very wealthy property investors when we should be spending that money for local people. It is simply unfair that the poor are penalised through council tax for allegedly underusing their council house, but the rich are being rewarded for underusing their property investment vehicle. I would be surprised if a Government who say that those with the broadest shoulders should bear the greatest burden do not address that issue or the issue of social justice. In Cornwall, £500 million of taxpayers' money has gone into the pockets of holiday home owners since 2012, and that is simply unacceptable. I hope that we can address those issues by having not only a stronger planning policy but justice in the tax system.

2.22 pm

Mr Joshua Reynolds (Maidenhead) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Ms Harris. I thank the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake) for securing this important debate, and I also thank her for making the distinction between homeowners who sometimes rent out their property when they are on holiday and the commercialised industry that has developed. There is a clear distinction between the two, and I thank her for raising it.

Short-term holiday lets have a role to play in boosting the local economy in holiday and city destinations, as has been mentioned by Members already. Until recently, I was the vice-chair of the VisitWindsor partnership, and I saw for myself the benefits that short-term holiday lets can bring to a town, particularly during events such as the funeral of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the coronation of King Charles III.

In the 19th century, my constituency of Maidenhead, aided by the advent of the railways, became a popular holiday destination and was known as the jewel of the Thames. Today, it is not necessarily the go-to place for a

weekend away, but we still have a number of short-term lets, which are not for holidays but instead support UK and global headquarters based in the town. They provide flexible accommodation for employees and visitors who come to the constituency, spend a few nights in a short-term holiday let and use our local facilities, such as the fantastic restaurants and businesses that we have. That is really welcome, but there is too much of a good thing.

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead council is one of many up and down the country that is facing rising housing costs, as it is battling to build both affordable housing, and temporary accommodation for people who find themselves homeless—some of whom have been evicted from properties that have made their way to being short-term holiday lets, as my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Andrew George) discussed. Some people are being forced to uproot their lives, take their children out of school and give up their jobs to move elsewhere in the country. It is devastating for everyone involved.

We have heard how councils could play a role in what the future looks like, but we have seen local authorities being asked to do more and more with less and less, which has plunged some into financial crisis. In rural areas, the growth of short-term holiday lets is undermining our communities. Key local services such as bus routes, shops and post offices are closing down. The hon. Member for East Thanet (Ms Billington) mentioned being told, “We don't have any neighbours.” No Member can fail to be moved by that statement. When we hear something like that, I think everyone is clear that something needs to change.

The Liberal Democrats have long argued for local authorities to be given more powers, backed up by proper funding, to control second homes and short-term holiday lets in their area. We would allow local authorities to increase council tax by up to 500% where a home is bought as a second home, and bring in a stamp duty surcharge for overseas residents purchasing properties. In that way, owners who profit handsomely from the tourism business would be forced to pay back into their local communities.

During consideration of the Renters (Reform) Bill, the Liberal Democrats argued for a six-month moratorium on the marketing of a property as a holiday let if it had been repossessed by the landlord on no-fault grounds. Local authorities are key to this, because they know what is right for their area. The hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Lizzi Collinge) spoke earlier about a thoughtful, tailored, local approach, which we would welcome.

We are calling for a separate planning class for short-term holiday lets, requiring owners to apply for a change of use and allowing local authorities to set their own numbers.

Noah Law: Does the hon. Member agree that for furnished holiday lets that are subject to planning restrictions, it should be possible to register a change of use given the impending legislative changes?

Mr Reynolds: I thank the hon. Member for that intervention. We need to make sure that what we do is backed up by funding so that local authorities are able to enforce the changes that are needed. I would not want to see local authorities having changes forced

upon them without the finances and manpower to carry them out. We have seen so many cases recently where local authorities have a duty to do something but not the finance or manpower to do it.

We recognise that local authority housing teams have been hollowed out. Local authorities need the support to be able to enforce whatever decisions are made. I am hopeful that the Minister can tell us the Government's thoughts about that. I think asking local authorities to put time and work into these changes, with the necessary finance and manpower, will be a worthwhile investment, because it is about time we turned the tide that we have seen engulfing our communities for so long.

I repeat that we need to draw a distinction with respect to people who have gone about this business in good faith. We do not want to penalise them, or people who have inherited a property and become second home owners by default. We all know that short-term holiday lets are growing in an uncontrollable manner. That is the thing that we really need to stop, especially where big business is involved, because it can rip out the heart of our communities. Our proposals would give control back to local authorities and communities, because that is where, as Liberal Democrats, we always believe that power should lie.

2.29 pm

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mrs Harris. I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake). It is good to see her following in the footsteps of her predecessor, who secured a number of debates and made many contributions on the impact this issue has on that constituency and others. May I also commend the work that London councils have done on behalf of local authorities in the capital to highlight the impact of this issue and bring forward constructive policy suggestions?

There is a high degree of commitment to cross-party working on this issue. As we have heard, it has an impact on constituencies across the country, not just here in the capital, and it was much debated in the last Parliament, particularly during the era of the covid pandemic. We saw many of our constituents who wished to go on holiday or needed to travel for work unable to use hotels, and they therefore made the best possible use of providers such as Airbnb to secure accommodation that met the covid regulations in place at the time.

Many of us worked on the assumption that post-covid there would be a return to the market as we had seen it before, which clearly has not been the case. At the same time, longer-term changes, driven partly by Government but also by wider issues in the market, have seen reducing profit margins for those in the buy-to-let market and people facing higher costs for the standards of the buildings that they maintain. They have also seen the introduction of significantly increased checks on tenants as a result of the need to crack down on unlawful lettings and market changes more generally, as the big players such as Airbnb and Booking.com have sought to create a greater supply of this type of accommodation for commercial reasons.

Clearly, the regulations introduced in 2015—particularly in the capital, with the 90-day limit and the requirement that somebody had to be paying residential council tax on accommodation for it to be let, as well as ensuring

that the hon. Member for Kensington and Bayswater (Joe Powell) would not be able to let out his parliamentary office should he wish to do so—are examples of measures taken by Government with a view to ensuring that this market played a positive role in local communities. However, as has been highlighted by many Members, significant issues clearly remain despite those measures and that high degree of cross-party consensus.

As with many things, I put it to the Minister that there will be an opportunity in the Government's review of the planning system to consider points about the use classes that would apply to property, in particular to introduce requirements around planning consent being sought for those properties that could create a nuisance because of their proximity to other types of residential development, and to ensure that powers that may be enforced are available to local authorities through the planning system.

Markus Campbell-Savours: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that planning authorities can barely wash their own faces, let alone take over the enforcement of thousands of holiday lets? Does he not think that that could be a huge challenge, which could perhaps be better funded through taking money directly from the holiday let operators?

David Simmonds: I started my political career as the chairman of a planning committee in London, and I am very aware of the challenges faced by planning authorities—not just in the capital, but elsewhere.

The design of the system around enforcement is clearly intended to ensure that it is financially self-sustaining; we have seen some examples of that with local authorities, including those that have entered into contracts with the private sector specifically to ensure higher levels of enforcement funded by fines and charges levied against those abusing the system. Not all local authorities have reached the stage where they are prepared to undertake that work, but clearly both the available market in providers and the powers and freedoms that local authorities have enable them to do that if they feel that it is an appropriate and proportionate solution to the level of challenges and concerns that they face in their local community.

We know that the current situation reflects a long-standing determination on the part of Governments of all parties to ensure that there is an increase in the accommodation available. Measures such as Rent a Room tax relief, which was introduced many years ago, were intended to ensure that there was a greater supply of flexible accommodation, so we need to ensure that we strike the right balance in this market.

I finish with some observations about the context of the housing market in which this debate is taking place. The UK has the most intensively used housing stock of any major developed country in the world. We have very few derelict or empty properties, so given the level of demand in comparison with other major economies, it is clearly important that we ensure as far as possible that accommodation is available to those who need it.

An element of that will be short-term lets, which play an important role in the economy, but with many people looking to secure longer-term and permanent housing that clearly needs to be a high priority. In taking forward their planning reforms, I urge the Government to consider

[David Simmonds]

the fact that there are already an additional 1.4 million new homes in England with planning consent already granted by our local authorities. Priority should be given to ensuring that those consents are fulfilled and those homes are built, rather than prioritising, for example, the deregulation of the green belt.

I also want to bring something else to the attention of those present. In some respects the previous Government's record deserves criticism, but on measures for net additional dwellings and new homes per calendar year—both major measures on housebuilding—development under the previous Government hit record levels; in fact, in recent years it hit the long-term record for as long as the statistics have been gathered. Indeed, during the last Parliament, a net additional 1 million new homes were built in England alone, in fulfilment of the manifesto commitment.

Many hon. Members have highlighted lots of issues that need to be dealt with effectively. I would encourage the Government to consider how, through their review of the planning system, those issues can effectively be brought forward. They should also consider how existing measures that have been highlighted, such as enforcement powers and the means of recouping costs, which are already available and used widely by some local authorities, could be put into action more swiftly.

2.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rushanara Ali): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Harris. I start off by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Rachel Blake) on securing today's important debate and highlighting the concerns of her constituency. I have an interest to declare: she is one of my oldest friends. I am proud to see her in her place, making her first speech in Westminster Hall.

I am grateful to Members from across the House for their contributions. They have raised extremely important issues and concerns about the impact of short-term lets on their constituencies. They have highlighted the serious challenges that such lets pose in a diverse range of constituencies, in cities such as London and in rural and coastal communities. They have also highlighted the need for action, but in a way that is appropriate for the different kinds of areas and challenges they face.

Contributions have also highlighted a wider point about housing and housing affordability, a major issue for our country. I hope this debate provides an opportunity for us as a new Government to take on board the many ideas, thoughts and insights that colleagues have shared. If we want to get this agenda right, it is important for us to have an ongoing dialogue.

The key concerns highlighted are around safety, waste management, antisocial behaviour, cost of housing and communities being displaced. That should not take away from the fact that we all recognise the important contribution that short-term lets can make to local economies, but they have to be done in a way that is appropriate and does not cause harm in local communities. The pressures cannot be properly understood without taking into account the impacts of such issues.

I recognise the frustrations that many communities feel, where there is an excessive concentration of the properties under focus and particularly in places where there is an acute lack of affordable housing for local people. I also recognise that short-term lets can cause other concerns for local people, including the hollowing out of communities and antisocial behaviour.

Andrew George: The Minister mentioned the contribution that self-catering short-term lets make to local economies. Hotels, purpose-built short-term chalets and so on also make an important contribution to local economies and often operate at a disadvantage relative to the many individual short-term lets that are operating below the VAT threshold and that in other respects are avoiding making their contribution to the local community or, indeed, national taxation.

Rushanara Ali: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point. This is why this debate is so important: we must make sure that we address the issues and challenges being raised. The new Government are taking stock and considering a full suite of options for the regulation of short-term lets before we make policy decisions, but I have heard clearly from hon. Members about the issues and challenges they face in their constituencies. We need to ensure that the response is proportionate and appropriate, reflects the different kinds of issues affecting different constituencies, and avoids unintended consequences. The actions we take must properly address those issues.

In England, the average house price is more than eight times annual earnings, and affordability issues are even more acute in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster. The average monthly private rent in London increased by 9.7% last year, and is more than one and a half times higher than the average monthly rent in England. Although it is true that London remains one of the country's least affordable areas, we are in the middle of a housing crisis right across the country. Years of low house building across all tenures, combined with rising interest rates, have resulted in too few genuinely affordable homes. The issue has been exacerbated in London, coastal towns in places such as Cornwall and areas such as the Lake district by the proliferation of short-term lets and second homes, as hon. Members have highlighted. That is why we want to go further by giving local authorities tools to tackle short-term lets where they are an issue.

The lack of robust data about short-term lets, which my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster mentioned, means that local areas often struggle to define the true extent of the problem and are unable to effectively manage the impacts. Although this data is not perfect, in 2022 a call for evidence suggested that there are about 257,000 short-term lets in England, about 43,400 of which are in London. I know my hon. Friend is keen to have better data about short-term lets in her constituency, and I am happy to hear that she and a number of other hon. Members support the short-term lets regulation scheme. We are committed to introducing the register, which will be an essential tool in enabling local authorities and central Government to access relevant data on short-term lets.

Markus Campbell-Savours: Does my hon. Friend recognise the issues with the registration scheme, which the previous Government described in their consultation

as “light touch”? It will not meet the needs of areas such as mine, where we do not have the additional legal powers available in places such as London.

Rushanara Ali: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. It is important that we look at what can be done as part of that exercise. He will appreciate the point I made about the new Government needing to take stock of what is working, where the good examples are and what we can draw on. The register is part of that, and I look forward to ensuring that colleagues’ insights and contributions are taken into account.

Rachael Maskell: Will my hon. Friend take a look at my Bill, which proposes a licensing scheme but allows local authorities to determine some of the parameters necessary to control the number of short-term lets in their local area, including control zones, so that we do not see a real expansion of such lets in precious places such as York?

Rushanara Ali: I thank my hon. Friend for the offer on the Bill that she prepared earlier, and I know that officials listening to this debate will consider the range of suggestions and proposals that colleagues are making today.

We know that many local authorities are eager for the registration scheme to be operational as soon as possible. We share this view and officials are currently working at pace to operationalise the scheme. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is now in the initial phase of a digital development process for the register, which will allow us to test and refine the possible options for design and delivery of the scheme. We will factor into that process the points made today and will update the House in due course.

As hon. Members have highlighted, London is unique in England in having certain powers regarding short-term lets. Since 2015, primary legislation has provided that homes in London that are liable for council tax may be let for temporary sleeping accommodation for up to 90 nights in a calendar year. Planning permission is required to let for more than that. However, as has already been pointed out today, in practice local authorities in London report that this limit is difficult to apply and enforce, due to a lack of data on addresses, ownership and the number of nights that properties are let for, and because of limited enforcement capacity. Points were well made in this debate about other parts of the country that do not have the London scheme.

We recognise that more needs to be done to ensure that authorities in London have the tools they need to enforce the limit. As we design the short-term lets register and consider future policy, we will keep in mind the uniqueness of each area of our country and in particular the interactions with the existing legislation that applies to London.

I recognise that the current taxation of short-term lets can be seen to incentivise such use. The Government have confirmed that we will abolish the furnished holiday lettings tax regime from April 2025, which will remove the tax advantages that landlords offering short-term holiday lets have over those providing standard residential properties.

At the end of July, the Government took concrete steps to abolish the regime by publishing draft legislation, which includes transitional arrangements to help landlords

to adjust to the change. Councils will also be able to charge a council tax premium of up to 100% on second homes from April 2025. It is for councils themselves to decide whether to charge such a premium in their area.

Jayne Kirkham: I have just one small point to make about the furnished holiday letting scheme. There are some properties in Cornwall for which there are planning restrictions that say they can only be holiday lets and nothing else can be done with the property, because it may be on the same premises as the first property. I just want the Government to be aware of that when the regulations are developed.

Rushanara Ali: I thank my hon. Friend for her contribution.

Where a short-term let does not meet the relevant lettings criteria, it will usually be considered a second home and will be liable for council tax, including the council tax premium where councils have introduced it. However, we recognise that this may not go far enough towards ensuring that all short-term lets are properly contributing to the local tax system, as the premium will not impact those short-term lets that are eligible for business rates. We will continue to keep the tax treatment of short-term lets under review and will consider what more is needed to achieve our aims.

Short-term lets are just a part of the housing challenge in our country, which is why we are determined to address the issue of affordability and to do what is necessary to get Britain building again.

Andrew George: I thank the Minister for giving way one more time. On the point that the hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth (Jayne Kirkham) made earlier about small business rate relief, could the Minister please make sure that some very strong representations are made by her Department to the Treasury with regard to this issue, because the system is being abused at present? When it was first introduced, it was intended to protect village shops and similar businesses; it was not intended to feather-bed property investors.

Rushanara Ali: Again, those are really important points that will need to be factored in as we develop these policies. The hon. Member will appreciate that I cannot make commitments today, but we are at the beginning of this Government. We are very keen to make sure we get the policies right. I thank him for the intervention.

Richard Foord: The Minister makes a good point about how she and the Government are setting out on a new term and looking at these things for the first time. But the furnished holiday letting regime is set to change in April 2025, so will she consider a pause and looking at that again, given that there has not been any assessment by the Office for Budget Responsibility of what effect it might have?

Rushanara Ali: I am going to make some progress, but perhaps I can write to the hon. Gentleman on his specific point.

I return to the point about short-term lets and the wider housing challenge. Through decisive action, this Government will reform the planning system, because we need to increase the building supply. We have our

[Rushanara Ali]

commitment to building 1.5 million homes over the next five years. We will deliver the biggest boost to affordable and social housing in a generation and establishing a generation of new towns. By doing that, we are improving security for millions of people and unlocking essential economic growth—the growth the country needs. The chronic shortage that the country is facing means that owning a home is a distant reality for many. We are committed to achieving a more balanced distribution of homes by directing them to where they are most required, in areas where they are not affordable. Increased supply will help to moderate house prices over the long term, provide for population growth, and improve quality and choice.

We have introduced the Renters Rights' Bill, which will end no-fault evictions, and we will lay legislation to further reform the leasehold system. We will open up the dream of home ownership to more people by introducing a permanent, comprehensive mortgage guarantee, and give first-time buyers their first chance to buy new homes. We will publish a long-term housing strategy, which will set out our vision for a housing market that works for all and provides long-term certainty for the market.

In closing, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster for securing this important debate and for her excellent contribution. I thank hon. Members for their contributions on this issue and assure them that we are very much aware of their concerns. We cannot let short-term lets undermine the availability of affordable housing for people to buy and rent. What is more, we are committed to rebuilding our country by taking the steps needed to fix the foundations of the economy and to ensure that everyone has a place to call home. This agenda is really important. It is vital that we respond appropriately, taking into account the insights that many Members have shared today, and I look forward to working with colleagues across parties. I again congratulate my hon. Friend the Member on securing this very important debate.

2.53 pm

Rachel Blake: It has been a real honour to hear the stories of different places across our country. It has been a real privilege to serve under your chairship, Mrs Harris; to be joined by my immediate neighbour and very old friend the Minister, who represents Bethnal

Green and Stepney, and by other immediate neighbours, my hon. Friends the Members for Kensington and Bayswater (Joe Powell) and for Vauxhall and Camberwell Green (Florence Eshalomi); and to hear contributions from Members who represent Devon, Kent, Lancashire, Cornwall, Leicestershire, Yorkshire, Sussex and Cumbria. We have been transported to the beautiful landscapes of Morecambe and the lakes, but we have also heard about some of the damage that short-term lets are doing to our communities and how challenging it is to take the action that we need.

I have particularly reflected on the following themes: the risks of depopulation and badly managed tourism, what is happening to the market and the challenges of enforcement in such a complex environment. This debate has clarified how important a localist, devolved approach will be. We have heard compelling and thoughtful contributions on the differences between the self-catered holiday let sector and traditional bed and breakfasts and hostels, and the risks there are to depopulation and otherwise thriving tourism industries if we get this wrong. We heard about the scale of the market impact, properties where rents could be as much as three times lower than the income from short-term lets, and just what that is doing to distort local housing markets.

I am struck by the challenge of effective enforcement and the fact that we have such a complex environment in which private landlords are unable to take action on their tenants. The urgent need for leasehold reform means we can get clarity and ensure we take action by delivering on the Renters' Rights Bill. I am heartened that we can move forward on this issue. Hearing the Government's commitment to make progress with a registration scheme is encouraging.

We need to think more about a licensing scheme. I shared some details about a unique property reference number and the importance of making sure that we have data available. I also welcome the idea of a toolkit. I foresee an opportunity with the devolution Bill and the publication of the national planning policy framework to make real progress on this issue to protect all our communities and contribute to tackling the long-term homelessness crisis in this country.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the regulation of short-term lets.

2.56 pm

Sitting suspended.

New Housing: Environmental Standards

[GRAHAM STRINGER *in the Chair*]

3 pm

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): I remind hon. Members to bob if they wish to speak so that I can see who wants to speak. Some people have written in—I have a list here. Please be patient if I get names wrong, because everybody's face is new. I will try very hard to get it right.

Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): I beg to move,

That this House has considered environmental standards for new housing.

I thank the Minister and all colleagues here for attending. This is the first time I have led a Westminster Hall debate, so please bear with me if I get the procedures wrong. We have lots of time today, so I welcome interventions and hope we can have a useful debate and conversation on this vital topic.

I want to begin by saying that I recognise that there have been some warm words from the Government on this topic. I look forward to hearing more detail from the Minister today. I called for this debate because, although I have heard one or two warm words in the last two and a bit months, I have not heard any detail. In fact, I have been concerned about hearing nothing specific whatsoever in the Secretary of State's speeches that I have listened to. The Government have made major commitments on building new housing and it is crucial to consider what type of housing, so I wish to start by outlining three reasons why I think this is a really important debate to have.

First, it is absolutely topical. The Government, as we have heard on numerous occasions—indeed, just five minutes ago in the previous debate—have committed to building 1.5 million new houses over the next five years, but what sort of homes will they be? In the Green party we specify that we need to think about the right homes in the right place at the right price. Today I want to talk about what “right homes” means, because it is not just about quantity; it is also about quality and the need to think long term when new homes are built.

The Climate Change Committee did a report on the UK's housing stock in 2019. It estimated that in 2050 80% of houses in this country will be houses that are already built, so we clearly have a massive job to do when we think about environmental standards and retrofitting the buildings that we already have. However, I am concerned to discuss the 20% of houses that will be new, because the worst possible outcome could be that we build lots and lots of new houses but to poor standards, thus requiring the retrofitting of those houses, too, so let us focus on new build homes.

The second reason why the debate is important is the scale of the issue relating to houses. Our built environment controls or influences roughly half of UK environmental impacts. Domestic housing accounted for more than a quarter of energy use in the UK in the last year for which we have statistics. Heating accounts for the largest single share of emissions from buildings. The fabric of buildings is crucial in controlling the impact of the housing and broader building sector on the natural environment and climate.

Thirdly, this topic is crucial because we have a massive win-win-win opportunity here. This is not just about reducing carbon emissions from housing, which is certainly very important and I will come on to that later. It is also about ensuring that new homes are warm, affordable to heat and not mouldy but great for people to live in. Just this week in the Chamber there was a debate about how people can stay warm in winter. We need to make sure that all new homes are built to the highest possible standards so that we do not have people shivering in their homes and choosing between heating and eating. Of course, this is a fantastic opportunity to give the economy a great big boost, creating thousands of high-skilled jobs. If we get this right, it will be a fantastic opportunity for economic renewal. We know that investing up front is much cheaper than having to retrofit later, so let us do this right from the start.

I wrote to the Minister for Housing and Planning before the recess about the timing of the release of the future homes standard, which has been in the works for quite some time now—we were consulting on it back in 2019-20, and again in 2023-24. In his response to me, the Minister said that the Government will release it in due course. If he is able to do so, I would love the Minister to provide some clarification on the timetable for publication of the standard; it is supposed to start implementation next year, which is only three and a half months away, so time is of the essence. Of course, it is vital that the policy is right, and not just fast, but, as we have had so many years to develop it, I would hope that it could be published ASAP.

This is not a new topic. One of the helpful briefings I read in preparation for this debate, from the House of Commons Library, which I recommend to everyone—it produces fantastic materials—reminded me that in 2006, the then Labour Government said that they would amend the building regulations to require all new homes to have net zero carbon emissions by 2016. Of course, that policy was scrapped by the Conservatives in 2015, but we are now eight years on from the point at which Labour previously thought that all new homes should be net zero carbon. This is the moment for the new Labour Government to fulfil that promise and put in place regulations to ensure that ambition will actually come to pass—better late than never.

I will speak today about five key aspects of environmental standards for new housing: maximising energy efficiency; minimising embodied carbon; maximising on-site energy generation, particularly rooftop solar; maximising biodiversity in the construction of new homes; and maximising resilience against things like flooding and overheating, which will become more and more important as time goes by and climate change becomes a reality that hits us ever harder.

The first aspect is maximising energy efficiency. To meet the Government's own carbon targets, almost all buildings will need to fully decarbonise. It is not just me who says that—it was in the Government's heat and buildings strategy back in 2021. That is what the future homes standard was supposed to ensure. However, the version of the future homes standard that is being consulted on is looking at a 75% improvement on 2013 levels by 2030, which is neither good enough nor strong enough. We need to get to all homes being net zero carbon as soon as possible.

[Ellie Chowns]

I do not expect the Government to introduce measures whereby every single building has to be built to that standard in 2025, but the industry needs a glide path. We need the Government to set that strategy to provide a framework within which the industry can sort out supply chain issues, both in terms of materials and, crucially, through upskilling, so that we are building zero carbon houses, not ones that are just a bit more efficient than the previous ones. The previous Conservative Government were very pleased to talk at length—I wanted to say “to bang on”—about the fact that more houses are reaching EPC C standard than 15 years ago, and that is indeed true. However, virtually no houses are reaching EPC A or B; that figure has increased from 1% to 3% of houses over the past 15 years. Almost no new houses are being built to those really high standards, which is what we need. Of course, there are major problems with energy performance certificates and the standards assessment procedure that underpins them—I am not pretending that that does not need review, and I commend the moves that are being made in that direction. However, we need to recognise that, flawed as it might be as a metric, it is telling us something really quite serious and worrying, which is that housing quality is not increasing at anywhere close to the rate that it needs to.

Key to reducing energy demand is fabric-first design. That needs to be absolutely integral to the future homes standard. It is deeply concerning that the previous Government claimed that the 2021 changes to building regulations were sufficient, and refused to tighten them any further. It is utterly wrong-headed. In making buildings more energy-efficient, fabric-first must be central. I would welcome a commitment from the Minister that fabric-first will be core to the future homes standard.

I also ask the Minister to lift the restriction placed by the previous Government on local authorities setting higher standards for house building in their areas. I do not think that local authorities setting piecemeal higher standards is the way we will get to a decarbonised housing sector, but we should not hold them back from going further and faster while we wait for Government to show the necessary leadership on a national level. We have too much piecemeal policy on this, both between local authorities and between the four nations of the UK. We need to ensure that we are united in a race to the top for standards, not a race to the bottom.

Calum Miller (Bicester and Woodstock) (LD): I thank the hon. Lady for securing this debate and the Minister for being here to respond. I second the hon. Lady’s point about the standards set by local authorities. I represent part of West Oxfordshire district council, where the Salt Cross development was brought forth. It was challenged by the developers because the local authority sought to set forth a net zero standard. The developers were unsuccessful in their appeal, but in a very obliging step, the previous Government issued a written ministerial statement in December 2023 clarifying that no local authority could have the power to set net zero standards. Does the hon. Lady agree that it would be very helpful if the Minister confirmed that this Government intend to issue a new written ministerial statement to make it more possible, until such time as we have new standards, for local authorities to pursue net zero targets in their planning permissions?

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): Before I call the hon. Lady to resume her speech, this is probably a good opportunity to remind hon. Members that we are all on a learning curve, and interventions should be short and to the point. We do not have a lot of Members here, so it will not be difficult for you to catch my eye if you want to make a speech yourself.

Ellie Chowns: Thank you, Mr Stringer, and I will compensate by being very brief in my response to the intervention by saying that I agree absolutely.

I have talked about the need to maximise energy efficiency. Let me move on to my second point: the need to minimise embodied carbon. In the future homes standard, we have some discussion of minimising operational carbon emissions. There is concern here not just from me. Back in 2022, in its report on the sustainability of the built environment, the Environmental Audit Committee expressed real concern that

“policy has focused entirely on operational emissions”,

and that it does not require the embodied carbon cost of construction to be assessed or controlled in any way. The Royal Institute of British Architects is deeply concerned about this, as are others.

In their response to the Environmental Audit Committee’s report, the previous Government recognised that embodied carbon can account for a very significant proportion of a building’s whole-life carbon emissions. They agreed that a standardised method was needed, and said that they would consult on embodied carbon. In a consultation from November 2023 to March 2024 on the future homes standard, the Government said that embodied carbon was outside the scope of consultation on the future homes standard, but that they would consult on it separately.

Does the Minister agree that embodied carbon needs to be part of the future homes standard? We cannot talk only about operational and not embodied carbon. It has been left behind—effectively the poor relation—in the need to assess the carbon impact of new house building. This urgently needs to be rectified. I very much look forward to hearing the Minister’s comments and, I hope, assurance that as much attention will be paid to embodied carbon as to operational carbon, because it is so significant in the whole-life carbon costs of any new housing.

I move on to my third point: maximising on-site energy generation. I have brought up this topic—the need to ensure that all new homes have solar panels—once or twice in the House already since I have been here. I would be delighted to be known as Mrs Solar Panel by the end of this Parliament. I would be even more delighted if, by the end of this year, we had the regulations necessary to ensure that every roof of a new home had solar panels on it because, frankly, that is what is colloquially known as a no-brainer.

Solar panels are one of the things that residents brought up with me time and again on the doorstep. Constituents of all sorts of political background and none said to me things like, “Why are we still building houses and not putting solar panels on the roofs?” It is something with which people have a real, visceral connection. They see new houses going up around them that do not have solar panels on the roofs, and they know that we need to sort out energy generation. Let’s

ensure that we maximise use of these wonderful surfaces that are already there. This is a classic example of where it would be much cheaper to put that technology in place at the point of construction, rather than retrofitting it afterwards. I cannot help but conclude that it has not been done so far only because developers are resisting anything that might increase their costs.

Developers are concerned only with the construction costs; we as lawmakers and as a Government should be concerned with the long-term social, public and environmental costs. Of course, this sort of investment pays for itself many times over during the lifetime of the technology. I warmly invite the Minister to confirm that his Government will bring forward measures to put solar panels on roofs as default, either within the future homes standard, the planning and infrastructure Bill or another appropriate legislative mechanism.

My fourth point is about maximising biodiversity. In the words of the 2021 Dasgupta review,

“Our economies, livelihoods and well-being all depend on our most precious asset: Nature.”

This Government have talked a great deal about growth. Unfortunately, the way we currently measure growth does not take account of the costs of the destruction of the natural assets we have. There have been some welcome moves towards recognition of the need to take account of impacts on biodiversity during construction, with the introduction of biodiversity net gain and so on, but so much more could be done. We could specify having bird and bat boxes for the 1.5 million new houses—wouldn't it be wonderful to have 1.5 million new bird and bat boxes for the creatures with whom we share this beautiful natural environment? Ponds are good for drainage and for wildlife. Let us take into account lighting design and how light pollution impacts nature if we are building these 1.5 million new houses. We could specify hedgehog highways—little holes cut in fences so that hedgehogs can get from one garden to the next—as well as bee-friendly plants, green roofs and walls, trees, hedges and so on.

We have a real opportunity. People are rightly concerned about the effects on the natural environment of the construction of lots of new homes. We certainly need new homes constructed—they should be affordable and accessible to the people who really need them—but let's not make it an either/or. Let's not plaster the country with tarmac in some places while keeping less and less space free for nature. Let's ensure that whatever new housing we are building recognises that we can also create space for nature to live alongside us and to thrive in those areas, too.

A classic example, and a personal favourite, is swift bricks. For just £30, we could put in place a swift brick in every new house to ensure that these beautiful creatures, whose populations have sadly declined by 60% over the past 30 years, can thrive again. I am not just saying this because both my sons grew up playing for Ledbury Swifts football club, meaning that these birds have a special place in my heart; they should have a special place in all our hearts. Let's make sure that every new house has a swift brick.

My fifth point is on maximising resilience. We must face up to the fact that the climate crisis means that some extremes of weather will be baked in. We must recognise that adaptation has to be part of what we do, as well as mitigation of the climate impact.

I have seen that very personally. I represent North Herefordshire, and in early 2020 Herefordshire was affected by the worst floods that we have had in 400 years of records. Last winter, we had the wettest 18 months on record in the UK. Such events have major impacts on people's homes, and we have to take them into account when we build new homes. So, please, may we ensure that the future homes standard and the regulations that go alongside it recognise the reality of the need to be more resilient with issues such as flooding and overheating?

Overheating does not occur much in my constituency, but it is certainly an issue in urban constituencies. Former office blocks are converted into housing through permitted development, but often that entails terrible conditions for the people who end up living in those places. Personally, I think that that should not be allowed to happen. Overheating is a significant issue in such buildings. Let us ensure that overheating and flooding are recognised in resilience planning in new housing.

Finally, water scarcity and efficiency—it is not just energy that we need to use efficiently, but water. That was the topic of my doctorate, although not in this country. Let us ensure that we use these pure resources as carefully and efficiently as possible. Again, that needs to be built in, baked in, right at the start of building new houses.

I have a present for the Minister to take away. A few years ago, in Herefordshire, we developed a thing called “Herefordshire Future Homes”, in which we assessed a whole range of building standards, because of the bewildering array of initiatives in place. The industry is now coalescing around the net zero housing standard, which is good news, but we also looked at things such as water efficiency, biodiversity and so on. I will give this document to the Minister after the debate to feed into his work.

Let me remind the Minister what the Government could and should do. They could ensure that all new homes had ultra-high levels of energy efficiency and were built to an EPC A standard right now, with a glide path through to net zero housing standards as soon as possible. Let us resist the pressure from developers to water down the standards, and let us give local authorities the freedom they need to put in place higher standards initially. Let us incorporate embodied carbon in the future homes standard, and set regulations for whole-life carbon limits aligned with the industry's building standard of net zero carbon.

I have not mentioned this much, but waste and recycling in construction is a core and enormous part of our waste economy. There are significant opportunities for a more circular economy approach. Let us also specify that all new homes should have solar panels on top and swift bricks everywhere. Let us ensure that all new homes are climate change-resilient.

Now is such an important opportunity for the Government to show leadership. As I said at the beginning of the debate, I confess to being somewhat frustrated that they have not taken the opportunity of their major, high-attention speeches on planning and infrastructure—nothing whatever about building quality. There is an opportunity to rectify that, and I would love to hear not only the Minister's response, but even more, the Secretary of State integrating building quality into everything that she says about building new houses going forward. I look forward to the Minister's response.

3.23 pm

Olly Glover (Didcot and Wantage) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I thank the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Ellie Chowns) for securing this important debate.

To start my remarks, I will reflect on why this is such an important topic for discussion. Clearly the major consideration, and one of the biggest threats facing us, is climate change and the need to decarbonise, but the beauty of improving environmental standards for new housing is in the many other benefits besides. Investing in insulation, heat pumps and solar-panel fitments for new homes would create jobs and stimulate supply chains, with the subsequent benefit of making it far easier to develop the capability to retrofit existing homes.

A significant benefit of such a policy of getting it right would accrue to those on lower incomes, insulating them not just from the cold, but from energy and fuel market price fluctuations and the global effects on those prices. Dare I suggest that had we been building new homes to good environmental standards for the past 15 years, the Government would perhaps have avoided the winter fuel allowance backlash that is dominating my constituency postbag. This is a great example of a policy that benefits not only the planet, but people and the economy. Many people feel that climate change is an abstract topic, something that is preached at them, and we need to consider more policies that achieve that holy trinity of benefit for planet, people and economy.

Many of my constituents are very frustrated on this topic, similarly to those of the hon. Member for North Herefordshire. They feel that there have been years of wasted opportunities to get new homes right, from design through to build. More energy-efficient homes is a rare example of a near universally popular policy. Unlike 20 mph speed limits, low traffic neighbourhoods or, dare I say, vegan sausage rolls, there are no culture wars to be had here.

I read that the logic of the last Conservative Government, in delaying solar panel mandates for new homes, was optimism about a fully decarbonised electricity grid, which was indeed too much optimism. We also need to work quickly to create a new electricity grid with good storage capability, so that we can capitalise on surpluses of locally generated solar and wind power.

My constituency has seen some of the fastest housing growth in the country, with 8,000 new houses built between 2011 and 2021, at Didcot Great Western Park, Wantage Kingsgrove, Wallingford Highcroft and Grove Wellington Gate, among others. My constituents are baffled by the fact that these houses have been built—and continue to be built—without solar panels, heat pumps or similar. Another development under construction at the moment, Valley Park near Didcot, of more than 4,000 homes, will also not be so equipped. That is despite the efforts of our Lib Dem-led Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire district councils, who have done what they can within the current rules to promote positive environmental measures. They do not have the powers to compel developers to meet net zero requirements as part of the scrutiny of planning applications. That also needs to change, all the more so if there is going to be further delay in implementing national environmental standards and effective requirements.

We need to make climate change action meaningful and beneficial for people. Designing new homes to the right standards has the potential to have universal appeal, and rather than solar panels' only being accessible to those on high incomes, it could benefit people across income ranges. Investing in solar, heat pumps and insulation will make that difference, and stimulate the economy. As the hon. Member for North Herefordshire said, we also need to think about designs that will keep our homes cool in the hotter weather expected in the future.

If we do not create the homes of the future now, there is a risk that we will need to retrofit the homes built now in only a decade or two's time, at much greater expense, in order to reach our net zero targets. We cannot wait any longer. I hope the new Government will treat the issue with the urgency it deserves, to help planet, people and economy.

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): I move to the Liberal Democrat spokesperson, Zöe Franklin.

3.28 pm

Zöe Franklin (Guildford) (LD): Thank you for calling me, Mr Stringer. I thank the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Ellie Chowns) for bringing forward this important debate, and for her extensive speech, which was full of sensible suggestions and thoughts. I thank the Minister for his attendance.

Heating our homes is one of the most pressing issues facing the UK right now. The cost of living crisis has sped up the urgent need to improve the environmental standards of our homes to keep people warm and stop people having to choose between heating and eating.

For far too long, households across Britain have been forced to make impossible choices: heating their homes or putting food on the table. It is a disgrace that in one of the world's wealthiest nations, millions are living in cold, damp homes that are too expensive to heat and are harmful to their health. Developers are not meeting the environmental standards we need for a sustainable future. That is unacceptable.

The Liberal Democrat manifesto said that all new homes need to be zero-carbon and fitted with solar panels. That rooftop revolution would make use of the vast dead space on roofs across the country, generating clean energy right where it is needed. Yet developers continue to submit plans that ignore these opportunities, and homeowners are the ones who pay the price. In my own constituency of Guildford, a developer recently submitted plans for new homes, without including heat pumps. That is bonkers. We know that there will be no new gas boilers in newly built homes after 2025, so why are developers continuing to insist on submitting plans with gas boilers?

All new homes will require alternative heating systems such as heat pumps. By allowing developers to cut corners today, we are passing the costs of upgrading homes on to future homeowners, who then face the high costs of retrofitting—not to mention the ongoing burden of high energy bills.

Developers need to take responsibility, and this House must put the onus on them to do so. Developers are putting homeowners in the position of having to foot the bill for improvements that should have been made when the buildings were first built. Building for the

future is not an option; it should be a requirement. We need to incentivise developers to act now, but we must also back up those incentives with strong legislation to ensure that new homes meet zero-carbon standards.

This about more than just the build cost; we need to consider the lifetime cost of these homes. How efficient are they for homeowners over time? For example, a house might be cheaper for the developer if it is built to lower standards, but if it is inefficient, the homeowner is left paying high energy bills for years. Making improvements at the building stage—for example, installing solar panels and domestic energy storage, and ensuring that the home has proper insulation—means that the fear of opening energy bills becomes a thing of the past.

The Liberal Democrats have shared our plan for a fairer deal on new homes and heating. We want homes that do not make people sick, where heating bills are not thought of with fear, and we want every new home to be built to the highest environmental standards. We have two key policies that we encourage the Minister, and his colleagues in the Labour Government, to consider seriously. The first is our 10-year energy upgrade programme, which will begin with free insulation and heat pumps for those on low incomes, and then ensure that every new home is built to zero-carbon standards. We, as Members of this House, know that local authorities play an integral role in our society, so let us give them the power to deliver that, ensuring that it is rolled out efficiently and where it is needed most. Councillors and local residents understand local need, so if there is local need, let Parliament make it work for local residents.

That raises the question of why we are discussing this, when it should have been sorted out many years ago. Conservative failure in government has left households high and dry during a cost of living crisis. Families are struggling to pay their bills, and, instead of support, they are met with rising energy costs and poor-quality housing. Britain's "warm homes" infrastructure has dry rot, and this plan will cut it out.

The evidence is clear: UK homes are among the least energy-efficient in Europe, with some of the oldest housing stock on the continent. Nearly 40% of our homes were built before 1946, compared to 21% in Italy and just 11% in Spain. Many of our homes are expensive to heat, and inefficient at that. This is not just a financial burden or an environmental issue; it is a public health crisis. The NHS spends an estimated £1.4 billion every year treating illnesses related to living in cold or damp homes, with wider societal costs reaching a staggering £15.4 billion. By upgrading homes with free insulation for low-income households, we can ensure that no one must choose between a warm house and a full stomach. By installing heat pumps and making homes zero-carbon, we will not only reduce emissions but make our homes greener, fairer and more affordable to live in.

The second idea that we encourage Labour colleagues to get behind is getting landlords to upgrade the energy efficiency of their properties. We would require landlords to upgrade it to EPC C or above by 2028, because British tenants are living in housing that is making them ill. It is unacceptable that 35% of fuel-poor households are in the private rented sector, where more than 1 million people struggle with fuel poverty, and an ever-increasing number of private renters live with dangerous mould and damp. I am ashamed to say that that is also causing children to die each year. Inaction from the previous

Conservative Government has left people trapped in homes that are harmful and costly to heat. It is appalling that last year, more than 8,000 new homes were built in England with an EPC rating below band C. That cannot be allowed to continue, and I strongly advise the Government to remember the promises they made on it while electioneering earlier this year.

Our plans for landlords are a fair and green message: under Liberal Democrat proposals, Parliament would be able to ensure that children and vulnerable families did not have to suffer because of poor housing standards. We want legislation that requires landlords to upgrade properties to EPC grade C or above, and we want homes to be built with higher EPC ratings from the start. Let me be clear: these measures are about not just improving homes, but restoring dignity and health to those who live in them. Alongside these proposals, we want social tariffs, and we need to decouple electricity prices from wholesale gas. We need to address the fact that we are building homes that do not meet environmental standards that look to the future instead of the past.

We have a cost of living crisis and a climate emergency, and we need to invest in a future where homes are energy-efficient, affordable to heat and zero carbon. Given that the Government intend to remove winter fuel payments to pensioners, it is all the more pertinent that we insulate people's homes from the very start to prevent them from struggling with their bills and to prevent elderly people from freezing during the winter. If we had insulated homes when they were built, as we are advocating, perhaps we would not have needed this debate. We should ensure that everyone's home is warm. These changes would make a real difference to people's lives by lowering energy costs, improving public health and tackling the climate crisis head-on.

It is time we delivered homes fit for the future and homes for the heatless, supporting those who are struggling to make ends meet. It is time, through our environmental standards for the building of new homes, to make our isles greener, fairer and thriving for everyone. I emphasise that, as the hon. Member for North Herefordshire said, we must think about the long-term cost of the homes that we build, not the cost of building them today.

3.37 pm

David Simmonds (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer, and to respond on behalf of His Majesty's loyal Opposition. I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Ellie Chowns) on securing this debate, and I congratulate other Members on their contributions. The issues raised in the debate have helped to illustrate the complexities inherent in housing environmental standards. We know that the UK has probably—or certainly among—the oldest housing stock of any developed country, and we know about the complexity of housing tenure in the United Kingdom. Freeholder-owned buildings that are often occupied by a combination of leaseholders and tenants continue to be a challenge to Governments of all parties, when it comes to introducing the required updates and retrofits. In the context of housing development—1.4 million units of new housing already have planning consent in the United Kingdom—developers' feedback on, for example, the cost of solar panels as a barrier to bringing forward new housing remains an active part of the debate.

[David Simmonds]

Governments of all parties have made strenuous efforts over the years to improve the quality of housing, including several aspects of its environmental impact. The 2018 update to energy performance certificates, with a view to setting a deadline of 2025 for all rental properties placed on the market to meet a certain minimum standard, was an example of a Government intervention that aimed to raise standards. Some of the challenges for which the housing retrofit and building sectors have advocated have led Governments to feel that it was necessary to think again. No issue illustrates the complexities more clearly than the point that has been made about nutrient neutrality, something for which decision-making is essentially delegated to a third party under legislation that goes back to the mid-2000s. Central Government's desire to minimise the environmental impact of development on surface water and waterways has led to significant delays in the delivery of new housing projects. I was going to quote the former leader of South Norfolk council—previously in the Public Gallery—who, in his capacity as a councillor, challenged the impact that that was having on the ability of local authorities to deliver new housing through the planning process, because of the delays in getting decisions made and permissions agreed. As the local authority bringing forward housing, if a site is not viable because of its environmental impact, it is clearly necessary then to be able to make a decision to move forward with other sites. It is clear that the planning process does not always support that decision making.

It is also noteworthy that the Innovate UK study, which looked at the real-world emissions of properties versus the intended emissions and those expected from the design estimates, identified that emissions were on average between two and three times higher than those that would have been expected from the design. I appreciate that Ministers in the new Government, like Ministers in previous Governments, face the challenge that we can do things that sound brilliant in theory, only to discover that how they operate in the real world does not meet the aspirations we all strive for.

I know the hon. Member for North Herefordshire previously served as a Member of the European Parliament. It is worth referring to the recent decision, outlined in a written ministerial statement, that from this period the intended deadline by which all building materials had to meet UK standards updated in 2018 would be set aside, and that products that met the CE standard would instead remain able to be sold into the UK market for an indefinite period. That may be an issue for fire standards; because the European Union standards on fire performance were last updated in 2015, they form part of that regulation, whereas the UK standards were updated in 2018.

Those standards also draw on a wide range of different studies and regulations in respect of performance, from damp resistance to energy efficiency. Again, it would be helpful for the Minister to set out for the benefit of Members present his expectation that those standards will meet the aspirations set out in the 2018 update of UK standards—I have confidence that that will be the case. Then we can be confident that the products sold into the UK market will meet the energy efficiency

aspirations that Members have set out, and ensure that those products and materials contribute towards creating high-quality homes that fulfil the important expectations of warmth, absence of damp and the accessibility of fresh air that have been set out.

The national planning policy framework updates in prospect afford a further opportunity to consider how those requirements can be better enshrined in planning law. I appreciate that Ministers have a difficult challenge: the national planning policy framework has something like 19 chapters of detailed guidance. Each local authority is then required to put together its local plan, following public examination, in detailed conformity with each of those 19 chapters. The impact of that, its interaction with local environmental impacts such as surface water runoff, and any requirements for the design and nature of the materials used, in conformity with established local practices, all combine to create a significant challenge.

If the aspirations set out by Members are to be seen in practice, we must make it as straightforward as possible for local authorities to exercise their community leadership role. Rather than having to go through lengthy and expensive processes to demonstrate in planning law that that conformity is present, we must ensure that the standards can be implemented as quickly as possible.

I know the Minister, and other Members who have been in office for some time, will be aware that past Government initiatives, such as those around green homes, although sensible in principle in seeking to make Government funding for retrofit available to households as quickly as possible, have led to significant challenges in their administration. That is especially true where, for example, a business that has been licensed and approved to carry out the retrofit of those initiatives then loses that licence between the time when it has done work on a constituent's home and the point when the invoice is paid.

The rules and regulations around that area need to ensure that it is as straightforward as possible for all constituents to make the right choice in buying a home, knowing that it meets the highest possible environmental standards, or in deciding to invest in their home in a way that will genuinely reduce running costs and improve the quality of the insulation. In practice, that must fulfil the aspirations the Government set out in allocating the funding.

Finally, it is a source of pride that under Governments of all parties, the UK has seen the biggest per capita carbon reduction from its residents—our constituents—since the carbon reduction target was first brought forward in the 1990s. It is very good that we have managed to achieve that. We have done it through a variety of measures, not just in the housing sector, but, given the significant part that emissions from the housing sector play in our carbon emissions, there is a clear opportunity for the environmental standards that have been thoroughly aired in this debate to play a significant role in how we address this challenge in future.

I can undertake that the Opposition will work constructively over this Parliament, where we can see the opportunity, with Government and other parties to support the implementation of standards and measures that will help to deliver that agenda.

3.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Alex Norris): It is pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Stringer.

I am grateful for the opportunity to close this important debate on environmental standards for new housing on behalf of the Government. I start by adding my congratulations to the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Ellie Chowns) on securing this debate and on the way she led it. I thought her speech was a real tour de force. I could not really believe that it was the first debate she has led in this place, because she spoke with admirable clarity and power. I have to say that is not how I remember speaking in my first Westminster Hall debate seven years ago. In the spirit of the clarity with which she spoke, I will seek to address the points she raised in turn.

I also want to mention the contribution from the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage (Olly Glover), with its thoughtful and well-pitched tone about the importance of bringing people with us, so that people see this as a good and positive thing in their life and are partners in the process, rather than net zero being something that happens to them. That is really important for us, as leaders in our own communities, and for the country.

We are mindful of the fact that the homes we build today will shape the environmental landscape for generations to come. The hon. Member for Guildford (Zöe Franklin) talked about not putting burdens on future generations. The choices we make shape the built environment that our children will inherit. It is with that long-term perspective that the Government remain steadfast in the commitment to achieving net zero by 2050. The energy efficiency of our buildings and the standards we set to drive that efficiency are instrumental in realising that goal.

Of course, we are acting in the context of an inherited housing crisis and our banner commitment, made during the election, to build 1.5 million new homes over the course of this Parliament. Again, ensuring that those homes meet the needs of homeowners and contribute positively to the environment is not a luxury: high environmental standards are a necessity. Those two goals must not be seen as being in competition, but rather as mutually supportive, because the decarbonisation of new buildings is a vital part of net zero efforts.

From homes to offices, the UK's built environment is responsible for about 30% of our greenhouse gas emissions. By improving energy efficiency and moving to cleaner sources of heat, we can reduce those emissions now and in the future and, as the hon. Member for Didcot and Wantage said, create warmer, healthier homes, protecting future generations from the impacts of climate change. But there are very real consequences of rising energy costs in the here and now, and the job of Government is to find the balance between getting those homes built, as the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds) said, and doing so in a way that is realisable. In many ways, that is our challenge.

I turn to the five points the hon. Member for North Herefordshire raised. First, with regard to future homes and building standards, we are clear in our commitment to introduce new standards next year that will set homes and buildings on a path away from the use of volatile

fossil fuels. Those homes will be future-proofed, with low-carbon heating and high levels of building fabric standards, which I know she is interested in. That will ensure that they do not require retrofitting to become zero carbon as the electricity grid continues to decarbonise, which speaks again to the point made by the hon. Member for Guildford.

The previous Government published a consultation in December, which closed in March. We are a new Government—I hate to say it, but it is true—and have been going for only a little more than two months, so we are looking at that very carefully. In her written question to my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing, Planning and Building Safety and her contribution today, the hon. Member for North Herefordshire stressed the need for a response and was keen to know when it will be. I am afraid I have to tell her that it will be in due course. We are talking to the industry and the public, and we want to ensure the standards we set are ambitious and achievable.

The hon. Lady mentioned local authorities, and I can give her clarity on that point. Plan makers' powers have not been restricted. The Planning and Energy Act 2008 allows plan makers to set energy efficiency standards at a local level that go beyond national building regulation standards, but that must be done in a way that is consistent with national policy. That is the balance that local decision makers will have to strike, but they have that ability.

The hon. Lady also mentioned the written ministerial statement and said that she wants clarity about its future. I am afraid that it is currently subject to judicial review, and as a result I cannot say very much about it at this time.

Calum Miller: I am grateful to the Minister for addressing my comments and those of the hon. Member for North Herefordshire (Ellie Chowns). On local authorities' powers, will he consider issuing a new written ministerial statement in advance of the new housing standards to clarify the one published on 13 December 2023 by the previous Government, which threw some of the efforts by local authorities to raise standards into disarray?

Alex Norris: I am grateful for that question. I cannot make that commitment to the hon. Member today. I hope the assurance I have given has demonstrated that there is a pretty clear landing zone for local authorities, but it must work within national standards. I also make the point, as others have, that the future homes standard consultation has come to a close, and we are consulting on the national planning policy framework. So there are some moving plates in the current setting of standards and we must be mindful of them.

The second point that the hon. Member for North Herefordshire made was about embodied carbon. As we make progress on solar panels, heat pumps and all the other ways to reduce operational carbon emissions, we will see emissions fall in buildings, and therefore embodied carbon will make up proportionally more of a building's whole-life carbon emissions. We are committed to understanding the scale of the challenge as part of our broader efforts to decarbonise the construction sector. It is vital that we encourage industry to reduce embodied carbon by choosing lower-carbon, but still high-quality, materials. That requires a fundamental

[Alex Norris]

shift in design and construction, and that is why we are pushing so hard to encourage the adoption of more efficient design practices that minimise waste, which the hon. Member for Guildford mentioned, and make better use of low-carbon materials such as timber. There are some very exciting new technologies in that space. Where it is safe to do so, higher-carbon materials will be gradually replaced along the way.

The third point that the hon. Member for North Herefordshire made was about solar panels, and this is where we may slightly differ. The Government's judgment is that we should set targets with regard to performance—what is the energy performance of the new home? Solar panels may well be part of that, but for some buildings they will not be suitable. As a result, if the choice is primarily solar, we miss out on a whole array of innovations that can help those homes reduce their carbon footprint, and there is a risk to cost-effectiveness. As I say, we are goal-oriented, rather than method-oriented.

The hon. Lady mentioned biodiversity net gain. We should recognise and build on the work that the previous Government did in this space. We see this—I think they did too—as a real opportunity as we address our urgent housing needs. We owe it to future generations to ensure that development leaves the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was. That is now mandatory for new applications for developments: all new developments, with limited exceptions, will be required to deliver at least 10% measurable net gain. The hon. Lady spoke about 1.5 million bird and bat boxes, but I would not want to be quite as prescriptive as that. We expect to see net gain, whether through the creation or enhancement of habitats on or off site, or through the purchase of registered biodiversity units on the new open market. We are working very hard with the sector to make sure that it realises those brilliant opportunities.

Let me turn to the hon. Lady's fifth point, which was on resilience and water. As the Minister for local resilience, among a number of things, that was of particular interest to me. Immediately prior to the debate, I took part in the inaugural meeting of the flood resilience taskforce, which seeks to bring together partners to reduce the number and the impact of floods. I know from having dealt with constituents that having your house flooded is one of the very worst things that can happen to you, short of losing your life or losing a loved one, because you live with the impact of it for so long.

We have a responsibility to make sure that development does not contribute to greater flooding, and the planning system is at the heart of that. We must ensure that development is in areas at the lowest risk of flooding and that it uses sustainable drainage systems to mimic natural systems and to slow the flow of surface waters. The current consultation on proposed reforms to the NPPF is seeking views, and we would be interested to hear from colleagues on that. It is a big opportunity.

The hon. Lady also mentioned water. Safeguarding the water supply is crucial to meeting our climate obligations. As we undertake consultations, we are actively looking at options relating to water efficiency in planning and building regulations. We are developing guidance on water-positive and net zero water developments and on how to integrate water efficiency into energy efficiency and retrofit programmes.

To make a quick point about the NPPF, the planning system is critical to delivering sustainable development that aligns with climate goals. Our NPPF reform marks an important milestone in that journey. Our consultation is seeking views on how planning policy can better support the industry to adapt. We hope to get that feedback, and we will consider any and all contributions.

The Opposition spokesperson, the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner, made a point about product standards to me for the fourth time in the past 24 hours. I can give him clarity that nothing in that statement from 2 September is about the reduction of standards—far from it. I reiterate the commitment I made yesterday that the Minister for building safety, my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Rushanara Ali), will write to him with further detail.

While building the homes this country needs to tackle the housing crisis, we will ensure that our climate change commitments are met. We will set high energy-efficiency standards, ensure water efficiency, secure biodiversity net gain and deliver flood-resilient developments as we lay the foundations of a sustainable future. We will ensure that everyone has access to a decent, warm and affordable home. That will be one of the standards by which this Parliament is measured and one of the ways in which our adherence to the manifesto on which we were elected is measured, too. We are actively doing that work. I am grateful to colleagues who want us to go further and faster, and that pressure is welcome. I look forward to working with all colleagues as we go along that journey.

3.58 pm

Ellie Chowns: I thank the Minister for his response and all colleagues for their very constructive contributions. I heard a lot of common ground from Liberal Democrat colleagues, and I welcome that. Indeed, there was an offer from my Conservative colleague, the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (David Simmonds), to work constructively wherever common ground can be found, so let us look for that, shall we?

The Minister made a point on goal orientation versus activity orientation. I reassure him firmly that I am focused on outcomes and performance, not on performativity. That is compatible with a view that all new houses should have solar panels on the roof as a default. There may indeed be one or two cases where it is not appropriate, but it is not an either/or. He seemed to suggest that if we put solar panels on, we might miss out on insulation—I am paraphrasing slightly—but we ought to be doing both/and. It is about doing everything that we can to ensure that homes are as energy efficient as possible and, indeed, that they generate as much of their own energy as possible. Let us get all those i's dotted and t's crossed in the forthcoming future homes standards.

On being goal-oriented, the hon. Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner mentioned—though he did not use these exact words—post-occupancy evaluation. That is crucial. There is no use setting standards if we do not enforce them and evaluate whether a building has achieved them. I know that many in the sector are quite frustrated that developers may say they are building something to a certain standard, but unless it is evaluated according to how it operates in real life, we will not know. There is an urgent need for an independent inspectorate to make sure that buildings are performing as designed.

I will finish by reiterating a point that came out in my initial speech and in other contributions: this is about thinking for the long term, and it is about the triple win that I talked about. This is not just about environmental protection, vital though that is to tackle the climate and nature crises. It is about making sure that every new home built is a warm home, so that every person who moves into those homes can keep warm and healthy at an affordable cost—at the least cost possible. This is a social goal.

It is also about recognising the opportunity that this sort of economic renewal policy offers the Government in order to achieve their goals of generating good jobs and so forth, and to strengthen the UK's position in these crucial sectors. With the green new deal and the economic transformation that we need to see globally, let us take the opportunity and be at the forefront of this, using the Government's excellent ambitions to build new homes as a chance to kick-start the industries

of the future, including construction. There are fantastic entities, such as the New Model Institute for Technology and Engineering in Herefordshire with its centre for innovation in timber technology, which the Minister just referenced.

There are lots of opportunities for innovation, so let us grab them with both hands. Let us build the homes that people deserve in this country and fix the problem of environmental standards for new housing having been too low for too long. This is the opportunity to change that.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered environmental standards for new housing.

4.3 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 12 September 2024

CABINET OFFICE

Procurement Act 2023

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Georgia Gould): The Procurement Act 2023 aims to create a simpler and more transparent regime for public sector procurement that will deliver better value for money, and reduce costs for business and the public sector. This Government will use this legal framework to deliver greater value for money and improved social value, which will help raise standards, drive economic growth and open up public procurement to new entrants such as small businesses and social enterprises.

Under the Act, the previous Administration published a national procurement policy statement to which contracting authorities will have to have regard. But this statement does not meet the challenge of applying the full potential of public procurement to deliver value for money, economic growth, and social value. I have therefore taken the decision to begin the vital work of producing a new national procurement policy statement that clearly sets out this Government's priorities for public procurement in support of our missions.

It is crucial that the new regime in the Procurement Act goes live with a bold and ambitious statement that drives delivery of the Government's missions, and therefore I am proposing a short delay to the commencement of the Act to February 2025 so this work can be completed. I am confident that the extra time to prepare will allow for a more seamless transition, ensuring a smoother and more effective implementation process for both contracting authorities and suppliers.

Letters to withdraw the previous Administration's statement will be issued to both Houses shortly and the Government intend to make regulations to set a new date for the commencement of the Procurement Act 2023 of 24 February 2025.

I have also written to the relevant Ministers in the Welsh Government and the Northern Irish Executive seeking their agreement to the new date and assuring them of my commitment to working together in implementing the Procurement Act.

[HCWS90]

TREASURY

Fiscal Risks and Sustainability Report

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Rachel Reeves): This Government's No. 1 mission is to grow the economy. Sustainable public finances support the stability necessary for a successful economy; the stability that allows a family to buy their own home, for a business to thrive and for a Government to invest in public services. The Office for Budget Responsibility's fiscal risks and sustainability report (CP 1142) laid today and based on the previous Government's spring Budget policies, shows the substantial longer-term challenges to the sustainability of the public finances.

As set out in the public spending audit (CP 1133) laid in July, the previous Government left a challenging fiscal inheritance, with a projected overspend of £22 billion. This Government have already taken action to begin fixing the foundations, including £5.5 billion in public spending savings for 2024-25. Further difficult decisions will be needed at the autumn Budget across spending, welfare and tax in order to meet the fiscal rules and to support sustainable economic growth. This is the responsible thing to do to fix the foundations of our economy and bring back economic stability.

Sustained economic growth is the only route to the improved prosperity that the UK needs. Had the UK grown at the average rate of other OECD economies over the last 13 years, the economy would have been over £140 billion larger and this could have brought in an additional £58 billion in tax revenues in the last year alone. Growth is therefore this Government's defining mission, and one pillar underpinning this mission is stability. Economic stability will allow us to grow the economy, maintain sustainable public finances, and keep taxes, inflation and mortgages as low as possible.

Economic stability requires respecting the institutions that are guarantors of our stability and we have already demonstrated our commitment to strengthening independent institutions, including the OBR. In July, I announced the most significant set of changes to our fiscal framework since the inception of the OBR. This included introducing the Budget Responsibility Act, ensuring that any major future fiscal announcements will be subject to an independent assessment by the OBR, as well as confirming that spending reviews will take place every two years with a minimum duration of three years in order to improve value for money and the planning of public expenditure, and to provide greater budgetary certainty. The Government are also committed to robust fiscal rules that will ensure the public finances are always managed responsibly.

The FRS—fiscal risks and sustainability report—builds on previous years' analysis, examining the risks posed to the public finances by climate change damage, health spending and debt sustainability. The OBR's analysis shows that the UK will face significant costs from climate-related damage, even in a scenario where the UK and the rest of the world continue with current mitigation commitments. The costs would be more severe if these commitments are not met, which is why one of the Government's missions is to make the UK a clean energy superpower. The Government have already acted to remove the de-facto ban on onshore wind, approve three major solar projects and significantly increase the budget for the sixth contracts for difference round. The Government will work with the private sector through the newly founded Great British Energy, capitalised with £8.3 billion. Preparing for the future also means adapting to the effects of climate change. Without action, flooding, coastal erosion and other climate hazards will pose greater risks to lives, livelihoods and people's wellbeing. The Government will explore how to further strengthen our approach to developing the country's resilience to climate change, working to improve resilience and preparation across central Government, local authorities, local communities, and emergency services.

The FRS sets out that rising health spending is forecast to be the single most important driver of public debt increasing over the next 50 years. It also shows that

a healthier population brings economic and fiscal benefits. The health mission will ensure that we build an NHS fit for the future that is there when people need it, with fewer lives lost to the biggest health-related killers, in a fairer Britain where everyone lives well for longer.

The final chapter of the report assesses the UK's debt sustainability. Public debt is projected to reach 274% of GDP in 2073-74, based on a number of long-term spending pressures and the previous Government's policies remaining unchanged. However, boosting the productive potential of the economy can help to reduce this rise in debt, with the OBR's analysis showing that every 0.1% increase in annual productivity growth would reduce the increase in the debt-to-GDP ratio by 25 percentage points. A full one percentage point increase in annual productivity growth to 2.5%, equivalent to a return to pre-financial crisis rates of productivity growth, could keep debt below 100% of GDP throughout the next 50 years. This underlines the importance of tackling the UK's weak productivity performance through the Government's growth mission. Since the launch of the growth mission in July, the Government have wasted no time in making progress and have already announced several growth-enhancing policies, guided by the principles of stability, investment and reform.

Economic shocks have been the most significant driver of rising debt in recent years. Through the spending review process, the Government will take forward work on a number of priority themes, including a greater focus on long-termism and prevention, to improve the resilience of the economy to future shocks.

The FRS highlights the challenging fiscal outlook faced by this and future Governments, and underlines the importance of growth and stability. I am grateful to the staff of the OBR for the work and expertise that has gone into this report, which fulfils the body's obligations in the "Charter for Budget Responsibility" to examine and report on the sustainability of, and risks to, the public finances. The Government will respond to the FRS in the spring.

[HCWS95]

DEFENCE

AUKUS Strategic Partnership

The Secretary of State for Defence (John Healey): AUKUS is a groundbreaking strategic defence and security partnership, and a clear demonstration of our long-term commitment to supporting the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. Given an increasingly unpredictable, interconnected landscape, with a war in Europe and rising tensions in the middle east, partnerships with our closest allies are vital to deterring our adversaries and maintaining that strategic advantage. The following statement is to update the House on AUKUS developments since this Government were elected.

Built on decades of integration, sharing and co-operation on defence and technology between our three nations, it is particularly significant that we secured landmark export control changes to benefit AUKUS partners last month. This marks a historic breakthrough in defence trade collaboration between AUKUS nations that will streamline future co-operation, create jobs and boost growth.

On 16 August 2024, the Government published the UK's AUKUS nations open general licence. Combined with a new exemption to the US international traffic in arms regulations for the UK and Australia, alongside further national exemptions for the UK and US in Australia's export control framework, this is a milestone moment in deepening the potential of our tri-nation partnership. Taken together, these changes will significantly ease our licencing requirements for the export and sharing of certain defence products within and between the UK, US and Australia, including advanced capabilities, technical data, and defence services.

These groundbreaking reforms will facilitate faster and more efficient collaboration between our scientists, engineers, and defence industries. These changes alone will support up to £500 million in UK defence exports each year, generating billions of dollars of trade across all three nations—improving access to international trade with our closest allies, while driving economic growth in communities across the UK.

We can also report further progress in delivering on the ambitious pathway to support Australia's acquisition of a conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarine capability.

On 5 August 2024, AUKUS partners signed a trilateral agreement on co-operation related to naval nuclear propulsion. This is a significant step that will facilitate the sharing of submarine naval nuclear propulsion information between partners as well as enabling the future transfer of material and equipment to Australia for the safe and secure construction, operation and sustainment of this important capability. The agreement was laid in Parliament on 2 September 2024, as part of the UK ratification process; it is undergoing similar processes in the US and Australia.

This agreement reaffirms and is consistent with partners' respective non-proliferation commitments. Our co-operation will continue to be undertaken in a way that is fully consistent with our international obligations and sets the highest non-proliferation standard while protecting classified and controlled information, material and equipment.

As part of our and the US's support to Australia, AUKUS partners commenced the submarine tendered maintenance period at HMAS Stirling in Australia on 23 August 2024. This represents another important advance for the partnership, with Australian personnel, supported by a US submarine tender and observed by Royal Navy officers, participating for the first time in the maintenance of a nuclear-powered submarine, to ensure Australia are on track to operate, maintain and regulate their future conventionally armed nuclear-powered submarine capability.

AUKUS is making significant progress. As AUKUS is a long-term strategic partnership, it is appropriate that this Government consider how best to deliver on the UK's considerable ambition for AUKUS and to maximise the benefits of this national endeavour.

To capitalise on the full suite of economic and security benefits of AUKUS, Sir Stephen Lovegrove has been appointed as the UK Government's AUKUS adviser, to assess UK progress against AUKUS goals. Sir Stephen has invaluable experience, having served as permanent secretary at the Ministry of Defence and as national security adviser at the time of the AUKUS announcement in September 2021.

The AUKUS report will be completed rapidly and will set out any existing barriers to success, alongside areas of opportunity the UK could be taking advantage of, ensuring defence and economic benefits are properly considered. Sir Stephen's findings will be presented to the Prime Minister, the Defence Secretary, the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor, with the report's conclusions reflected in the broader strategic defence review already under way.

AUKUS is the most significant defence, security, and diplomatic arrangement the UK has entered in the past 60 years. This Government are fully committed to this national endeavour, working with partners, stakeholders and industry to achieve the maximum economic and security benefits possible, while upholding stability, peace, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

[HCWS92]

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

Exercise of Powers over the Office for Nuclear Regulation

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Ed Miliband): My noble Friend Lord Hunt of Kings Heath has today made the following statement:

Later today, the annual report to Parliament setting out the use of the Secretary of State's powers exercised in respect of the Office for Nuclear Regulation during the year will be published. This is in accordance with section 108(1) of the Energy Act 2013.

[HCWS88]

Grangemouth Oil Refinery: Jobs

The Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero (Ed Miliband): It is deeply disappointing to learn that Petroineos has confirmed its previous decision to close the oil refining operation at Grangemouth. All of my thoughts are with the workers and their families and the wider Grangemouth community. The site will now convert to an import terminal, which will continue to provide a secure and flexible fuel supply for Scotland.

The Government will stand with the workforce in these difficult times. That is why we are announcing a package of investment to help the workforce find good, alternative jobs, invest in the community and deliver a viable industrial future for the Grangemouth site, with potential for future support from the national wealth fund.

Since taking office, I have taken joint action with the Scottish Government to urgently engage with the company and its shareholders, leaving no stone unturned to find a viable long-term future for the site. As it is clear that there is no viable commercial future for the current refinery operations, the UK and Scottish Governments have today announced a package that seeks to chart a new future for Grangemouth. This includes:

£100 million package for Falkirk and Grangemouth, including £20 million in joint funding from the UK and Scottish Governments announced today, on top of £80 million in joint funding from the two Governments for the Falkirk and Grangemouth growth deal. This funding will support the community and its workers, investing in local energy projects to create new opportunities for growth in the region.

Investment in the site's long-term future. The £1.5 million joint-funded Project Willow study has identified a shortlist of three credible options to begin building a new long-term industry at the refinery site, including low-carbon hydrogen, clean fuels and sustainable aviation fuels. We will work with the community to seek a commercially viable proposition, with the potential for future support from the national wealth fund.

Immediate career support for workers. The UK and Scottish Governments will provide tailored support that will help affected workers in finding new employment—and Grangemouth will be among the first areas that the new office for clean energy jobs will work with to help deliver a just transition.

Alongside the Scottish Government, I will also be holding an extraordinary meeting of the Grangemouth Future Industry Board today to discuss next steps with local industry leaders, Falkirk council, and trade bodies and unions.

[HCWS96]

FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

Hong Kong: Six-monthly Report

The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (Mr David Lammy): The latest six-monthly report on the implementation of the Sino-British joint declaration on Hong Kong was published today and is attached. It covers the period from 1 January to 30 June 2024. The report has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. A copy is also available on the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/six-monthly-report-on-hong-kong-january-to-june-2024>. I commend the report to the House.

The attachment can be viewed online at: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-09-12/HCWS94>.

[HCWS94]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Food and Drink: Advertising Restrictions

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Andrew Gwynne): I wish to update the House on the Government's progress on delivering our manifesto commitment to implement restrictions on junk food advertising on TV and online.

The country wants to see our broken NHS fixed. Our health mission makes it clear that this requires a prevention revolution, tackling the drivers of preventable illness and reducing demand on health services. One of these pressures is the childhood obesity crisis, setting up children for an unhealthy life and generating yet greater pressures on the NHS. More than one in five children in England are overweight or living with obesity by the time they start primary school, and this rises to more than one third by the time they leave. We want to tackle the problem head-on, and that includes implementing the restrictions on junk food advertising on TV and online without further delay. We will introduce a 9 pm watershed on TV advertising, and a total ban on paid-for online advertising. These restrictions will help protect

children from being exposed to advertising of less healthy food and drinks, which evidence shows influences their dietary preferences from a young age.

I am today confirming that we have published the Government's response to the 2022 consultation on the draft secondary legislation. This is a key milestone that confirms the definitions for the products, businesses and services in scope of the restrictions. This provides the clarity that businesses have been calling for and will support them to prepare for the restrictions coming into force across the UK on 1 October 2025.

As part of our response, we will clarify how the regulations will apply to internet protocol television, which delivers television live over the internet. Our proposal is to make it clear in the regulations that IPTV services regulated by Ofcom will be subject to the broadcast 9 pm watershed in the same way as other TV and Ofcom-regulated on-demand programme services. This requires clarification within the secondary legislation and, in line with our statutory duty to consult, we are launching a targeted consultation, which is open for four weeks from today.

These steps mean we can move forward to laying the final legislation and publishing guidance. I will provide a further update to the House when the secondary legislation is laid to implement the advertising restrictions on 1 October 2025.

The Government's response to the 2022 consultation and the IPTV consultation have been published on gov.uk.

[HCWS93]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill

The Minister for Security (Dan Jarvis): The Government have today introduced the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill to the House of Commons.

The Government would like to pay tribute to the 22 victims of the horrific Manchester Arena attack in 2017, and to Figen Murray, mother of one of the victims, Martyn Hett. Her campaigning has been crucial in driving this Bill forward.

Against the backdrop of an increasingly complex, evolving and enduring threat picture, the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill will deliver on the Government's manifesto commitment to "strengthen the security of public events and venues".

The Bill seeks to improve protective security and organisational preparedness across the UK. It will require those responsible for certain premises and events to take steps to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack and reduce harm in the event of a terrorist attack occurring. In addition to this, certain larger premises and events must also take additional steps to reduce the vulnerability of the premises to terrorist attacks.

Through the Bill, qualifying premises and events should be better prepared and ready to respond in the event of a terrorist attack.

BILL DEVELOPMENT

This Government have reflected on the scrutiny provided throughout the Bill's development. As well as the extensive engagement that has taken place with security partners,

business and victims' groups including Figen Murray and the Martyn's law campaign team, the Survivors Against Terror, as well as parliamentarians.

That is why important changes have been made to the Bill to ensure that we can both achieve public protection outcomes and ensure there are no undue burdens on businesses and other organisations:

We have raised the standard tier threshold from 100 to 200, to create a more appropriate scope of the duty;

The "reasonably practicable" standard of requirements, now applicable in both tiers, is designed to allow procedures and measures to be tailored to the specific circumstances of a premises or event. This will enable duty holders to take into consideration what is within their control and the resources they have available to them, as well as what is suitable and appropriate for their premises or event; and

We have removed the requirements for a specific, prescribed form of training and the completion of a mandatory standard terrorism evaluation form—in recognition that a one size fits all approach is not appropriate and could be onerous.

We are confident these changes ensure the Bill is more appropriate whilst still delivering on its core aim of enhancing public safety.

BILL PROPOSALS

Scope

A person will be subject to the main requirements of the Bill if they are responsible for a qualifying premises or events.

A person who has control of premises in connection with their relevant schedule 1 use is responsible for qualifying premises. For example, the operator of an arena or governing body of a school will be responsible for fulfilling the requirements of the Bill at their respective premises.

A person who will have control of the premises at which an event is to be held in connection with their use for the event will be responsible for a qualifying event.

Control over premises has been utilised in other regulatory regimes, such as fire safety.

Standard duty premises

The Bill establishes a tiered approach linked to the activity that takes place at premises or an event and the number of individuals it is reasonable to expect may be present on the premises at the same time.

Persons responsible for a standard duty premises, i.e. qualifying premises where it is reasonable to expect that between 200 and 799 individuals may be present at the same time, will be required to:

Notify the regulator of their premises; and

Put in place appropriate and reasonably practicable public protection procedures, as set out in clause 5 of the Bill.

These procedures are to be followed by people working at the premises if an act of terrorism was to occur at the premises or in the immediate vicinity, which may be expected to reduce the risk of physical harm being caused to individuals. This includes ensuring there are procedures in place to provide information to individuals on the premises and to evacuate, invacuate or lockdown the premises.

The requirements for standard duty premises are focused on simple, low-cost activities surrounding policies and procedures, which are to be followed by staff in the event of terrorist attack or suspected terrorist attack

occurring. The aim of these requirements is to improve staff preparedness and responses. There is no requirement to put in place physical measures in this tier. Furthermore, the reasonably practicable element will enable standard duty premises to tailor their approach to the resources they have available.

Enhanced duty premises and qualifying events

“Enhanced duty premises” and “qualifying events” are premises or events where it is reasonable to expect that 800 or more individuals may be present on the premises or attend the event at the same time. In addition to the same procedures as standard duty premises, persons responsible for enhanced duty premises and qualifying events will be required to:

Notify the regulator of their premises/event;

Put in place appropriate and reasonably practicable public protection measures that could be expected to reduce both the vulnerability of the premises or event to an act of terrorism occurring at the location, and the risk of physical harm being caused to individuals if an attack was to occur there or nearby. For example, an enhanced duty premises will be required, insofar as reasonably practicable, to implement measures relating to the monitoring of the premises and their immediate vicinity;

Document the public protection procedures and measures in place, or proposed to put in place, and provide this document to the regulator. This document should include an assessment as to how those procedures and measures may be expected to reduce, so far as is reasonably practicable, vulnerability and risk of harm.

Where the responsible person for an enhanced duty premises or qualifying event is not an individual, they must appoint an individual as a designated senior individual with responsibility for ensuring that the relevant requirements are met.

Special categorisations and exemptions

There will be some limited exclusions and exemptions from the Bill’s requirements, in particular where premises are already subject to existing requirements to consider and mitigate threats that achieve comparable security outcomes.

All places of worship will be placed into the standard tier where there are 200 or more individuals present at the same time—even if that number is 800 or greater. The Government consider it is appropriate that such places of worship take forward the standard duty procedures. However, places of worship are different to other premises in scope, in being readily accessible and welcoming to all, without the same commercial drivers as other premises, usually having no restrictions on entry, or staff routinely present. The Government recognise this, and will continue its work with faith communities to respect the unique nature of places of worship and how they operate, whilst considering how we can support them to reduce their vulnerability to terrorism and hate crime. This includes developing measures to better mitigate threats through local police engagement and Government-funded work programmes.

Primary, secondary and further education establishments have been placed within the standard tier even if their capacity is greater than 800 individuals. Existing safety and safeguarding requirements at these establishments mean they have a range of appropriate security procedures and access controls measures in place.

However, premises belonging to higher education institutions (e.g. universities) could be in either tier, depending on the number of individuals that can reasonably

be expected on the relevant premises. This is because they are, in the main, more freely accessible and so should be subject to the full requirements of the Bill.

The regulator

The Bill establishes a regulator to oversee and enforce compliance of the Bill’s requirements. This regulator will operate as a new function of the Security Industry Authority.

As an arm’s length body, the Security Industry Authority is operationally independent of the Home Office whilst being accountable to Home Office Ministers. Because the Security Industry Authority is an existing Home Office public safety regulator, we assess that this is the most appropriate way to deliver this critical function. Utilising an existing arm’s length body also follows the Cabinet Office guidance and precedent set across Government for establishing new regulators. With its years of experience in inspection and enforcement around public safety at venues, alongside the work it already does with our security partners to promote best practice around counter terrorism protective security.

Sanctions and enforcement

Compliance with the Bill’s requirements will be overseen by the Security Industry Authority. The core principle of the regulator’s activity will be to support, advise and guide those responsible for premises and events in meeting the requirements of this legislation. Due to the severity of the risk posed by terrorism, it is important that the Security Industry Authority has the necessary tools to investigate suspected non-compliance and, where it is found, remedy serious or persistent non-compliance.

To that end, the Security Industry Authority will have powers to issue a range of civil sanctions such as monetary penalties. Due to the seriousness of some actions and in line with other regimes, the Bill also includes a limited number of underpinning criminal offences—for example, it will be a criminal offence to impersonate an inspector.

The Security Industry Authority must set any penalty at an amount that is reasonable and proportionate and take into account a range of factors including—but not limited to—an organisation’s ability to pay.

The Bill also makes amendments to the Licensing Act 2003 and the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 to protect premises plans from being used for the purposes of terrorism.

Dedicated guidance and support will be provided for duty holders to ensure that those in scope have the required information on what to do and how best to do it.

NEXT STEPS

We believe it is now time that this cross-party commitment to improve the safety and security of venues in the wake of the Manchester Arena attack is delivered without further delay. The public rightly deserve to feel safe when visiting public premises and attending events and we see it as reasonable that, in many locations, they should take appropriate, reasonably practicable steps to protect staff and the public from the horrific impacts and effects of terrorism.

I look forward to engaging with Members in Parliament on this important piece of legislation. I will be holding a drop-in session in due course, should they wish to learn more about the Bill, and would be happy to answer any of their questions. Details will be provided shortly.

The Bill and accompanying documents will be available online here <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3765> and further information, including factsheets on the key elements of the Bill, will be available on gov.uk here www.gov.uk/government/collections/terrorism-protection-of-premises-bill-2024.

[HCWS98]

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Data and Digital Infrastructure: Security and Resilience

The Minister for Data Protection and Telecoms (Chris Bryant): The security and resilience of the UK's data and digital infrastructure are of central importance to the Government's strategic objectives. This statement provides two updates on the Government's approach to safeguarding connectivity and the foundations of the digital economy.

Designating UK data infrastructure as critical national infrastructure

Data infrastructure—the physical data centres and cloud infrastructure which provide the foundations of the digital economy—faces significant risks and challenges that threaten the day-to-day lives of citizens and other critical infrastructure in the UK. We are today taking a significant step to meet these challenges by designating UK data infrastructure as critical national infrastructure, putting our digital foundations in the same category as energy and water.

Data infrastructure underpins essential services that are critical to the UK economy and our way of life and will only become more vital as technologies like AI require greater data centre and cloud capacity. The data it contains is highly valuable, and as such attracts security threats from cyber and physical attacks. Data centres are also vulnerable to the effects of climate change, which is increasing the risk of environmental hazards like flooding, heatwaves, and other extreme weather that can disrupt operations and result in a compromise or loss of crucial services.

Although the sector already has high standards, CNI designation enables better mitigation of risks the sector faces through an improvement to the Government's visibility and engagement with the data centre and cloud service industry. It signals the Government's intention to better partner with the UK's data infrastructure sector to work together to mitigate these. We will also explore further how to ensure the right conditions are in place to drive necessary capacity expansion to support economic growth and innovation.

As the Department responsible for monitoring, protecting and enhancing the security and resilience of data infrastructure, the Department of Science, Innovation and Technology will be working to better understand industry operators' existing risk mitigations and identify areas for Government support. Data infrastructure will be managed under existing cross-Government CNI structures led by the Cabinet Office, as a sub-sector of communications. We will work closely in a joined-up approach with internal colleagues, other Government Departments and their respective CNI sectors, such as energy and water, contributing to cross-sector work and planning.

I am confident that these measures, taken together and implemented in close consultation with industry, will provide a high level of security and resilience for this increasingly critical infrastructure, giving confidence to the public and investors, and supporting the growth of the UK economy.

Telecoms Supply Chain Diversification Advisory Council report

In addition, I want to thank the independent Telecoms Supply Chain Diversification Advisory Council, who will today publish a new report setting out recommendations to Government on telecoms diversification policy.

A healthy and diverse supply chain for the technology that goes into our telecoms networks is essential for resilience—ensuring that UK network operators can deliver good, reliable connectivity for all. Concentration of that supply chain into a very small number of companies means the UK network is more vulnerable to disruption and means that outages, when they occur, may have greater impact. It is important that we take action to address this, working closely with international partners and allies.

I will review the Council's recommendations carefully and will provide a Government response and update to this House on our efforts to maintain secure telecoms networks, supported by a healthy, diverse supply chain. I value the ongoing collaboration of the technology vendors and UK operators that have been engaging productively with Government on this matter.

A copy of the report will be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

I look forward to continuing work to strengthen, secure and expand our data and digital infrastructure, working with stakeholders across the economy and international partners.

[HCWS89]

TRANSPORT

Bus Retrofit Performance Report

The Secretary of State for Transport (Louise Haigh): Today, I am providing an update regarding the retrofitting of buses with selective catalytic reduction—SCR—technology to reduce emissions of nitrogen oxides.

Through a series of trials between 2013 and 2015, the previous Government explored the potential of reducing emissions or improving fuel economy in older buses and other large vehicles through a range of retrofit technologies. Retrofitting SCR technology was found to be the most effective in reducing the levels of NOx emitted from older buses. Allowing for some variation based on the Euro standard of the retrofitted bus, the reduction of NOx using SCR technology in trials averaged around 90%.

The clean vehicle retrofit accreditation scheme—CVRAS—was launched in 2017 to accredit retrofit technologies that could reduce NOx emissions from buses to close to Euro VI levels. Between 2017 and 2019, £64 million was allocated to the clean bus technology fund for bus upgrades and retrofits. A further £31 million was provided to local authorities in the Government's NO₂ programme. Approximately 9,000 buses in England have been retrofitted with CVRAS-accredited SCR technology.

In 2021, the Government were made aware of new evidence from Scotland suggesting that real-world emission reductions from retrofitted buses were lower than expected. In 2022, a roadside monitoring campaign was commissioned to measure NOx emissions from retrofitted buses in three areas in England, which reported in early 2023. The findings were similar to those in Scotland. Government funding for bus retrofits was paused in April 2023 while further research was carried out to understand the causes of poor performance and assess the scope for improvement.

The research was overseen by the Department for Transport and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs chief scientific advisers, assisted by an external independent expert group. Today I have placed the bus retrofit performance report, containing the findings of this research, in the Libraries of both Houses. The performance report was commissioned by the Government and finalised in November 2023. In the interest of transparency, I am releasing the report today.

The report concludes that the real-world performance of bus retrofit SCR technology is highly variable, achieving 80% to 90% NOx reductions in some cases, but having a minimal effect in others. There is an average 11% reduction in NOx emissions overall from retrofitted buses, compared with non-retrofitted Euro V buses, which is significantly lower than the 80% reduction anticipated.

The research shows that a number of contributing factors can lead to poor performance, including the incorrect functioning of retrofit systems, the condition of bus engines and low catalyst operating temperatures. Based on these findings, I am announcing today a permanent end to further Government funding for retrofit and the closure of the clean vehicle retrofit accreditation scheme to further accreditations.

Moving forward, we will work with bus operators and retrofit suppliers to encourage a step change in the monitoring and maintenance of retrofit systems to get the best possible performance from the retrofitted buses currently in service. This will include ensuring that buses are providing live data showing retrofit performance, so that operators and depots can prioritise and target essential maintenance on the poorest-performing buses. Providing this data will be a condition of the buses remaining on the list of CVRAS-accredited vehicles.

Air pollution is the biggest environmental threat to human health, and this Government recognise the need to take preventive public health measures to tackle the biggest killers and support people to live longer, healthier lives. We will continue to work closely with the relevant local authorities to identify alternative measures to deliver compliance with legal NO2 limits in the shortest possible time.

[HCWS97]

London Luton Airport Development Consent Order: Decision Extension

The Secretary of State for Transport (Louise Haigh):

This statement confirms that it has been necessary to extend the deadline for the decision for the London Luton airport development consent order under the Planning Act 2008.

Under section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008, a decision must be made within 3 months of receipt of the examining authority's report unless the power under section 107(3) to extend the deadline is exercised and a statement is made to Parliament announcing the new deadline.

The examining authority's report on the London Luton airport development consent order application was received on 10 May 2024. The current deadline for a decision is 4 October 2024, having been extended from 10 August 2024 to 4 October 2024 by way of written ministerial statement dated 24 May 2024 available at <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-05-24/hcws506>

The deadline for the decision is to be further extended to 3 January 2025—an extension of 3 months. The reason for the extension is to enable the applicant further time to provide requested information, and for that information to be considered, including by interested parties, before the final determination of the application.

The decision to set a new deadline is without prejudice to the decision on whether to give development consent for the above application.

[HCWS91]

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